Sink or Swim in Liquid Modernity:
The Chronotope of the Modern Woman in Early 1930s Hollywood

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ABSTRACT

Sink or Swim in Liquid Modernity: The Chronotope of the Modern Woman in Early 1930s Hollywood

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The woman's films of the early 1930s constitute a large body of work whose boundaries remain somewhat fluctuating and nebulous. Although not the product of specific studios or directors, nor belonging to a common genre or tackling specifically "feminine" issues, these films are nonetheless identifiable and culturally significant through their various portrayals of the *Modern Woman.* Through textual and historical analyses, this dissertation traces the figure of this Modern Woman, which, I argue, constitutes a chronotope in the Bakhtinian sense. Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotope" is a valuable concept for film studies, for it clarifies the relationship between cultural products and the society that creates them, while avoiding simplified causality and mirroring effects. It is a way of understanding a concrete socio-historical period and its artistic output without resorting to simplistic explanations that would reduce artistic productions to mere reproductions of reality under a different banner. Furthermore, the chronotope allows for creativity and imagination while not necessarily de-politicizing or segregating cultural products from their production environment and the ideological concerns of their time.

It is my contention that a reflection on American inter-war modernity is articulated through the Modern Woman chronotope. Following her from her emergence in the

late 20s through her containment and evacuation in the mid-30s, we can delineate the boundaries of her engagement with her environment, the imaginary geography she is associated with, and point to both the contradictions at her core as well as the hope she embodies. Using Zygmunt Bauman's concepts of "solid" and "liquid" modernity we come to understand the social dynamic at work during a period when social norms, values and conventions were in constant flux, and when twin calls for greater social relaxing and order cohabited. Miriam Hansen's theory of vernacular modernity helps situate the importance of the woman's film in American modern culture. Ultimately I will show that far from representing an apolitical realm of domesticity, love and emotion—a reproach usually aimed at woman's films—the woman's films of the early 30s are eminently engaged in the re-imagining of the United States in modernity through the chronotope of the Modern Woman, a chronotope animated by both centripetal and centrifugal forces.

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Introduction —Woman's Films and Modernity

> A certain type of life has inspired the modern world. It is our life, but it is particularly America's. And our life is the motion picture (George Schultz, qtd in May, 2000, p. 101).

> Exploring the connections between American Studies and Film Studies is rather like standing before the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. The observer is confronted with the necessity of stepping into two rivers at once or not getting wet at all (Sobchack, 1980, p. 280).

Introducing the term "liquid" in 2000 to qualify late modernity, Zygmunt Bauman did not intend to refer to the binge drinking of the 20s and 30s often depicted in movies. Rather, the sociologist meant the term as a replacement for "postmodernism"—a term he had originally used but of which he grew critical. Liquid modernity, contrary to "solid" modernity, is characterized by the dissolution of firm social bounds and stable institutions, ambivalence and contingency. The Holocaust, the most radical expression of solid modernity's passion for order and instrumental thinking, is also the penultimate garden state, where individuals are either rooted and ordered or wedded out (2007, p. 99). Conversely, liquid modernity represents a "disembedding" of individuals, a loosening up of social control, and greater freedom and mobility. Always in movement, the liquid modern is either vagabond—vagrant by obligation—or tourist—nomad by choice (1998). Never short of colourful metaphors, Bauman

likens the liquid modern individual's experience to that of "airline passengers who discover, high in the sky, that the pilot's cabin is empty" (2002, p. 133).

Bauman's understanding of modernity, both solid and liquid, is also highly determined by a specific understanding of time and space:

> Fluids, so to speak, neither fix space nor bind time. While solids have clear spatial dimensions but neutralize the impact, and thus downgrade the significance, of time (effectively resist its flow or render it irrelevant), fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it; and so for them it is the flow of time that counts, more than the space they happen to occupy: that space, after all, they fill but 'for a moment'. In a sense, solids cancel time; for liquids, on the contrary, it is mostly time that matters (2000, p. 2).

Although periods of rapid change did occur during the solid era, claims Bauman, these were always thought of as exceptional, temporary, and leading to greater stability (2000, p. 3). Liquid modernity does not offer such promises, for it is marked by perpetual flux and flow; it is forever becoming. During the process of liquefaction, the principle of modernity—radical questioning—is reflexively turned against modernity itself. Indeed, although Bauman indicates that modernity's solidity was at best a smoke screen—as it could never completely eradicate contingency (1993, p. 211)—he also claims that the passage from solidity to liquidity is irreversible (2001, p. 89). A condition of liquid modernity, uprooted freedom is necessarily accompanied by insecurity, anxiety and fear. Indeed, individuals experience liquid times as unstable, uncertain and as lacking a clear shape and direction (2005).

I propose to analyze the early 30s films as swimming in liquid times. This may appear anachronistic given Bauman's own indication that liquefaction only began in the sixties. However, it should be remarked that Bauman gained insight into the phenomenon, and coined the term, after Marx and Engel's famous line from *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), "All that is solid melts into air". Additionally, rather than presupposing linear progression from solidity to liquefaction[1], this study poses that American modernity has been marked by periods of relative solidity and liquefaction. The relative solidity may be conceived as illusory, or imaginary as some social constructivists would see it (Castoriadis, 1975), but it is always "temporary". Periods of intense crisis, be they economic or social, bring on a questioning of the pillars of social stability and are experienced by individuals as both liberating and anxiety-inducing, generating contradictory calls for both increased liquidity and renewed ordered solidity.

As Rita Felski points out, conceptualizations of modernity often appear contradictory (1995, p. 11); while some view it as stable, coherent, disciplined and rational (Hekman, 1990; Turner, 1987), others see it as a "discontinuous experience of time, space and causality as transitory, fleeting and fortuitous" (Frisby, 1985, p. 4), a culture of rupture (Calinescu, 1987) and "radical doubt" (Giddens, 1991, p. 3). Although contradictory, these opposing views can be reconciled under Marshall Berman's conceptualisation of modernity as "a struggle to make ourselves at home in a constantly changing world" (1988, p. 6). Berman's theorising of the modern matrix

[1] See Raymond L.M. Lee (2011) for a cogent critique of Bauman's linear framework.

helps clarify the relationship between "modernity", "modernization" and "modernism". Like Bauman, Berman understands modernity in phenomenological terms, as an experience of space and time: to be modern is to live in a world that is, for better and for worse, constantly changing. What propels these constant changes—scientific, industrial and demographic—is, still according to Berman, socio-economic *modernization*. Individual efforts to make sense of this process of modernization, to give shape and artistic expression to its experience, in turn, is what we commonly refer to as "modernism". More particularly, modernism is understood as, an "attempt by modern men and women to become subjects as well as objects of modernization, to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it" (p. 5).

A feeling of social liquefaction was experienced, the present dissertation asserts, in America in the early 30s. The crash of 1929 and the Great Depression of the early 1930s literally halved the national income[2] and resulted in significant changes in many aspects of American life—both public and private—rapidly altering the face of America and putting into question its core values. America had built itself on a national narrative according to which individual entrepreneurship, private

[2] The national income went from $81 billion in 1929 to $41 billion in 1932. By the end of 1932, 28% of Americans were living without any income (notwithstanding another 25% of the population living on a farm and trying to live off the land). Most of those who remained employed endured drastic wage cuts. Anthony Badger reports that school teachers in Chicago went without pay during the winter of 1932-1933 (1989, p. 24). During the first three years of the Depression, 85 000 businesses went bankrupt, 5000 banks closed down, and 9 million savings accounts were wiped out. Badger argues that the Depression affected working women less significantly than working men, for employers were keen on hiring women, which they could pay less, and "sexual stereotyping" guaranteed women a number of jobs.

businesses and capitalist-driven abundance produced an ever-more prosperous nation (W. L. Wall, 2008, p. 18). A concrete consequence of the Depression was the "rural flight", the largest migration in American history. Census data shows that by 1940, 2.5 million people had moved out of the Plains states into major cities. Many of those leaving the countryside were young women who found themselves alone in the city. This rural exodus meant both an increased tipping, by the late 20s,[3] of the demographic scale in favour of the city and the emergence of a new phenomenon: the *woman adrift*—the unattached, young working woman. Another major change was an unprecedented massive unemployment. Unemployment affected both men and women in different ways: The inability to work crippled men's self-esteem, especially in a context where men's identity was defined primarily by their work and their ability to provide for their dependents. Women—who were allegedly not supposed to be on the job market in the first place—suffered from cultural invisibility, their hardship politically ignored and publicly denied. This happened precisely at a time when family ties loosened, and women could count less and less on the kindness of a family member to provide room and board (Abelson, 2003).

As the depression deepened, the United States experienced one of the most profound periods of self-doubt in its history. Concomitant with this period of self-doubt and

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[3] US Census shows that whereas 60.4% of the population lived in rural areas in the 1900, this percentage decreased steadily for the next 50 years. In 1910 it was down to 54.4% and went just below the 50% mark in the 1920s. By 1930, rural population was down to 43.9%, reaching 36% by 1950. While the report of these statistics had a significant impact on the social imaginary, they remained somewhat dubious, "since the Census Bureau used a population of 2,500 people as the cutoff for 'urban'" (Dumenil, 1995, p. 11).

liquefaction are attempts at redefining America. According to historian Warren Susman, the 30s were marked by the confrontation between

> two cultures—an older culture, often loosely labeled Puritan-republican, producer-capitalist culture, and a newly emerging culture of abundance. […] The battle was between rival perceptions of the world, different visions of life. It was cultural and social, never merely or even centrally political (1973, p. xx).

An attempt at reconstructing America on new values was done, on the one hand, negatively—through a distancing with the "Old World"—, and positively, through a reaffirmation of what it means to be American. Between 1890 and 1920, eighteen million immigrants, mostly Europeans, made the United States their home. The immigrant past was perceived by many to be the root of American exceptionalism (W. L. Wall, 2008, p. 22). The challenge of making America "one nation under God" involved both an abandonment of past traditions, values and customs, and the adoption of a purely American identity manifested in language, garments, values and habits (Hogan, 2009, pp. 75-94). In this context, Americans were of two minds with regards to the "Old World" of England: on the one hand, the Anglo-Saxon lineage affirmed a white, Christian heritage reassuring for many. On the other, it also stood for stale traditions which threatened the emergence of the new.

Americans were engaged, to borrow Benedict Anderson's term, in re-imagining their nation (1991). Communities of all sizes, Anderson explains, are sustained at a vernacular level through a set of shared myths and stories about their own existence as a community and their projection into the future. In times of crisis, these myths

need to be re-imagined. The term “American Way” may have appeared widely in public spaces in 1938, but the impetus for the development of a new common ground emerged with the crash and the ensuing social, economical, and political unrest: the billboards, which trumpeted that ‘There’s no way like the American Way’ “testified to the intensity of the debate over national values unleashed by the Depression” (W. L. Wall, 2008, p. 34). In this sense, we may want to think of 1930s Hollywood from the angle of a national cinema and a functionalist approach. According to Jinhee Choi, “a functional approach identifies instances of national cinema based on what a film embodies at the level of text and how it functions within a nation-state” (2006, p. 311). The functionalist approach therefore looks at national cinema to see how “it functions for members of a national community” (p. 313), including in the process of nation-building.

My aim is not to posit these social changes as originary and claim a direct causal relationship between social reality and cinematic representations. Rather, I explore early 1930s woman’s films as presenting a specific chronotope: an imaginary formation condensing a particular experience of time and space. The chronotope, a term coined by Mikhail Bakhtin, literally means “time space” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84). Its significance, however, lies in the underlying idea formulated by Bakhtin, that artistic productions stem from a concrete experience of time and space, which in turn influences the type of characters and narratives generated. On a similar note, David Harvey points out that “neither time nor space can be assigned objective meanings independently of material processes, and […] it is only through

investigation of the latter that we can properly ground our concepts of the former" (1990, p. 204). In other words, conceptions of time and space are created through concrete, material practices such as literature, architecture and movies; "each distinctive mode of production or social formation will, in short, embody a distinctive bundle of time and space practices and concepts" (p. 204).

Within film theory and film history, the early 30s represent a period sandwiched between silent cinema and the establishment of classical Hollywood cinema, two periods heavily scrutinized, justifiably so, by feminist film theorists. As Shelley Stamp, Lauren Rabinowitz and Miriam Hansen have shown, the 10s and 20s are an exhilarating period for feminist film scholars: during this period women entered the public sphere like never before (Norden, 1984). The film industry itself proved to be particularly welcoming for women who held jobs in various fields, from scriptwriting to costume design, from production to camera operator (Slide, 1994). Given that women were believed to comprise the majority of the audience (Balio, 1993, p. 235), it stood to reason, as a 1924 industry article states, that films should be "made primarily by women" (qtd. in Slide, 1996, p. 11). Perhaps overenthusiastically, Slide goes so far as to claim that until 1925, women "virtually controlled the film industry" (1977, p. 9). Although precise numbers regarding women's involvement in the film industry (and, more particularly, the exact significance of these numbers) are a matter of some debate, Karen Ward Mahar (2006) has uncovered evidence of a tendency to perceive the film industry, as early as 1908, as holding the key to women's emancipation.

In this context, Miriam Hansen (1991), Anne Friedberg (1993) and Shelley Stamp (2000) among others, have studied women's spectatorship in conjunction with the emergence of a female-centric consumer culture. Stamp, for instance, showed how the film industry sought a female clientele by replicating and becoming a substitute for women's consumption habits, habits that included keeping female patrons as centers of attraction to be seen (p. 20). By installing oversized mirrors in lobbies, theaters were transformed into venues where one would see as much as be seen.

The postwar era of the 40s and 50s, with its heavy output of woman's melodramas, has proven another fertile ground for feminist film scholarship. Mary Ann Doane sees these films as struggling with two contradictory tasks: to be a vehicle of patriarchy (and its sexual imbalance) and to present a woman in a central position, articulating her own desire or knowledge. Despite relying on a female protagonist, the films, Doane claims, systematically use mechanisms that deny, within their narrative structure, the woman's mastery over her desire. As E. Ann Kaplan puts it, man's desire carries power, woman's does not. Even though the woman's film centers around a woman's desire, it does so by perpetuating stereotypes of female subjectivity as negatively defined through masochism, paranoia, hysteria, and narcissism, thereby leaving patriarchy's sexual imbalance untouched. Despite their appearance—despite being concerned first and foremost with women and women's issues, and putting a woman forward as their main protagonist—the woman's films,

still according to Doane and Kaplan, ultimately serve to reinforce patriarchy by perpetuating an image of female subjectivity as lacking.

Doane's analysis, like much of feminist film theory, was heavily influenced by Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", an essay interested mainly in post-40s classical Hollywood cinema. In these films, Mulvey claims, the active party is a male character—a surrogate ideal-ego for spectators—while women onscreen are essentially there to be looked-at, acted upon and to serve as reward (literally for the male protagonist and visually for the male viewer). Following Mulvey's early theorization, women's relationship to film has long been theorized as passive, submitted as they are to the control of the three facets of the male gaze: the viewer's, the male protagonist's and the camera's—which are, in turn, also submitted (along with women on and off screen) to the sexual imbalance of patriarchy.

As inspiring and foundational as Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure…" was for feminist film theory, its psychoanalytic framework proved at once too abstract and totalizing as it forced spectators into constricting binary positions and categories. These were, moreover, impervious to social context and historical change. Janet Bergstrom (1979) and Barbara Creed (1993) used the tools offered by Freudian psychoanalytic theory to complicate gender identification, while Jacqueline Bobo (1995), among others, used ethnographic approaches to concretize the female spectator and broaden our understanding of spectatorship.

Overall, however, feminist film theorists have had little to say regarding the woman's films of the period situated between the silent era and the 1940s. Lori Landay unwittingly confirms this blind spot when she claims that after the Jazz Age, "the flapper heroine bifurcated into the fallen woman and the screwball heroine" (2002, p. 225). In fact, between the flapper of the 20s and the fallen woman and screwball heroines of the late 30s on, a great many working girls populated the big screens in countless woman's films.

Woman's Film

The category "woman's film" poses many problems; we must therefore pause to establish a preliminary working definition. As feminist film theorists established themselves within academia throughout the 1980s, they brought to the fore a new film genre, the "woman's film". The immediate effect of this new research was to revalorise films that had long been neglected by critics and academics alike and had therefore fallen by film history's wayside. As the Editorial Board of *Women & Film* stated in their 1972 inaugural issue, one of the main fronts of a feminist involvement with film should be criticism. Women, the editors go on, are not only oppressed within the film industry (they are receptionists, secretaries, prop girls) and within films (by being packaged as sex objects), they are also oppressed within film theory, by male critics who celebrate auteur theory "which has evolved into a male and masculine theory on all levels" ("About this Issue," 1972, pp. 5-6).

While the films in question are now deemed worthy of serious study, the initial push for legitimacy was achieved through a strategy of "genrification"[4]: films were re-valorized by showing their participation within a legitimate yet somewhat unknown genre (the woman's film). While effective, this circular strategy (in which films are valued for their participation within the woman's film genre while the woman's film is constructed as a genre by virtue of the homogeneity of select films) had the effect of severely constricting what counted as a "woman's film".

Indeed, the "woman's film" became synonymous with the melodramas centering on home and family made in the 1940s and 1950s. E. Ann Kaplan, for instance, has equated the woman's film with maternal melodrama (1983, p. 25 and 28), and Annette Kuhn takes the "woman's picture" to be a subtype of the melodrama (1989, p. 18). Laura Mulvey (1986, pp. 21, 36) and Tania Modleski (1984, pp. 20-21) also both affirm the near interchangeability of "melodrama" and "woman's film" in film history. Although Doane wants to recognize the woman's film as encompassing different genres and eras (1984), her focus remains on the limit cases that most forcefully (re)affirm patriarchy's subjection of women and recuperation of the excess they represent. Doane consequently makes it a characteristic of the genre that the woman's films' plot centers on the actions and *emotions* of a female protagonist. This equation with maternal melodramas is far from belonging to a bygone era, for Alison McKee recently wrote that the woman's film of the 1940s is "the heart of melodrama"

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[4] I borrow this term, which emphasises the ongoing process of film categorization and genre formation from Rick Altman (1999).

and that melodrama “is marked historically and typologically as feminine” (2009, p. 5 and 6).

Feminist analysis of post-1945 woman’s films has highlighted their deeply conservative nature. During this period, America struggled to re-integrate soldiers into the job market (and society as a whole) which translated into pressuring women out of their jobs and back to the domestic sphere. Michel Foucault’s conception of power was perfectly suited to show how woman’s films served ideological goals. According to Foucault, power relies on subject positioning rather than overt repression: “What gives power its hold, what makes it accepted”, Foucault believes,

> is quite simply the fact that it does not simply weigh like a force which says no, but that it runs through, and it produces, things, it induces pleasures, it forms knowledge, it produces discourses; it must be considered as a productive network which runs through the entire social body much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression (1979, p. 36).

Contrary to Marxist accounts, this approach focuses less on *who* exercises or benefits from power, but rather on *how* it functions at micro-levels such as the body. Seen through a Foucauldian lens, the woman’s film becomes an operation of power which produces and regulates female subjectivity within a patriarchal structure.

In this respect, Doane’s appreciation of the woman’s film is similar to “first wave” feminist film theorist Molly Haskell’s. As the title of her book indicates, her chronological study of the image of women in film shows a regression *From Reverence to Rape*. Starting with the 1920s, and treating each decade as a separate

chapter, Haskell adds a chapter on “The woman’s film” between the 1930s and 1940s. Even though “woman’s film” is not rigorously defined, the damning language with which she describes it indicates in no uncertain terms the little consideration she has for the genre. The woman’s film is likened to “soap opera”, “affairs of the heart”, “wet, wasted afternoons” (Haskell, 1973, p. 154) and “soft-core emotional porn for the frustrated housewife” (p. 155). Like Doane and Kaplan after her, Haskell believes “the weepies are founded on a mock-Aristotelian and politically conservative aesthetic whereby women spectators are moved, not by pity and fear, but by self-pity and tears, to accept, rather than reject, their lot” (p. 155). Those critical of the woman’s film therefore see it as a vehicle of patriarchal ideology that both uses the sexual imbalance present in society and in individual psyche and reinforces it by perpetuating an image of woman as lacking, helpless and passive in contradistinction to an image of man as powerful and active, able to articulate and satisfy his desire.[5]

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[5] A Lacanian account (as the one found, for instance, in Kaja Silverman’s work), however, emphasizes the fact that both men and women are fundamentally marked by lack and that male mastery is an alienating illusion perpetrated through various cultural manifestations, notably cinema. The goal of Lacanian psychoanalysis, many have argued, is for the subject to recognize his lack and find a way of living while being aware it. This interpretation stresses the fact that being overwhelmed by lack is as debilitating as being overwhelmed by false mastery. Zizek, among others, has argued that by being unable to pretend to have the phallus (since they visibly do not possess its symbol), women provide the model of a healthy subject. Men, however, are expected by society to have the phallus. They are confronted on a daily basis with injunctions to demonstrate its size and power, when in fact all they have (as is clearly apparent to them, but must not be acknowledged or made public) is the penis—a very pale substitute indeed. Silverman believes that by constantly reaffirming woman’s otherness, and by symbolically punishing and destroying her, what the male character actually does is prevent the woman from revealing the fact that no one, not even him, has the phallus. In film, the woman becomes bearer of the burden of castration so as to provide the male (character and viewer) with the illusion of

Not all feminists, however, were so critical of the woman's film. Initial reticence was followed by work which highlighted the genre's redeeming qualities. Once again though, the prototypical melodramas of the 1940s, films trading heavily in emotions and pathos, are seen as representative of the genre as a whole. Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill, who approach the woman's film sympathetically, find in its pathos a source of resistance to ideological closure. "Reading" these films "against the grain", one can, for instance, find strength under the guise of weakness of the woman who stubbornly insists on suffering until the very end. The very fact that she voluntarily puts herself into a situation whereby she suffers ennobles her with a sublime quality that only increases as she endures.

The divergence of opinion regarding the woman's film amongst feminist film theorists was made explicit in the debate between E. Ann Kaplan and Linda Williams surrounding *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937). Whereas Kaplan grounds her analysis on the primacy of the film's point of view and narrative closure—and the ability of both to close off contradictions—Williams grants the spectators a certain amount of power to determine their own subject positioning, point of view and reading strategies. In both cases, an analysis of the woman's film and of the spectators' relationship to the genre occurs at a theoretical level, with the spectator remaining a theoretical construct. More recently, reception theorists have turned their attention

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plenitude and power. As Silverman's analysis of *Peeping Tom* shows, cinema *can* confront men's lack as well, but it results in an unpleasurable, distressing film for male viewers, something which is attested to by the disavowal with which it was met.

to concrete women's relationship with woman's films.[6] This approach relies on historical research and spectators articulating their own viewing experience. One of its aims is to grant greater importance to the context of reception, but some have criticized this approach for leaving little room to the text itself (Kuhn, 1984, p. 26) and for remaining at an anecdotal level.

Whether one condemns or embraces the woman's film, most feminist theorists agree with Mulvey's general claims regarding the importance of taking into account the gendered nature of spectatorship, the patriarchal nature of classical Hollywood cinema and the centrality of pleasure, power and desire in cinema's scopic economy. At best, one can identify in certain films signs of patriarchy's contradictions (as in Doane's analysis) or locate "those spaces in which women out of their socially constructed differences as women, can and do resist" (Gledhill, 1984, p. 42). In either case, however, subversive readings emerge from ideology's other.[7]

In his 1998 essay, "Reusable Packaging: Generic Products and the Recycling Process", Rick Altman contentiously questioned the use of the term "woman's film" in film

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[6] See, for instance, Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (1994); Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (1991) and Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Film: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (1992).

[7] Although Tania Modleski focuses on Hitchcock's films rather than the woman's film, the reading strategy is similar. In *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (1988), Modleski seeks a "third way", apart from masochism and transvestism, in understanding female spectatorship. She claims that women, because of their peculiar position within patriarchy, have an acute sensibility to understanding the system's contradictions. She further claims that Hitchcock, by making his viewers identify with the female victim, establishes a specific spectatorial position for women to both identify with the female victim and yet not be victimized.

scholarship. The "woman's film", he claims, is a critically (as opposed to industrially or historically) constructed genre, defined retrospectively rather than at the time of the film's production (p. 28). Altman takes issue with Doane, among others, for what he believes is a shifty definition of the woman's film. Indeed, in *The Desire to Desire,* Doane maintains that the woman's film "does not constitute a genre" (p. 34), but she nevertheless pursues her study as if it were (pp. 9, 27 and 30). This, Altman suggests, may result from the very effort on Doane's part "to establish the woman's film as a genre" (1998, p. 31).

We must take note of Altman's comments and guard ourselves against the temptation to "genrify" a selection of films that do not possess the homogeneity and stability we often attribute (perhaps mistakenly) to genres. Altman may be right in claiming that the critical construction of genres as categories serves academic needs more than they reflect historical reality, but it is important to account for the fact that the concept, if not the term, of "woman's film" has been in usage for quite some time and precedes the academic effort of *genrification.* While I recognize that the "woman's film" was never a full-fledged genre in the same way that the Western was (and matters may not be so clear-cut for the Western either), perusal of film reviews of the period confirms that various terms were in use in the late 1920s and early 1930s to indicate a film's appeal to women. The review might emphasize the presence of an actress popular with women—Ann Harding and Greta Garbo, for instance—, the film's romantic or melodramatic appeal, its fashions or even its centering on urban, working women. "Femme" and "matronly appeal", "built for

women" and "sob sisters" were expressions used to quickly convey a sense of the film. At least one film, considered particularly racy, (*Unguarded Girls* [William Curran, 1929]) was also shown "to women only" in Pittsburgh, a city with "a reputation for going for the sex stuff". The article adds that during these showings, "both houses did their best business in a long time" ("Pitt. Goes for Sex Films", *Variety*, August 13, 1930).

The term "woman's picture" was used to designate a variety of films, most often those dealing with women's lives and interests, such as sex and romance. As such, it intersected with other cultural products such as popular literature and women's magazines. The "women's page", common to many popular publications and newspapers, began in New York at the end of the 19th century as a way to cater to the new readership and garner new advertising revenues (Adams, Keene, & Koella, 2012, p. 10). As Adams, Keene and McKay point out, the women's page

> did not so much fill the gap in news coverage as it accentuated the gap that was already there. By granting women a discursive presence but isolating that presence from 'real news', papers reinforced women's absence from the activities reported elsewhere in the paper, the activities that constituted the sphere of significant public endeavour—politics, law, commerce—that is, the sphere of men (2009, p. 8).

Although the term was common,[8] an analysis of its uses in trade journals and newspaper film reviews reveals that the "woman's film" was not a specific genre but designated films that could be grouped based on a shared "family resemblance"

[8] For instance, predicting that women will love the film, the *Variety* review *Stella Dallas* (Henry King, 1925) calls it "a 'woman's film'" (Nov. 18, 1925, p. 42).

(Wittgenstein, 1958); movies susceptible to please women. Along this line, starting in 1931, *Variety* also featured a separate sub-section titled "A Woman's Angle" in addition to its film-reviews, summarizing in a few sentences the particular attraction for female filmgoers of specific films. Although its film reviews tended to be geared towards an urban demographic, an important goal of this kind of trade publication was to determine which audiences would turn up for various films, and for what reasons. Indeed, *Variety* reviews were aimed at industry people, not the general public trying to find out what was worth seeing.[9] Numerous critics also used the term "woman's film" colloquially, showing the presence of a common understanding of the term.[10]

In 1952, Margaret Hinxman, film critic for *Picturegoer,* muses over the characteristics of the woman's film and concludes that "dramatic intensity" is as close as she can frame it (p. 12). Three years earlier, Catherine De La Roche, protested against a common understanding of the woman's film: "you will find that sentimentality, lavish and facile effects, the melodramatic, extravagant, naively romantic and highly coloured, the flattering, trivial and phoney—these are the elements in pictures, whatever their overall qualities, that are supposed to draw women" (qtd. in Bell &

[9] Whether film critics writing for other publications saw their job as film appreciator or box-office predictors cannot always be determined in all assurance. *Variety*, however, seems to have seen film reviews as serving only to predict box-office success. Accordingly, it ranked the "accuracy" of film-critics nationwide. In this respect, the Garbo-Gable "sex appeal picture", *Susan Lenox,* is predicted to profitability for it will "draw women of all ages" (Oct. 20, 1931, p. 21).

[10] We can also think of *King Kong* (Cooper & Shoedsack, 1933), whose entire plot is premised upon the necessity of a film director of taking a woman along on his journey into the jungle, to add a "woman interest" into his film upon his producer's request, in order to make more money.

Williams, p. 2). Complaints regarding the content of women's films weren't new. For instance, Cecelia Ager used her 1931 weekly *Variety* column to charge against RKO, a studio whose "lady pictures" are premised on the mistaken assumption that "the country's full of women who want clean, moral entertainment, women who like to see their picture heroines observe the proprieties" (October 6, 1931, p. 33). Two years earlier, Ruth Morris also expressed conflicted feelings regarding the "woman's film" critic. In a signed review (uncharacteristic for this publication), Morris—who also had a column in the "Women's Page" section (which subsequently became "To the Ladies", and then "For Ladies Only") and who wrote the short blurb for the "Woman's Angle"[11]—reveals rather ambiguous feelings regarding her own line of work. The movie under review was King Vidor's *Hallelujah,* an event as much as a movie, since it had an all-black cast. *Variety* asked three critics to write reviews to be published side by side: two men (unidentified) saw the film in different venues (one in a predominantly white theater, the other in a predominantly African-American venue in Harlem), and Ruth Morris provided "the woman's angle" which this time ran as long as a regular film review. While Morris gives a positive review of this important "human document", she predicts the film will not be a good matinee fare because

> it is not, in itself, a woman's picture. There is nothing in it to attract the flappers or superficial lunch-goers who flock to a matinee after a morning's shopping in town. This element, wanting only a box of chocolates and a little light diversion, will be quickly bored by the picture, and take a rather indignant leave, as did several of its number at Monday's crowded matinee. It is generally believed that if a film cannot be called a

[11] Although the column isn't signed, we learn in the "Hallelujah" review that she is the (or one of the) author.

> ‘woman’s picture’, it won’t be a hit; this one isn’t, yet it should be a smashing success. […] Only femme dumb-bells will be bored with the fact that it has no hey-hey night club scene, no handsome white hero and no sparkling gowns which usually set the pace for what should not be worn. The thinking woman spectator will realize from the first few sequences that a fine intelligence is in back of the telling of the simple story, that a real feeling for artistic composition is in back of the photography, that the dialog in itself is a musical accompaniment and that a masterpiece is unfolding on the screen” (August 28, 1929, p. 18).

I have quoted this review at length, for it reveals not only the author’s own conflicted relationship with female viewers, but also with her job requirements: to predict which movies women will like, regardless of her own appreciation of the film. Consequently, Morris was consistently obligated to equate the “woman’s angle” with what she felt were unsophisticated tastes, despite making a clear distinction between “the thinking woman” and the masses that make up the matinee crowd.[12] A similar sentiment is expressed in the June 18, 1930 editorial, where the un-named author expresses hope that “the talking picture will convert the picture film fan and flap into a lover of good drama or musical”. “The film flappers are”, the author continues, “a heritage of the silent picture days”. Sound pictures should change all that, for they will train the movie fan in the more noble art of drama.

What becomes patently clear when looking at reviews from the late 1920s and early 1930s is that, contrary to later understandings of the term, critics did not have a

[12] This may also explain why she doesn’t raise the possibility of a black female viewer, for whom the black hero may prove to be a big draw: the female black viewer, like the “thinking woman” is not what makes the box office till ring.

single, easily identifiable (through plot or iconography) type of film in mind when they used the term “woman’s film”. In fact, *Variety*—always fond of coining its own “slanguage”—developed an elaborate semantic field to describe both the range of female audience-members and films for women.[13] The female spectator spectrum covers an area set between two poles: the “kind-hearted matrons”, on the one side, and the “city femme”, the “younger element” and the “flap”, on the other.[14] Over and over, films are evaluated on the basis of their ability to please either camp. Not only that, but as the 30s roll in, these two poles seem more and more diametrically opposed, and we find few films that are said to appeal to “women” as a whole. When they do (and this is seen as a sure recipe for box office success) the reviewer explains which aspect will titillate the femme while comforting the mother’s sentimental heart.

During the 20s, “women’s programming” also came into being as a distinct category for marketing purposes, and the content of the shows was devised with this in mind. Looking at early 1930s films’ marketing campaigns and press sheets, we see an effort on the studio’s end to develop marketing material specifically for women for films with a female interest. As Mark McGee (1989) shows, these kinds of marketing strategies and gimmicks were not the prerogative of the woman’s film, far from it.

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[13] *Variety* published a short dictionary online, but it unfortunately does not contain much of its early lingo (http://www.variety.com/static-pages/slanguage-dictionary/).

[14] “Class” per se, does not appear to be a determining factor in this taxonomy. Rather, women are divided in two according to age (young / old) and geographical location (city / remote localities) which, moreover, always appear to intersect, so that the young element equals the city, and the remote localities appears synonymous with the good-hearted matron.

For instance, theaters were urged to develop contests wherein women were invited to write down a tagline for the film on a special wall using their lipstick. For the release of *I'm No Angel* (Wesley Ruggles, 1933) it was suggested that local theater owners contact the fire department to have the fire engine drive around town with sirens on to deliver the film cans. The fire engine, the press-book specifies, should have a banner that reads: "Taking no chances with this combustible consignment! Fire-proof delivery of MAE WEST's red-hot film". These elaborate female-centric strategies, however, attest to the fact that women were perceived by the film industry as a market with specific—though sometimes contradictory—needs and desires that, if addressed properly, could prove lucrative.

Given this, I therefore use the term "woman's film" as a production trend specifically targeting a female audience and crossing various genres (drama, melodrama, urban comedy, etc.) rather than as a specific genre. Especially in the early 30s, studios designated a certain portion of their production to films directed at a female audience and focusing on issues deemed of particular interest to women. In a letter dated February 28, 1933, James Wingate tells Will Hays of a recent conversation in which Darryl Zanuck claims studio sales departments require that "at least 20% of their product [be] women's pictures" which, still according to Wingate "inevitably means sex pictures" (*Baby Face* PCA file). The woman's film will, accordingly, be recognizable by its woman-centered narrative and the presence of a central female character, as well as a plot that usually involves issues and concerns that are of

particular interest to women. Using the term in this way has the advantage of taking into account various modes of address.

As previously intimated, theorists have often identified characteristics pertaining to content of the woman's film. Andrea Walsh (1984) and Stephen Neale (2000, p. 192), for instance, claim that the films take place in a domestic sphere completely cut out from the social and political environment. Similarly, Maria LaPlace claims that the woman's film "revolves around the traditional realms of women's experience: the familial, the domestic, the romantic—those areas where love, emotion and relationships take precedence over action and events" (1987, p. 139). For various reasons, I reject these further specifications. For one, they tend to narrow down unduly the category to specific genres (often, the melodrama) and exclude a variety of films that were clearly intended for a female audience but that do not take place in the home. As I will show, many pre-Code woman's films are not melodramatic in tone and take place outside the domestic sphere, usually in the work place. At best, I take the woman's films to be a "genre" to the extent that genres are taken to be "different strategies for dealing with the same ideological tensions" (Wood, 2002 p. 292). For Robin Wood, classical Hollywood cinema is riddled with motifs and tensions crossing repeatedly across various genres. It is a mistake, according to Wood to think of genres in terms of discrete unity, when in fact classical Hollywood cinema can be thought, as a whole, as proposing different genres as so many solutions to these tensions.

American Modernity: Vernacular and Liquid

Referring to the native dialect specific to a population, the term "vernacular" has been used in various disciplines to designate a "popular", "every day" level, distinct from a "higher" one. Today, for instance, vernacular literature could refer to the high circulation paraliterature of popular magazines, pulp and dime novels. In a stronger sense, however, the vernacular may be seen to be intertwined with late modernity in Depression and post-Depression era America, with its interest in folklore, urban anthropology (as seen in the work of Zora Neale Hurston), local cultures and myriad accents (as evidenced, for instance, in John Dos Passos), and its shift from a producer to a consumer ethic. When coupled with "modernity", "vernacular" refers to how ideas and issues related with modernity and modernization circulated in popular forms (Hansen, 1991).

On a superficial level, modernity is first and foremost a temporal concept. As Singer (2001) points out, not only do the boundaries delimiting the modern period vary greatly (Hegel situates the beginning of the modern era somewhere in the 14th century, while others date its birth at the end of the 19th century), but the exact meaning of the term is far from making consensus.[15] For E.P. Thompson, modernity was characterized by a shift in people's understanding of time, from natural cycles to

[15] By distinguishing between the modern *age*—which began in the 17th century and ended at the beginning of the 20th—and the modern *world*—which began with the first atomic explosions—Hannah Arendt, for one, gets rid of a lot of unnecessary confusion (1958, p. 6)

standardized calendars and clocks. Industrial modernity, according to Thompson, signals the individual's submission to a regimented clock-time. Conversely, as the understanding of space expands and becomes more abstract, the notion of a stable, immutable locale for individuals disappears: "Modernity provides no home—domesticity is the antithesis of this concept of the modern" (qtd. in Umbach & Hüppauf, 2005, p. 4).

Another helpful way of understanding modernity is to examine the culture against which it sets itself: Victorianism. Aspiring to a "radical standard of innocence", Victorian culture set "[s]harp distinctions [...] in every aspect of existence", most notably in the sexual sphere, and aggressively sought to enforce and maintain these distinctions, thereby offering moral certainty (Singal, 1987, pp. 9-10). Modernity can therefore be seen as both a liberation from the oppressive constraints of Victorianism and a blurring of the previously sharply distinguished and immutable categories of morally right and wrong, good and evil, civilized and barbarian, masculinity and femininity, etc. "Thus", Daniel Joseph Singal writes,

> the Modernist world-view […] begins with the premise of an unpredictable universe where nothing is ever stable, and where accordingly human beings must be satisfied with knowledge that is partial and transient at best. Nor is it possible in this situation to devise a fixed and absolute system of morality; moral values must remain in flux, adapting continuously to changing historical circumstances (1987, p. 15).

The "epistemological uncertainty" (Croce, 1995) that ensued from such radical shifts generated both profound anxieties and exhilaration, not only in the domain of high arts and philosophy, but also in the popular spheres—at the vernacular level.

In *Vision and Difference,* Griselda Pollock demonstrates how art history, as a field, has celebrated a certain vision of modernism—a bourgeois, gendered vision of modernism—"as the *only* modernism" (1988, p. 50). Modernity has been conceptualized as a regime of pure, unobstructed, vision when in fact a sexual politics of looking assigned vision to men. Celebrating Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin defines modernity as a particular experience of space (the streets of the city) and time (the present, the ever-new), best encapsulated by the strolling *flâneur*. The *flâneur* can move through the city crowds, inebriated by the city's stimuli, unnoticed and unbothered, and observe as if a disembodied yet covetous gaze. The anonymity of the *flâneur* allows him to revel in the spectacle of the city, consuming it without having to interact with it. The *flâneur*, the "fundamental paradigm of the subject in modernity" (Friedberg, 1993, p. 3) is therefore a man of pleasure "who takes visual possession of the city" (Wilson, 2001, p. 78) and its inhabitants. *Flânerie* has therefore "become a metaphor for the gendered scopic hierarchy in observation" and, one might add, *occupation*, "of urban space" (Parsons, 2000, p. 4).

While women "did not enjoy the freedom of incognito in the crowd" and "were never positioned as the normal occupants of the public realm", (Pollock, 1988, p. 100) they certainly *did* experience modernity. Recent efforts at understanding and conceptualising women's interaction with the city have therefore focused on theorising a *flâneuse*, a female incarnation of the *flâneur.* Debates have consequently

pertained to the extent to which women had the liberty of inhabiting, travelling and deploying the gaze of the *flâneur*.

Vernacular modernism and cinema

Miriam Hansen pioneered the study of Hollywood cinema through the lens of vernacular modernism. Although the popularity of Hollywood cinema domestically and abroad can be partially explained by the industry's business model and the development of a formal aesthetic, Hansen claims that its chief success stems from the way it articulated the challenges of modernity in a way that appealed to both domestic and foreign audiences. Hansen's account, then, locates classical Hollywood cinema's universal appeal precisely not in its "universal" characteristics but on its ability to address particularities, differences and singularities located outside the norm. "American movies of the classical period", Hansen maintains, "offered something like the first global vernacular":

> If this vernacular had a transnational and a translatable resonance, it was not just because of its optimal mobilization of hardwired structures and universal narrative templates but, more importantly, because it played a key role in mediating competing cultural discourses of modernity and modernization, because it articulated, multiplied, and globalized a particular historical experience. If classical cinema succeeded as an international modernist idiom on a mass basis, it did so not because of its presumably universal narrative form but because it meant different things to different people and publics, both at home and abroad (1999, p. 68).

The worldwide success of Hollywood films is due in large part, Hansen believes, to "their ability to provide, to mass audiences both at home and abroad, a sensory-reflexive horizon for the experience of modernization and modernity" (2000, p. 10). By "sensory-reflexive horizon", Hansen means,

> a discursive form in which individual experience may find expression and recognition by others, including strangers, that is, in public; and this public sphere is not limited to print media but circulates through visual and sonic media, involving sensory immediacy and affect (2000, p. 10).

Hansen's focus on the vernacular, therefore, does not situate it as an oppositional force to the modernist movement, as a rise of the people against high modernism circulated from above. Rather, her analysis highlights how modernity was negotiated, contested and challenged, but also embraced in daily, commercial, popular culture. A modern medium *par excellence*, cinema partakes in modernity's inherent reflexivity, a term which, Hansen points out, need not be equalled with overt, unequivocal critique: "the reflexive dimension of these films may consist precisely in the ways in which they allow their viewers to confront the constitutive ambivalence of modernity" (1999, p. 71).

Drawing on Siegfried Kracauer's work, Hansen stresses how the cinema, as a cultural institution, allowed the masses to "represent themselves as a public" (1995, p. 377). Hence, her approach shows how Hollywood perceived cinema as a public sphere implicating concrete, specific, local audiences at the same time as it strove to construct a universal spectator. The creation of the new public sphere was of particular importance for women who, up until then, had been excluded from most

public spheres. Discussing women's particular relationship with cinema and the erosion of the traditional gender hierarchy (public/male, private/female) it entailed, Hansen rightly pays particular attention to the concurrent transition from a producer to a consumer ethic. Drawing on William Leach's (1984) work on the consumer aesthetic shared by cinema and the retail stores, Hansen claims "the cinema became a powerful vehicle of reproducing spectators as consumers, an apparatus for binding desire and subjectivity in consumerist forms of social identity" (1991, p. 86). In this new mass consumption society, women became a central actor.[16] As the growth of consumer culture relied on soliciting women, advertisement targeted women by appealing directly to needs and desires which had long been excluded from the public sphere (pp. 116-118).

This new female-centric Hollywood no doubt also generated reactive strategies meant to contain, regulate and regain control over a female gaze gone adrift (p. 119). Hence, just as "the codification of spectatorship offered a mechanism to regulate and contain forms of scopic desire, to channel it into scenarios of conformity and consumption" (p. 86), "the cinema [...] both recognized and absorbed discourses of experience that conflicted with the latter, thus reproducing the conditions for the articulation of female subjectivity along with the strategies for its containment" (p. 123).

[16] By 1915 "women were doing between 80 and 85% of the consumer purchasing in the United States" (Edwards, 2001).

The woman's films of the early 1930s are overwhelmingly formulaic. They can easily be classified in a handful of sub-categories (Cinderella, gold digger and fallen women stories, maternal melodrama), each repeating, often with very little novelty similar plots, conventions and narrative devices. Rather than dismiss these films on account of their formulaic nature, I follow John Cawelti's advice to see in formulaic stories a "form of collective artistic behavior" revealing "cultural patterns" (1976, p. 2). While the archetype appeals to universal features (or presumed psychic "needs"), the formula represents the specific arrangement of figure, setting and situation taking shape in particular times (p. 6). Visual formulas gain strength, Martha Banta further argues, as they emerge "as answers to intense desires" (1987, p. xxxvii). What "holds" the woman's films together as a category, I argue, is the presence of a figure, the Modern Woman, around whom plots and situations are structured. As such, the Modern Woman functions as a chronotope in the Bakhtinian sense.

This dissertation explores the chronotope of the Modern Woman as it appears in the woman's films of the early 1930s, an important but often neglected vernacular expression of inter-war modernity. "Liquid modernity" provides the conceptual lens through which I look at the inter-war period of American modernity. Zygmunt Bauman's concept highlights the dual dynamic at work in the process of modernization: on the one hand, a push for radical change, freedom and an overthrowing of tradition and values and, on the other, a pull toward "solid" order, stability and control.

This dissertation follows the Modern Woman from her emergence in the late 1920s to her ultimate containment and expulsion outside the realm of American modernity in the mid-1930s. The Modern Woman is visually identified by her slender body, bobbed hair and simple, functional and revealing up-to-date clothes. These, in turn, are an expression of her personality and individuality. Indeed, the Modern Woman is also recognizable by her autonomy; a desire to determine one's own beliefs and to craft one's identity without recourse to family background, religious precepts, or social convention (Pippin, 1991). A high degree of reflexivity and a stubborn desire to pursue one's desire are therefore key aspects of the Modern Woman. "To be modern", notes Joel Dinerstein, "was to reject the wisdom of the ancients for self-authorization through experience" (in Halttunen, 2008, p. 199). This independence is manifest in the Modern Woman's "vibrant physicality" (Dumenil, 1995, p. 134) and easy mobility—both physical and social—as she is relieved (or in the process of being relieved) of the weight of Old World baggage. Independence, individualism, passion, reflexivity, physicality and social movement are, indeed, at odds with Victorian conceptions of order, hierarchy, stability and restraint (Halttunen, 2008, p. 199).

My concern, however, is with the Modern Woman understood as a chronotope; how she generates specific spatial and temporal configurations in film. This dissertation therefore goes beyond an analysis of the Modern Woman's visual and narrative characteristics and looks at the spaces and temporal coordinates of modernity as expressed in woman's film. Special attention will therefore be paid to modern

temporalities and modern spaces—temporalities and spaces expressing or permitting the enactment of modern subjectivity.

In chapter 1, I flesh out how we can think of the Modern Woman as a central chronotope of the early 1930s woman's films. Bakhtin's conceptualizations are explored along with those of recent interpreters and film scholars. This allows us to take an initial look at the Modern Woman's relationship with modern urban spaces. In chapter 2 I pursue this exploration to include the temporal dimension as it relates to the emergence of the Modern Woman as a synecdoche of American Modernity. In chapter 3 I take a closer look at three films—Alfred E. Green's 1933 *Baby Face*, Ray Enright's 1933 *Blondie Johnson* and Dorothy Arzner's 1931 *Working Girls*—to highlight the political charge of the Modern Woman chronotope, the challenges she poses, as well as the anxiety she gave rise to. I argue that in times of rapid social changes and cultural transitions—such as we find in inter-war liquid modernity—the Modern Woman is depicted in a way that makes her best adapted to the rapid changes. As the flux and flow of interwar modernity persist, and as the changes associated with the Modern Woman in film become both more radical and vernacular—matter of fact and pertaining to daily life rather than exceptional or limited to the upper class and high culture—the pressures to control the Modern Woman become more acute. Chapters 4 and 5 investigate two narrative "solutions" elaborated to deal with the unruly Modern Woman; containment through domesticity and abject expulsion.

Chapter 1 Modern Woman as Chronotope

"Sail forth — steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all."
—Walt Whitman, "Passage to India", qtd. in
Street Scene (King Vidor, 1931)

Bakhtin's Chronotope

Given his era's indifference to questions of gender, Bakhtin has rarely been thought of as a feminist thinker. Many have even criticized the gender-blindness of his work on the novel, more particularly in his essays pertaining to chronotopes. Indeed, Bakhtin's protagonists are always male, and the few women mentioned are narrative devices: courtesans, lovers and prostitutes (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 125). This may very well have resulted from the nature of the material Bakhtin uses to establish his taxonomy (he uses written documents from antiquity), but the fact remains that he seems at least unaware of the implications of looking exclusively at such material for his theory. Just as it has been remarked that Baudelaire's *flâneur* can only be male—a woman walking down the street is not a *flâneuse* but a streetwalker (Buck-Morss, 1986)—the protagonist walking down the road, as presented in Bakhtin's chronotope of the road, can only be male, for a woman would have a radically different experience and set of encounters. Were the protagonist to be a woman, Bakhtin's road chronotope would have to be significantly altered: she most likely would have to be accompanied by protectors, and her encounters would be threatening rather than fortuitous.

Nevertheless, many feminist theorists have found in other aspects of Bakhtin's work—most notably his dialogism—material with which to work. To understand the affinities between Bakhtin and feminist theory, and the potential benefits of using Bakhtin's framework in feminist analysis, we must first clarify the nature of the relationship between a work of art such as film and the society from which it stems, as well as Bakhtin's view of ideology.

Although Bakhtin does not make gender a determining factor in either language or ideology, Suzanne Rosenthal Shumway (1994) concisely shows how the concepts of "centrifugal" and "centripetal" can be made to intersect with what various feminist critics have termed "feminine" and "masculine" with regards to these two fields. As the author reminds us, many feminists have embraced the binary view that "masculine (or phallocentric) discourse is seen as a representation of the unified symbolic order that attempts to structure narrative, excluding the alien other that disrupts its unity", while the feminine is seen precisely as that which attempts to disturb and is constantly excluded by the masculine discourse (p. 154). Hegemonic discursive practices such as Hollywood films are, accordingly, seen as articulating a masculine voice and as promoting a patriarchal order.[17] This can only be done by suppressing discordant and dissident, feminine, voices: The more univocal the film, the more permeable it must make itself to the feminine.

[17] This approach would, moreover, be congruent with Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975).

In a similar fashion, Bakhtin's linguistic framework posits the presence of centrifugal and centripetal forces within language. Centripetal forces are those that pull language in the direction of the status quo. These forces, actively promoted by the dominant culture, seek to arrest the natural flow of language and to stabilize meaning. In contradistinction, centrifugal forces pull language away from this unification and towards change, play and destabilization. Both centripetal and centrifugal forces are present, Bakhtin believes, in all aspects of discursive practices, from novel to single utterances (1981, p. 272). Bakhtin, as we can see, conceives of languages as "living", in constant movement because animated by opposing forces engaged in a tug-of-war that constantly pulls them in various directions. The natural condition of any particular language (be it a "natural" or a specialized language) is "heteroglossia": the intermingling of various other languages. The centripetal forces of a language pull it towards "monoglossia" by suppressing and closing-off these other languages (p. 271). Ours, concludes Bakhtin, is a "contradictory and multi-languaged world" (p. 275), a fact that is potentially reflected in every utterance.

One can see here how Bakhtin's work on the novel extends far from the literary field and onto larger social issues pertaining to language and philosophy, and why Bakhtin saw himself as a philosopher rather than a literary theorist (Bakhtin, 1986, p. xiv). Indeed, his "perspective addresses, within a critique of literary texts, the complex relationships between humans and nature and social relations, without, however, succumbing to correspondence theory" (Aronowitz, 1995, p. 121). For Aronowitz,

Bakhtin's main ambition was "to read history through discourse" (p. 127) and an epistemology which places interpretation in its center:

> Until the discovery of the work of Mikhail Bakhtin [...] the debate concerning the possibility that literature might be a source of social knowledge was determined by the tenets of realist epistemology, according to which the literary text corresponds to an objective reality and, in fact, is determined by it, albeit not in a one-to-one copy. Even in the more sophisticated versions of the position, such as that of Lukàcs, the problem of the epistemological status of representation is never avoided. Within this framework one needs no theory of language, only a theory of narrative (p. 120).

The novel represents for Bakhtin the "quintessential register of society's attitudes toward itself and the world" (Danow, 1991, p. 43). While the poem tries to crystallize the author's voice in a centripetal fashion, the novel—animated by a centrifugal force—seeks to give equal voice to all its characters. The novel is therefore termed "polyphonic" by Bakhtin. Dostoevsky, the ultimate representative of polyphonic *novelness*, could accordingly give voice to characters adhering to various convictions and ideologies, even when these conflicted with his own. Reading his novels, one can hardly determine whether Dostoevsky was in favour or against religion, whether he believed in socialism or not. Additionally, Bakhtin claims the novel to be in "maximal contact with the present" and its "multi-languaged consciousness" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 11). While the epic recapitulates a past, finished, event, the novel locates itself in the here and now. This is intimately linked with the novel's "openness", since the present, as an unfinished event, has no definite conclusion yet. The novel, in its essence, is therefore more open to conflicting tendencies present in society and can hence "serve as contemporary vehicle for philosophical investigation" (Danow, 1991,

p. 43 and 113). “The language of the novel”, Bakhtin contends, “is a system of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 47). Consequently, “when the novel becomes the dominant genre, epistemology becomes the dominant discipline” (p. 15). Much like the novel itself, which remains open in an effort to combat closure (narrative, ideological), novelness, as a quality, also transcends the novel to “novelize” other genres (p. 39).

Even though Bakhtin never defines precisely what he means by “ideology,”[18] inferences can be drawn from various writings on the novel and language. For instance, when he criticizes formalist analysis for assuming “a simple and unmediated relation of speaker to his unitary and singular ‘own’ language” and for “postulat[ing] as well a simple realization of this language in the monologic utterance of the individual” (1981, p. 271), we sense an impatience with theorists who deny the importance of the social—and by extension, of ideology—in the production of discourse. “Such disciplines”, Bakhtin continues, “actually know only two poles in the life of language, between which are located all the linguistic and stylistic phenomena they know: on the one hand, the system of a *unitary language*, and on the other the *individual* speaking in this language” (p. 269).

This “unitary language”, which is the focus of study of the traditional philosophies of language, linguistics and stylistics criticized by Bakhtin, consists in fact solely in the centripetal forces of “linguistic unification and centralization” of the “*verbal-*

[18] Although essays whose authorship has been contested, and who have been attributed to the Bakhtin circle, do. See, for instance, Valentin Voloshinov (1973).

ideological world" (p. 269). The centrifugal forces present in language—forces that oppose ideological closure—are therefore excluded from traditional, formal analysis. A celebrator of heteroglossia, Bakhtin denounces vigorously the formalists' promotion of "one reigning language (dialect) over the others" (p. 270) and their taking sides in the tug of war between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Centripetal and centrifugal, however, are not originally linguistic, but, rather, mechanical, terms. By deliberately choosing these terms, "Bakhtin spatializes culture" (Rode, 2006). Keeping this in mind, one can easily expand these concepts outside the linguistic realm and onto cultural productions.

Important debates have divided Bakhtin interpreters ever since the rediscovery of his work in the 1960s[19]: one regarding the attribution of certain works, the other pertaining to the "systematicity" of his body of work. While the first debate has been "mediated" amicably by assigning authorship of V.N. Voloshinov and P.N. Medvedev to the "Bakhtin Circle",[20] the second debate still rages on. Caryl Emerson, Gary Saul Morson and Michael Holquist have sought to offer an overview of Bakhtin's thought as one that is unified and overall coherent. They argue that hints to the latter developments of Bakhtin's thoughts can be found in his earlier writings, and, moreover, that they can offer clues into the more profound meaning of later writings. Bakhtin, according to this view, had, from the beginning, an essential idea which he articulated in various forms throughout his life. Anthony Wall, among others, has

[19] For more on the "politics of Bakhtin's reception", and the various parties involved, see Tom Cohen (p. 130).

[20] David K. Danow (1996) provides a thorough exposé of this strange philological question.

convincingly argued against such a position, claiming that Bakhtin's own philosophy put forth the benefits of fragments over consistency (1990).

My use of Bakhtin in the present work does not seek to settle these debates. A few words must nevertheless be said regarding my position towards the systematicity of Bakhtin's work. As a writer, Bakhtin was anything but systematic (Danow, 1991; A. Wall, 1998). Not only did his writings cover a variety of subjects (philosophy, linguistics, literary theory), but he also adopted a variety of approaches without seeming to care whether they were compatible with one another. While not suggesting that the philosopher's work should be taken as contradiction-free (indeed, as Anthony Wall points out, Bakhtin seems to make it a point of constantly contradicting himself), I will interpret such underdeveloped concepts as the chronotope in light of his previous work, most notably in *Art and Answerability*, *Author and Hero*, and *Toward a Philosophy of the Act.* Holquist and Wall have provided convincing arguments to do so, and I believe that a much richer and fruitful understanding of the Bakhtinian chronotope results from such an approach.

Bakhtin's principal development of the chronotope is contained in "Forms of Time and of the chronotope in the Novel" published in *The Dialogic Imagination.* The essay, however, consists of an assemblage of notes Bakhtin wrote throughout the 1920s and 1930s that were subsequently put together by his editor (A. Wall, 2001, p. 139). This genealogy explains the strong sense of disjointedness that comes through, a sense that is only heightened by the 1973 "Concluding Remarks" closing the essay.

Indeed, if the various parts comprising the body of the essay seem disparate, the "Concluding Remarks" appear to have been written by someone else entirely. The first nine sections of the essay are concerned with identifying what he calls the "major chronotopes" of various literary genres. Following this method, Bakhtin identifies a series of chronotopes—the "adventure time" of Greek romance, the "adventure of everyday life" and the "biographical time" of antiquity—and what some would consider to be "motifs", *topoi* or settings. The "genre-defining" chronotopes are listed, briefly explained, and appear to be part of the effort, on Bakhtin's part, at establishing a firm taxonomy.

In the first sections of the "Concluding Remarks"—remarks that can hardly be said to "conclude anything" (Dentith, 1995)—Bakhtin briefly lists a series of additional chronotopes (the castle, the road, the salon). The goal here seems to be similar to that guiding the previous section, but Bakhtin's lack of enthusiasm for the procedure rapidly comes through. Anthony Wall claims that Bakhtin was reluctant to write the remarks (2001, p. 140), and only did so following his editors' insistence. Wall and Ladin (1999) indicate that Bakhtin's resistance to writing the remarks stem from the "fixity" of his previous method. The taxonomy, indeed, established a-historical, unchanging chronotopes, whereas Bakhtin's writings—which were not only constantly evolving, but also very much concerned with the constant historical development of language—strongly advocate against such a method.

Beyond a simple lack of enthusiasm with summing up the argument presented in the previous sections, the remarks point toward an entirely new way of conceiving the chronotope and chronotopical analysis. Indeed, Bakhtin opens with a strong argument in favour of looking at the chronotope as defining the relationship between a work of art and the outside world. Not only are chronotopes pivotal in evaluating this relationship, Bakhtin now tells us that they are so because of their evaluative aspect: "temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another, and always colored by emotions and values" (A. Wall, 2002, p. 205). Indications such as this one have lead interpreters to expand the conceptualisation of the chronotope much further than the application developed by Bakhtin in "Forms and Time".

The present work on chronotopicity participates in this effort to show the fruitfulness of an understanding of the chronotope in light of Bakhtin's ethics, that is, as a concept whose interest lies precisely in the way it links the time and space of film with that of its production and reception, a connection that occurs through embodied, situated, subjectivities.[21] This way of understanding the chronotope has certainly not been the most common. Most literary and filmic chronotopic analyses have focused solely on identifying and studying spatial and temporal archetypes.[22]

[21] A strong emphasis on Bakhtin's *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* was advocated by American translators and interpreters Holquist, Morson and Emerson who put forward a "hermeneutical" view relying heavily on the concept of "self". That this early text colors Bakhtin's entire oeuvre has been questioned, most notably by Marxist and British interpreters. While I do not wish to weigh in on this issue, my aim here is merely to show the importance of a literal sense of "situatedness" for Bakhtinian philosophy and to highlight the more profound implications of the chronotope.

[22] See, for instance, Best (1991), Moore and Valverde (1989) and Andrew (2000).

According to Joy Ladin "[o|ften, the chronotope is invoked to justify theoretical discussions of what is more simply called setting, that is, the time or space in which narrative events unfold” (1999, p. 214).

Chronotopes and the Body

Much of Bakhtin’s ethics, as developed in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* engages with “chronotopic”-related concepts, such as time, space and subject location. In this work, Bakhtin stresses the importance of spatial and temporal location for human life:

> Mathematical time and space guarantee the possible sense-unity of possible judgments (an actual judgment requires actual emotional-volitional interestedness), whereas my actual participation in time and space from my unique place in Being guarantees their inescapably compellent actuality and their valuative uniqueness—invests them, as it were, with flesh and blood (1993, p. 59).

The body occupies a central place in Bakhtin’s philosophy. Indeed, it is akin to an “event” in that it is conceptualized as a unique occurrence that “stands out”. As such, it is localized; it occupies specific spatio-temporal coordinates. Bakhtin stresses this “localisation” on a number of occasions because it literally grounds his further thoughts on ethics. In passages inspired by advances in relativity theory (and reminiscent of existential phenomenologists such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty), Bakhtin remarks:

> My active unique place is not just an abstract geometrical center, but constitutes an answerable, emotional-volitional,

> concrete center of the concrete manifoldness of the world, in which the spatial and temporal moment—the actual unique place and the actual, once-occurrent, historical day and hour of accomplishment—is a necessary but not exhaustive moment of my actual centrality—my centrality for myself (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 57).

The body has the privilege of occupying, at any point in time, a unique place. By being somewhere, a body excludes all others; "I occupy a place in once-occurrent Being that is unique and never-repeatable, a place that cannot be taken by anyone else" (p. 40). Following his reading of Einsteinian writings on relativity, Bakhtin stresses the fact that the singular place occupied by the body is also a unique point of observation. It is by virtue of this placement that human beings are accountable: embracing Einstein's relativity theory doesn't have to mean that one embraces relativism. One *must* answer when asked about one's "position", or one's "point of view" because no one else can: "From the unique place I occupy in existence there are things only I can see" (Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 71). The privilege of occupying such a unique point of observation does not come for free: it is paid for by the obligation of answerability. The self, in other words, is answerable *to* its social environment, what it is responsible *for* is authorship of its responses (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 38).

Through this "law of placement", we can see how embodiment, spatio-temporal placement and ethics are all interdependent terms for Bakhtin. Michael Holquist therefore concludes that the chronotope is a concept that "insists on the simultaneity and inseparability not only of time and space, but also value" (1990, p. 155). To this

effect, Bakhtin writes that "only the value of mortal man provides the standards for measuring the spatial and the temporal orders" (1993, p. 65). And although a certain tendency has prevailed in thinking of the chronotope as "time-space arrangements provid[ing] the ground for action for characters in a narrative" (Jack, 2006, p. 53), recent work in linguistic and narrative theory has shown the constitutive interdependence of subjectivity and chronotopical coordinates. One could argue, in fact, that in his taxonomy, Bakhtin only treats chronotopes as they relate to characters' development in a manner very similar to the architectonic deployed in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. In this earlier work, Bakhtin explains that readers can only approach a literary work through the "valuative spatial-temporal context of the heroine's life" (1993, p. 67). Along this line, Asif Agha (2007) demonstrates how a conception of chronotopes as "depictions of place-time-and-personhood" is implied in Bakhtin's literary criticism, since "projections of time cannot be isolated from those of locale and personhood" (p. 320). "A chronotopic depiction", Agha believes, "formulates a sketch of personhood in time and place" (p. 321). Mary Bratton also embraces a tri-partite definition of the chronotope, when she writes:

> For Bakhtin the chronotope is more than just a set of temporal and physical co-ordinates between which a hero moves: the hero is a configuration through which time and space find their specific and historically determined co-ordinates (2002, p. 208).

The Chronotope and Film Analysis

Although many interpreters have acknowledged the importance of the chronotope as more than a simple time/space coordinate for literary analysis, few have actually

used the term to its full potential by posing it as the link between diegetic and extra-diegetic worlds—or, in terms of cinema, on and off-screen worlds. In their glossary to Bakhtin's *Dialogic Imagination,* Holquist and Emerson define the chronotope as "an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring" (pp. 425-426). The chronotope, as I have already mentioned, was to be conceived by Bakhtin as much more than a simple motif, but as that which links the creating and the represented world. Bakhtin was indeed preoccupied by the conceptualization of this link in a way that would not be a mere causal relationship. Although he stresses the importance of maintaining the difference between art and the lived world (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 253), Bakhtin describes the two as participating in a situation akin to that of a dialogue (Vlasov, 1995, p. 38). Accordingly, the chronotope can be seen as a key point of entry into this dialogue and the central element to Bakhtin's "historical poetics". Contrary to David Bordwell's conceptualization of the historical poetics project, Bakhtin's goal when analysing narrative isn't simply to

> understand how stories are constructed and the effects they have on people [...]. It [also means] understanding why they have the effects they do, which [brings] us face to face with the messages, both overt and covert, that narratives carry—messages that are "powerful" and evocative because they touch a deeper substratum of chords in a culture that, once touched, resonate with a multiplicity of implications that interpretation articulates (Bhaskar, 1999, p. 392).

As Michael Montgomery (1993), Robert Stam (1989) and Joy Ladin (1999) point out, the chronotope is best exemplified, not in literature, but in film. Because of its nature, every filmic image is inherently chronotopic: time is only represented through space,

and spatial representations unfold over time. A series of fused time/space coordinates, film therefore poses a unique challenge for a chronotopic analysis. In order to help determine whether a particular element in a film should be considered a chronotope or not, Ladin lists four conditions: being organizing and foregrounding centers of key events and scenes; repeat explicit, concrete markers (the language must call attention to the spatio-temporal dimension); be well delineated (time and space must fuse in a distinct manner); and provide physical metaphors for abstract ideas or elements (1999, pp. 218-219). To function in a significant way, chronotopes should combine some of these characteristics. Otherwise, these spatio-temporal knots "remain incidental chronotopes, which are neither visible nor functional as "grounds" for narrative" (p. 219).

That being said, we must also guard ourselves against the "taxonomy" temptation, one which consists in focusing on "inert, discrete and a-temporal" motifs. Chronotopes, Ladin reminds us, "are dynamic, interrelated and highly temporal" (p. 230), and they must, first and foremost, be experienced as such by an interpreter. The chronotope must be "lived through" by a historically-situated interpreter, for (one of) its roles is precisely to establish a link between the world of the artwork and that of the interpreter/reader/spectator (Agha, 2007).

Vivian Sobchack's article on film noir, "Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir" (1998), provides an excellent exemplification of how one can use chronotopes to understand the relationship between film and offscreen

world in a way that is not as deterministic as a "cause-effect" relationship. Using the chronotope, she re-defines the link between the film's textual form and aesthetic and the social context from which it stems. Sobchack does not look for the social cause behind the text, but reads together "the internal logic of the films and the external logic of the culture" as they interlock in the spatial archive comprised by a particular genre or style of film (Wallace, 2009, p. 4). The chronotope, she points out, provides a way of "comprehending historically the phenomenological relation between text and context in a way richer than that afforded by traditional generic analysis" (p. 149). It therefore provides us with a way of re-articulating the relationship between filmic representations and social context, while avoiding crude sociological explanations.

As a "spatiotemporal structure of meaning" (p. 149), Sobchack shows how "lounge-time" can help elucidate the relationships between the emergence of film noir and the interplay of masculinity and femininity within its universe. Concretely, Sobchack believes that during the postwar years, "both wartime and the home front together come to form a re-membered idyllic national time-space of phenomenological integrity and plenitude". "A mythological construction, this chronotope" of the home front "emerges in postwar culture itself and becomes the lost time and place of national purpose, cohesion, and fulfillment" (p. 133). A lost object, home life hovers on the edge of noir, structuring the genre through its very absence. Noir unfolds in the transient spaces of the roadside cafés, diners, hotels and seedy cocktail lounges, cheap substitutes for domestic spaces. Peopled with untrustworthy femme fatales

rather than caring wives, these spaces "substitute perversely for the hospitable and felicitous places and domesticity of a 'proper' home" (p. 138). Sobchack concludes:

> The noir world of bars, diners, and seedy hotels, of clandestine yet public meetings in which domesticity and kinship relations are subverted, denied, and undone, a world of little labor and less love, of threatened men and sexually and economically predatory women — this world (concretely part of wartime and postwar American culture) realizes a frightening reversal and perversion of home and the coherent, stable, idealized, and idyllic past of prewar American patriarchy and patriotism (pp. 166-167).

The New Woman, the Flapper and the Modern Girl

Modernity has been theorized as masculine, and its iconic figures—following Baudelaire and Benjamin—are male (Felski, 1995; Wilson, 1991; Wolff, 1990). Although such an understanding of modernity has often been applied to the American context, embodiments of American modernity in vernacular culture have been primarily female (the flapper, the Gibson Girl, the Brinkley Girl). "However masculine the political and commercial activities that controlled 'the main world'", writes Martha Banta, "the images dominating the turn-of-the century imagination were variations on the figure of the young American woman and permutations of the type of the American Girl" (1987, p. xxxi). Billie Melman concurs: while "the contemporary woman had a counterpart in the 'modern young man'" in the 20s and early 30s, this masculine counterpart was presented as "unnaturally effeminate". "Sophisticate", "cosmopolitan" and "continental" were so many terms used to describe men possessing "Latin sex-appeal". The gigolo—the male taxi-dancer rumoured to provide sexual and romantic adventures to wealthy middle-aged

women—became a figure of both fascination and ridicule. *Variety* reported on the state of the Parisian trade in its May 21, 1930 issue, headlining "Gigolo Racket on Rocks", and hotels toying with the idea of offering a covert gigolo service were reported (*Variety,* October 27, 1931, p. 48). George Raft, who years ago had been a taxi-dancer with Rudolph Valentino, vehemently fought what he considered to be the highest insult to a man, comparing gigolos to sewer rats ("I'm No Gigolo!" rpt. in Levin, 1970, pp. 22-23). Consequently,

> [t]he phrase 'modern man' came to signify impotence in both the literal and metaphoric sense of the term (…). Unlike the young woman, who came to embody the spirit of 'modernity', the effeminate male made no impact on popular writing and the collective imagination (Melman, 1988, p. 24).

Rather than try to find evidence of a *flâneuse,* this section looks at American figures of modernity to derive a sense of a feminine experience of inter-war modernity. As Mary Poovey argues, "representations of gender [constitute] one of the sites on which ideological systems were simultaneously constructed and contested. […] They were sites at which struggles for authority occurred" (1989, p. 2).

A product of late 19th century England, the New Woman was an eminently political figure in both Britain and the United States where she quickly proliferated. She was associated with higher education, independence, but most importantly with feminism and the suffragette movement. An omnipresent figure in the press, the New Woman was often visually represented as matronly, riding a bicycle and participating in protests in favour of women's vote or prohibition. Indeed, the New Woman was very much associated with activism and the betterment of women's

living conditions, both at home and in the workplace. Visually, popular representations of the New Woman inspired and encapsulated hope but also much anxiety[23] as she was perceived as a threat to the Victorian social organisation based on "separate spheres" (M. H. Patterson, 2005).

The subsequent emergence of a "Modern Girl"—easily identifiable by her eroticized, slender and athletic body, bobbed hair, and "unladylike" smoking, drinking habits and flexible morals—has recently been closely documented by the Modern Girl Around the World Research Group.[24] Their research has brought into focus an understanding of the Modern Girl as a highly complex and multifaceted phenomenon: both a social reality and a commercial representation, an iconic image embodying various anxieties emanating from rapid social change and a lifestyle with incredible liberating potential. The authors of *The Modern Girl…* have fruitfully distinguished the phenomenon as distinct from the "New Woman" and, more specifically, from previous models of womanhood. Although the Modern Girl is a direct descendent of the New Woman, indifference to politics and community, as well as a concern with the self, distinguishes them. Whereas the New Woman emerged in a producer economy, the modern girl is a product and a producer of consumer culture: she buys and sells products, quite often, beauty products. She is visually

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[23] I follow Fredric Jameson in arguing that "anxiety and hope are two faces of the same collective consciousness" (1979, p. 144)

[24] Based at the University of Washington, the research group comprises members with research experience in China, Germany, India, Kenya, the United Kingdom and the United States. Their collaborative research has shown that the Modern Girl emerges as a popular figure in print media at about the same time on a global scale.

represented as self-absorbed and indulgent of pleasure: she often gazes at herself in a mirror, revelling in her youth and beauty.

The Group's "modern girl", however, is a composite image, one that betrays the subtleties of a series of developments in popular representations of women. Indeed, under the term "modern girl", the authors include such disparate figures as the flapper and the vamp, to mention only the American ones.[25] At the turn of the 19th century, a series of images of women emerged in the United States, a result of developments in print media, photography and cinema, the accelerated entry of women in the public realm and as consumers, and a symptom of what Jean-Louis Comolli termed the "frenzy of the visible" (1980, p. 122). Katherine Adams, Michael Keen and Jennifer Koella (2012) have identified five such figures dominating the American visual media between 1880 and 1920: the woman as child, the Gibson Girl, the stunt girl, the comedic victim of violence, and the evil lone dancer (Salomé, the Vamp). To this list, others could be added: the flapper,[26] of course and the Brinkley girl, whose characteristics have been analysed by Trina Robbins (2001). Each of these spoke *for* women as much as they were speaking *to* them, representing both liberation and ideological containment, and expressing both the hopes and fears generated by incarnations of new womanhood.

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[25] "Modern Girls were known by a variety of names including flappers, *garçonnes, moga, modeng xiaojie,* schoolgirls, *kallege ladki,* vamps and *neue Frauen*." (Group, 2005). The advantage of grouping all these figures under the umbrella term "modern girl" is to acknowledge the parallels and similarities among these varied figures emerging within the same time period around the world.
[26] For an in-depth study of the emergence and changing meaning of the flapper figure in British popular culture, see Billie Melman (1988).

The Group's use of the word "girl" has, by their admission, been questioned and criticized on numerous occasions. Using the term "girl", the authors do not so much want to focus on the woman's un-married status but to highlight how the Modern Girls "define[d] themselves in excess of conventional female roles" (p. 9):

> 'Girl' signifies the contested status of women who lie outside childhood and outside contemporary social codes and conventions relating to marriage, sexuality and motherhood and is a preferable theoretical alternative to the overdetermined category 'woman' (Group, 2005, p. 291, n15).

It seems, however, that it is precisely by using the word "girl" that attention is brought to the woman's un-married status or childlike nature. Indeed, while Merriam-Webster defines "woman" simply as "an adult female person", it defines "girl" as either "a female child from birth to adulthood", "a daughter" or "a young unmarried woman". It also adds that "girl" can be offensive, especially when it is used dismissively to imply a woman's lack.

While this is certainly not the Group's intention—as their work could be said to participate in a reclaiming of the word for empowerment purposes—I do believe that the term "girl" still unfortunately carries connotations pertaining to a woman's immaturity. For this reason, I use the term "woman". "Woman" here does not connote marital status but implies maturity and experience, a sense that she is not "unfinished", "in development" or in need of supervision, parental or otherwise.

The Modern Woman

The young woman at the center of the early 1930s woman's films no doubt often bears resemblance with the various figures of new womanhood of previous years. The girl reporter, but also the mystery-solver (*Night Nurse* [William Wellman, 1931], *Miss Pinkerton* [Lloyd Bacon, 1932], *Girl Missing* [Robert Florey, 1933]) bear traces of the stunt girl, and the various performers (dancers, torch singers, circus acts) often resemble the evil lone dancer and the vamp. Her physical appearance, moreover, links her to the flapper. But she also offers enough novelty to justify looking closely at her specificities. More importantly, she functions as both synecdoche and critique of modernity. Female characters have played both parts, quite often concurrently, in other art forms on a global scale (Warner, 1985; Weinbaum et al., 2008). But Hollywood's conversion to sound signalled a transition from women *in* modernity to women *as* modernity—or, more properly speaking, from topos to trope (Liska, 1995). Costume designer Adrian noted how the introduction of sound had changed both movies and their fashion: "With the entrance of the human voice actresses suddenly became human beings. A quality of mind came with the characterization and the story" (qtd. in Gutner, 2001, p. 8). As Lary May notes, "the 'talkie' film [...] interjected into the national civic sphere the voice and views of formerly silenced groups". Title cards, May maintains, had long been written

> in accord with the standards of official tastemakers. The advent of sound, however, generated films that officials saw as capable of reversing the basis of cultural authority from the top to the lower classes (2000, p. 62).

The introduction of sound not only gave voice to this new female figure (thereby making her much more than an image), but it also allowed her to take part in and to be embedded in sophisticated—if somewhat indirect—discussions regarding modernity.

Reflexivity, as I will show, is an important characteristic of the Modern Woman chronotope. The modern woman is presented as not only self-sustaining, but also as self-producing. Image is still an important component of the modern woman (she is to be looked at, and her being looked at is a condition of her success), but reflexivity plays an important role as she fully shapes her self-image. Reflexivity is therefore at her core, and it offers a way through liquid modernity, through her ability to mould and adapt herself to a rapidly changing social context.

The Modern Look

The pivotal importance of the emergence of a consumer ethic—and the demise of a producer ethic—for American inter-war modernity, and its link with the rise of women in the public sphere has been well documented. In a pioneering examination of female representations in silent cinema, Sumiko Higashi (1978) detailed how the emergence of a feminine figure of consumption within the public sphere facilitated popular circulation of images of desiring and pleasure-indulging women. The rise of

capitalist consumption is undoubtedly the most frequently commented upon aspect of women's relationship with silent cinema. Throughout the early 30s, this relationship is maintained as female characters and film stars sport the latest fashion, and the film industry develops tie-ins to promote specific brands and designs. Film narratives routinely depict success through the acquisition of the right look and proper consumption habits. Women's ability to purchase and wear the elegant lines of modern designs is indeed often presented as their way in, if not good society, then at least financial stability. For Richard Maltby, "[t]he culture of consumption" such as that found in 20s and 30s women's films, "promoted fashion as a mechanism of change that in itself not only increased the obligation to consume but provided a substitute for other, more politically active, forms of change" (1986, p. 26). Following Jackson Lears, Maltby believes that a consumption ethics—more particularly, an ethics of consumption as therapy—coopted and de-politicised the feminist movement:

> The emphasis on self-realization through emotional fulfillment, the devaluation of public life in favour of a leisure world of intense private experience, the need to construct a pleasing 'self' by purchasing consumer goods—these therapeutic imperatives helped to domesticate the drive toward female emancipation. […] They promised fake liberation through consumption, and many women accepted this new version of male hegemony (qtd. in Maltby, 1986, p. 26).

Many Marxist-inspired theorists have therefore condemned the woman's film as an ideological apparatus devised to "manufacture" subjects more concerned with cold creams than pink slips. The outright condemnation of the woman's film on the ground that it depoliticized the women's movement by promoting empty

consumption should, however, be mitigated by placing it within the larger context of American modern industrialization. In *Making the Modern* (1993), Terry Smith shows how Fordism coaxed men into becoming mindless machine-like operators during work hours by promising them freedom through consumption. "While men as workers were reduced to machines", Smith writes,

> men as consumers were trained, by the salespeople, in simple mechanics. The process consumed men in producing itself, but promised to liberate them as consumers by selling them freedom of movement, ownership of their mobility (p. 98).

In women's magazines and advertisement, "consuming was portrayed" to women "as a simple method of keeping [their] family healthy and intact through the crisis of the Great Depression" (Ryan, 1975, p. 299). This is part of a larger shift in advertising occurring through the 1920s, from a "product-centered approach"—which sought to introduce the product and its properties to consumers—to a "high-pressure, psychological" approach, which "preyed upon consumers' fears and insecurities, bred dissatisfaction and envy, and fostered a desire for an elegant carefree way of life" (Addison, 2006, p. 5). This is evidenced, for instance, in the advertising campaign Kotex ran throughout 1929 featuring a number of authority figures talking to shamed young women about their "offensive" smell. Concurrently, however, Johnson & Johnson ran its "Modernizing Mother" vignettes, in a number of national publications (*Ladies' Home Journal, Photoplay, Pictorial Review*). Contrary to Kotex, Modess used humour and appealed to women's desire to partake in the era's new freedoms. Its various episodes featured a mother and daughter partaking in daring adventures together—alpine skiing, boating, flying, going to amusement parks and

dancing. In these episodes, furthermore, the young woman introduces her mother to the new, modern ways. The copy invariably begins with an introduction promoting modernity over the old ways: the young daughter of today "will not tolerate the traditions and drudgeries which held her mother in bondage" claims the second episode. "Youth", in episode eight, "will not tolerate senseless drudgery, the slavery of old-fashioned ways". The last episode in the campaign concludes that "Old-fashioned ways cannot withstand the merry onslaught of the modern girl. Her enthusiasm is so sane and contagious, she is so everlastingly right in refusing the drudgeries and repressions of her mother's girlhood that the whole world is approving her gay philosophy" (Figure 1.1).

The two approaches adopted respectively by Kotex and Modess not only exemplify different marketing strategies but encapsulate modern institutions' twin pulls as described by Anthony Giddens (1991): one toward the suppression of the self, the other toward its actualisation and expression.

Figure 1.1 Kotex and Modess ads were featured on pages 129 and 123 of *Photoplay*'s April 1929 issue. Episode nine appeared in the November 1929 issue of the magazine.

The development of a consumer ethic was an integral part of American modernity. Men and women were, in this respect, equally *hailed*. Movies, like other cultural products, were never simply capitalism's mouthpiece. A discourse on modernity, or, more specifically, on the desirability of being "modern", is deeply imbedded in the woman's films of the early 1930s and in criticism around them. This discourse, however, occurs in film as much through explicit dialogue and narrative plot and structure as through visual means. In this way, architecture, set design and clothes play important narrative functions. Architecture and set design, according to Gabrielle Esperdy, "became, in effect, a quasi-character" in that "[i]t did not just accompany, but commented upon the action of the plot, reinforcing and promoting

the vision of American society it depicted" (2007, p. 199). Similarly, the clothes conveyed an imaginary, a utopian hope into the future's potentialities, not merely an "escape from the daily grind".

The Modern Woman as Chronotope

To claim that the Modern Woman is a chronotope is to argue that she is the structuring spatio-temporal knot around which a number of films from the early 30s are organized, that she possesses concrete and distinct socio-temporal markers and that she functions as physical ground for the articulation of abstract ideas. As a cultural artefact, she is also an ideological battleground, animated by both centripetal—unifying, solidifying—and centrifugal—fragmenting, liquefying—forces and constantly interacting with the producing world. Before moving to a closer analysis of the Modern Woman chronotope within the woman's films of the early 1930s, however, we will first focus on the spatial dimension of the chronotope to show how it relates to American inter-war liquid modernity.

In a recent article on women's relationship to cityscape in early 1930s films, Lucy Fischer claims that, although women have for long been associated with the city (cities often being referred to as feminine), "for […] on-screen women of the 1930s, modern architecture and design conspire to erase or expel the female element from

the metropolitan scene" (2010, p. 126). For Fischer, Busby Berkeley's films, among others, display an alarming concern with the elimination of women from the modern city.[27] Art Deco aesthetic[28] was used by men—"the authors of Art Deco"—as a way of controlling women's bodies and sexuality (2003, p. 32). To support this claim, Fischer puts forward a "gendered" conception of space and, more specifically, of Art Deco architecture and design. Art Deco, she maintains, "is often partitioned into two broad strands with opposing gender associations" (2000, p. 124). While straight lines, angularity and geometric shapes are associated with masculine rationality; curvilinear shapes, ornaments and decorative flourishes are associated with the feminine. Using select films, Fischer then goes on to show how *modern* apartments and workspaces prove inhospitable environments to women who are in constant danger of being sexually harassed. Moreover, these living and work spaces are located on top of high-rises (a phallic symbol if there ever was one), high-rises from which women, particularly, loose women, either jump to their death or are pushed off by a mob of men. Their death, she argues, alleviates both the desire and anxiety the woman on screen causes for the male subject (2010, p. 124). "In the 1930s", Fischer concludes, "filmmakers' [...] viewpoint did not bode well for the modern urban woman (p. 126).

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[27] Fischer is certainly not the first to criticize Busby Berkeley's treatment of the female form. For instance, Mary Ryan credits Berkeley with enacting "one of the most crass and explicit presentations of women as sexual commodities [...] on the movie screen" (1975, p. 302).

[28] Fischer uses "Art Deco aesthetic" as an umbrella term which includes modernism and streamlining.

Discussing women and modern architecture in early 1930s films, Philippa Gates expresses a similar idea (2011, pp. 62-63). Both authors support this argument with examples of films showing women being pushed off high-rises or jumping to their death. It should be mentioned, however, that such deaths are not the purview of women. *Secrets of a Secretary* (George Abbott, 1931), *Manhattan Tower* (Frank Strayer, 1932), *The Miracle Woman* (Frank Capra, 1931), *Counsellor at Law* (William Wyler, 1933) and *Employees' Entrance* (Roy Del Ruth, 1933) feature men committing or attempting to commit suicide by throwing themselves off tall buildings despite the Hay's office explicit recommendations against such imagery. The 1933 poverty-row *A Shriek in the Night* (dir. Albert Ray, starring Ginger Rogers), moreover, opens with an unusually graphic view—and scream—of a millionaire falling to his death from his modern penthouse balcony.

Fischer's gendered partitioning of both space (public: masculine/private: feminine) and Art Deco aesthetic (functional and angular: masculine/ornamental and curvilinear: feminine) is, I believe, questionable. While Joel Sanders makes a similar point, Katharine McClinton, whom Fischer also cites, is careful to avoid the dichotomy.[29] Rather, McClinton posits a distinction between two major approaches: "the traditionalists who tried to adapt the forms and techniques of the past to the demands of modern life and the innovators who rejected the past and accepted the materials and possibilities of the modern machine" (1986, p. 13). Fischer's analysis

[29] While she uses the word "feminine" to qualify the early incarnations of Art Deco, McClinton does not use the word "masculine" to qualify the modernistic approach (Weinbaum et al., 2008, pp. 3-4).

of the relationship between women and modernity is premised on a conflation of these two trends identified by McClinton, namely between Art Deco proper and modernism. Like modernism, Art Deco was associated with a rich spectrum of ideas and values. Unlike modernism—with its emphasis on novelty—Art Deco entertained a more direct (if playful) relationship with previous architectural movements. A distinction between Art Deco and modernism is key to understanding on-screen women's relationship to American modernity, as the Modern Woman is strongly associated with modern architecture and design and contrasted with Art Deco.

In *Designing Dreams*, Donald Albrecht provides an in-depth account of architectural trends in the United States and Europe from the 20s to the 40s as they intersect with their incarnations on screen.[30] Like McClinton, Albrecht shows that a definition of modernism was never the object of consensus, even among modern architects. Perhaps because *movement* is central to modernist architecture, the question of *direction* never ceased to arise. Albrecht nevertheless situates the emergence of modernist architecture at the 1927 Exhibition of the *Deutscher Werkbund* in Stuttgart, where modern architects were the sole exhibitors, and the following International Exhibition at New York's MOMA in 1932, when modern architecture took a definite turn towards the United States. The overarching philosophy guiding the modern style was a desire to bring architecture into the machine age and to

[30] Although Albrecht presents great discussions of the modern elements of movies' set design, he does not relate it with a film analysis, so that the set designs are not discussed in relation with the film's narrative or ideological ties. For instance, his lengthy discussion of *What a Widow!* (Allan Dwan, 1930) never once mentions that, the film being lost, his analysis is based solely on stills and promotional images.

improve working and living environments through functionality. By removing walls, favouring large windows, as well as generous and natural lighting, modernist architects sought to create in inhabitants a feeling of lightness, freedom and "openness". Walls, pillars and other structural elements are designed so as to appear to float in weightlessness. As Sheldon Cheney wrote in his 1930 *The New World Architecture*,

> Many times I have mentioned "openness" as an ideal of the new home building. I use the word with more than a spatial connotation. It seems to me clear that there is going on *a freeing process* in regard to both our physical and our mental lives. While the old walled-in house, the essentially castle-refuge sort of structure, is giving way before less-confined living space, women are discarding most of their clothes, and human minds are freeing themselves slowly of old superstitions, old limiting religions, old narrowly selfish motives. This is a general coming-forth—which seems to me calculated for the better health and the greater happiness of mankind (qtd. in Albrecht, 1986, p. 12).

A cosmopolitan, egalitarian and progressive hope in a future where work is valued and working and living environment are pleasant and healthy: "Modernists argued that the new age required nothing less than excellent design for everyone" (Duncan, 1988, p. 9). A pleasant and healthy environment, in the context of confined urban cities bursting with life and crowded with people, noise and pollution, is one that is understood as "open", bare from excessive decorations and "de-cluttered". In many ways, this cluttering was central to Art Deco, which originated in the early 1900s and culminated at the Paris *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* of 1925. "Art Deco" as it came to be known in the 1960s, "was essentially a conservative style", claims Albrecht (p. 7). In fact, "[m]any Art Deco designers transformed late-eighteenth-century neo-classical models into generously

proportioned furniture in rare and exotic materials such as ivory, heavily veined wood, tortoiseshell, and lizard skins" (p. 7). This emphasis on luxurious materials and decorative collectibles clashes with the modernistic no-nonsense functionality and classless society imaginary. So while Art Deco and modernism often intertwined in the mid-20s—creating what is often called "déco moderne"—modernism defined itself in large part in opposition to and as a departure from Art Deco sensibility. This is particularly significant in the context of a study of American modernism, for extravagant Art Deco remained associated with the Old World of Europe. For Terry Smith, Art Deco was a short-lived foreign import in the US until it developed its own "American" modern designs centering on "novelty, speed and change" (1993, p. 363). "Although the explicit distinction between Art Deco and modernism was not made until the later 1930s", Smith writes, "these differences were quickly spotted" (p. 368). While the United States did not send delegates to present their work at the Paris Exhibit, judging it could not fulfill the organizers' stipulations that "all items displayed be modern" (pp. 6-7) after 1927, it fully embraced a modern style whose industrious nature aligned perfectly with American sensibilities.

Alastair Duncan posits a similar distinction when admitting that Art Deco style "defies precise definition" (1988, p. 7). The original iconography, which included "stylized bouquets of flowers, young maidens, geometric patterns including zigzags, chevrons, and lightning bolts, and the ubiquitous *biche* (doe)" and other various influences from "high fashion, Egyptology, the Orient, tribal Africa and the Ballets Russes" were superseded, after 1925, by "the growing impact of the machine" and,

after 1930 by streamlining (p. 8). Futuristic streamlining invoked speed and movement: its "visual message was the promise of smooth sailing through the elimination of friction; its aim was to sweep through resistance of all kinds" (T. Smith, 1993, p. 379). For streamlining advocate Norman Bel Geddes, it "functioned as a metaphor for progress, prosperity, and modernity" (Esperdy, 2008, p. 147). In France, Duncan claims, Art Deco "manifested itself emotionally; with exuberance, colour and playfulness. In the rest of Europe, and later in the United States, its interpretation was more intellectual, based on concepts of functionalism and economy" (1988, p. 8). This later development, the author continues, "is known today as 'Modernism' to distinguish it from the high-style French variant, which is usually referred to as 'Art Deco'" (p. 8). "The modern", Lary May concludes his discussion on theater design, "presented a cultural critique of the old order as well as a model for the future" (2000, p. 119). We can easily see how Art Deco and Modernism entertain very different relationship with, not only history, but also with temporality: Art Deco is turned towards the past, Modernism looks towards a utopian, always changing future.

On a vernacular level, the introduction and dissemination of Art Deco and Modernist design in the United States spread through the movies and movie palaces. Benefitting from the influence of German émigrés, the movie sets and fashions embraced Art Deco designs as early as the 1920s. Naturally, the connotations associated with modern sets and designs, once part of film, transcended what modern architects had envisioned. The architects' and set designers' modernist visions encountered

resistance and were confronted with prejudices and preconceptions—often their own—regarding the nature of the public and the private realms. Modern architecture, Paramount's set designer Hans Dreier believes, has

> its place in the world of today, particularly in America. For skyscrapers, broadcasting stations, steamships, factories, warehouses and other structures of an industrial and impersonal nature, having few ties with the past, Contemporary design and material are indicated. The more functional the better. But in the home, the emotions as well as the intelligence have their place. As an institution it is ageless, and its design should express the many ties and facets of its essentially intimate role in our lives (qtd. in Albrecht, 1986, p. 111).

Dreier's comments call attention to the implicit association between, on the one hand, modernity, the public realm, change and the fluidity of the flow of time and, on the other, the "ageless", solid, quality of the home as a place of unchanging stability. Indeed, the essence of home lies in the stability it provides in an ever-changing world. A repository of patterns, the home is a "familiar point of reference in time, space, and society" (Terkenli, 1995, p. 326) furnishing, ideally, a solid anchor to people. As such, it can fulfill deep-seated emotional needs.

The cinematic Modern Woman's domestic interiors, however, rarely shied away from adopting modern designs, on the contrary. This is particularly the case for un-married, successful women. In *Blondie Johnson* (Ray Enright, 1933), the apartment Blondie (Joan Blondell) shares with Mae (Mae Busch) and Lulu (Toshia Mori) exemplifies the modern architecture's penchant for large, open spaces and colossal windows (Figure 1.2). Both Alison Drake's (Ruth Chatterton) office and home in

Female (Michael Curtiz, 1929) exemplify functional and elegant modern design. As seen in Figure 1.3, her office opens onto a massive window whence the whole car factory can be viewed. Her home—Frank Lloyd Wright's Ennis-Brown house—displays similar horizontal lines, high ceilings and absence of partitions (Figure 1.4). Susan Lenox's (Greta Garbo) lavish rooftop apartment displays openness, as no room is ever closed off, every partition being thinly veiled at best (Figure 1.5). High ceilings, rooftop balcony and large windows opening onto the cityscape (Figures 1.6 and 1.7) further contribute to people's free, flowing movement within a space that seems to hover over the city. The storefront aesthetic is probably at play here, as movie sets came to be seen as models for home renovation and decoration (Esperdy, 2007). To borrow Doane's words—written in a different context and pertaining to female spectacle—in these instances, the frame can be said to function "not as a 'window on the world' as in the Bazinian formulation but as a quite specific kind of window—a shop window" (1989, p. 24). The transparency offered by the glass partitions and the absence of walls certainly allowed the viewers to get a better view of the products and designs. However, these also functioned to highlight the modern, open-mindedness of their inhabitants—usually women—and their desire to see and be seen. This, in return, need not be associated with female narcissism, as many claim. Rather, it signals the women's willingness to break the Victorian taboos regarding women's bodies and the chastity and modesty that was expected of them.

Figure 1.2 Blondie Johnson's living room.

Figure 1.3 Alison Drake's office.

Figure 1.4 Picture window in bedroom.

Figure 1.5 See through partitions in *Susan Lenox*.

Figure 1.6 Susan's rooftop apartment lobby.

Figure 1.7 Bedroom overlooking the city.

American, democratic, dissolving of social distinctions reached far and wide, including daily, intimate life. Of this, Daniel J. Boorstin continues, we find no example more vivid or neglected than the story of glass, which came to be used as windows

and transparent walls (1973, pp. 336-345). Once it became mass-produced and cheap, “glass was now revealed on a grand scale as a medium that could erase old barriers” (p. 341); “the consequence for everyday experience was to give a new ambiguity to where people were and to confuse the boundaries of place” (p. 336). It also became a “symbol of the modern American spirit” as it removed the “sharp visual division between indoors and outdoors” and “blurr[ed] the distinctions among people” (p. 345).

Such a conception is congruent with Henri Lefebvre’s double understanding of space as semiotic and phenomenological (Schmid, 2008). A result of “past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 73). Henri Lefebvre argues that the production of space is primarily about performances of power through spatial practice, representations and representational spaces (Aitken & Dixon, 2006, p. 332). In phenomenological terms, these become perceived (*perçu*), conceived (conçu) and lived (*vécu*). Although one might be tempted to simply divide spaces into types (an urban development map of a park would be classified as a representation of space, the act of walking or using the park on a daily basis would be a social practice, etc), Lefebvre specifies that all three dimensions are inter-connected: space is at once perceived, conceived, and lived” (Schmid, 2008).

Archie Mayo’s *Street of Women* (1932) contrasts the modern woman’s apartment with the older, society woman’s home. We first meet Natalie (Kay Francis) as Larry

Baldwin comes (to what appears to be) home following a visit of the Baldwin Skyscraper, whose construction is visible through the apartment's large window. Natalie, we soon find out, is a woman's fashion designer who owns her company. Both partners seem equally successful, and their ease, shared interests and equal professional determination results in what appears to be overwhelming happiness. A recurring theme of the film is Larry's overcoming of mid-life lethargy after meeting Natalie. Larry attributes his success—and the building of the skyscraper—to them both, claiming she gave him back a hunger for life. "Behind every skyscraper" and "every successful man" is a woman, claims Larry. But not any woman.

A liberal ease and informality pervades the early scenes taking place in Natalie's apartment, a fact that is embodied in Mattie (Louise Beavers). A maid, Mattie is nevertheless absent when Larry first comes through the door, as she is busy in the kitchen. Frequent banter and laughs are exchanged with the various guests, and her relationship with Natalie is one of informality.

In the next scene, however, Larry comes home again. This time, it is a different home, and he is greeted by a dutiful English butler. A parallel composition invites the viewer to contrast the two dwellings (Figures 1.8 and 1.9), as both doorways are framed with chairs: the first, mismatched modern low-rising oval chairs, the second, Victorian and over-sized. This is Larry's "real" home, one he shares with his wife of seventeen years, Lois, and their daughter. The couple has clearly drifted apart for

some time, Larry caring nothing for his wife's social agenda, and she resentful of his recent devotion to "building things".

Throughout the film, we witness Larry Baldwin's skyscraper being built through Natalie's window (Figure 1.10). The construction of the building itself seems to depend on his relationship with Natalie, since she provides him with the hunger and passion to build and develop the city. The nation's development in fact, appears to depend on a male/female companionship. The skyscraper may have been the ultimate symbol of modernity, but the building industry had been the hardest hit during the Depression. Building activity declined from $4 billion in 1925 to $1.5 billion in 1930 to $400 million in 1933. It is estimated that 80 percent of all those working in the building industry—30% of the unemployed—were out of work during the worst years of the Depression (Esperdy, 2008, p. 53). The absence of construction projects and urban development, which occurred immediately after the construction of landmark skyscrapers,[31] came to represent the concrete effect of economic stagnation. According to Gabrielle Esperdy, "[p]rior to the Depression [...] modernization was regarded as a real estate strategy concerned with ends and not means since the modernized building was more important than the act of modernization". After 1929, however, "modernization was repositioned as a central building industry activity capable of producing jobs, increasing demand for materials, and generating economic revival" (2008, p. 55). The Depression was

[31] The Chrysler and the Empire State building were completed in 1930 and 1931 respectively.

largely thought to be prolongied due to industrialists' hoarding away their money instead of injecting it back into society. The New Deal may be remembered as promoting a philosophy of "pulling together to whip the depression" (Eckert, 1978, p. 3), but it was also chiefly to "coax reluctant capital out of hiding".[32] Tellingly, a man's career in architecture is associated with beating the odds to achieve success in *Mothers Cry* (Hobart Henley, 1930), *The Lady Refuses* (George Archainbaud, 1931), *The Guilty Generation* (Rowland V. Lee, 1931) and *Ann Carver's Profession* (Edward Buzzell, 1933). Men "building things" is a powerful visual analogy for the nation's recovery, and women are credited for inspiring men to join or pursue the profession.

In an intimate discussion with his daughter—who is entering the social realm as a debutante—Larry implores her not to follow her mother's upper-class aspirations, but to rather find a creative man and help him achieve success. Lois' "social scheme"—her words—, indeed, demands much human sacrifice. Belonging to the upper class requires one to leave all passions behind and devoting one's life to appearances, quelling all traces of authenticity. It is, moreover, a world that devalues creative and economic endeavours: one proves their social and economic standing *precisely* by not working. After much tribulation and one-too-many plot twists, Larry will obtain a divorce from his wife. As he and Natalie embrace in the final scene, the camera pans right to show the newly finished Baldwin building (Figure 1.11).

[32] "Roosevelt Acts to Speed Building Trades Recovery", *New York Times,* May 15, 1934, p. 1, (qtd. in Esperdy, 2008)

Figure 1.8 Natalie's modern apartment.

Figure 1.9 Lois' traditional home.

Figure 1.10 The Baldwin Building in construction.

Figure 1.11 The Baldwin Building completed.

The basic plot of *Street of Women*—of a man made lethargic by his stale upper-class domestic life who meets an energetic, young woman who gives him back a hunger for life and productive enterprises—is found in a number of films in the early 1930s. Analysing popular representations of women in newspapers, Adams, Keene and McKay (2009) have noticed a similar trend starting in the 1920s: Aging and married women, the authors claim, paid the price of the twin-cult of youth and body image. Released in 1934, *Upper World* (Roy del Ruth) adopts a similar narrative line. The disagreement between husband (Warren William) and wife (Mary Astor) is encapsulated in the fact that she wants their young son to go to a reputed and expensive military school, while he wants their son to attend public school. It may be

a sign of changing times that the modern woman in question (Ginger Rogers) is killed by film's end, and husband and wife—a wife who now realizes the error of her ways—embark on a transatlantic liner to start afresh in Europe. The wife's "redemption" is made possible here, we could hypothesize, by her youthful appearance and slender body. Social climbing was merely a wrong turn to be rectified. But it is also a redirection of energy from the social scene to their romantic life. Indeed, they vow to avoid all the "nonsense" of social calls and obligations which brought them apart. They also pledge to renew their vows every year by visiting a different country and extend their travels to Asia and South America. Being an international tourist, regardless of the destination, is synonymous with freedom (freedom from social ties, but also freedom of movement), prosperity and, in a way, with an idealized vision of modern *Americanness*, as it symbolizes the modern American's ability to face, adapt and manoeuvre in any situation. It is, furthermore, a marker of status potentially available to anyone who can afford it (C. Kaplan, 1996; Urry, 2002). Tourism, Bauman believes, exemplifies the loosening of temporal and spatial attachments of liquid modernity; "being *in* but not *of* the place" (Bauman, 2012; Franklin, 2003, p. 208):

> The tourists want to immerse themselves in a strange and bizarre element [...] on condition, though, that it will not stick to the skin and thus can be shaken off whenever they wish [...] This makes the world seem infinitely gentle, obedient to the tourist's wishes and whims, ready to oblige [...] One may say that what the tourist buys, what he pays for, what he demands to be delivered is precisely the right not to be bothered (Bauman, 2012, p. 30).

Being a tourist therefore affirms one's capacity for detachment and ability to escape, untouched, from any earthly encroachments. But the tourist's capacity to move

through space at will and at great speed also enacts a mastery of time and space, a refusal to being determined by them both.

One can see from these examples that it is not unusual for women to make a home in high-rises and modern designs. In fact, these suit perfectly a certain type of woman: the successful, modern, workingwoman. These women represent a hopeful progress into the future, and it is therefore not surprising that they come to be associated, narratively and visually, with the building of skyscrapers themselves. The apartment's design and overview of the cityscape reflect the woman's character and personality, and is constitutive of the Modern Woman as a chronotope. The open designs lead their inhabitants to ease in movement and general comportment and informality. It is not unusual for the inhabitants to be lying down or reclining on a chaise longue, to sit on the floor, or to sit askew. They are, furthermore, spaces associated with a woman's professional success and independence, not with the domestic nurturing and care of the home as an "institution". Women often conduct business from their apartment. Flowers, vases and statues can nonetheless be said to mark the modern space as "feminine" without adopting a deco aesthetic. As such, these modernist spaces are not anti-feminine but are rather antithetical with traditional conceptions of feminine domesticity. This clarifies Dreier's earlier comments regarding the difficulty of applying the modern aesthetic to the home: it isn't the home itself that is anti-modern, but a certain idea of the home as a traditional, domestic sphere.

Furthermore, these examples show that there was no simple binary opposition between modern and traditional, whereas "modern equals bad; traditional equals good". According to Gabrielle Esperdy,

> in the late twenties and continuing into the thirties, motion picture set design was directly influenced by broader social considerations. It was a relationship that could be summed up by two fairly simple equations

whereas "good meant honest virtue, loyalty and fidelity" and "bad, at least in Hollywood's vernacular, was subject to as many interpretations as modern" (2007, p. 207). This may have been the case in certain films, but it isn't so in the woman's films featuring the Modern Woman. We can only agree with Esperdy when she stresses the mutual influence of set design and broader social concerns. Taking gender into account, however, we notice that the relationship is far from simple. The Modern Woman's environment is a modern, functional one, one that invites free movement and visuality. It is contrasted with the partitioned spaces and ornamentations of Victorian, Old-world tradition.

Grand Hotel

The open design of modern architecture reaches its apogee in Edmund Goulding's 1932 *Grand Hotel.* Based on Vicki Baum's 1929 bestselling novel *Menschen im Hotel* ("People in a hotel"), the movie takes place almost exclusively inside a luxury Berlin hotel[33]. The book's novelty—so popular as to give birth to a trend of the same

[33] Even when the camera moves out of the hotel, it is still filming the hotel.

name[34]—resided in creating a setting where various people, unrelated and of different backgrounds, meet and whose lives become intertwined:

> A beautiful ballerina to whom love is no less an art than dancing… a lovely and ingenuous peasant girl (with a fixed price on her charms)… a respectable business tycoon, caught in the web of an unholy lust… a world-weary cynic who lost hope (and half his face) at Flanders… a down-trodden clerk with only a few weeks left to in which to grasp life… These are some of the men and women of the GRAND HOTEL![35]

The interest of the book resides in creating a place where people of various means and social classes are made to socialize even though they have, at first glance, very little in common. Once they interact, such commonalities become apparent: they all share the same hopes, desires, and despairs. Moreover, various strategies are used to create a microcosmic melting pot in which social classes fluctuate at will and where social mobility is easily achieved.

Cedric Gibbons—an "architect of the Functional persuasion" (Cutts, 1938, p. 18)—was tasked to re-create, visually, the ambiance of *Grand Hotel* (Figure 1.12). In a distinctive modern style, Gibbons placed the hotel reception on a circular desk in the center of the lobby, with various shops and restaurants located on the outside edge of the hotel (Figure 1.13). According to Donald Albrecht, "[m]ovie plot and architecture have seldom been so closely harmonized" as in *Grand Hotel*:

> Circles are prominent in every aspect of the Grand Hotel's design—an appropriate image for the spinning-wheel-of-fortune

[34] *Shanghai Express* (Josef von Sternberg, 1932) and *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939), to name only a few, were both referred to as "Grand Hotel on wheels". See David Bordwell (2006, pp. 94-97).
[35] American edition back cover.

> scenario. The circular motif appears in the hotel's round, multilevel atrium with open balconies, in the continually revolving doors, and in ornaments on balcony railings. It also appears in the round reception desk, which acts as a pivot for the curving shots that follow the movement of the film's characters, who travel across the black-and-white floor like pawns in a chess game (1986, pp. 139-140).

The 360 degree hotel lobby is thereby transformed into something akin to a popular boulevard, complete with lounging chairs.[36] The upper floors, where the rooms are located, are similarly adorned with very large hallways and sitting areas where people congregate to socialize. It is in just such a communal area that on-call stenographer Flaemmchen (Joan Crawford) is mistaken for a baroness because of her close physical proximity to a baron (John Barrymore), who is in fact later revealed to be *also* a gambler and a thief.

The Grand Hotel may be a space of hyperbolic luxury, the kind associated with the upper class and Old World elites, but in the American context hotels were thought of—and they still are today—as Palaces for the Public (Boorstin, 1973, p. 350). Indeed, the luxurious hotel offered the *Everyperson* a chance to experience modern commodities, and the opulence and grandeur offered only previously to the aristocracy. Moreover, the Grand Hotel is a space which prompts seismic social hierarchy shifts and culminates in the triumphant liberation of the working class as Flaemmchen and a lowly clerk put their tyrannical boss in prison and leave, arm in arm, for France—a space of fantasized escape and freedom for them both. The

[36] The original shooting script indicates that the opening scene would have the camera moving around the lobby much more than we see in the film, going into a bar, a florist, and a restaurant's dining room and kitchen "like a human being, seeing and hearing".

conventions of the genre would have dictated a Cinderella-inspired love–story blossoming between the baron and Flaemmchen following their magnetic first encounter on the mezzanine. Instead, however, the baron falls madly in love with an even more improbable match: world-renowned—and world-weary—ballerina, Madame Grusinskaya (Greta Garbo). Their encounter is exemplary of the type of relationships allowed by the Grand Hotel: close proximity resulting in chance encounters, class intermingling and temporary class dissolution. Upon their first night together—and having just met as the Baron intruded into her room to steal her pearls—Grusinskaya and the Baron lie casually on a chaise longue made to look like a bed.

A characteristic trait of *Grand Hotel* is its indiscriminate treatment of workers and guests. The picture opens with a camera panning over the hotel's many female telephone operators connecting the hotel guests with the outside world. This first sequence dissolves into a succession of static shots of numerous hotel guests on the phone, in various stages of personal crisis. The to-and-fro of the hotel guests, made possible by the hotel's design is matched by the "sweeping scope of the camera and in swaying from room to room and from the lobby to the telephone switchboard,"[37] following the action as it moves indistinguishably from hotel guest and workers. Goulding's avowed intention was to "use the camera as a 'walking personality', letting it follow the tangled destinies of the central characters […] as an invisible

[37] Mordaunt Hall, "A Pictorial Version of Vicki Braum's Stage Work", *New York Times,* April 13, 1932.

onlooker."[38] This moving camera contributes to the democratic character of the picture, capturing the upper and working classes in the same movement. It also seems to travel incognito, either staying in a single room to show how the same space can be occupied by workers and guests, but also to show the usually unseen, private life of both classes. When the camera reveals what the guests do behind closed doors, the effect is, once again, class levelling, democratic. Grusinskaya the celebrated ballerina is suicidal, the baron lies on the floor to talk to his only true companion, a dog (Figure 1.14), and the porter is a fretful and caring husband about to become a father.

As the camera moves freely around a self-contained environment where people stroll, lounge and shop, the hotel resembles an ocean liner, a resemblance reinforced in various scenes "on deck" (Figure 1.15). The hotel, like the ocean liner cruising through the open sea of modernity, offers the security of containment from the outside and a temporary democratic space where conventional social hierarchy is suspended.

Figure 1.12 Grand Hotel lobby seen from above.

Figure 1.13 Grand Hotel lounge.

[38] "'Grand Hotel' Film", *New York Times,* March 27, 1932.

Figure 1.14 The Baron with dog on floor.

Figure 1.15 The Baron and Flaemmchen having a cigarette in the upper-floor lounge.

A contained space such as the one found in *Grand Hotel* is an important element of many Modern Woman's films. The various spaces, be they hotels, large office buildings, department stores or ocean liners often look very much alike and can hardly be told apart. Structurally, they are large, open spaces facilitating the intermingling of various people belonging to different classes. They are linked in the types of comportment and encounters they facilitate. The office building lobbies in *Manhattan Tower* (Frank Strayer, 1932) and *Skyscraper Souls* (Edgar Selwyn, 1932), for instance, create similar chance encounters among various workers. *Manhattan Tower*'s camera is even more mobile than *Grand Hotel*'s. In the opening minutes of the film, the camera ceaselessly moves from window washers working on a suspended platform to tourists admiring the skyscraper in an open-top car to secretaries walking on the sidewalk to work to the masses of workers in the lobby. From the hotel's lobby, special effects are used to create the impression that the camera is descending into the underground, where we meet Jimmy (James Hall) working in the engineering room in overalls. As the clock hits 8:45, Jimmy changes jacket and climbs up to meet his girlfriend Mary in the lobby. As they part, the

camera stays with Mary who takes the elevator to her upper-level office. Camera movement is emphasized, once more, by being seemingly located on top of the elevator so that the viewers see the many floors travelled, thereby creating a stronger sense of the environment as a closed, lived in, unit. A social microcosm, the office building functions thanks to various people doing their respective jobs, from engineers hidden in the basement to top-floor office clerks and managers.

Tellingly, in *Skyscraper Souls* Anita Page is wearing a very similar dress to Crawford's signature Grand Hotel outfit. The dress by Adrian (Figure 1.15)—a "masterpiece in design"—had created quite a sensation with its interesting manipulation of various codes: the solid black dress with white collar and cuffs recall Puritan wear which its plunging neckline contradicts. The white cuffs evoke clerical workwear, but the asymmetrical cut of the collar indicates greater refinement and add a touch of sass. Finally, the dress is presented as the most clever outfit for a woman of low means, since it works for both day and night time, which is evidenced in the fact that it is the only gown worn by Flaemmchen throughout the film.

The Grand Hotel constitutes a space of modernity in the sense of our earlier formulation, as a space allowing for the emergence or enactment of modern subjectivity. In its simplest form—and like all hotels—it is a home for the homeless, a home of non-committed, transient and selective relationships. It suspends to some degree "normal" social hierarchies: everyone who can afford a room is an equal. In modern hotels, "time and space are available to anyone as long as he or she has the

money to buy, that is, rent them, and guests have no anterior or future identity beyond the one as a guest of a certain hotel" (Matthias, 2004, p. 327). In an early scene, lowly clerk Otto Kringelein (Lionel Barrymore) vigorously protests for his right to pay and receive a room of equal quality as those received by the other guests: "I want a room—a big room—like you would give General Director Preysing—I'm as good as Mr. Preysing—I can pay like Mr. Preysing". This implacable argument wins him a room next to the other guests.

Although *Grand Hotel* could count on the heavy draw of not only one, but two Barrymores, it also starred two "femme favourites": Joan Crawford and Greta Garbo. *Grand Hotel* was the first film to be conceived as a multi-star vehicle, a fact that caused some tensions on set on Garbo's part, as the actress was not used to such a "democratic" work environment[39]. The unusual coupling of not only one but two female stars caused much enthusiasm. This was to be Crawford's—the rising Modern—first prestige picture and the Great Garbo's—who was at the top of her career—first romantic pairing with another screen legend; John Barrymore. Edmund Goulding was chosen by Irving Thalberg to direct the movie for his ability to work with women: "Eddie thinks like a woman. He'll bring out their femininity. I want them to stand out over the men" (qtd. in Kennedy, 2004, p. 113). The two women, however, shared no scenes together: Goulding envisioned the film's narrative

[39] To her request, Garbo would not have to interact with Crawford, who could only arrive on set after 5pm, once Garbo's workday was over (Bret, 2006; Kennedy, 2004).

structure as two films[40]—each starring a woman in crisis—linked by the baron. John Barrymore's performance has, in fact, been seen recently as mediating Crawford and Garbo's very different acting styles (Azcona, 2010).

Despite being a multi-protagonist film, it therefore re-centers the novel's action around its two most interesting characters: the modern stenographer/prostitute Flaemmchen and the famous Grusinskaya. Both are, in a sense, homeless, unattached women who have made hotels their habitual transitory *pied-à-terre*. Grusinskaya because she has been touring for years, travelling from one city to another, and Flaemmchen because she makes a living from seducing wealthy men in luxury hotels.[41] Both women therefore enter the hotel free of parental authority and constraints. But they are also trapped in social and economical circumstances and both struggle to re-gain control over their existence, which constitutes the personal crisis structuring the film.

Grusinskaya has become ensnared into an ungrateful career for which she has lost all passion. She might be a dancer, but ballet offers her very little room for self-expression. She has devoted her life to moulding her body to classical ballet's tyrannical demands and finds herself alone and empty as the walks through the doors of the Grand Hotel. Flaemmchen is likewise trapped into routine one-night stands while she dreams of a film career and travels. Her career as a stenographer

[40] Although William Drake received screen credit as per contractual agreement, Goulding is responsible for writing the screenplay (Kennedy, 2004, p. 113).
[41] A fact that is asserted bluntly in the novel, but only alluded to in the motion picture.

cannot sustain her and she must rely on prostitution for clothes and meals. Both, finally, are threatened by time: Grusinskaya's aging body endangers her career—a career to which she has devoted her entire life—and Flaemmchen is bound to waste her youth and beauty—the best years of her life—until she eventually loses both. The cruel pressure effectuated by the passage of time and the urgency of living one's life to the fullest while there is still time, is reinforced throughout the film with the other characters being engaged in a race against time: Kringelein has only a few days to live, and has therefore left his boring provincial town to finally enjoy his last pennies, the baron has only hours to find money to settle a gambling debt, and Preysing (Wallace Beery) must conclude a complex business deal or else he will lose the family's company and fortune.

The speeding up of time and people's feeling of being caught in its whirlwind has often been seen as one of the defining experiences of modernity (Rosa & Scheuerman, 2009). One of the defining features of *Grand Hotel* is how it stages the temporal experience of modernity. In this respect, passage through the Grand Hotel proves cathartic for both Flaemmchen and Grusinskaya. Grusinskaya, by engaging in an erotic adventure with a stranger and overcoming loneliness, and Flaemmchen, by striking a friendship and leaving the hotel to travel Europe as a tourist. Through her friendship with the newly affluent Kringelein, she is able to leave the Grand Hotel—which she has occupied as a commodity—and re-enter any other European hotel as a tourist. The crisis resolved as a result of passage through the Grand Hotel is one concerning the women gaining some control over the passage of time.

Spaces of Appearance, Spaces of Surveillance

In *Sinners in the Sun* (Alexander Hall, 1932), Carole Lombard models expensive gowns at Louis', a fashion designer's lavish store. Extended scenes take place at Louis', filmed so as to display its modern interiors to their fullest (Figure 1.16). Models at various stages of undress walk around, which, added to the interior architecture, creates an ongoing visual spectacle. High ceilings, minimal furniture and an absence of partitions creates the sense of openness and freedom mentioned earlier by Albrecht and Cheney. Not only do women move around freely, but their walk and overall demeanour is easy and relaxed. More importantly, this space—in which wealthy customers and working models circulate together—permits class intermingling and transgressions. In the opening sequence, Doris—Lombard's character—is mistaken for a customer, a scene we see repeated in other films of the period (Figure 1.17).[42] In a latter sequence, a wealthy customer intuits that Doris is a working model (only because "she wears clothes so beautifully"), yet invites her to sit for a cigarette and a chat. The two converse as equals, each sharing their reality to the other, discovering the commonalities in their divergent situations.

[42] See, for instance *Bought!* (Archie Mayo, 1931) and *The Reckless Hour* (John Francis Dillon, 1931). *Bad Girl* (Frank Borzage, 1931) and *Double Harness* (John Cromwell, 1933) create a similar confusion in the viewer. In both films, what the viewer thinks is initially a wedding ceremony turns out to be a fashion show.

Figure 1.16 Inside *Sinners in the Sun*'s Louis'.

Figure 1.15 Models and customers sharing a cigarette.

Figure 1.18 Doris' family home.

Figure 1.16 Crowded home interior.

The opening sequence at Louis' is followed immediately by scenes taking place at Doris' home, where she lives with her parents, grandparents, brother and sister-in-law. Even though Doris brings in more money than anyone else, all except her mother persist on disparaging her for her job and lifestyle. Mealtimes are particularly painful for Doris, who is constantly persecuted. After meals, everyone—except mother who must clean up after everyone—retires into their assigned seat in the living room to read their section of the newspaper while listening to a hysterical program blasting from the radio (Figures 1.18 and 1.19). Their actions seem well-rehearsed, even their banter sounds old. These are sad scenes: everyone is profoundly unhappy, and they take revenge by making each other's lives unbearable.

Not only are the two spaces—work and home—highly contrasted, but they are shown to affect Doris in significant ways. Once at home, Doris' comings and goings are closely scrutinized, and she is scolded for the company she (supposedly) keeps, her father eventually kicking her out in the middle of the night. She is constantly denigrated and dehumanized. One gathers from the living room scene that, were she to remain at home, she would eventually join the routine, be assigned her own section and take her place among the Sunday paper readers.

Louis', with its expensive clothes, inviting and open interior and sophisticated patrons, is a *space of appearance* in contrast to the home, which is a *space of surveillance* and control. As Xavier Marquez recently remarked, "both types of spaces"—the first developed by Hannah Arendt, the second by Michel Foucault—"represent poles in a spectrum of possibilities for the settings where selves and subjects are partially constituted by the ways in which they become visible" (2012, p. 7). Although power relations and visibility can become entangled in a multitude of non-exclusive ways, the point Marquez wants to emphasize is that certain spaces can create a relationship among equals which, in turn, become settings "where individuality emerges from self-disclosure" (p. 7). In other words, making oneself visible, revealing or unveiling oneself to others does not have to be equated, *pace* Mulvey, with a tipping of the power-balance in favour of the bearer of the gaze.[43]

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[43] Although the films I am looking at cannot be said to demonstrate usage of power that is congruent with Arendt's understanding—concerted action—, it should be

According to Arendt, the public realm, a space of appearance, action and speech, is crucial for human existence. Appearance constitutes, first and foremost, reality for human subjects. Thoughts, feelings, and emotions, remain uncertain unless they enter the public realm and are shared with/by others (Arendt, 1958, p. 50). In order for venues to become spaces of freedom and appearance, "artificial equality" must be established. Such equality is artificial, Arendt believes, because it is limited in time and space—it only exists within the limits of a particular space—, and it does not eliminate completely differences in wealth or status. Equality is dependent on the space itself, and on the lateral and mutual visibility it allows. In spaces of freedom, social distinctions are temporarily suspended so that individuals of different backgrounds and social standings can interact on an equal footing, allowing all to express their individuality to others (p. 12). There is therefore nothing "natural" about a space of appearance: it is artificially created, and is dependent on human and environmental conditions. In *Sinners in the Sun* we witness such a state of artificial equality created by the unique environment that is Louis'.

A setting such as Louis', one that is found in many a woman's film, no doubt serves as an ideal venue for fashion shows and the general display of beautiful clothes, bodies and interior designs. For this reason, they have often been seen as promoting a-

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mentioned that power for Arendt is purely relational and cannot be possessed (Gordon, 2002, p. 133).

political consumption. It is important, however, to acknowledge how these settings also function productively, as spaces permitting the expression of individuality,[44] through visibility and the suspension of conventional rules. A modern aesthetic espousing the ever-new, displayed in both interior design and fashion, contributes, moreover, to this temporary equality and suspension of conventional rules: in the case of interior design, among other reasons, because it does not refer to old social conventions; and in the case of fashion, because it allows all women to dress similarly. In fact, when inequality based on social standing emerges, it is usually mitigated by the models' ability to wear clothes better.[45]

Based on such a conception of space, visibility and power, Arendt associated freedom and expressiveness to the public realm, while the home remained associated with necessity, invisibility, conformity and hierarchy (1958, pp. 28-37). Arendt can be seen as translating in political, rather than philosophical terms Heidegger's conception of freedom, as the disclosure, or the possibility of disclosure of being. This disclosure is associated, as we have seen, with *appearance*—since a public is necessary—, but also with *performance.* The public space creates the conditions where individuals can appear in front of equals, and perform their individuality

[44] For Arendt, identity is neither purely performative, nor does it precede appearance; rather, a subject's identity is created through action. We can therefore see the crucial role played by public spaces for the expression of individuality.
[45] Society women are often put down by peers who tell them that the clothes the model is wearing will not fit them as well.

through speech and action. This performance makes the subject a political, public, being.

Some would no doubt disagree with a space of consumption being considered "political". However, Arendt has often been criticized for defending an elitist conception of the political, one that denies, among other things, the possibility of proper political actions to those who cannot appear as equals on the public stage. An obvious consequence of this shortcoming is the increased difficulty of identifying political stages in Western, (post)modern societies, dominated by the private, or social realm. This analysis of fashion shows in film can be seen as an attempt to widen the realm of the political and show how various stages can conform to at least some of the conditions of public life[46].

For Arendt, moreover, expressing one's individuality is only possible outside the realm of necessities; in the political, public, realm (p. 31).[47] This implies both that freedom is not possible through activities aimed at sustaining life, and that one may only express their individuality when free from want. Originally, "the privative trait

[46] Along this line, Ronald Beiner (2005) has raised the possibility that some shortcoming in Arendt's political philosophy may be redressed through the introduction of architecture.

[47] Without going into too many details here, it should be mentioned that Arendt sought to bring forward the Ancient Greek's understanding of politics as an additional, privileged, realm, outside of the private realm. This realm of praxis and speech is neither never simply given—as it exists only through action—nor is it limited to "official" or governmental politics.

of privacy", Arendt writes, "meant literally a state of being deprived of something, and even of the highest and most human of man's capacities. A man who lived only a private life, who like the slave was not permitted to enter the public realm [...] was not fully human" (p. 38). "The privation of privacy lies", Arendt adds

> in the absence of others; as far as they are concerned, private man does not appear, and therefore it is as though he did not exist. Whatever he does remains without significance and consequence to others, and what matters to him is without interest to other people (p. 58).

Spaces such as *Sinners in the Sun's* Louis'—spaces which allow women to appear and display a uniqueness to be seen and acknowledged by peers thereby creating equality and permitting freedom—abound in woman's films of the early 1930s. It would be a mistake, therefore, to look at fashion shows as only revelling in base consumerist, a-political, culture. Fashion, and the fashion-show realm, provided a sphere where women could excel in front of others. Indeed, this artificially-created consumer realm generated a space where women could appear. More important, this space established conditions for women to appear as equals by suspending, albeit only temporarily, social status.

As a chronotope, the Modern Woman is linked with a specific conceptualisation of space and time conveyed through architecture and set design. This understanding of space is both semiotic—pertaining to the meanings conveyed—and phenomenological in terms of the type of experiences it allows. In his early essay

"Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity", Bakhtin claims that spatial configurations are self-manifestations of the protagonist, that they are part of the "whole of the hero" (1990, p. 5). In the examples discussed above, I have emphasized how concrete film spaces—such as modern apartments and public and work spaces such as hotels, office buildings and department stores—function as expressions of the Modern Woman chronotope in both semiotic—as producers and conveyors of meaning—and phenomenological senses, permitting a certain way of being. In the next chapter I pursue the chronotopic analysis of the Modern Woman's relationship with time and space as it relates to American inter-war modernity and discussions pertaining to domesticity and marriage.

Chapter 2 Women Adrift

"This country can't go on this way.
It's the end of America"
Heroes for Sale (William Wellman, 1933)

The increased circulation of popular images of women (Gibson, Fisher, Christy and Brinkley Girls) at the turn of the century resulted from both technological advances in photography, film, and the print media, but also from rapid changes in women's public and private lives. Women's life expectancy not only increased by ten years between 1850 and 1910, but middle-class and urban women also married later (and less) and had fewer children, resulting in a longer period of their life not devoted to family obligations (Dumenil, 1995, pp. 129-130). Women used these years to further their education and sustain their independence with a job outside the home. By 1930, women accounted for 30% of the urban workforce.[48] The nature of women's work shifted slightly in the early years of the 20th century, moving from domestic to white collar office employment, such as clerk, typist, telephone operator, saleswoman and stenographer. For most, work represented a transitory period before marriage. Indeed, only 11.7% of all married women were reported at work in 1930 (Tentler, 1979, p. 137).[49]

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[48] Overall, women comprised 22% of the labor force population aged 16 and over. For a more detailed account of the ethnic make up of this group, see Evans (1979, p. 130).
[49] Having gone from 5.6% in 1900.

While surveys and census provide no details, Joanne Meyerowitz (1988) has looked at personal accounts which explain why young women left their family for work in the city. Although a desire for adventure was mentioned by a few, most of the times, necessity was the greatest motivator. According to these accounts, many women felt the need to earn wages because they were burdens to their family, because they were expelled or because their family terminated their financial obligations towards them. In some cases, women left following the death of a parent or wage-earning sibling. Women who were already wage-earners also left for the city because of abusive family-members or spouse, to escape their family's close monitoring, or to keep wages seized by family members (pp. 13-20).

The incentives to marry were many. Although the modern work market could no longer function by employing men only, women's salary were kept much lower than men's—about 60%—so that a woman's single income made independent living difficult. Women used various strategies to make ends meet with a salary intended as a second rather than a primary income: they boarded, found roommates or moved into rooming houses. Looking at female wage earners in Chicago at the turn of the century, Meyerowitz noticed a gradual shift from boarding to rooming as women "increasingly [..] rejected imitations of family life and reshaped their social lives among their peers" (p. 70). Many also entered "temporary alliances" whereas they traded romantic or sexual favours for meals, gifts, or economic support (pp. 92-117). Dating therefore became an integral part of the economic life of the city. The "woman adrift", Meyerowitz explains, was the popular term used to describe this urban

independent woman, free of familial ties and scrutiny. Analyzing the language used by social reformers, Meyerowitz notes that "drifting"—a term bearing negative connotations by indicating a lack of direction and navigation—was used mainly for women: men in similar situations were said to be "floating" (p. 65).[50]

In this chapter I explore further the temporal dimension of the Modern Woman in late 1920s and early 1930s, and how she functions as a chronotope in Hollywood films. More particularly, I examine the way in which she functions to determine a specific spatio-temporal order that affects both the present in which she evolves, but also the past whence she comes and, perhaps most importantly, the future which she foreshadows. What makes her a particularly appealing figure, for both men and women, is precisely the spatio-temporal dimension she evokes. Indeed, I will show that these spatio-temporal organizations are intimately related with socio-political concerns and discussion specific to American modernity. As she suggests a hopeful vision of the future, the Modern Woman becomes a powerful symbol of modernity. However, as she articulates desires and aspirations she also becomes a potentially dangerous figure requiring constant control. Indeed, enmeshed with the hopes of modernity, she eventually becomes intimately related to the fears and anxieties modernity gave rise to.

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[50] Movies of the period do not use the pejorative term to qualify their modern protagonist. Tellingly, however, Wilson Collison's *Blonde Baby* does, but not to describe his independent heroine: the term is used mid-way through the novel once she has fallen in love with a man—"I thought I was just a hard-boiled virgin. Now I'm a drifting girl"(p. 174). Falling in love is what causes her to drift away from her professional goals.

The Marriage Question

In his well-known analysis of the comedies of remarriage—a flexible category in which he includes films such as *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934), *The Awful Truth* (Leo McCarey, 1937), *Bringing Up Baby* (Howard Hawks, 1938), *The Philadelphia Story* (George Cukor, 1940), *His Girl Friday* (Howard Hawks, 1940), *The Lady Eve* (Preston Sturges, 1941) and *Adam's Rib* (George Cukor, 1949)—Stanley Cavell detects "the creation of a new woman" (1981, pp. 16, 18, 140). "This phase of the history of cinema", Cavell believes, "is bound up with a phase in the history of the consciousness of women. You might even say that these phases of these histories are part of the creation of one another" (p. 16). In fact, in the early pages of *Pursuits of Happiness*, Cavell situates the genre of remarriage within the larger history of the women's movement, seeing the films as articulating the "inner agenda of a culture." The films belonging to the comedy of remarriage

> may be understood as parables of a phase of the development of consciousness at which the struggle is for the reciprocity or equality of consciousness between a woman and a man, a study of the conditions under which this fight for recognition (as Hegel put it) or demand for acknowledgment (as I have put it) is a struggle for mutual freedom, especially of the views each holds of the other (pp. 17-18).

The narrative arc of the comedy of remarriage typically goes as follows: A married man and woman, who have always known and loved one another, are deeply bound by affection. Despite this love and affection, their marriage has become unsatisfying. A central characteristic of the genre is that rather than separating (or after briefly

parting), the two will enter into a "happy conversation" (p. 87) and will begin, anew, their weddedness to one another on an equal footing—as equal partners. Through this happy conversation, man and woman will learn to know one another, once again, and will learn to speak with one voice.[51] This meeting through weddedness ensures an overcoming of the individual's isolation in the world: "the vicissitudes of their weddedness to one another symbolize the vicissitudes of human weddedness to the world" (Mulhall, 1996, p. 11). Indeed, finding an equal partner who shares our views and confirms them allows us to overcome skepticism—the doubt that we can ever know with certainty that there exists anything outside our mind, the defining condition of modern beings.

For this union of equals to occur, however, Cavell claims that a new woman is required, and it is precisely the task of these films to create a woman that will prove equal to her partner (1981, p. 65). This equality is achieved through education, first by her father—whose twin duties, following the romantic tradition, are to educate her and preserve her virginity (p. 53)—then by her husband (p. 114). This explains, for Cavell, the conspicuous absence of the mother: "the creation of the woman is the business of men; even, paradoxically, when the creation is that of the so-called new woman, the woman of equality" (p. 57). Before this creation occurs, it is "as if the women's lives heretofore have been nonexistent, as if they have haunted the world" (Cavell, 1996, p. 86).

[51] "To speak for oneself politically is to speak for the others with whom you consent to association, and it is to consent to be spoken for by them – not as a parent speaks to you, i.e., instead of you, but as someone in mutuality speaks for you, i.e., speaks your mind" (Cavell, 1979, p. 27).

The exact terms of this education differ depending on the film under review, but it always pertains to a woman's self-knowledge and acceptance of some part of herself that she has as yet refused to accept (Cavell, 1981, p. 56). In some comedies of remarriage (in *It Happened One Night* as we'll see in chapter 4), the education pertains to the woman's desire:

> [i]n comedies of remarriage it [the resolution] requires learning, or accepting your sexual identity, the acknowledgment of desire. Both forms of discovery are in service of the authorization or authentication of what is called a marriage (p. 56).

In others (*The Philadelphia Story* and *The Lady Eve,* for instance) it hinges on the woman's acceptance of her flaws and coming down her pedestal (p. 141). Once she has acknowledged her desires and "all-too-human" nature, her education is complete and reciprocity may begin (p. 69). Emphasizing the gendered economy of the comedy of remarriage, Cavell thus sums up:

> In the genre of remarriage the man's lecturing indicates that an essential goal of the narrative is the education of the woman, where her education turns out to mean her acknowledgment of her desire, and this in turn will be conceived of as her creation, her emergence, at any rate, as an autonomous human being (p. 84).

The union of man and woman and the weddedness with the world, finally, is an unambiguously happy event, failure or refusal of which results in the sadness and isolation typical of melodrama.

In both *It Happened One Night* and *The Philadelphia Story*, David Shumway remarks, the "education" in question concerns, in effect, married women being made to

become little girls (1991, p. 14). Despite their other qualities, these "comedies of conquest" (p. 15)—Cavell speaks of men "claiming" women (1996, p. 29)—in fact, stage a woman's "infantilization" in order to justify their strong men narrative. The emancipation and creation of the new woman which Cavell detects—and which he believes ushers in real female emancipation—is therefore entirely staged so that men (the woman's father and husband) become their main instigator and creative force. This, Cavell recognises, grants "a privileging of the male [...] within this atmosphere of equality" (p. 5).

Although Cavell's method for studying films—grouping films into genres based on their peculiar narrative characteristics—is premised on a larger understanding of film as social discourse, this method appears at odds with his earlier writings on the ontology of film as a medium. In *The World Viewed* (1971), Cavell indeed sees film as a direct, unmediated presentation of reality rather than a social or cultural product. Not unlike Bazin—whom he quotes abundantly—Cavell claims that the mechanical recording of film allows us to live the ultimate fantasy: to see reality while remaining unseen. Like photography, film "does not present us with 'likeness' of things; it presents us, we want to say, with the things themselves" (p. 17). Cavell also stresses the "objective" nature of filming: like Bazin, who asserts that cinema is "une reproduction mécanique dont l'homme est exclu" (2007, p. 12), Cavell claims that "[p]hotography overcame subjectivity in a way undreamed of by painting [...] one which does not so much defeat the act of painting as escape it altogether : by *automatism*, by removing the human agent from the task of reproduction" (1971, p.

23). The mechanical nature of the photographic process ensures that what is seen is "detached" from any points of view or subjectivity by "removing the human agent from the task of reproduction" (p. 23). If the creating and the produced/projected worlds are not the same, they nevertheless entertain, for Cavell, very close relationships, the only difference between the two being that "the projected world does not exist (now)" (p. 24). This aspect of Cavell's analysis—the idea that films simply record the world as it unfolds in front of the camera—can give the impression that his philosophical reflections on movies are uncritical. Indeed, since movies are perceived as natural objects of the world, Cavell can only look at movies as *the way things are*, rather than seeing them as participating in the socio-political, or ideological, construction of the world from which they emerge.

Using Bakhtin's concept of chronotope—where the chronotope is said to translate particular (embodied, situated) experiences of time and space and to acquire axiological qualities—allows us to derive a very different conception of the marriage question as it emerged in the period immediately preceding Cavell's corpus. The "new woman", these movies show, had already been created. In fact, she had created herself.

Home, Not So Sweet

A great number of woman's films of the era begin with a brief introductory scene depicting the protagonist living with her family in poverty and the "backward"

conditions of small-town, rural America. The divide between country and city, and the debate between pro-and anti-urbanists certainly did not emerge in America in the 1930s. Raymond Williams (1973) identifies its traces as far back as 17th century Britain. The dichotomy between country and city acquires great significance in late 1920s and early 1930s woman's films featuring the Modern Woman, so it is worth looking at its function. Consider the following examples:

- *Three Wise Girls* (William Beaudine, 1932) opens with Cassie (Jean Harlow), walking home after a lousy date and getting to bed with her mother, with whom she shares a bedroom. Cassie has clearly outgrown her childhood home, but her $15 per week salary hardly suffices to improve her situation. Meanwhile, her childhood friend Gladys is making $200 a week modelling clothes in the city and sending expensive gifts to her mother back home.[52]
- In *The Easiest Way* (Jack Conway, 1931), Laura Murdoch (Constance Bennett) is first seen in bed with two of her siblings, the other members of the family also bunking in adjacent rooms. As the alarm clock rings, messy-haired, dirty and rag-wearing family-members create an anarchic cacophony in a house where privacy, peace and quiet seem like distant memories. The house is crowded with people, objects, and the noises of fighting and screaming (Figure 2.1). *The Easiest Way* may play upon a certain nostalgia for the good old family days, but the abuse, which gradually becomes evident, situates this nostalgia into a larger bitter-sweet context. Laura must plead with her father, who insists on taking her 14 year-old brother out of school to work. One needs "an education to get anywhere", Laura implores to no avail. The father, it turns out, is an unemployed drunk who finances his habit with his children's earnings. While her family will later on disapprove of her kept-woman lifestyle, they will have no problem taking her money.

[52] Her salary is in fact only $60 per week, but she rounds it out by dating a wealthy, married, banker.

- Lily Powers (Barbara Stanwyck) is similarly exploited within the family economy in *Baby Face* (Alfred E. Green, 1933), as she serves homebrew to grabby miners in her father's speakeasy, which is also home and brothel where she is pimped to local men. The home insures anything but peace and privacy, and exemplifies the idea of the "public woman": the woman whose presence in the public realm signifies both her non-possession by a single man (and confinement in the private domain) and her possession by all men of the community. Unposessed by one, she belongs to all. The German cobbler, with whom Lily socialises, spells out clearly the direct relationship between the rural setting and her sordid existence. After her father's sudden death, the cobbler encourages her to emancipate herself by moving to the big city and to "use men" rather than be used by them.
- Perhaps nowhere more than in *Back Pay* (William Seiter, 1930) and *Possessed* (Clarence Brown, 1931) is the desire to leave small-town existence for the city made explicit. In *Back Pay,* Hester (Corinne Griffith), who works in a small-town department store, refuses her co-worker/boyfriend's advances: She wants to move to New York City, and he is only willing to go as far as Nashville. The choices she faces are simple: the quiet, predictable rural existence she has always known with her sweetheart Gerald, or the excitement of the big city. Between Gerald and the city, she seems torn but initially decides to stay on with him. As she slowly comes down the stairs to meet him one evening, however, she sees him sitting in the living room, reading the evening paper, feet on coffee table (Figures 2.2–2.4). This scene occurs after the return of "the big boss"—a caricaturesque patriarchal figure—and the resulting messy kitchen (2.5). A close-up of her staring at a sink-full of dirty dishes (Figure 2.6) will be repeated in the following scene with a close-up of her boyfriend sitting in the living room. Seeing this quintessential domestic scene, foreboding her own drab future were she to stay in Demopolis, Hester flees to New York without a word.

- In *Possessed,* Marian Martin (Joan Crawford) is a paper-box factory worker in an anonymous small town being courted by a jealous and ill-tempered overall-wearing hick who, "just like a turnip" is "happy in soil". The film's iconic scene has Crawford's character peer into the windows of a slow-moving train, each pane offering her—much like Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954)—a peak into life's many possibilities. This train appears as if in response to Marian's quarrel with her boyfriend: he wants to get married and start a life, and, although she likes him, she cannot simply "accept her lot" and spend the rest of her life there. Once again, a "domestic" setting, and a foreboding into her future as a housebound mother and wife, convinces her to leave for New York City.

Figure 2.1. Breakfast scene in *The Easiest Way.*

Figure 2.2 Hester coming down the stairs.

Figure 2.3 Hester hesitates.

Figure 2.4 Counter-shot reveals the object of her apprehension

Figure 2.5 The "Big Boss" has come home.

Figure 2.6 A messy kitchen, the result of the big boss' home coming.

In these films, the Modern Woman's entrapment in rurality is expressed in various ways. Often, she is engaged to a fellow co-worker and living in close quarters with her parents, two elements emphasising the claustrophobic feeling of rural life. The rural setting represents an entrapment in the domestic sphere, as she is set to move directly from one home and kitchen (her family's) into another (her husband's). She is therefore entrapped in both time (the cyclical time of female familial obligations) and space (the home). As Marian remarks in *Possessed*, were she a man, "she'd be encouraged to go out into the world". As a woman however, her existence is entirely determined by the role she plays in the family economy, leaving her no room to exercise her agency through freely determined action. To borrow from Luce Irigaray (1977), she is a commodity rather than a producer in the family economy. What she produces—children, meals, clothes—has no exchange value outside the home.

The women are, however, marked as "different" and not wholly belonging to the small-town setting, either because of their "modern" looks, their determination to

better themselves through education, or their desire to escape rural domesticity. Laura's modern physical appearance in *The Easiest Way*—her elongated figure, delicate lingerie, bobbed hair and form-fitting dress—stands in sharp contrast with her family members. The will to better one's situation is often criticized, despised, if not thwarted, by relatives. Leaving for the city represents for them a chance to express their individuality in a way that would not be possible at home.

For young women, rural life often consists in dodging brutish men. Only the "civilized" city can provide women with enough protection for their emancipation. In *Susan Lenox <her Rise and Fall>*, orphaned Susan Lenox (Greta Garbo) is slaving away in her aunt and uncle's kitchen. Her development into adulthood is depicted through a montage of her growing shadow over the kitchen wall as she performs various chores, thereby emphasizing her cloistered existence and domestic entrapment. She flees her sordid existence when she is forced to marry a much older and coarser man. Until she reaches the safety of the city, she will be hunted down by her uncle and promised husband, and will be forced into a relationship with a greasy protector. Here again, Susan has very little control over her destiny and is completely dependant on others.

With *Professional Sweetheart* (William Seiter, 1933) we can see that the idea of rurality—and what it means for women—is not presented only as a thing of the past, but that it threatens to resurface at any moment. The film's plot revolves around Glory Eden's (Ginger Rogers) forced return to Kentucky—through kidnapping—by

her hick "arranged husband" Jim. Incidentally, once isolated in their bare Kentucky cottage, Jim's violence reaches levels rarely seen on-screen during this era. After calling her a "bad woman" for wearing delicate lingerie and make-up, he tries to force her to cover herself up by wearing over-sized pyjamas (Figure 2.7). Jim then forcibly grabs Glory and gives her a hard spanking (Figure 2.8). When she frees herself, he knocks her unconscious with a punch in the face (Figure 2.9).

Figure 2.7 Jim hands Glory what he thinks she should wear instead of lingerie.

Figure 2.8 Jim spanking Glory.

Figure 2.9 Jim then punches Glory, knocking her out.

Similarly, in *The Purchase Price* (William Wellman, 1932), Joan Gordon (Barbara Stanwyck) escapes her bootlegging boyfriend and heads to Elks Crossing, North Dakota, to marry Jim (George Brent), a perfect stranger who "bought himself a wife" through a "mail-order bride" scheme. The Elks Crossing inhabitants are portrayed as

particularly backwards, and Jim is an uneducated oaf with little (if any) knowledge of women. On their wedding night, he bursts into her bedroom after seeing her feet's shadow moving under the door. Forcing himself on her, he threatens to beat her after she pulls herself away (Figure 2.10).

Figure 2.10 The wedding night.

Figure 2.11 Bull flirting with Joan.

Villagers soon invade their house to celebrate the young couple's wedding, getting drunk, creating havoc and playing silly games more befitting to children and young teenagers[53]. There's something quite frightening about Jim, whose pent up sexual frustration constantly threatens to burst into outright aggression. During the party, various villagers will flirt with Joan, arousing his jealousy. Jim's fist is visible as Bull (David Landau) asks Joan for a dance, reminding the viewers of the couple's wedding night (Figure 2.11).

We are miles away from Gaston Bachelard's theorizing of the poetic imagery of "home" as a "safe", "happy" and "attractive" space (1957). Following Bachelard, the home has been theorised as a primordial space where "man can move freely and

[53] One of them being "Post office", a "kissing game" similar to "Spin the bottle".

without constraint, here he can be at peace with himself" (Bollnow, 2011, p. 124). In these films, "home" is a space of repulsion rather than attraction. It is a space that women long to escape, synonymous with disorder, overcrowdedness, lack of privacy and agency. In fact, these films appear to display *oikophobia*, the aversion to home and the household.[54]

What may be even more threatening for the female protagonists is the "natural" evolution whereas they will slowly but inevitably develop into wives and mothers themselves. They are, as such, entrapped in a temporality over which they have no control. Living in their family home, they are faced day after day with their sad, drab future or domestic chores.[55] A mother is often present in the narrative's background as a sympathetic, loving, but most often defeated character. Early American films, most notably those of D. W. Griffith, often presented women as victims or potential victims of violence in their home,[56] with melodramatic thrill resulting from watching

[54] Developed by conservative philosophers Roger Scruton (2004) and Alain Finkielkraut (2013) in their respective defense of national identity, the term has mostly been used pejoratively as a charge against "unpatriotic" liberals and proponents of multiculturalism. To Scruton's own avowal (p. 36), however, using the term this way to designate the nation is a stretch—if not a misnomer altogether—as the Greek "*oikos*" designates the household (the basic unit of the ancient Greek society), in opposition to the political sphere.
[55] In *Shopworn,* Aunt Dot (Zasu Pitts) explains why she left her husband: "Fred didn't need me anymore, he's using paper plates now".
[56] See, for instance, *An Unseen Enemy* (1912), where two sisters are prisoners of their bedroom, with an evil maid shooting at them through the door. After long minutes of agony, the girls are rescued by their brother and a boyfriend.

women suffer. In early 1930s woman's films, however, domestic violence is no longer presented in spectacular terms to titilate the viewer's excitement[57].

If the early 30s woman's film's house appears to be a suffocating environment for women, the outside offers little comfort. Rurality altogether is threatening to women, who are not free to roam around as they are in the city. They are constantly preyed upon by lusty men driven by animal instincts. The lurid setting permeates *City Girl* (F.W. Murnau, 1930), *The Story of Temple Drake* (Stephen Roberts, 1933, based on Faulkner's *Sanctuary)* and William Wellman's silent feature, *Beggars of Life* (1928). In the latter, Nancy (Louise Brooks) escapes with Jim, a vagrant, after having killed her abusive adoptive father. Their journey as they try to reach the city is constantly jeopardized by men intent on attacking a helpless Brooks. Her only hope to escape the men's assaults is to dress up as a boy (Figure 2.12). Indeed, the attempted rapes only start occurring after it is discovered she is in fact a girl. Interestingly, the ring-leader of these would-be rapists—Oklahoma Red (Wallace Beery)—not only receives

[57] In *Way Down East* (1920) and *Broken Blossoms* (1919), "it is the female character's suffering that provides the central articulating crisis of the films. The body of the woman becomes the stage across which the melodramatic spectacle is played out" (Flitterman-Lewis, 1994, p. 5). As pointed out by Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, films like *Broken Blossoms* "offer a sustained emphasis on the image itself, an almost non-narrative stasis", a poetic fixation on the suffering of the female body (p. 4). Suspense is nevertheless generated, within these relatively static scenes, by intercuting between images of a menacing, sadistic brute (Lucy's father, in the case of *Broken Blossoms*) and a terrorized female body. *Broken Blossoms'* climactic sequence lasts 9 minutes, intercutting three histrionic characters: a savage father enraged by his daughter's desertion to a Chinese shopkeeper's, his vulnerable, distressed daughter, and the distraught yet impotent shopkeeper. Angela Carter (1978) Ruth Prigozy (1980), Julia Lesage (1981) have analysed more closely the erotic aspect of this violence.

top billing, but also the only synched voice segments (now lost). The film's denouement might have been conceived as a happy ending, as they successfully cross the Canadian border, where, we surmise, they will enter into holy matrimony. Louise Brooks' physical appearance, now properly dressed as a woman, however, is rather upsetting. Her signature bobbed hair—a symbol of the modern flapper—is now fully covered by a dainty bonnet[58] from a by-gone era (Figure 2.13). On their way to Canada, the pair is visually likened to 19th century Old West pioneers. Looking down in a diminutive pose, Brooks mourns the death of Oklahoma Red ("After all, he wasn't such a bad guy"), as Jim scolds her at length for being so naive. To temporal entrapment, we must therefore add spatial powerlessness.

Figure 2.12 Promotional material for *Beggars of Life*.

Figure 2.13 Nancy and Jim, on their way to Canada.

Rurality is presented in these films as backward and un-civilized. Modern hygiene has not reached it yet, and rural men and women are portrayed as siding more towards animality than humanity. Men, particularly, seem driven by unrestrained animal sexual instinct, while women are unaware of feminine beauty standards and

[58] The film may be using a popular trope of the teens, the woman as child / child wife, by showing the rapid transformation from tomboy to beautiful adult woman (Adams et al., 2012, pp. 23-54)

the care of the self advocated widely in magazines of the era. Rurality is therefore not only a spatial but also a temporal concept as it belongs to a past era. Its inhabitants are portrayed as unwilling to follow the movement of time and enter modernity. They represent a stubborn refusal to change as they follow cyclical rather than linear time. The woman stuck in cyclical time is condemned to follow in her mother's footsteps, a prisoner of destiny rather than a master of her future. This lack of mastery over one's future is represented spatially as a lack of agency outside of the domestic sphere. The woman who leaves the house exposes herself to attacks, "seduction", as well as gossip and judgment. Her place is in the home and only in the home, which contributes to the suffocating, claustrophobic, character it acquires. As Joanne J. Meyerowitz points out, "historians and sociologists often attribute events in history to the rebellion of sons who would not or could not live up to the ideals of their fathers" and they have been less receptive to socio-historical shifts resulting from women's frustrations and rebellions, not only against their fathers, but also against their mothers (1988, p. 90). In the case of these early 1930s woman's films, we can see the young women's rebellion against and a refusal of a certain way of life. The rural domestic sphere isn't just left behind; it is thoroughly "rejected, judged and condemned."[59]

The rural world is unfailingly represented not only as stuck in the past, but it is also associated with *women's* past, a past the Modern Woman is determined to leave

[59] I borrow this formulation from Michael Walzer (1985), who uses it to describe the Israelite's Exodus from Egypt to Canaan, an analogy to which I come back in the last chapter.

behind by moving to the big city. Unsurprisingly, when the woman with modern inclinations leaves rurality for the city, the last thing on her mind is to cloister herself once more in family life and domesticity. The women in *Illicit* (Archie Mayo, 1931), its remake *Ex-Lady* (Robert Florey, 1933),[60] *Sinners in the Sun* and in *Under 18* (Archie Mayo, 1931) all offer convincing arguments against marriage. In *Sinners in the Sun,* Doris justifies her refusal to leave her family-home to marry working class boyfriend Jimmie (Chester Morris) with these words: "I'm not going out of this into something as bad. I'm not". *Ex-Lady*'s Helen Bauer (Bette Davis) justifies her desire to remain un-married precisely with a yearning to avoid her mother's fate: "I went away from home to be on my own" she explains,

> I don't want to be like my mother, a 'yes' woman for some man. I want to be a person of my own. I like to live a certain way and with a certain kind of furniture. Do a certain kind of work and wear a certain kind of clothes.

Ultimately, Helen explains, she doesn't want babies, not at least for the next 20 years, so that she may have a career and enjoy life: "I don't want to be a wife".

In sophisticated films such as *Illicit*, *Ex-Lady*, but also *Merrily We Go to Hell* (Dorothy Arzner, 1932) and *Party Husband* (Clarence Badger, 1931), the woman's defence of non-marital domestic arrangement is premised on her desire to remain free, but also of accommodating the two parties' equality. These discussions were echoed in advertisement, movie posters and numerous fan magazines which published

[60] Pat McGilligan (1997) writes that the two are adaptations of Robert Riskin and Edith Fitzgerald's play *Many a Slip,* but this is most likely a mistake on the author's part. *Many a Slip* was purchased by Columbia and turned into a movie in 1931, directed by Vin Moore.

countless articles on the challenges of Hollywood marriages (Figure 2.14). In December 1931, *Silver Screen'*s assistant editor asked "Can any man be blissfully happy with a woman who makes five times as much as he does? Can he passionately adore a wife who pays the grocery bills?" (p. 74). One of the main difficulties facing female stars was precisely the conflict between domesticity and personal success: although their very being as stars depended on them being successful, marriage asked of them to not be *too* successful:

> "It's asking a lot of a man to expect him to be the lesser half of a marital partnership indefinitely—the lesser in income, the lesser in prestige. No matter how much a man loves his wife, it's almost too much to expect him to be happy in the role of just-a-husband, in which people confuse him with just-a-gigolo, say he's living on her salary, and call him by her name with a "Mr." attached" (George Benjamin qtd. in Levin, 1970, p. 112)

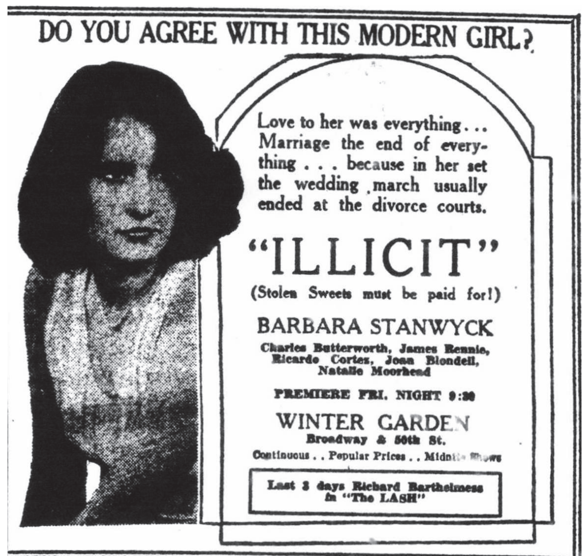

Figure 2.14 Advert for Illicit, hailing viewers.

Critique of marriage and domesticity did not, however, only pertain to the upper classes of sophisticated films. *Under 18* is probably the bleakest in its portrayal of

married life: its plot centers around Margie's (Marian Marsh) efforts to secure the $250 required to get her pregnant and battered sister a divorce and possibly an abortion.[61] The movie opens on her sister Sophie's joyous wedding day, but an ellipsis quickly takes us from 1929 to 1931 and to a much impoverished family where women are left holding the bags.[62] Sporting a black eye, Sophie calls marriage "a great game! It's to make saps out of girls, make them have lots of kids to starve".

Less dark, King Vidor's film of the same year, *Street Scene*, also centers on the tragic plight of Anna Maurrant (Estelle Taylor) and her daughter Rose (Sylvia Sidney). Unhappily married, Anna is the subject of constant gossip on account of an affair with the milk company collector. Anna's actions, however, are not simply condemned. Various strategies are indeed used to arouse the viewer's sympathy. Chief among them, a cold, authoritarian husband (David Landau); a despicable neighbour fuelling the rumour mill; an understanding daughter; and Anna's sympathetic characterization. Looking after her husband and children in a hot and humid New York tenement, Estelle Taylor ponders: "it seems a person ought to get more out of life than just looking after somebody else", "what's the good of being alive if you can't get a little something out of life?" As everyone mechanically repeats standard and inane comments about the weather, Estelle indicates that her relationship with the

[61] The film is very ambiguous on this point. After Sophie tells Margie she doesn't want to go along with her marriage, Margie takes her to an office: "I know just where to take you, I heard the girls talk about it". The two are later seen discussing the divorce with a lawyer, but it is not clear whether he received any money, or if it paid for other services.

[62] The father dies shortly after the Crash, and Sophie's husband gambles all their money away, leaving his family homeless and hungry.

milkman fulfills a deep, human need for meaningful connection: "It seems like everybody in the world's got to have somebody to talk to…you can't live without somebody to talk to!" Minutes later, she is shot dead by her drunk and jealous husband.

Dancing Mothers (Herbert Brenon, 1926) similarly serves as a cautionary tale as it stages the story of a woman who has given up everything, including a successful stage career, for her family. Her husband and daughter expect her to stay home alone while they spend their nights partying and carrying on affairs. Their selfish nature is revealed at the end of the film when they demand she gives up her social life and her lover to go back to taking care of them—thinking only of their own happiness and not hers. Ethel (Alice Joyce) resolves the age-old a-sexual mother/sexual woman dichotomy as she is both a mother and a sexual being. She smokes, wears make-up and bobbed hair, and, as seen in Figure 2.15 her dresses are decidedly late 20s fashion (she doesn't appear to be wearing a corset as her low-waist, zippered chemise dress sits on her hips). For all intents and purposes, she looks like a modern woman. Yet, her condescending daughter and husband—a husband who does look much older—constantly imply that she is old-fashioned, belongs to a by-gone era, and would not be able to cope with the modern lifestyle. They *construct* her as old-fashioned, and through their own attitude towards her, make her a "hopelessly good and hopelessly uninteresting wife and mother" (Mantle, 1925, p. 176). A true woman, her husband explains, does not try to fight nature with makeup and beauty products but "is a person of simple honesty, who loves her children and her home and is

willing to pass on unresistingly" (p. 186). For selfish motives, they both tell her she does not belong outside of the home. And so she stays home, alone and lonely, as if her life was over. A visit from a friend confirms this is the plight of older mothers, until they decide to get out of the house, and "to live". She too, her friend explains, thought her life was over when her only son died. One day, she realized she was still alive, and coming back to life, she went out. Toasting "to life", Ethel joins her friend at the club and starts enjoying herself again (Figure 2.16). Appearing much younger than her age, she easily charms her daughter's love interest—Jerry Naughton (Conway Tearly)—whom she wants to seduce away from her daughter to protect her. Doing so, however, she falls in love with him and he with her.

Figure 2.15 *Dancing Mothers*' modern dress.

Figure 2.16 Ethel courted by much younger man.

According to Lori Landay, in "*Dancing Mothers* (1924), dancing along with drinking, smoking, and unladylike comportment were the primary signifiers of the modern femininity represented by the flapper and jazz" (2002, p. 233). The film, however, cannot be fully understood if looked at as a "flapper film", for its main character, the sympathetic dancing mother, is contrasted with her flapper daughter. The film indeed expresses early flapper-culture backlash as it sides decidedly with the mother

rather than with her ditzy, childish daughter. The careless life of non-strop partying, drinking, dancing and flirting adopted by both father and daughter is also one of selfish lying, cheating and deceit. Clara Bow's flapper daughter character is childish, verging on boorish.

The Ladies' Home Journal may have jumped the gun by proclaiming the flapper dead as early as 1920 (Ryan, 1975, p. 257). For F. Scott Fitzgerald, interviewed in 1923, the flapper was "going stronger than ever" ("F. Scott Fitzgerald Says: 'All Women Over Thirty-five Should Be Murdered'", *The Metropolitan Magazine*, 58 [November 1923]). In reality, the flapper remained both a mystery and a contentious object dividing people into two opposing camps, as evidenced in Margaret O'Leary's April 1922 column for the *New York Times,* "More Ado About the Flapper". While some saw in her a model of independence and novelty, O'Leary explained, others thought her an irresponsible and destructive creature. Newspapers of the period are rife with passionate articles defending or condemning her existence. In fact, the flapper quickly became a convenient scapegoat to which the various ills of modernity could be attributed from home desertion to poor academic results. [63]

Nevertheless, *Dancing Mothers* is anything but a reactionary or conservative film. Although it portrays Jazz Age insouciance in a negative light, it is less didactic when it comes to what it proposes in its stead. It certainly does not advocate for a return to

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[63] See respectively Sheila Kaye-Smith, "The New Woman", *Living Age*, November 5, 1929, p. 356 and "Flappers Lowest in Radcliffe Tests", *The New York times*, December 28, 1923, p. 15.

home life. Throughout the film, home life for Ethel—and for women—is associated with loneliness, stagnation, and death, or at least a disappearance of agency. An early confrontation between Ethel and her husband in the original play, once again, expresses this even more clearly:

> ETHEL (sarcastically) — Yes — while her husband pursues his pleasurable way. Life isn't over for him just because he has reached forty. The woman sacrifices her youth to be a wife and mother and just when she has reached the age when her duties have ended and life lies before her, you say it is over the Divine Will commands her to resign all thoughts of further living. That's fair — that's very just — isn't it?
>
> WESTCOURT — My dear girl, I don't say it is either fair or just, but your quarrel is not with me — it is with Nature. The woman of forty becomes the High Priestess of her sex.

Husband and daughter not only take her for granted, but they assume that her life consists in taking care of them. When her husband "gives her back her freedom" after she refuses to come home from the club one night, she simply decides to sail away to Europe. Naughton, her love interest, proposes to marry and sail away with her, but she refuses and instead leaves on her own. This *Doll's House* ending did not sit well with everyone. *Variety* thought an alternate ending would be more suitable "for the regular audiences outside the bigger towns"[64] and *Moving Picture World* predicted the ending would not appeal "to those who demand the definitely happy ending".[65] In a similar vein, *Motion Picture Magazine* writes "*Dancing Mothers* develops into a problem story which ends with the problem still unsolved. The sponsors have forgotten, apparently, the tradition of supplying a happy ending. The final scene is

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[64] *Dancing Mothers* film review, *Variety,* February 17, 1926.
[65] *Dancing Mothers* film review, *Moving Picture World,* March 13, 1926.

hopeful but hardly cheerful."[66] Both *Moving Picture World* and *Motion Picture Magazine* agree, however, that the chosen ending is more artistic and "true to character and situation."[67] Based on Edgar Selwyn and Edmund Gould's mildly successful play—which ran in New York's Booth Theatre between August 1924 and May 1925—the film kept the controversial ending intact, probably because contemporary commentators believed it was key to the play's success (Mantle, 1925, p. 176).

Dancing Mothers is an unusual film, not only because it stars an "older" woman (Alice Joyce is 36 at the time of filming, but her character is probably meant to be slightly older) who is mother to a young woman—mothers are rarely at the center of Hollywood films—but also because it ends on her leaving home and family to pursue her own happiness away from them. Alice Joyce's character, furthermore, is more complex than run-of-the-mill mother depictions. Indeed, her physical appearance does not align her with the Victorian values on-screen mothers were usually associated with.

Depictions of women in "fear of being trapped by domesticity and baby carriages" weren't unique to cinema. They could also be found in popular, high-circulation literature. Bett Hooper's *Virgins in Cellophane: From Maker to Consumer Untouched by Human Hands* (1932) stages just such a tale of a woman caught in a familiar dilemma: wanting romantic love, but not the ensuing domestic bondage. Illustrated

[66] *Dancing Mothers* film review, *Motion Picture Magazine,* May 1926.
[67] *Ibid.*

by James Montgomery Flagg—author of the famous "I Want YOU for U.S. Army" poster—the graphic novel illustrates the contradictory demands of men and society on women, and women's conflicting desires (Figure 2.17). These depictions remained marginal so long as they were limited to paraliterature. With cinema, however, the Modern Woman's romantic dilemmas made their way into mainstream culture.

Figure 2.17 "A fear of being trapped by domesticity and baby carriages...". Drawing by James Montgomery Flagg from *Virgins in Cellophane* (1932)

To Be Modern

Mick LaSalle credits Greta Garbo and Norma Shearer with "persuad[ing] Hollywood to drop the stereotypes" and to present real women as mature sexual beings on screen (2000, p. 4). Shearer, LaSalle continues, "[took] the ingénue into the bedroom and [made] everybody like it" (p. 6). Similarly, Mary Desjardins conceives of the American new woman as "seeking her own pleasures outside the traditional patriarchal family" (Petro, 2010, p. 6). Greta Garbo, Clara Bow, Colleen Moore and Gloria Swanson's sexuality and autonomy "had a profound cultural impact, which proved at the time to be cause for celebration and alarm" (p. 109). LaSalle and Desjardins do not deny the importance of the social context whence these stars and their films came, but by focussing primarily on the role of individual stars in the emergence of modern femininity onscreen, the social context gets lost. Tino Balio (1976, 1993) and Alexander Walker (1970), among others, have also convincingly demonstrated that in the early 1930s, Hollywood stars had far less leverage than the system let on to believe. When LaSalle comments Rodney's (Clark Gable) harsh treatment of flimsy women in *Susan Lenox* by saying "Gable had a way of making his preferences [for modern, self-reliant women] clear" (LaSalle, 2002, p. 136), one should keep in mind Gable's comments to the effect that he was never consulted about the part he was to play, and that he found out about his participation in *Susan Lenox* in the paper (Walker, 1970, p. 252). What also gets lost, finally, is the extent to which the Modern Woman was a *negotiated* figure, one that integrated, mitigated and attenuated hopes and anxiety regarding modernity and modern sexuality.

In the early 20th century, many advocated for a different approach to the relations of the sexes. David Graham Phillips opens *Susan Lenox* (published posthumously in 1917) with the following warning, written in 1908:

> There are three ways of dealing with the sex relations of men and women—two wrong and one right. For lack of more accurate names the two wrong ways may be called respectively the Anglo-Saxon and the Continental [….] The Anglo-Saxon article reeks the stench of disinfectants; the Continental reeks the stench of degenerate perfume.

The third way, the right way to approach the relations between the sexes, could be called the new American way. It consists in treating sex questions with "simple candor and naturalness", without false moralism. In other words, the novelist recommends,

> don't join in the prurient clamor of 'purity' hypocrites and 'strong' libertines that exaggerates and distorts the most commonplace, if the most important feature of life. Let us try to be as sensible about sex as we are trying to be about all the other phenomena of the universe in this more enlightened day (pp. ix-xi).

As Christina Simmons points out, the Anglo-Saxon repression was partly "a myth in the sense that it strategically created a broad generalisation about Victorian culture that advocates of change used rhetorically to distance themselves from the past and present themselves as pioneers of a modern way" (2009, p. 7). This mythological generalisation was nevertheless based on real and still very powerful elements: "intrusive moral policing, including denial of free speech for alternative sexual views; the illegality of contraception; and constraints on women, based on the double standard of moral judgment" (p. 7). Victorian culture, furthermore, advocated

women's moral superiority—a double-edged sword to be sure, as this view was premised on their sexual restraint and general passionlessness.

Demographic, social and political changes made the repressive views of sexuality increasingly at odds with many people's reality and desires. As marriage was perceived to be the root of social inequality and of women's subordination within both family and society, various groups (socialists, anarchists, "bohemians", artists, feminists, reformers) and individuals voiced their opinion or even practiced openly alternative sexual and marriage arrangements. In this context, Floyd Dell announced that society was in the process of transitioning from patriarchy to the machine age, and so people should be encouraged to take "enjoyment in each other's separate, unique self" (qtd. in Simmons, 2009, p. 70). "Marriage reformers", on the other hand, advocated for significant changes in marriage arrangements in order to save the institution (Simmons, 2009, pp. 106-108).

Throughout the early 1930s, discussions on modern marriage arrangements pervade women's films. In *Illicit* and its remake *Ex-Lady*, but also in *The Divorcee* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1930), *Party Husband*, *This Modern Age* (Nicholas Grindle, 1931), and *Merrily We Go to Hell* modern marriage is, first and foremost, premised on equality between men and women. Both partners have, within the union, the same rights and expectations of honesty and mutual respect. Women often work, and both partners conserve a certain amount of independence from one another. Since the modern marriage appears to be a prerogative of the upper class—no working men or women

can afford such dilemmas and lifestyles—the question of domestic chores never arises. Another important aspect of the modern marriage, one which derives directly from the ideals of equality and independence, is the right to see other people and to carry on affairs. To be sure, these are only the *ideals* guiding the modern marriage, and each film ends up exploring the difficulties of living up to these ideals. By film's end, the couple has abandoned its ideals and is now fully committed to marital exclusivity. Nevertheless, the movies become forums in which these ideals can be put to the test. As Olafson Hellerstein, Parker and Offen (1981) explain, the idea of a partnership between spouses has been around since at least the Victorian era. Contrary to moderns, however, Victorians saw this partnership as based in duty rather than passion. The Victorians saw a clear distinction between long-lasting love and momentary passion. Regardless of love, however, once married, both partners were expected to fulfill their responsibilities in harmony as they invested their respective spheres.

In early 1930s woman's films, women are the most concerned and affected party by changing notions of marital arrangements. Indeed, the modern marriage is often presented as a "settling of accounts" or as women gaining the right to act as men do (to hold a job and carry on affairs). As such, they are usually the main advocates of such marriages. As previously mentioned, the modern marriage is only discussed in the context of well-to-do, sophisticated, upper class couples. Since it essentially promoted behaviours and standards that were similar to that of many workingwomen of the era—who valued their economic contribution and

independence and entered into temporary sexual or romantic alliances before marrying—it is not unreasonable to speculate that the issues discussed resonated with the larger population as well. Keeping it within an upper class setting might have been a way of alleviating its perceived threat, as censors were always more concerned with quashing the promotion of "revolutionary" ideas and behaviour in the working class and the "impressionable" elements (S. Smith, 2005).

The modern marriage could indeed have easily become an incendiary subject, especially since it was tackled with the utmost seriousness, rather than being a source of comedy. *Party Husband* opens with a discussion of the modern marriage as Laura (Dorothy Mackaill) and Jay (James Rennie)—who have been planning their wedding their entire life—are celebrating their union. This "bigger and better matrimony", the best man explains, is "based on the most advanced ideas". Jay defines it as each party retaining "their own separate individuality", and Laura explains that they "intend to take marriage apart and see what makes it stick". As the film unfolds, we witness the effects of this taking apart: despite their love for each other, their differing schedules—part of their modern conception of marriage is that Laura will keep her job—make them grow apart. Alone and idle, Jay easily succumbs to women's flirtations and heavy drinking, a development not unlike the one seen in *Merrily We Go to Hell* and *The Divorcee.* Men, the movies seem to warn their audiences, should be kept on very short leashes, for they cannot handle modern independence.

When Don (Gene Raymond) protests to having to sneak around to see Helen in *Ex-Lady*, he proposes to marry:

Don: Let's get married, so I'll have the right to be with you.
Helen: What do you mean right? I don't like the word "right".
Don: Oh, let's not quibble about words.
Helen: I'm not quibbling. No one has any rights about me, except me.

Helen Bauer seems to be making a philosophical point about her very existence when she claims that no one should have a right over her. The next scene opens with her parents' visit, which reveals her father to be authoritarian, controlling and mean to both his wife and daughter. If Helen's motivations were mysterious in the previous scene, this one provides the reasons behind her conviction. The confrontation between Helen and Don, on the one side, and her father turns into one between the modern way of living and the old-fashioned world.[68]

Although the modern marriage experience ultimately fails, the film does not advocate for a return to previous conceptions of marital unions. The main cause of failure is usually jealousy—on both parts—and a growing apart caused by the two individuals' separate lives. It is up to women to defend their independence and individuality, but men cannot rise up to the occasion. Alone, men turn to the bottle and other women. As they re-commit to their marriage—paraphrasing Cavell, we could call this a *drama* of re-marriage—the modern marriage experiment seems to have achieved its intended purpose: to demonstrate, in practice, that men and women *should* be equal in a marriage, a question that goes beyond the issue of

[68] Helen appears to be a second-generation immigrant: she does not have an accent, but her parents do.

monogamous exclusivity. The movies struggle with finding ways of accommodating this equality.

In the early 1930s woman's films addressing the question of marriage in a modern context, the man and woman about to enter into union are *already equals*. Their equality does not pose a problem—and does not threaten their relationship—as long as they remain unmarried. Marriage is what threatens their equality: these films represent marriage as the main threat to the woman's status as an equal partner to man. Marriage, with its many conventions and habits, is an institution burdened with the past, a past which promotes both gender obligations and sexual imbalance. These films can be seen as struggling (and, more often, failing) to accommodate a new vision of marriage capable of handling gender equality.

Just as the marital relationship is the nucleus of society, the equality between partners implied by the modern marriage has repercussions well beyond the domestic sphere. As Bridget Bennett points out, the home is often used in art to signify both family and the nation (2012, p. 180). When Jan's father tells relatives in *A Free Soul* (Clarence Brown, 1931) that his "daughter does as she pleases, she's free of your blindfolds", the implications of the modern marriage are clear. Indeed, discussions may have pertained to the institution of marriage, but the ramifications at play extend far and wide. The legitimacy and logic of the modern marriage is argued at length and convincingly by women for whom this issue is of the utmost importance. One could further argue that the movies are using their stars'

credentials—the fact that they were well-known, loved, and respected, but also strong women deserving of the viewer's respect—as leverage in the debate around modern marriage.

Our Dancing Daughters

Although some aspects of the modern life had been tackled previously, *Our Dancing Daughters* is the first film to confront the question head on, and to use the heated debates concerning the modern way of life to its advantage. Doing so, *Our Dancing Daughters* became not only a filmic event but an object stimulating intense arguments throughout American society.

An early synchronized music and sound effect film,[69] *Our Dancing Daughters* broke attendance records in many major cities and remained in theaters for months.[70] It garnered a staggering $40 000 on its opening weekend,[71] making it one of the biggest blockbusters of its days. Marketing at MGM ran pictures of line-ups forming in front of theaters alongside those of its three leads in revealing gowns. A novelization written by Winifred Van Duzer was published in 1928 and William Randolph

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[69] MGM wanted to produce a sound film quickly, in order to keep up with Warner Brothers, but facilities for recording synchronized sound had not been built yet (Crafton, 1997, p. 206). Sound was added in post-production at key points in the film—during spectacular interludes—but the dialogues remained on intertitles.

[70] *To-Day's Cinema*, Jan 4, 1929 (Hunt Stromberg Scrapbook 5, from the Margaret Herrick library).

[71] The *Examiner Daily Review* notes that the film's weekly gross is of at least $95 000, $10 000 more than the previous highest weekly gross. ("*Our Dancing Daughters* $95 000 Breaks Record", October 13, 1928).

Hearst—who co-produced the picture—ran a weekly serialized version in seventeen newspapers throughout the nation at the time of the movie's release, fuelling both a continued debate around its themes as well as interest in the film throughout the country.[72] Unusual at the time, photographs of the sets appeared in Hearst-owned magazines months before the film's release (Gutner, 2001, pp. 104-105). The film wasn't only a huge success with the crowds, but also with the critics. Indeed, very few disapproved of the film in the United States.

The British press, however, was much less impressed by the film, and the reviews ranged from extremely negative to indifferent. The film was described as "barbarian" and "uncivilized", and many British critics questioned the decision of American studios of portraying their fellow countrymen in such undignified manner. Britain's "most powerful film critic" (Glancy, 2013), G.A. Atkinson compares the film to "an enemy's work":

> If a picture such as *Our Dancing Daughters* were produced in Britain we should at once say that our enemy had done this thing, but in America, apparently, the 'latchkey' principle identified by Mr. Goldenberg applies also to her film producers. The truth is that Hollywood film impressarios have no sense of national responsibility. If they had, they would not produce such libels on America as *Our Dancing Daughters* because they are, in the main, representatives of a non-Aryan stock, and if they are not actively interested in the overthrow of Christian civilisation they are at least unconcerned to hinder its downfall. *Our Dancing Daughters*

[72] *The Distributors,* September 7, 1928 (Hunt Stromberg Scrapbook 5, Margaret Herrick library). The serial started running shortly before or after the film's release, depending on the location. The papers were the *Albany Times Union*, the *Atlanta Georgian*, the *Baltimore News*, the *Boston American*, the *Chicago American*, the *Detroit Times*, the *Los Angeles Herald*, the *Omaha Bee News*, the *New York Journal*, the *Pittsburgh Sun Telegraph*, the *Rochester Journal*, the *San Antonio Light*, the *San Francisco Call*, the *Syracuse Journal*, the *Washington Times* and the *Wisconsin News*.

> purports to be a picture of American civilisation, but the mind and eye behind the picture are Oriental. That makes all the difference. The film has no evidential value, but it will breed Communists by thousands (*Daily Express,* January 7, 1929).

Heavily marketed as an "ultra-modern" story, the critics commended the film for delivering on its promise.[73] The various critics' enthusiasm and excitement is palpable as they describe the film's "lively tempo", "fresh" plot and "intriguingly sumptuous" sets. While they systematically point out that the film's main appeal lies with the younger crowds, critics often admitted, much to their own surprise, having been swept by the Jazz-mad and colourful[74] atmosphere. The film's "ultra-modernity", many critics noted, was achieved not only through characters and narrative elements, but also aesthetically and technically, by using panchromatic film, incandescent lighting and peripathetic camera shots.[75] To read the American critics, one would think they approved of the Jazz babies' dancing, drinking, and smoking. In fact, they approved of what they felt were high production values, standards, and realistic portrayals of "modern American youth in the middle and well-to-do classes."[76] The final saving grace of the film, and what made its "wild

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[73] "For years film producers have been endeavouring to give the Great American Public a real sort of movie of our so-called Younger Generation MGM has turned the trick" (Jimmy Starr, *Los Angeles Record, September 19, 1928).* "Ever since the word 'flapper' came into vogue screen producers have been endeavouring to put on celluloid the reckless spirit of modern youth. They have all hit far wide of their mark until Harry Beaumont made *Our Dancing Daughters* for MGM" (Betty Colfax, "*Our Dancing Daughters* Brings Exciting Film to Capitol", *Graphic*, October 10, 1928).
[74] It is surprising to see how often the film is described as "colourful", given that it is a black and white feature.
[75] See for instance "Modern Young Women", *New York Times,* October 7, 1928, *T0-Day's Cinema,* January 4, 1929, *The News of the World* (British), January 6, 1929, "Jazz-Age Film Closing Today in Two Houses", *Los Angeles Times,* November 11, 1928.
[76] G.A. Atkinson, *Daily Express* (British), January 7, 1929.

parties, girls dancing on tables and hot love scenes" acceptable, was its well-bred, upper-class setting. That the youth in the film came from the upper crust made the scenes of drinking and dancing, if not palatable, than at least acceptable to many, as it contributed to the film's "good taste" and "restraint". This rich gloss made late hour cocktail-sipping sophisticated, glamorous and tasteful rather than degenerate and threatening. Indeed, Louella Parsons writes:

> *Our Dancing Daughters* exposed to all the dangers of cocktail drinking and late hours, presents a very true picture of modern life. So many of the flapper screen tales are woefully exaggerated. We see wild automobile rides and hi-flask drinking to excess. Let it be said to the credit of Harry Beaumont, the director, while this gay set does indulge and has its jazz parties, there is a pleasing moderation. You feel the youngsters are well brought up and that they come from well-bred homes.[77]

The film concerns the life of three young girls—"three different types of modern girlhood"—and their respective parents. Diana (Joan Crawford) is a socialite whose parents give her complete freedom. She is shown—in the film's most popular and memorable scenes—dancing a mad Charleston in outrageous and ever more revealing garments, garments which allow the viewer to see her body's movement in every detail (Figure 2.18). But despite this fiery lifestyle, Diana is a very proper, honest, girl. Ann (Anita Page), on the other hand, is the exact opposite: she maintains an image of virginal purity solely for the purpose of "hooking" a rich man—a mission for which her mother has carefully groomed her. Ann is indeed a hot commodity in her family's economy: her mother counts on a good marriage to elevate her status. The third party in this trio is Beatrice (Dorothy Sebastian), a woman in love but

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[77] "Dancing Daughters Entertaining Drama", *Examiner,* September 29, 1928.

tormented by her past indiscretions. The narrative plot concerns mostly Diana and Ann, as they compete for a man's love. The "trick" of the film is that the one that appears "bad" (Diana) is revealed to be good, and vice versa. Diana and Ben (John Mack Brown) fall in love at first sight, but Ben quickly has second thoughts as things get serious; he is scared of her wild behaviour. Ann uses this to her advantage as she charms Ben, professing her desires to be pure for husband and children, and tricks him into marrying her instead of Diana. "When it comes to marriage", intertitles tells us, "men are still old-fashioned". Once marriage is secured, Ann is free to pursue her affair with Freddie, with whom she was in love all along but couldn't marry for financial reasons. Despite being in love with Ben, Diana resigns herself to sailing for Europe. To celebrate her crossing, her friends organise a party at which Ann—who no longer needs to keep up appearances—gets drunk and falls down the stairs to her death, leaving the coast clear for Diana and Ben to finally be together.

Key to the film's success is the fine balance between a realistic modern look and an essentially Victorian and comforting morale, which many critics noted at the time of the film's release. For Norbert Lusk,

> …it's not beside the point to remark that this suppositious expose of jazz-mad youth is inspired by mid-Victorian psychology and while superficially daring it is hollow and self-conscious. We have two girls angling for a rich man with the same wiles that have been practiced since time immemorial and the momentarily defeated one loses her quarry with all the airs of 'Lydia Languish' and other repining heroines. To some of us the modern girls of our observation do not glorify the male to this extent and bring to their

> sentimental defeats something approaching a sturdy philosophy.[78]

The film reviewer for *Picture-Play* has similar reservations: "My point is that really modern [women], do not so glorify the male by openly pursuing him and proclaiming themselves rivals". The third main character, Beatrice, the author pursues, is no more a true example of modern girlhood as the other two:

> No heroine of an old-time melodrama ever traded more upon what Beatrice tremulously calls 'her indiscretion'. …Do professed moderns take on like this? All that Beatrice needed was a black frock, a baby wrapped in a shawl and a snowstorm to remind me that she really belonged in *East Lynne.*[79]

Finally, the British critic for *Bioscope* remarked:

> What interested me most was the discovery that the moral tone of the film was almost Victorian, with that exaggerated emphasis on the importance of the sexual relations which so obsessed our forebears. That obsession is simply not characteristic of the genuine "modern" who is bringing the sexual relations into proper perspective with other equally important things.[80]

Where then, exactly, was the film's "ultra-modernity" to be found? At the cross-road of silent and talking feature, the film can be seen, as Veronica Pravadelli argues, as using a narrative that advances a conservative scenario of upper-class, heterosexual coupling, while revelling in a visual spectacle of modernity. Indeed, in her recent account of women in 1930s films, Pravadelli shows how visual spectacles—"preclassical formal ploys", remnants of a cinema of attractions—serve to visually

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[78] "Newcomer is Lauded Highly", *Times,* November 14, 1928.
[79] "An Éclair", *Picture-Play,* January1929.
[80] *Bioscope* (British), January 9, 1929.

advance ideas pertaining to women's emancipation in non-narrative form. "Around 1933—1934" Pravadelli maintains,

> the dominant mode of female representation veers toward the convergence of normative forms of desire and strong narrative structures dominated by action and dialogue. While visual attractions tended to disappear, linearity and causality furthered a rational mode of storytelling which in turn, supported traditional forms of identity and lifestyle, especially for women (2012, p. 14).

The establishment of a classical cinema in the mid-1930s, the author continues, can therefore be seen as relying on both formal and narrative techniques and a "specific ideological project" (p. 15). Ultimately, both served to re-orient women's quest away from independence, sexual freedom and upward-mobility and towards heterosexual coupling.

Whether visual and narrative elements can so neatly be divided as advancing progressive and conservative ends is a matter of debate. *Our Dancing Daughters,* however, certainly contains visual elements that appeal to the power of the spectacle as defined by the cinema of attractions. The film indeed contains visually powerful scenes of spectacles that are removed from the narrative in their framing and in their direct address to the camera. Various visually striking elements also contribute to a spectacle of modernity. Lavish set designs by Cedric Gibbons certainly add to the film's "up-to-the-minute" feel, and so did the much commented upon costumes. In the film's opening scenes, luxurious modern commodities are paraded as if for the camera thereby establishing a direct communication with the viewer (Figure 2.19).

Figure 2.18 Diana's first dance at the yacht club.

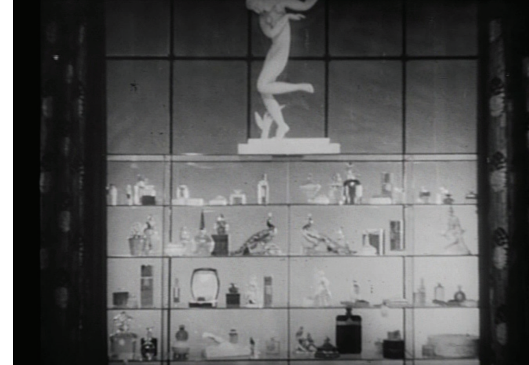
Figure 2.19 Perfume display in Diana's home.

The *ethos* of modernity, however, is not contained in the film's spectacular interludes. The film indeed engages in a conversation regarding modern womanhood on various visual and narrative levels. Many promotional interviews focused on the film's costumes, and they help us understand how they would have added to the film's "modern" feel. Joan Crawford summarizes concisely how modernity finds embodiment in the garments:

> The spirit of modernity finds expression in the clothes we wear. They are startling. They do not blend; they contrast. They do not conceal; they expose. They do not rustle; they swing. They do not curve; they angle. Perhaps this new feeling in dress finds its first and most definate [*sic*] expression in the motion picture world. We are the first to exploit a style... my own wardrobe, and the wardrobe worn by Dorothy Sebastian and Anita Page, breathe the very essence of restless activity (Gutner, 2001, p. 104).

Wearing these "gowns of the day after tomorrow" requires "a new type of walk, a new set of gestures, and a new attitude": "The clothes themselves have abandon, therefore one's manner must be more abandoned." [81] *Zeitgeist*, clothes, and subjectivity find themselves intimately enmeshed in this vision of modernity, and it is difficult to determine which one is the "primary mover" propelling this historical

[81] "Joan Tells how of Modern Dress", *Herald,* September 24, 1928.

development. To follow Joan Crawford's comment strictly, however, the logic makes "the spirit of modernity" the causal element inspiring particular clothes (gowns, specifically), which in turn required an adjustment in one's comportment. One should note, however, that movement, abandon, exposure and curvatures are all qualifications of developments in women's garments. Men's clothes may have evolved during the same period, albeit at a much slower pace, but they never embodied these characteristics believed to lie at the heart of the modern spirit. Women's new gowns, and their various "requirements" (lighter and minimalist undergarments, for instance) notoriously facilitated free bodily movements. If anything, men's garments became *more* constricting as they adopted sharper angular lines created with wider shoulders and a nipped in waist, and came closer to the body at the hips (Mendes & de la Haye, 2010, p. 92). These changes, however, were associated with the Depression's incentive to use less material and were therefore seen less a fashion statement or an expression of the self than a necessity. Menswear, as many theorists have pointed out, has long been built on denials, the most important of which is that there is no such a thing as men's fashion (Bruzzi, 1997; Craik, 1994). According to Daniel Delis Hill, menswear remained mostly "unchanged, familiar and safe" during the early 1930s, becoming more conservative in times of incertitude (Hill, 2011, pp. 171-174). Unlike women's fashion, which was heavily influenced by the French, men's fashion became even more Anglocentric (Mendes & de la Haye, 2010, pp. 70-71). In the early 1930s, one could say, men are from London, women from Paris.

The female-centricity of the "ultra-modern" spirit finds its echo in the discourse around the film: the moderns are the three girls, Johnny Mack Brown's character being described as "just an old-fashioned boy from Alabam'", and usually only in passing at best. The second main male character, Norman (Beatrice's husband) is a jealous, insecure man incapable of dealing with his wife's sexual history. Diana is described as "a modern" on account of her free and daring attitude towards men, but this attitude towards men is only an extension of her outlook on life, which is visually represented through her "kinaesthetic", frenetic movement. Although the spectators (on and off screen) revel in the exciting spectacle she offers, it is precisely this excess that the narrative cannot accommodate. Ben may eventually change his mind regarding Diana, but only after she erases all traces of modernity in herself. After his marriage to Ann, she no longer performs outrageously—spectacularly—at parties: she dances conservatively (and no longer solo) and she wears a pre-modern gown that clashes visually with the modern fashions seen thus far (Figure 2.20).

Figure 2.20 Diana in old-fashion dress, looking out the sea.

The tour de force accomplished by the movie was to appeal not only to both women and men but also to young and old[82] by not only presenting up-to-date images, situations and problems, but by evoking a hopeful and exciting vision of the future—a future that is both to come and already present. In a witty formulation, the critic for the *Times* calls the film "as modern as tomorrow."[83] This future is sophisticated and pragmatic, characterized by wealth and a code of conduct which favours frankness and honesty over hypocrisy. What made the film's main protagonist, Diana, so interesting to critics was the way in which she was more than a flapper: Indeed, she is more often referred to as "modern". According to Jimmy Starr, "Miss Crawford has 'that something' oft-times called 'it'—only Joan's is more than 'it'. [84]" Regina Cannon similarly remarked that what set apart *Our Dancing Daughters* from other jazz-mad pictures are the female characters that "are real flesh and blood human beings, not merely young people who behave as alike as biscuits cut from the same mould look."[85] For Bland Johaneson, Diana, contrary to Clara Bow, is a "modern" flap, she has "more refinement than the trim-legged Bow."[86] The true flapper in the film is Ann, a ditzy, childish and irresponsible blonde who cannot hold her liquor. Despite

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[82] As popular as the film was, it also created an immense controversy—a controversy well attested by the many letters from concerned citizens, mayors, local exhibitors, various censorship bodies and editors archived in the film's PCA file.
[83] "Dancing Youth Picture Moves to Boulevard", *Times,* October 14, 1928.
[84] "It" here refers to the famous Clara Bow movie which made her an icon of the flapper era. *Our Dancing Daughters* movie review, *Los Angeles Record,* September 19, 1928.
[85] "*Dancing Daughters* Called Best of All Jazz Theme Films", *New York American,* October 8, 1928. A review of *Honor Among Lovers* (Dorothy Arzner, 1931) similarly contrasts its star, Claudette Colbert, to "the sexy but empty flapper" (*Variety*, March 4, 1931).
[86] "Jazz Age Sins on Screen at Capitol", *New York Mirror,* October 8, 1928. This indicates that an appreciation for actresses who exuded intelligence, rather than girlishness, preceded talk.

this, her character might have been the most memorable because the most tragic: the film makes clear that she is groomed and controlled by her greedy mother. Her death occurs during an arresting scene that is all the more powerful by being shot in a spectacular fashion, with the camera isolating the various characters facing the camera head-on. The scene first shows a close-up of an inebriated Ann laughing, then cuts to a counter-shot, showing three older women on their knees, scrubbing the floor (Figures 2.21 and 2.22). This shot alone strikes the viewer who has up until then been submerged in a world of opulence and infinite consumption, where work is hidden from view. Although voiceless, the three women do more than just stand in contrast to the upper class. Ann laughs at them, laughs at "women working". At this point, Ann has been behaving like a spoiled brat for several minutes, embarrassing herself and insulting everyone, so the viewer easily identifies with the working women who could be said to express the viewers' disapproval through a "return of the gaze". As she explains her sad plight—telling the working women they should doll up their daughters and marry them off to rich men, instead of scrubbing floors—she stumbles to her death.

Figure 2.21 Ann, looking at the women working from atop the staircase.

Figure 2.22 The women look back.

Our Dancing Daughters stands as a hybrid at the juncture between two distinct representations of women: the 1920s carefree, childish, flapper, and the 1930s Modern Woman. Diana's character, indeed, represents an early version of the modern woman with flapper attributes. As such, she is not, strictly speaking, a modern woman, even though a discourse of modernity permeates the film. In the film's opening scenes, Diana's life revolves around leisure, drinking, dancing and all-night partying. By film's closing, however, she is no longer a flapper. The film reveals her to be very different from Ann: she has a pragmatic view of life, and is not willing to compromise on her morals and principles. She also cares for others and refuses to enter into social games. The film may close on Diana and Ben's happy coupling, but it has made no effort to resolve the contradictions it established explicitly between, on the one hand, the liberative potential of modernity for women, and, on the other, men's (and, by extension, society's) inability to cope with it. As Lori Landay argues,

> on the one hand, the narrative of the flapper film explores women's liberation from Victorian restrictions, and seems to represent an emerging alternative or even oppositional culture; on the other, it contains female independence within the traditional confines of romance and marriage (2002, p. 225).

Our Dancing Daughter, however, goes further, as it problematizes the presence of the modern flapper as an excess that, albeit alluring and exciting, cannot be accommodated by current social mores and heterosexual coupling. Diana's pronouncement, that "you can't be honest; men want flattery, trickery, lies, lies, lies" applies to her situation, but also Beatrice's. The film's third "modern girl" made the mistake of telling Norman, her boyfriend, he is not her first lover. Although he marries her anyways, the information drives him crazy with jealousy. To his request,

the wedding is a private affair and he prevents his wife from seeing old friends, attending parties, or even receiving guests. Beatrice's situation is rather concerning, as she must lie and is subject to Norman's close scrutiny and interrogations when she steps out of the house. After Norman leaves in a jealous furry, the scene ends on Beatrice's despair "all through our lives together—he'll be coming back— hen leaving me again".

The ideological containment of the modern woman that often characterises early 1930s woman's films should therefore not be read as an automatic condemnation of the Modern Woman. The films, by making use of narrative and visual tropes of modernity, put forward an alluring chronotope in the figure of the Modern Woman. Her containment by film's end can be seen as society's reticence towards change, a reticence that is explicitly attributed to men's insecurity. If "modernity exists" as Terry Smith argues, "in the play of flow and blockage between imagined future and echoing past" (1993, p. 8), then women, at least in *Our Dancing Daughters,* exemplify the difficult flow of an appealing future in a present still encumbered by the hang-ups of the past.

Re-figuring the American Way

Following the success of *Our Dancing Daughters*, MGM released two pseudo-sequels: the rather uninspired *Our Modern Maidens* (Jack Conway, 1929) and the more successful *Our Blushing Brides* (Harry Beaumont, 1930). Both films starred Joan

Crawford and Anita Page, Dorothy Sebastien re-joining the duo for *Our Blushing Brides*. The three actresses play different characters, or, more properly speaking, variations on the same characters. Even though their names change, the films of the franchise seem to present the modern girl *au goût du jour*—sporting the latest fashion, but also embodying popular and rapidly changing character traits. In *Dancing Daughters*, the three girls are upper class socialites out of school, waiting to find suitable husbands. In *Our Modern Maidens*, they are still upper class young women just graduating college and starting married life. Registering recent unpopularity and general lack of sympathy towards upper class subjects following the Crash (Slavens, 2006), *Our Blushing Brides* now features the girls as department store employees rooming together in a modest apartment in the big city.

Released in 1931, *Dance, Fools, Dance* was perceived by many to be the fourth instalment in the lucrative franchise[87]. Even though the story marks an important departure from the previous three films (it is more serious in tone, being both a shyster and a gangster picture as much as a woman's film), its stylistic and character development follows the evolution present in the first three. Continuity with the trilogy is also suggested in the Crawford character—Bonnie—who starts off as a wealthy socialite. The world of opulence in which Bonnie lives initially is similar to the one found in the first two films, and the film opens with Crawford's signature extravagant dancing, this time on a private yacht named after her. While they dance,

[87] See, for instance, "Joan Crawford in Another Hit", *M.P. Reporter,* December 18, 1931 and Edwin Schallert, "Youth Flames: Gangsters War", *LA Times*, November 3, 1931.

drink and swim in their underwear, her father is playing cards with his peers, talking about the stock market, claiming to be "on top of the world". Minutes later, her father dies on the stock exchange floor as he witnesses the Crash, and the family is left penniless.[88]

Following the family's downfall, friends quickly distance themselves, taking pleasure in witnessing the social queen's descent into destitution. Bonnie and her brother's contrasted reactions to their new situation will become conventional of many films of the era: Rodney takes to drinking as a full-time occupation until he is recruited by bootleggers, and Bonnie finds employment at a newspaper, starting at the bottom. Contrary to her brother, Bonnie insists on obtaining work and advancement based on merit rather than lineage: "You don't know the thrill of trying to make good on your own", she tells Rodney, "not trading on your name and running around parties all the time". "It's not *who* you are that counts", she concludes, "it's *what* you are". Bonnie here articulates the philosophy of the self-made man, the quintessential American subject, to a brother who has become corrupted by an easy, lavish lifestyle (Cawelti, 1965; Wyllie, 1966).

This insistence on earning one's own keep through hard, honest work is customarily articulated by the female characters in the films of the early 30s, and this position is, moreover, contrasted with their male counterpart's idleness. *Brief Moment*'s Abby

[88] The crash literally kills patriarchs in early 1930s films; *Under 18* (Archie Mayo, 1931), *Secrets of a Secretary* (George Abbott, 1931), and *No More Orchids* (Walter Lang, 1932) also feature fathers whose death coincides with the Crash.

Fane (Carole Lombard), a torch singer who marries a man from a wealthy mid-Victorian family, articulates this most clearly. Fane describes her life after marriage, which consists mainly of hopping from party to party, as a merry-go-round. This is represented visually in the film by a montage sequence conveying the aimlessness of a life of pleasure. The spiral motif is used to symbolise both the dizziness of a life of party and drinking, but also the impasse of standing still.

The "merry-go-round" metaphor is used by another character played by Carole Lombard, *Sinners in the Sun*'s Doris Blake. The characters are very different, since Blake is a kept woman. Both, however, are equally dissatisfied by the hollow life to which they are confined. A feature of several films of the era, the dizzying montage of idle life can justifiably be contrasted with the montage of urban life, such as the ones opening Paul Fejo's *Lonesome* (1928), King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928), *The Office Wife* (Lloyd Bacon, 1930) and *I've Got Your Number* (Ray Enright, 1934). While the montage of urban life conveys a sense of order, as if the city was a well-oiled machine working to a regular beat, the montage of idleness, often associated with a by-gone jazz age, expresses dizziness through camera movement and fast editing.

Short montage sequences were often used in early 1930s films to represent in condensed form the passage of time and space. Christian Metz (1966) uses the term "*syntagme en accolade*" ("bracket syntagma") to describe an a-chronological sequence of shots of elements alluding to a given order of reality. While the descriptive syntagma seeks to provide viewers with information regarding specific

events by assembling shots in a chronological order, the bracket syntagma's shots only serve illustrative purposes (Crisp, 1986). In the bracket syntagma, the whole (sequence) is more important than the sum of its parts (shots). What is important is the general meaning emanating from the sequence, not the individual shots, which only serve as illustrations and do not refer to a specific time or place (Metz, 1966).

The montage sequences were particularly helpful to convey in a very brief amount of time a large quantity of information regarding character movements and developments, and were used in narratives of extended travel and constant partying and leisure. As they are used in many woman's films of the era, they can be seen as representing the woman's mobility and mastery over space. But the montage-sequence was also used to convey the emotional charge of these developments. In *Forbidden* and *Sinners in the Sun* the montage sequence condenses a very short event: an evening of drinking at a club (Figures 2.23 – 2.25). The line up of multiple cocktail glasses, champagne bottles and corks, in conjunction of a rotating drinking Lombard over a saturated audio track of music and laughter is used to convey the excessiveness but also the madness of her drinking. The rapid cadence of repetition will be dizzying for the viewer, conveying that such a situation is dizzying for the characters as well. The first montage sequence in *Sinners…* is followed by two more, shortly thereafter. The two additional montage sequences last longer and join together more images of drinking, intercut with images indicating world travels and leisure, all superimposed over a spinning casino roulette. Although they concern two different characters, these last two montage sequences are very similar. They are

used as transitions, but also as parallels to establish the similarity between the lives of the two main characters who used to date but parted ways for financial reasons: she becoming a kept woman, he a gigolo.

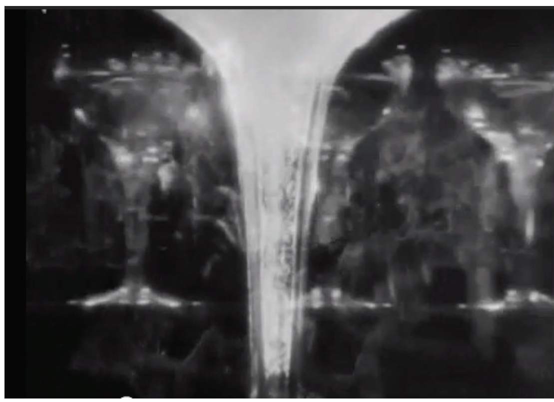

Figure 2.23. Montage sequence from *Forbidden.*

Figure 2.24 Abby, holding her temples from too much partying in *Brief Moment*.

Figure 2.25 More champagne in *Sinners in the Sun*.

Both the urban life and the idle life montage sequences (Figures 2.26 and 2.27) emphasize repetition and multitudes, but while the first creates a sense of linear movement (people walking in the same direction) the latter emphasizes circular movements and shapes, disorder and disorientation. This is furthermore conveyed, in *Brief Moment*, by a shot of Carole Lombard's character, Abby, holding her temples (Figure 2.24).

The idle life, indeed, does not agree with Abby. After quitting her torch-singing job to marry upper class Rodney, she finds her life empty and devoid of meaning. She also finds her unemployed husband Rodney uninteresting, and she insists he finds a job or else she will leave him. Rodney has never needed to work, his family providing him a generous monthly allowance. She explains that although they do not need more money, they must work in order to gain self-respect:

Abby: "You can't want to spend your whole life having a good time!"
Rodney: "What's the sense of working if I don't have to?"
Abby: "You do have to for your self-respect. You should be able to say this
money is mine and I've earned it. It's a grand feeling"
Rodney: "But we don't need more money!"
Abby: "No, darling, but I need to be proud of you".

What ultimately convinces Rodney to take on a job is Abby's expressed need to be proud of her husband. While his family financed his laziness and encouraged idleness, his wife convinces him to work his way up and earn a living he can be proud of.

Classical Hollywood films have often been described as a-political on account of their tendency to present all socio-political problems as resulting from individual actions rather than systemic causes. Although they also focus on individuals and individual actions, early 30s woman's films can be seen as displaying the opposite tendency: complex socio-economic and political issues are enacted within family dynamics, so that contemporary challenges are tackled, in more or less veiled ways, through marital negotiations. The montage sequence, I would argue, was one strategy used to

visually establish a link between individual characters and the larger population from which they stem and which they are meant to represent. *I've Got Your Number*'s opening montage sequence lasts three minutes (two if one deducts the credit sequence) during which we move seamlessly through various locations, workers and customers. Because of the unusual length of the sequence, the film makes it unclear which of the many potential characters the narrative will concern itself with. The film appears to randomly select one of many possible stories it could have followed. The montage is therefore used to visually establish the character as synecdoche.

Figure 2.26 Dizzying idle life, *Brief Moment*.

Figure 2.27 Looking for work among millions.

The "synecdochal" role of these characters is also established narratively through dialogues. While the study of the fallen woman (either the prostitute or the kept woman) has often emphasized the "archetypal" nature of the character and its ideological underpinnings, what has been neglected is the critique of patriarchy and economy that these films contain and that is voiced by female characters, making them vehicles of socio-political discussions on current issues. Films such as *Beauty and the Boss, Employees' Entrance* (Roy Del Ruth, 1932 and 1933), and *Under 18* include concrete discussions of financial hardship as lived by women. *Sin Takes a*

Holiday (Paul Stein, 1930) contains such a scene of frank financial discussion, one that moreover seems designed to entice female viewers' identification with the story. In the film, Sylvia Brenner (Constance Bennett) is an unassuming secretary living on a modest paycheck. Noticing a run in her stocking, her playboy-boss, Stanton, asks: "expensive?"[89] There is, of course, a double-entendre as the question could just as well pertain to Brenner's legs. Where the gold-digger would have jumped on the occasion, Brenner asserts her modesty, yet maintaining both lines of inquiry: "it depends on what sort you buy". What ensues is an unusually detailed discussion of the difficulties of living in a big city on a single income as a secretary:

Stanton: "What salary do I pay you?"
Brenner: "$35 a week"
(…)
Stanton: "Isn't it difficult to live on so little?"
Brenner: "Difficult perhaps, but I manage"
Stanton: "Do you live at home?"
Brenner: "No. I share a furnished apartment with two other girls"
Stanton: "How do you manage to clothe yourself on your salary?"
Brenner: "Many girls do it on less, dirty crowded basement
bargain sales, make things yourself"
Stanton: "Hum, and presents I suppose"

It is often repeated that money was rarely discussed in mainstream Hollywood productions and that price tags were conspicuously absent. In early 1930s woman's films, however, the opposite appears to be the case. The entire discussion from *Sin Takes a Holiday* evolves around two central preoccupations, money, of course, but also clothes, more particularly, the difficulty of clothing oneself properly on a tight

[89] The situation here could be said to plagiarize *Our Blushing Brides*, released four months earlier. In the earlier film, however, the line only serves as a pick-up line used on the Crawford character by her ogling boss.

budget. *Ten Cents a Dance* and *Central Park* (John G. Adolfi, 1932) show women's difficult relationship with their worn-out shoes (Figure 2.28). Such "reality interludes" act, on the one hand, to establish a connection between a glamorous actress and the theatregoer. My argument, however, is that they also serve to translate complex socio-economic situations into the woman's narrative presented on screen. In *Beauty and the Boss,* Suzy (Marian Marsh) describes herself to a prospective employer as a "church mouse", the race of unemployed women looking for work: "I belong to the poor who press their nose against windows...you've seen those girls, right? I belong to the delicatessen group". Hunger is visible on her face, as we see her, nose pressed against a window overlooking a man's copious lunch (Figure 2.29). Practicing shorthand and memorizing stock trading in her spare time, Suzy impresses with her machine-like efficiency. Before long, she runs the office—and her boss—with a hand of steel.

Figure 2.28 *Ten Cents a Dance,* backstage.

Figure 2.29 Nose pressed against the window.

In *Beauty and the Boss,* much like in *Brief Moment, Dance, Fools, Dance* and *Party Husband,* a female character—a Modern Woman—articulates the value of work and the importance of a productive (rather than idle) life. She possesses, moreover, a

strong work ethic and is often portrayed as being the one running the office, albeit in a man's shadow, as is also the case in *Honor Among Lovers*, *Behind Office Doors* (Melville Brown, 1931) and *Big Business Girl* (William A. Seiter, 1931). When contrasted with the idle rich, whose drunken life is made possible by the past work of their father and entitlements, the Modern Woman appears as both a breath of fresh air, energetic, and ready to take on the hard work necessary to put the country back on track.

In this chapter I have shown that early 30s woman's films stage a feminine experience of modernity through the Modern Woman chronotope. The woman's past, whether rural or urban, is tied to domestic entrapment and patriarchal surveillance. This is, in turn, manifest in the woman's lack of mastery over time and space and her desire to gain such mastery by leaving for the city and obtaining wage work. In the films under review, a marked association with hard work, a strong work ethic and patriotic values certainly serves to contain the Modern Woman and present her under a favourable light in the context of the Depression. The Modern Woman is therefore not wholly oppositional; as a chronotope, she functions both as a centripetal and a centrifugal force. One could indeed say that by being strongly associated with "performance" work—work premised on the exhibition of her body—she remains "on the market": continuing to be an essential cog in the patriarchal socio-economical fabric. As a centripetal force, she functions as a unifying drive promoting a solidified *status quo*. Her position, as a body "to-be-looked-at" can

be seen—and has been seen—as a lack of mastery over the space in which she appears.

I would argue, however, that containment by centripetal forces is not the only mechanism at play here. The place the Modern Woman occupies in the nation's economy, rather than the family economy allows her to move from commodity to producer (to use, once again, Irigaray's Marxist terminology). Wage work in the city also allows women to develop a public identity and a sense of self-worth outside the home, thereby challenging traditional and familial hierarchies and patterns of authority (Dumenil, 1995, p. 126). In this sense, she also functions as a centrifugal force of individuation, personal expression and social liquefaction.

In the context of the Depression—and vivid discussions between those advocating government intervention to help the destitute, and those proponents of self-reliance—the Modern Woman's "pulling oneself by the bootstraps" attitude was bound to resonate, making her an eminently desirable character and, possibly, a model of a way out of socio-economic lethargy. As a chronotope, the Modern Woman is associated with a hopeful view of the future, a particularly appealing aspect at a time of economic stagnation. A strong association with work, finally, marks her as an independent woman—a master of her own person and destiny—and is linked with discussions on modern marriage. The films, however, struggle with finding marital arrangements that will accommodate both spouse's independence and equality, or, as *Illicit* put it: finding a legitimate arrangement without killing the romance.

Romance, it would seem, proves difficult to portray as a meeting of two people who wish to retain their independence. Workspace and domestic space can only accommodate the Modern Woman chronotope with some friction; her own spatial and temporal coordinates conflict with current society's and cannot be easily integrated.

Chapter 3 At Home in Modernity

How could we drink up the sea?
Who gave us the sponge
to wipe away the entire horizon?[90]

Working in the field of interpersonal communication and relationships, Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery (1996) have attempted to theorise Bakhtin's chronotope in light of his work on centripetal and centrifugal forces within language and culture. More recently, David M. Boje (2009) has distinguished between chronotopes that are fundamentally centripetal and those that are centrifugal. I have argued, however, that this is granting too much solidity and coherence to the chronotope. Instead, I suggest that centripetal and centrifugal forces are constitutive of chronotopes. If we think of the Modern Woman as a chronotope, and the chronotopes as traversed and animated by centripetal and centrifugal forces, we can begin to see how the chronotope of the Modern Woman can function alternatively as a force of increased social homogenization and solidification of the *status quo* and a force of contest and fragmentation: Both a reassuring, comforting figure and one that generates anxiety and discomfort.

For Anthony Giddens, modern societies have become increasingly post-traditional and, consequently, more reflexive. When traditions, values and conventions lose their firm anchors—which we have defined thus far as a condition of liquid

[90] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, New York : Vintage, 1974 (1882), p.181.

modernity—the "reflexive project" becomes more pressing and central. Indeed, reflexivity is, for Giddens, the most important change brought on by late modernity:

> The reflexivity of the self, in conjunction with the influence of abstract systems, pervasively affects the body as well as psychic processes. The body is less and less an extrinsic 'given', functioning outside the internally referential systems of modernity, but becomes itself reflexively mobilized. What might appear as a wholesale movement towards the narcissistic cultivation of bodily appearance is in fact an expression of a concern lying much deeper actively to 'construct' and control the body" (Giddens, 1991, p. 7).

Giddens therefore differs from Bauman in seeing in liquid modernity the possibility for agency. For Bauman, once individuals have uprooted, they are bound to forever float freely over a fluid social realm, subject as they are to contingency and unable to anchor themselves. Reflexivity, as theorised by Giddens, reinstates the subject as an agent of change within an uncertain, fluid world (Lee, 2011). Since societies are forever changing, identity can no longer be seen as either given or firm, it must be "routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual" (Giddens, 1991, p. 52).

Reflexivity concerns an agent's relationship with itself, but also with the various structures with which they are in contact: A better understanding of the social environment and how it affects the self will lead, in a highly reflexive situation, to greater adaptation and successful self-fashioning. While traditional and "solid" societies advocate past trends, experiences and beliefs as bases for decision-making, ever changing liquid societies offer accurate, up-to-date knowledge. Experts come to replace guardians of traditions (Bauman, 2012; Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994, p. 65).

The self-improvement craze taking hold of fan publications in the 1930s is a telling exemplification of the phenomenon described by Giddens and other proponents of reflexive modernity. In countless advertisings, readers were urged to adopt new products and fashion their behaviour according to expert's advice. Movie stars' expertise was invoked mostly to sell soap, cosmetics, hair products and diets, while scientists' expertise tended to be used to sell less tangible and more dubious products and techniques, such as posture and body shape correctors, public speech techniques, music lessons and languages—always with the aim of increasing one's popularity and personal success. Fictional relatives, coworkers and friends were especially conjured to sell products meant to prevent embarrassing body odours, bad breath and dandruffs. These advertising techniques—appeal to self-improvement and expert knowledge—are well documented in the context of a nascent consumer culture and have justifiably been seen as ways to sell commodities.[91] While an integral part of commodity culture, early 1930s woman's films also present knowledge, visibility and personal experience as key to the Modern Woman's reflexive fashioning and success in ways not entirely encapsulated by consumerism.

Blonde Baby, Wilson Collison's 1931 dime novel on which *Three Wise Girls* is loosely based, identifies visibility and knowledge as the two most important factors in a girl's survival in the city. Early in the book, the main character, Cassandra, writes to her mother who lives in Brian, Ohio (a town she "had to get away from"). She has been in New York City for three weeks, and she writes to reassure her mother that

[91] See Barbas (2001), Marchand (1985), Susman (1973) and Weinbaum et al (2008).

she made the right decision in moving to the Big City. Even though she sometimes gets lonesome, she does not plan on going back home: "You know, girls are never the same when they come back as they were before they went away. They get ideas and the hometown always looks cramped and mean. They never get themselves adjusted properly …" (p. 3). The city, she reassures her mother, is always safe for a beautiful girl, perhaps even more so than the small provincial town (p. 17): "I don't know why people imagine that New York is such a dangerous city for girls. You can walk through the streets alone, even at night, and no one bothers you" (p. 69).

Two elements, according to Cassandra, contribute to a woman's safety in the city: visibility and a certain education in modern living. "Frankness and insouciance", she points out, are the most effective ways of handling men trying to pick her up: "Men are quickly embarrassed by frankness" (p. 70). An education—the kind that can only come from experience— and an absence of naiveté are key to keeping an upper hand over men: "You can squelch them [men] in a minute if you let them know that you know what girls are for if they want to be for that" (p. 70). Secondly, women's safety in the city is assured by the visibility afforded by its constant crowdedness: there's always people around, people looking and preventing men from making inopportune moves.[92] Modern, urban crowdedness has often been associated with alienation, anxiety and nervous disorder caused by sensory hyper-stimulation (Singer, 2001;

[92] *Shopworn*'s Kitty Lane (Barbara Stanwyck) claims to like the city crowds precisely for this reason.

Storey, 2013, p. 78). In the present case, however, the urban crowd is reassuring as it surveils male behaviour as much as women's.[93]

The Modern Woman of early 1930s woman's films are presented as particularly apt for reflexive manipulations and constructions of the self. Indeed, although early 1930s Hollywood films feature a few notable exceptions, most young women leaving their hometown for the city become performers in some form or another: models, chorus girls or torch singers.[94] These professions certainly employed a number of women in the early 1930s, but the nature of employment on screen was in no way reflective of women's actual off-screen work.[95] The over-representation of women as performers on film may have to do with the media's lasting fascination with depicting the female form and finding various excuses to do so. The films of the early 1930s addressed to women, however, have at their center a female protagonist who is portrayed as longing to be seen and deriving both pleasure and various advantages from it. More than pleasure and material possessions, their prominent position as

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[93] The idea that the city may be "a place of liberation for women" while also being "a place of growing threat and paranoia to men" was explored in a slightly different context by Elizabeth Wilson (1991, 2001).

[94] There are also a number of secretaries, but having a pleasing and attractive appearance is still a pre-requisite of employment.

[95] In 1910, service was the most important sector for working women (76% for black women, 37% for foreign-born white women, and 16% for native-born white women), closely followed by the "needle trades" (19% for black women, 23% for foreign-born white women and 18% for native-born white women). Native-born white women also worked in the clerical sector (22%) and as semi-professionals (17%). In 1930, a third of all working women were employed as domestics, of which more than half were either black or foreign-born whites, and 29% were married (Dumenil, 1995, p. 112). 14% of working women were professionals—teachers, nurses and social workers, all 'feminized' fields with consequently lower pay (p. 116).

model or performer also gives them a unique point of view from which they can observe their observers. Performers and models frequently pick out men in the crowd or gain crucial information while working.[96] Being visible in public affords them a unique vantage point (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Models at work in *Three Wise Girls*.

Figure 3.2 "Well, how do you like it?"

Figure 3.3 *Three Wise Girls*.

Figure 3.4 *Our Blushing Brides*, winter collection.

These films present the fantasy of being seen, illustrating the idea according to which "there is no identity without visibility". The centrality of the woman's visual appearance in the film's narrative development could be perceived as confirming John Berger and Laura Mulvey's analysis regarding the objectification of women in pictorial art and on screen through their status as images to be looked at. However,

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[96] Examples include *Dance, Fools, Dance* and *Three Wise Girls*.

early 30s woman's films show that through visuality, women have a capacity to reinvent themselves, a quality that was in turn critical in times of rapid social change. Moreover, the ability to mould herself to face the challenges brought on by modernity is presented as thoroughly reflexive.

The Modern Woman is usually presented as lean, healthy, sturdy and energetic. Her physical attributes are often emphasized by the necessities of her job (as model or performer) and their desirability is confirmed with customary eye-line matches. The bearer of the gaze in early 1930s woman's films is often male, but it is not unusual to find women looking, inspecting, and appreciating other women as well (Figures 3.2 and 3.3). The women looking are almost necessarily of a certain social and economic status; it could be hypothesized that their social and economic superiority gives them a right to look that is similar to men's. Women who are looked at are often seen as controlling their own visibility, by first determining the value of the onlooker and the amount of flesh to display. Mulvey's analysis regarding the association between the gaze and power would therefore require some adjustments to accommodate these films, and the power women exercise *as* bodies to-be-looked-at.

When she parades her attributes, she does so confidently and with pride (Figure 3.4). Most importantly, she is often shot as a showpiece, centered or even framed within the frame to enhance the visual impact of her shape and performance (Figures 3.5 and 3.6). Her physical appearance and state of mind are presented as reflecting one another, and to be both in sync with modern times. Dorothy Mackaill describes this

pointedly in a 1930 interview: “the modern girl is like Lindbergh, built for speed. We have tremendous vitality of body and complete emancipation of mind. None of the old taboos…mean a damn to us. *We don’t care*” (qtd. in LaSalle, 2000, p. 76). *Silver Screen* calls the new silhouette—whose “High Priestess” is Constance Bennett—a “fast figure”: “This is the speed age”, the magazine claims, “[m]otion picture stars, like motor boats, aeroplanes and racing cars, are built on greyhound lines” (September 1931, pp. 23-25).

In *The Easiest Way* and *The Reckless Hour* the main female protagonists become model to artists because they embody the spirit of their time (Figure 3.7). In *Ladies of Leisure* (Frank Capra, 1930) and *The Song of Songs* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1933), women become muses to artists in desperate need of hope and inspiration. In *Inspiration* (Clarence Brown, 1931), Yvonne (Greta Garbo) has been the muse of famous painters, sculptors and authors and is said to be “as well-known as the Eiffel Tower”. As such, these films represent the Modern Woman becoming a popular national figure, in the same way that the Gibson and the Brinkley girl had become popular icons in previous decades. *Ex-Lady*’s Helen Bauer, “one of the foremost young illustrators in America”, whose “drawings of young moderns show the American *jeune fille* in her most engaging aspects”, seems modeled on Alice Barber Stephens,[97] Neysa McMein[98] or Nell Brinkley.

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[97] The “dean” of female illustrators, Stephens was tasked by the *Ladies’ Home Journal* to portray the “American Woman as she is” (Kitch, 2001).

[98] McMein gained fame with *McCall’s*, for which she drew all the cover illustrations between 1923 and 1937.

Far from representing the model of innocence and purity found in the Gibson girl, the Modern Woman providing inspiration for a popular representation of her time is always a woman with a past and experience. Kay Arnold (*Ladies of Leisure,* Barbara Stanwyck) is a "party-girl" for hire and Margie (*The Reckless Hour,* Dorothy Mackaill) has even had a pregnancy out of wedlock. In *Central Park, The Greeks Had a Word for Them* (Lowell Sherman, 1932), *Trouble in Paradise* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1932) and *Travelling Saleslady* (Ray Enright, 1935), among many others, the female protagonists have street knowledge: they know the latest cons, how to acquire food and get their various bills paid. They are experts in urban living.

Street knowledge operates as an equalizing, democratic force in many films featuring the working class and the street hustler: strangers connect, strike immediate friendship and cooperate. In these films, society is divided into two classes: good society and outsiders. Films championing the outsiders and the underclass—especially those made by Warner Brothers—present good society people as "suckers". They may have a college education, but none of the street knowledge which the outsiders possess. Within the outsider class—workers of different stripes, street hustlers, gold diggers and con artists—equality reigns, suspending the usual inequalities of gender, race and nationality. The value of an individual is based solely on their wits and skills. "Sister", used by both men and women, is a common nickname pointing to this equality. Among the outsiders, cooperation and solidarity are key values.

Hold Your Man (Sam Wood, 1933) provides many examples of this. Eddie (Clark Gable) meets stranger Ruby (Jean Harlow) by entering her apartment trying to avoid the police officers following a con job gone wrong. Deducing from the many pictures of men on her walls that she's "been around"—perhaps seeing a parallel between their two lines of work—Gable falls for her and she for him. The two strike an instant friendship and start working together. Harlow will shortly thereafter be sent to a reform institution. The institution, in which most of the film takes place, is shot to emphasize the diversity of its occupants—as was *Ladies They Talk About* (Howard Bretherton, William Keighley, 1933) released a few months earlier: a series of close ups show different nationalities and backgrounds all made equal by the conditions of their detainment. Regardless of race and background, the women band together and help each other. In this environment, Theresa Harris plays one of the very few roles in which she is not a maid. In fact, her father, who is a reverend (George Reed), will perform the wedding ceremony between Ruby and Eddie. An African-American officiating a religious ceremony for white Americans was still a contentious subject, as is attested by Hays Office documents for *Anybody's Woman* (Dorothy Arzner, 1930) requesting that a similar scene be removed. In an inter-office memo to Jason Joy, Lamar Trotti writes that

> the marriage by the negro minister [...] will not be condoned by motion picture patrons in the Southern states, and that even in the other states where a certain amount of mingling is permitted between the races, there will be many who will consider this an unnecessary bit of action (PCA files, dated May 8, 1930).

The scene, Trotti added, could be modified to make clear that no other church was available to celebrate the wedding, but "the idea of calling the negro minister Brother

and his addressing the white woman as Sister is wholly offensive" and should be cut entirely. Trotti's opinion was shared by Joy and John V. Wilson, who then told Paramount that "the business of having Neil and Pansy married by a negro is absolutely out of the question" (PCA files, letter dated May 16, 1930).

Hold Your Man could be said to go the extra mile in its representation of class solidarity: Ruby and Gypsy—Eddie's former lover—become friends, Gypsy defying the law to help Ruby, and Ruby's former lover Al (Stuart Erwin) gives Eddie a job when he comes out of prison. In this way, it is entirely in line with forward-moving American films of the era, films inspiring hope in the future through solidarity and cooperation.

In other films, the Modern Woman's knowledge concerns her life *as a woman*: she knows the ways of the world—she knows men—and she is not about to get caught making the same mistakes again. In fact, many woman's films of the era begin with the female protagonist just recovering from just such a mistake, and vowing to get their revenge using their knowledge of the world and people. After becoming a successful entertainer, Sally Trent (Claudette Colbert, *Torch Singer* [Alexander Hall and George Somnes, 1933]) goes back to the nightclub owner who had turned her down in the past, condescendingly claiming she needed "to suffer" to have a better singing voice. The remark is all the more hurtful that Sally has just been forced to give her daughter to adoption because of her inability to find work and feed her.

Headlining at the club years later as the notorious Mimi Benton and accepting the manager's compliments, she asks him if he thinks she's suffered enough, the implication being that she's had to entertain a great number of men to get where she is.[99] The films therefore turn a woman's past into a source of knowledge and empowerment; a key to their better understanding of the present and the future.

Often times, women are hired as models for the proper display of clothes, and their performance is presented as such. They are performing for the camera under the guise of performing for the diegetic spectators. Their poses and walks often appear exaggerated, and backstage scenes—where various aspects of their performance are discussed—serve to reinforce the performance's performativity. These backstage scenes—as well as scenes showing the models and performers discussing what *they* see and feel while performing—indicate, if not a *return of the gaze* then at least agency, or self-mastery. *Havana Widows* (Ray Enright, 1933) opens with seemingly jovial chorus girls dancing on stage. As the camera moves closer to them, we can hear their actual conversation: they make fun of the audience, gossip and complain about physical pain and the poor quality of the show. They become truly ecstatic as they leave the stage to pick up their pay check behind the curtain.

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[99] Although the film—for censorship reasons—centers on Sally's singing career, the promotional material alludes to other facets of her profession. For instance, the tagline says her "Lips [have] kissed more men than she could remember".

The scenes in which they perform are often shot as spectacular moments detached from the movie's narrative development. Attention is also brought to the fact that they are indeed adjusting their comportment (their walk, accent, etc) to suit this performance of sophistication. Rarely do they fail to perform properly. In fact, these moments often serve as the perfect innuendo for their encounter with wealthy men who mistakenly assume they belong to the same class as them, such as in John Francis Dillon's *The Reckless Hour* (1931). Once their performance is over, however, the female characters are shown to be decidedly working-class. It is precisely their ability to negotiate their way through various social situations and social classes that marks their strength and success. These scenes serve to display the latest trends in fashion—which was perceived as an important selling point for female viewers—but also the latest trends in "bodies" and comportment.

Rapid changes in mass media, consumer culture and demographics sparked an ongoing dialogue in popular culture and advertisement on how one should comport themselves in the new, urban, modern metropolis. As Samantha Barbas points out, old recipes emphasizing morality made way for "personality, charm, friendliness, and flawless self-presentation" (2001, p. 36). These films served not only as "educational guides" for female viewers on how to present oneself in different circumstances, but they featured women who always knew how to dress, walk and talk in various situations.

Figure 3.5 ***Our Blushing Brides*****, fashion show.**

Figure 3.6 ***Sinners in the Sun*** **(A. Hall, 1932)**

Figure 3.7 ***The Reckless Hour*** **(J.F. Dillon, 1931).**

New Morals for a New World

During the early years of the 20th century, but even more so during the troubled years of the Depression, the values associated with America's Puritanical tradition were under attack. Warren Susman identifies the four tenets of the American Puritan heritage: Puritanism promoted (1) "self-restraint and control over appetites and emotions"; (2) order and law, as well as the subordination of the self to society; (3) a stern morality and subjugation to a strict code of ethics dictated from above; (4) and the valuation of personal material success, thrift and capitalist entrepreneurship. As Susman explains, not everyone agreed with these tenets; those that did not, either

because they came from other traditions or because they were disadvantaged by them, saw the Puritan focus on society as breeding persecution and intolerance, the stern morality as "a device to maintain order and control by a few who regarded themselves as morally superior", and its capitalist ethic as sanctioning crass materialism (1973, pp. 41-42).

In this context, young intellectuals "sought to create a national American culture" by, first, "reject[ing] America's subservience to Anglo-Saxondom because, in part, it suggested cultural dependence on Great Britain at the very time these men [*sic*] sought to create a consciousness of American cultural distinctiveness" (Susman, 1968, p. 149). Their intervention sparked a popular interest in the idea of America as a "civilization".[100] Scholars in various fields questioned the notion of "Americanism", of what constituted American "exceptionalism" and, most importantly, the direction the nation was heading towards: the Old World, an American brand of Puritanism, the rugged individualism of the frontier, or a purely American way liberated from the shackles of the past, unafraid of constantly reinventing itself and adaptable to change. For the intellectuals of *Civilization in the United States*, "whatever else American civilization is, it is not Anglo-Saxon", and a chief concern should be the development of a new, vibrant culture adapted to the American national temperament and needs (qtd. in Susman, 1973, p. 115). The

[100] Among the many books published between 1920 and 1940, let us mention only *Civilization in the United States: An Inquiry by Thirty Americans.* Ed. Harold E. Stearns. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1922; *Whither Mankind: A Panorama of Modern Civilization.* Ed. Charles A. Beard. New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928; *Recent Gains in American Civilization: By a Group of Distinguished Critics of Contemporary Life.* Ed. Kirby Page. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929.

anthology, furthermore, blamed women who, as "guardians of the genteel culture" had been more preoccupied with Puritan morality than art, and had consequently fostered a sterile society. All these strands, Susman points out, contributed to the nationalism that took shape during the 1930s.

In the months preceding and immediately following the Crash, fan magazines and other popular publications participated in debates pertaining to the specificity of the new American woman. *The Smart Set* asked its 1929 readership to send them their thoughts on the typical American girl for a chance to win $100 (Figure 3.8), which then morphed into a nation-wide search for the typical American girl with a prize that included a trip to Europe. The December 1929 issue reported on the trip with an article titled "All Europe Gives the Little Typical American Girl a Great Big Hand". Often, however, the opinions of various social leaders and aristocrats were solicited.[101] Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr. penned a series of article in which he compared favourably the Hollywood woman to fifth avenue high society. "The son of America's oldest aristocracy", one subtitle triumphantly declared, "prefers the new aristocracy of Cinemaland" (*Silver Screen*, November 1930, pp. 12-13). In the front page story "American Women Hard-Boiled and Wise…" the wife of a popular English actor expresses her views:

> 'American women', Mrs. Keith-Johnston began (…) 'are rather hard-boiled, very much so compared to English women. They are

[101] These debates were also carried at local levels, as is attested by the *Miami Daily News*, which published a series of articles on the subject, soliciting local leaders and socialites' opinions ("Clubs Eligible to Nominate Their Typical American Girl", March 27, 1929, p. 6; "Girls of Today Are Marvels of Ability, Mrs. Brown Finds", April 6, 1929, p. 5).

so very much more sophisticated, it is amazing. They have none of the graciousness of English women. They seem to be born old and from their cradles know all about life and sex and what not. They have a bold push-and-go manner and are never young girls, yet they haven't the poise of English girls' (*Variety,* December 25, 1929).

Figure 3.8 Ad published in the January 1929 issue of *Photoplay*.

Defining the American girl seemed a fascinating and urgent occupation, linked with national character. In this quest, old aristocratic opinions were particularly solicited to confirm both American exceptionalism and worth.

To say, as many do, that the Depression was absent from early 1930s Hollywood films is not entirely true. What was mostly absent were realistic depictions of the misery experienced by the poor. But the Crash itself and its consequences were

represented more or less directly in many films.[102] More precisely, the Crash and the ensuing Depression were used and represented in film as an opportunity for American growth. The Depression was portrayed as a positive rather than a negative event; an opportunity to change for the better, to re-construct the nation on better, more "American", values.

Jeffery Morton Paine voices a commonly held opinion of Depression-era films when he states that despite the catastrophic changes brought on by the Crash,

> the old world does not appear to die, it seems to live on in the movies of the thirties [...] As often happens in such cases, the most certain path through an uncertain future seemed the past: Hollywood films settled upon a platitudinous, familiar, and previously-sanctioned picture of life and work in America (pp. 21-22)

Yet, as this chapter will show, the effort to find a way out of the flux of the Depression in early 1930s woman's films involves the development of an American modernity as distinct from Old World, Anglo-Saxon Puritanism and "European" decadence.

In the next three film analyses, I investigate in more details the Modern Woman's relationship with the visibility and self-fashioning that is characteristic of modernity (Chow, 1995), as well as her axiological component. As the images of Barbara

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[102] The most explicit is obviously William Dieterle's *The Crash* (1932), but the Crash is also alluded to directly in *Today* (William Nigh, 1930), *Reaching for the Moon* (Edmund Goulding, 1930), *Dance, Fools, Dance* (Harry Beaumont, 1931), and more indirectly in various films, among them *Tarnished Lady* (George Cukor, 1931), *American Madness* (Frank Capra, 1932), *Faithless* (Harry Beaumont, 1932), *Gabriel Over the White House* (Gregory La Cava, 1933) and *The Mayor of Hell* (Archie Mayo, 1933).

Stanwyck, Constance Bennett, Joan Crawford and Jean Harlow (Figures 3.1 – 3.7) shown above intimate, the Modern Woman appears to be displayed and framed, in early 1930s woman's films, in a way that would, at first glance, be congruent with feminist gaze theory. The Modern Woman offers herself as an object to be looked at, and she takes pleasure in occupying this position. As I will show, a chronotopic approach to the Modern Woman figure shows not only the inadequacy of gaze theory for understanding early 1930s Hollywood, but a woman's relationship to visibility and the self-fashioning of her image that challenges gaze theory-inspired feminist film theory. The Modern Woman's ability to knowingly and reflexively self-fashion herself makes her a better navigator than men in liquid times. No longer adrift, she becomes in certain, more daring films, a powerful figure instigating changes far outreaching her person, namely, changes in values and value systems.

Baby Face

The unexpected discovery of an earlier version of *Baby Face* in 2004 modified substantially the critical appreciation of the film. Written hastily by Darryl Zanuck (under the pseudonym Mark Canfield) as a response to MGM's *Red-Headed Woman*, the film seems to derive its strength and power from its crude and unsentimental explicitness. The film has traditionally been analysed in relationship with *Red-Headed Woman,* notably, for they inaugurated a cycle of films centering on serial men-eaters, women who sleep their way up the social ladder. This pre-release version, as well as censorship documents subsequently made available showed,

however, how Lily Powers (Barbara Stanwyck) "become[s] imbued with the philosophy of Nietzsche to the effect that she should use the power she has over men to rise in the world."[103] In this respect, *Baby Face* is quite different from *Red-Headed Woman,* as it bears a definite political charge, even though both films recount a similar story of beautiful women seducing and ruining men to escape poverty and acquire material comfort.

Undoubtedly, both versions of *Baby Face* orchestrate a recuperation of "the independent woman stereotype" (Gledhill, 1984) by ultimately showing Lily Powers' "inability to […] reject her prescribed role as Woman" (Maltby, 1986, p. 37). Nevertheless, it is worth looking closely at the philosophy behind Lily's initial social rise. Although all references to Nietzsche were removed from the theatrical-release copy, the philosopher occupies a significant and unusual place in the script and pre-release copy. After her father's death, a friendly cobbler convinces her to leave her sordid existence and move to the big city to find opportunities. To Lily's reply that a woman doesn't stand a chance, the cobbler launches into a Nietzschean speech:

> …A woman, young, beautiful, like you, can get anything she wants in the world, because you have power over men!...But you must use men, not let them use you. You must be a master, not a slave! Look, here! Nietzsche says: 'All life, no matter how we idealize it, is nothing more nor less than exploitation!' That's what I'm telling you! Exploit yourself! Go to some big city where you will find opportunities…Be strong, defiant! Use men to get the things you want!

[103] Letter of James Wingate to Will Hays dated March 2, 1933.

This is precisely what Lily will do. After talking to the cobbler, she boards a freight car that will take her to New York City, and aboard which she will use her sex to her advantage for the first time. We know from an earlier scene that Lily has been a prostitute since the age of 14,[104] and she resents her father for pimping her for his own profit. Now that she controls her body, she no longer resents prostituting herself. In New York, she finds employment in a bank by seducing a clerk, and then sleeps her way up to the top by ensnaring ever-more powerful men. An office-vamp, Lily leaves behind her a trail of heart-broken, ruined and destitute men. Her path of destruction culminates with the director of the bank, who is killed by her former lover (who is also his son-in-law). This murder-suicide puts an end to Lily's source of income, and she decides to extort the board of directors by threatening to sell the diary which contains the details of her experiences at the bank. Following the scandal, the Board of directors meet to appoint a new director—Trenholm (George Brent)—and buy Lily's silence. The board easily falls prey and offers Lily $15 000. What convinces them so quickly is her claim that she called the bank director "baby". Their face and posture registers shame: both because they could all have been "baby", but also because it would do the bank great damage were it known that the bank director was also a woman's "baby", weak and vulnerable in the hands of a woman. Unmoved, Trenholm calls Lily's bluff and sends her instead to their Paris office. To his surprise, Lily sticks to the deal and the job. They meet in Paris, and he

[104] Columbia's 1932 *Shopworn* (Nick Grinde), also starring Barbara Stanwyck, begins along a very similar line. Stanwyck here plays Kitty, who lives with her father in a mining town. After being injured during a blast, he uses his last breath to exhort her to leave the town ("too many men around here"), and be tough, "because it's a tough world". In this film, Stanwyck's character also states that men started to make passes at her when she was 14.

joins the long line of lovers, as a husband this time. On his way back to the United States, he finds out the bank has gone bankrupt because of financial mismanagement. He is made the scapegoat and must use his own money to save himself (and the bank), but Lily initially refuses to help him, which leads him to suicide. Lily realizes that she really does love him more than she does money and goes back to find him in time to save him.

Lily Powers represents, to be sure, an extreme version of the cold-hearted gold-digger at the center of many films of the era. But her case is most interesting for us because the film articulates in clear terms her motivations and guiding philosophy: the world has gone to shambles, men are weak and yet they control it, one must therefore be strong and elevate oneself to gain control over others and, most importantly, over one's own existence. It is up to her to become master. In this way, Lily Powers—whose evocative name can hardly be seen as coincidental—embodies perfectly Nietzsche's vital energy, "the will to live and to power, swimming in a sea of disorder […] and despair" (Harvey, 1990, p. 15). This message is reasserted towards the end of the pre-release version. The cobbler sends Lily a copy of Nietzsche's *Thoughts Out of Season*, in which he has highlighted a section that reads "Face life as you find it—defiantly and unafraid. Waste no energy yearning for the moon. Crush out all sentiment."[105]

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[105] In the theatrical-release version, the cobbler will send her a note of disapproval instead.

As is attested by extensive communications to that effect, the Nietzschean element central to the film was the most problematic from the standpoint of the Studio Relations Committee (SRC). To be sure, the Office suggested the studio eliminate various elements, such as profane language and sexually-charged shots, but only so that the film would pass state and foreign censor boards. For its part, the SRC was, at this point, mostly concerned with enforcing the overall *moral* message of the film. That Lily ruthlessly pursues men and luxury was understandable, especially in light of her hard childhood[106] and was not, in itself, a problematic subject for the film, even though the office pointed out this type of story was becoming "exceedingly difficult to get by" with the various boards.[107] The SRC requested, however, the studio "eliminate the declaration of the Nietsche [*sic*] philosophy and sufficiently eliminate the practice, else the picture could not be shown."[108] Two shots showing books by Nietzsche—*Will to Power* and *Thoughts out of Season*—were removed for the theatrical release (Figures 3.9-3.10). The "philosophy of living" guiding the film was perceived to be the main problem, so that James Wingate requested that "there may be some denunciation of that mode and philosophy of living" "to show in the end that anyone who embarks upon it cannot make it profitable."[109] The philosophy in question—to "use [one's] body for material advancement"[110]—was directly linked to Nietzschean philosophy in the film. One immediately wonders, however, what exactly bothered the SRC about Nietzsche, so much so that all references to the

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[106] Letter of James Wingate to William Hays, dated March 2, 1933.
[107] Letter to Darryl Zanuck dated January 3, 1933.
[108] Hays Office Memorandum dated April 20, 1933.
[109] Letter to Jack Warner dated May 11, 1933.
[110] Letter to Jack Warner dated April 26, 1933.

philosopher had to be eliminated. We know that the office was particularly careful to discourage studios from having any "ethnic" or "national" references in their films, for fear of incurring distribution problems abroad. Spain, for instance, threatened to ban all of Paramount productions from the country, because they objected to the depiction of Spaniards in *The Devil is a Woman* (von Sternberg, 1935). The Hays Office was also sensitive to direct or indirect references to political systems, parties, or ideologies.[111] One might therefore infer that references to Nietzsche were problematic because of their possible links to Nazi ideology. Nowhere in the voluminous correspondence, however, are these concerns mentioned. It would be incorrect, therefore, to presume that references to Nietzsche had to be eliminated for fear of offending foreign markets or for invoking indirectly the rising Nazi party.

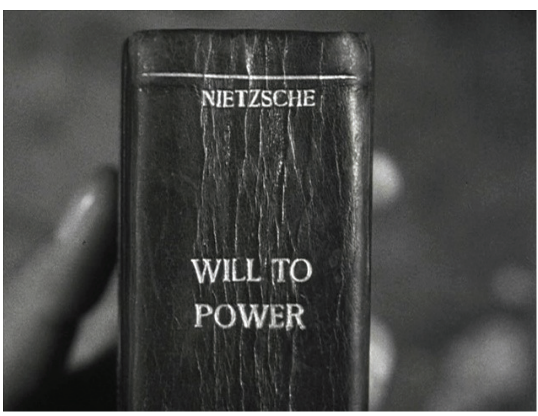

Figure 3.9 The guiding philosophical sources of Lily's code of conduct are clearly presented.

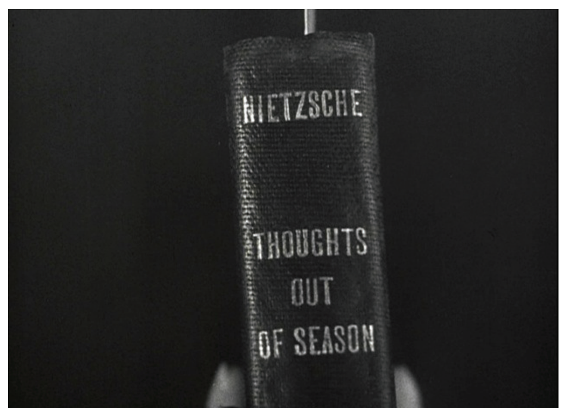

Figure 3.10 Both shots were removed.

The problem with the direct Nietzsche reference, it would seem, was that it proposed an entirely different, and coherent, set of morals. Gold-digging itself had been presented without too much fuss many times on film, but attaching it to a

[111] The Code prohibited the depiction "in an unfavourable light" of another country's "institutions [and] prominent people".

philosopher famous for his critique of Christian morality—and presenting on screen not only one, but two books—gave the practice a level of legitimacy that seemed to put it on par with other codes of conduct. By presenting Nietzschean philosophy in such a way, the movie offered an alternative or a substitute code of morality to guide one's action. It was therefore necessary that the movie be expunged of any reference to a coherent philosophy guiding Lily's actions, that the cobbler be changed from an exponent of Nietzschean philosophy to a voice of (Christian) morality, and that Lily's chosen path be shown to fail to lead to lasting happiness.[112] In fact, although such a scene was never filmed, Wingate suggested that Warner Brothers shoot an additional scene

> showing the cobbler giving [Lily] a good scolding [...]. In this scene he would tell her emphatically that she was entirely wrong, had been going not only against his advice but against all moral precepts, and that she would never find happiness unless she regenerated completely, mended her ways and made retribution of her ill-gotten gains.[113]

As Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen (2012) carefully details, Nietzsche's influence on American philosophy should not be underestimated. Indeed, the German philosopher was instrumental in American modern thought's questioning of foundations:

> [E]ncounters with Nietzsche's philosophy and persona provided an opportunity for observers to examine their ideas about truth and values in a world without foundations [...]. Nietzsche did not just encourage Americans to rethink the moral and cultural grounds of themselves and their modern America, he helped them to *feel* the thrill and the terror of his challenges to foundationalism (pp. 23-24).

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[112] James Wingate's letters to Jack Warner and Darryl Zanuck, dated respectively April 26, 1933 and January 3, 1933.
[113] James Wingate's letter to Jack Warner dated May 11, 1933.

And although it is difficult to assess the influence of Nietzsche in popular culture at the time, a review for *Employees' Entrance*—a movie that contains no references to Nietzsche implicit or otherwise—implies a certain familiarity with a vernacular version of the philosopher's work: "It was old boy Nietzsche (as if you didn't know) who chirped in one of his gayer moods, "Be hard! Live dangerously!". From this philosophy is derived the basis for a very absorbing and unusual film."[114]

The movie, according to Richard Maltby, is one of many early 1930s films which presented themselves as accounts of the events leading to the Crash, offered a critique of the consumerist culture of accumulation, and reaffirmed Protestant values. The kept woman, an icon of both sin and excessive consumption, became a popular scapegoat. "What makes *Baby Face* so appropriate an example of the processes of ideological repression", Maltby writes, "is the way in which the cinematic inverts the causality of the extra-cinematic: the Crash, represented by the failure of the bank, is caused—which is to say, explained—by Lily's effect on men" (1986, p. 44). For Maltby, *Baby Face* stands as an example of movies where "Victorian patriarchy strove to reassert itself by identifying the alleged permissiveness of the Jazz Age as the scapegoat for the collapse of the economy" (p. 28).

The movie may, as Maltby claims, present an allegorical representation of the causes of the Crash, but it certainly does not put the blame on Lily (in fact, the Hays Office would probably have preferred it had, for this element would have served to

[114] Jerry Hoffman, *Los Angeles Examiner*, January 3, 1933.

condemn her actions). Rather, it puts the blame on the pillars of society themselves: bankers and patriarchs, who are portrayed as old, weak, gullible and outmoded. The movie establishes no link between Lily and the bank's troubles, which are said to be due to mismanagement. Board members, in fact, state that Trenholm—Lily's husband (George Brent)—should not be held responsible, as they are all to blame. Trenholm is a convenient scapegoat whose integrity leads him to accept full blame for the bank's closing. Shots of the board member's meeting following the bankruptcy, which emphasize the members' opulent living—cigars, buffet table, samovar—indicate their shared responsibility. Their lethargic demeanour, moreover, imply a certain irresponsible *laissez-faire*. From the very beginning, the board of directors' meeting room has a quasi-gothic aesthetic—complete with ominous shadows and candelabras (Figure 3.11 and 3.12)—heavily contrasted with the modern high-rises visible through the window. While Trenholm is framed with the modernistic architecture in the background, they are only seen sitting, discussing, or leaning on their old-fashioned chairs (Figures 3.13-3.14). They are also much older than Trenholm; they knew his grandfather. Trenholm, on the other hand, is not a banker but a "playboy and a polo player". He is depicted as energetic and quick-witted, and he immediately catches on to Lily's extortion attempts.

Figure 3.11 Board member's meeting room.

Figure 3.12 Opulence as the bank enters bankruptcy.

Figure 3.13 Trenholm, energetic and modern.

Figure 3.14 Stern, passive board members.

Lily Powers embodies the Nietzschean vital energy cutting through the sea of despair that was the Depression. Modernity, for Nietzsche, represents a moment when all values lose legitimacy because they are shown to be empty, false, illusions: "the crisis of modernity, nihilism, is a crisis of values" (Rampley, 2000, p. 32). Lily emerges from a universe that is thoroughly morally corrupt: her house doubles as both speakeasy and brothel and her own father pimps her out to corrupt politicians in exchange for money and personal protection. She is even propositioned at her father's funeral. The Nietzschean principles guiding her actions—to be a master rather than a slave by being driven by rationality rather than sentiment—offer her a successful, if somewhat lonely, way out of her sordid existence. Her ultimate downfall will be

precisely in her failure to follow her guiding principles: in a moment of weakness she let her emotions rather than her reason dictate her conduct and she chooses love rather than material security.

There is, however, another way of looking at Lily's sudden change of heart. Trenholm, as we saw, is clearly presented as not belonging to the banking world. He is, furthermore, sharply opposed to the members of the Board of directors in his willingness to accept responsibility for the bank's failure. If anyone is made to "atone for" the bankruptcy, to quote Maltby, it is Trenholm, not Lily. Lily had become enslaved by material possessions; her eventual abandoning of it all (illustrated in both pre-release and theatrical versions, as she neglects to pick up her jewellery and cash in the ambulance taking Trenholm to the hospital following his attempted suicide) could be seen as an overcoming of the stale, backwards values that are still governing the Board of directors by film's end. Lily, moreover, is not the only one to grow out of this ordeal: Trenholm goes from playboy/polo-player to labourer. In other words, he moves from someone who lives off other people's work to contributing to the economic growth and betterment of society.

Paradoxically, Lily's increased adornment with furs and jewellery make her both a visual symbol of success and crass materialism. Barbara Stanwyck—both the actress and the characters she portrayed—had by now been associated with "naturalness", both in terms of her acting and of her looks (Berkvens, 2009). As Lily becomes more and more glamorously adorned, she also appears to become less authentic. Choosing

Trenholm over material possessions, Lily therefore continues her personal growth, further exemplifying Nietzsche's call to constantly overcome all values so as not to enslave oneself to them. Indeed, Lily may have amassed a considerable fortune of bonds, jewellery and furs, but it was gathered at the cost of loneliness, as she had to eradicate all meaningful relationships. To trick and trap men, she has had to posture, masquerade and lie. In short, she has had to close off any human connection. To borrow Donald Winnicott's[115] formulation, Lily becomes trapped in a false self (1971). False selves, according to Winnicott, are maintained thanks to resistance mechanisms as a defense against unpredictable growth. As pointed out by Emmanuel Ghent, however, individuals are inhabited by a deep longing to be "recognized, deeply known" and discovered by others, a force which may bring one to abandon false selves (1990, pp. 125-126). Inauthenticity leads necessarily to loneliness.

To claim, as Maltby does, that the last meeting of the board of directors "provided a reassertion of traditional Protestant values" presumes that the viewers will have suddenly and unexpectedly changed their allegiance to side with the board rather than Lily. The ending is bleak and tragic: the couple is penniless and back to a steel town, while the board of director's cheerfully pass around the cheque—Lily's fortune—that saved the bank and their own necks (Figure 3.15). The supposed reassertion of traditional Protestant values is therefore highly cynical. Lily, the independent woman, isn't so much recuperated by the narrative as chewed up and

[115] Incidentally, Winnicott's own analyst was Joan Riviere, who developed the concept of masquerade, to which we will return shortly.

spat out.[116] This last gesture by the board members, who can barely contain their glee as they smoke their cigars, passing around Lily's fortune, could hardly appeal to the audience's sympathy. To assume that viewers will so effortlessly shift their allegiance makes light of the fact that they have been invested in the Stanwyck character (it is, after all, Barbara Stanwyck), a character they are made to identify with throughout the film.

Figure 3.15 Cheerfully passing Lily's cheque around.

Baby Face is undoubtedly the woman's film that is most explicit in spelling out its philosophical underpinnings. Although the insertion of famous philosopher's work was an unusual move, one finds a similar philosophy, albeit in more subdued form, in other woman's films of the era. As many film critics noted with no small measure of fear and stupor, "that body means power" made the "picture a positive menace to

[116] To assert the narrative recuperation, Maltby is using the shooting script rather than either filmed version. The script had Lily work nights as "waitress in a cheap hotel" and planning "to go into the business of raising good babies". This is present in neither filmed versions. The pre-release ends in the ambulance rather than the board meeting; the theatrical release has Trenholm working as a labour in a steel mill in Pittsburgh, but says nothing about her work or their having babies.

silly and unreasoning young girls."[117] As the next film analysis will show, however, the woman's social climbing and ability to navigate among society's various classes was not necessarily premised on sex. Indeed, it often hinged on performance and masquerade.

Blondie Johnson

To promote the release of *Blondie Johnson*, Warner Brothers wrote a piece to pass as an article for local newspapers. In it, the studio develops the idea of a particular kind of truth only attainable through fiction. Although contemporary audiences see gangster films as a source of entertainment, they write, future historians will find in them truth about the era:

> When serious historians begin to piece together the picture of our modern times they will give particular thanks to four people, James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, Paul Muni and Joan Blondell. These young players, more than any other, are supplying future generations with the true picture of our own hectic current problems by their work on the talking screen (Ruth 5).

Through this publicity, the studio was promoting and "elevating" its own productions, of course, but also inserting Joan Blondell and *Blondie Johnson* in a tradition of hugely popular gangster films. Like other cycles, the gangster film had become formulaic, and *Blondie* brought an interesting twist by casting its lead-

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[117] Mae Tinée, "Sordid Drama Under Fire of Movie Critic", *The Chicago Tribune.*

gangster as a woman.[118] The ploy of having a "strong feminine angle"—a woman as head racketeer—was also meant as a way of circumventing the censor's opposition to violent gangster films. Knowing that the studio was walking a fine line, Zanuck sent the film's writers to the New York Censor Boards to get their approval on the material. The board gave the writers a guarantee that it would pass the censor boards were the movie to be shot exactly as it was written.[119]

The story remains true to the gangster progression from the slums to the top and back down again. *Blondie* starts with a shot of Blondell's feet as she stands in front of a Welfare and Relief Association employee, seeking help for her ailing mother. The shot is both unglamorous—we see multiple runs in her stocking—and un-erotic. While it is characteristic of such shots to be followed by a tilt up so as to show the rest of the woman's legs, in Blondie's case, the camera pans away from her legs when reaching knee-height. Besides, Blondell is wearing an ankle-length, loose fitting black skirt, so that all we see is dirty shoes and old stockings. Next we see a plain-looking Blondell, her face devoid of make up and wearing disparate, loose pieces of clothing. As she turns around and prepares to leave the Relief office, she sees those waiting for aid, in worse shape than she is. The poor are presented in a visually realistic way and seem to have been picked off the street. This contrast allows us to see a noted

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[118] *Frisco Jenny* (William Wellman, 1932) previously featured a woman as leader of a criminal racket. Starring Ruth Chatterton, the film uses elements of the mother-love / fallen woman's film. Culminating in a drawn-out trial scene, where her son, who is a district attorney, prosecutes her, Chatterton's character bore many similarities to her previous role in *Madame X.* Contrary to *Madame* X, however, *Frisco Jenny* was poorly received by fans and critics.
[119] Wingate's weekly report to Hays dated Oct 28, 1932.

difference between them and Blondie: they are resigned, she is fighting; they are old, she is young; their look is tired, she is still beautiful despite her "plainness".

After being turned away from the Relief office, Blondie is called back to the store where she and her mother have been residing after being evicted from their apartment. By the time she arrives, her mother has already succumbed to pneumonia. Blondie will then seek help from a lawyer and a priest, to no avail. Urged by the priest to make something for herself rather than ask for charity, she heads for Chicago. A montage sequence showing how Blondie acquires her street knowledge, going from "taxi dance hall, cheap cabaret, noisy night club, reform school, chorus" was removed to satisfy the censors. In the theatrical release, Blondie only alludes to the tough life she has had to live to get where she is. On her first day in the city, she expertly cons Danny, who turns out to be working for the city's biggest gangster, Max Wagner. The two strike a friendship and Blondie quickly works her way to the top of the "Little Navy" gang.

Many have seen in the gangster story the universal quest of an individual for community.[120] The genre has been particularly linked with immigrants: the gangster, who comes from immigrant-stock, represents in an indirect way the immigrant's quest for integration and acceptance within American society. As Martha Nochimson notes, at the core of the gangster film lies a tension "between immigrant reality and the deeply cherished central fable of modern democracies that promise immigrant

[120] See, for instance, Jonathan Munby (1999).

(and other) outsiders that they can become social insiders" (2007, p. 6). Defined as this quest by an outsider to join in the American capitalist and materialist middle-class, the gangster can therefore be opposed to the rebel—an insider who makes him/herself an outsider and attacks society.[121] Blondie breaks away from this tradition as she is not presented as belonging to an immigrant community.[122] Rather, she is linked, in the first scene, with the tenements and the masses of poor people struggling through the Depression. And although the male gangster typically originates from the heart of the city, Blondie, like the modern women of the woman's films, comes from "a rotten little burg up State." The film establishes early on that Blondie has suffered injustice and rejection not only on the basis of her socio-economic status, but also because she is a woman. Indeed, she entered poverty and became ineligible to relief aid when she voluntarily quit her job following her boss's inappropriate behaviour.[123] Blondie will face three male figures of authority who will take turns at refusing to help: the unsympathetic Relief administrator, an attorney who tells her that although she has a case against the city and her former landlord, she doesn't have enough money to sue, and a particularly condescending priest who indicates she can only blame herself for her dire situation. Her dual status as member of the working class and woman place her in a particularly vulnerable position.[124] As

[121] Our interpretation is therefore diametrically opposed to Robert Warshow's, who claims the gangster to be "expressing that part of the American psyche which rejects the qualities and the demands of modern life, which rejects 'Americanism' itself" (2002, p. 100).
[122] This is especially made clear when she complains of her work in a factory with "ignorant foreigners".
[123] She claims he wouldn't leave her alone.
[124] The vulnerability of female workers towards male employer is also addressed in *Torch Singer* and *Three Wise Girls*.

a downwardly-mobile working-class woman, Blondie joins the outsiders and shares the gangster's longing to take part in the American dream. She announces her decision to do so during a confrontation with the insensitive priest in a scene that was later edited so as to attenuate direct references to, and criticism of, current social problems.[125] Her determination is in fact fuelled precisely by the priest's reaction as he denies the difficulty of her situation (Figure 3.16).

Figure 3.16 During her confrontation with the priest, the focus is on Blondie's face registering anger and determination.

Although some contemporary reviewers have described Blondie as a fallen woman, a "peroxide man-eater" (Munby, 1999, p. 193) and even a prostitute (Hanson, 2008, p. 32; Parish & Pitts, 1987, p. 44), the film makes clear that Blondie chooses racketeering over the "easy way". When Danny asks her to seduce a judge, she comes up with a different plan which does not involve using her feminine charms. On a

[125] As the PCA files show, James Wingate asked Zanuck to "drop the short episode with the minister". Although he admitted there was "nothing actually offensive in the scene […] it might be interpreted in certain quarters as showing religion turning a rather cold ear to distress" (letter dated January 5, 1933). In the end, the scene remained but the confrontation was toned down with the deletion of a few assertive lines ("I haven't an education like most people -- we've been poor, I couldn't afford to get one!"; "I tried the hard way -- and look what it got me!") and Blondie's final exit, slamming the door in the priest's face.

personal level, Blondie repeatedly refuses Danny's advances, affirming the importance of putting business before pleasure. Gangsters, she points out, are often slowed down, when not taken down, by dames. The clothes she comes to wear once a successful gangster reveal more of her shape, but they remain conservative and very little skin is exposed. She often sports elegant wide pants, which allow her more mobility than a skirt or dress would. More importantly, she never trades on her looks or flirts to con men.

Rather, Blondie will repeatedly con naïve men by performing traditional gender roles. Her first con involves a gangster who falls for her act. Positioning herself outside a speakeasy, Blondie pretends to be a damsel in distress, drying her tears with a dainty handkerchief. She claims to have been tricked into a hotel room by a boyfriend and is now stranded on the wrong side of town. Danny, the poor sap, gives her $10, so she may return home: "anyone can see you're not that kind of girl". Shortly thereafter, Blondie will cook up a plan to incite a jury to exonerate a gangster undergoing trial for murder. Blondie this time appeals to an all-male jury's gullible sentimentality, as she performs the role of loving wife and sobbing mother. Putting aside the issue of whether or not gangster Louis is guilty, the attorney directs their attention to teary-eyed Blondie who will have to put away her "wedding veil, with its little sprig of orange blossoms" and say goodbye to "a woman's crowning glory: Motherhood". As the defense attorney urges them "in the names of the mothers who carried you all under their hearts", to acquit Louis, the jury falls for her act. Even more so than the first instance of performing femininity, this one clearly invokes the

maternal courtroom drama. Finally, a third instance of performance occurs as Blondie develops her own insurance-racket. The ruse involves her playing a rich girl whose reputation is tarnished after being mistakenly arrested for fraud. In all three cases, the performance of female stereotypes plays a central part in the ruse. All three instances also reference cinematic stereotypes whose somewhat tired omnipresence in woman's films become here a source of mockery.[126]

Performing a series of female stereotypes (wronged woman, maternal figure, rich girl), Blondie manipulates her femininity to get ahead, which should remind us of Mary Ann Doane's analysis of the role of masquerade in film. Doane claims that overt parade of femininity is a way for women to hold femininity at a distance. An exaggerated femininity highlights how physical appearance is a mask that women can choose to don at will and therefore be free of its trappings. This, she points out, is particularly significant in cinema. Whereas men have been associated with the control of cinema's three-dimensional space, women have been assigned a much more meagre place: that of image, surface and two-dimensionality (1991, p. 20). It is precisely their status as mere image which "orchestrates a gaze" (20), that aligns women with passivity and men with activity, and, ultimately, viewers with the male character rather than the female. Cinema has therefore participated in an objectification of women by presenting them as devoid of subjectivity, their entire being residing in their image.

[126] Blondie also performs for laughs. When Danny asks her if she lives alone, she theatrically declares: "sometimes I think I shall go mad, alone with these four bare walls…when can you move in?". Her delivery and body language immediately evoke such passion-tormented cinematic figures as Garbo.

An analysis of the masquerade allows us to see that along with a binary opposition of male/female and active/passive lies that of distance/proximity in relation to the image (21). This proximity with the image, Doane claims, also characterizes the female spectator who cannot establish an appropriate distance: "[f]or the female spectator there is a certain overpresence of the image – she *is* the image" (22). Distance with the image, Doane maintains, is a necessary condition of desire and of an "adequate reading of the image" (31): "[t]his body so close, so excessive, prevents the woman from assuming a position similar to the man's in relation to signifying systems" (23). Hence, women's privileged relationship with the "weepie" is no accident: as spectators, women cannot relate to cinematic images in the same way as men, for they cannot manipulate the symbolic realm with the same ease, detachment and control. Still according to Doane, their immediate attachment to their cinematic image forces them into a masochistic position, whereas they can only cry and suffer alongside their screen image.

Doane is critical of theories of femininity which stress the importance of presence over distance: "to embrace and affirm the definition of femininity as closeness, immediacy, or proximity-to-self is to accept one's own disempowerment in the cultural arena, to accept the idea that women are outside of language" (37). She therefore sees the potential of the masquerade as a way out of the regressive masochistic position. The masquerade, like Mulvey's transvestism, is essentially a putting on of clothes and of an image. "In flaunting femininity", the masquerade

"holds it at a distance" (25). Masquerade therefore generates the possibility of "manufactur[ing] a distance from the image, [of] generat[ing] a problematic within which the image is manipulable, producible, and readable by the woman" (32). It provides women with "the distance, alienation, and divisiveness of self (which is constitutive of subjectivity in psychoanalysis) rather than the closeness and excessive presence which are the logical outcome of the psychoanalytic drama of sexualized linguistic difference" (37).

This discussion of the masquerade is relevant for our analysis, for the term itself was instrumental in Lacan's 1958 development in his treatment of the role played by the phallus (Lacan, 1999). Whereas Freud defined masculinity as "having the penis", Lacan brought in a significant shift of emphasis, by moving from the biological fact of the penis to a purely symbolic, empty, concept—the phallus— which must remain veiled in order to be operative (171). This development was, in turn, brought about following his reading of psychoanalyst Joan Riviere's 1929 article on masquerade and the "intellectual woman". According to Riviere, the intellectual woman, whose possession of masculine qualities generates anxiety in men, puts on a mask of overt femininity in order to hide this very possession (pp. 35, 38). Femininity, for Riviere, is nothing but this mask: femininity and the masquerade are one and the same—there is no femininity outside of the masquerade.

Lacan, however, takes Riviere's concept of the masquerade in a diametrically opposed direction, as having not so much to do with femininity *per se* but with

human beings in general. Lacan extends the concept of masquerade in his discussion and formalization of the "semblant", which Jacques-Alain Miller explains with great clarity. The term "semblant" is linked first and foremost with the idea of pretence and posturing. The semblant, Lacan points out, is attractive not only because it deceives us by pretending to be the object of our desire, but because it hides the absence of the said object. The semblant therefore emerges where something should be, to provide pleasure rather than displeasure. This is why, according to Lacan, human beings prefer semblants, because this "preference" prevents them from looking for the real thing (a doomed, anxiety-riddled quest, since "the real thing" doesn't exist). Miller further develops this through the function of the veil which veils nothing by mimicking what should be there (1997, p. 7). As Lacan's views on the semblant develop, they will become particularly expansive and will encompass the entire realm of the symbolic.[127]

Although divergent, Lacan and Doane's thoughts around the masquerade are not entirely incompatible, as my analysis of *Blondie Johnson* will show. Blondie may seem to be an odd character to explore the concept of masquerade: not only is she presented as particularly plain from the beginning—especially considering Hollywood's standards of femininity—but she remains so throughout the film despite her rise to success. However, she also exemplifies a manipulation of femininity, and a control over her own image and the symbolic system that is remindful of the masquerade. Rather than using the physical attributes of femininity,

[127] Lacan criticizes a certain philosophy for believing in the existing of the "thing-in-itself" hiding behind the realm of appearance (121).

Blondie uses the cultural markers, conventions and stereotypes of femininity. In so doing, she exhibits greater performative ability—a greater ability at manipulating stereotypes and social signifiers—as well as a greater knowledge of the nature of performance than men (since they are duped). This is done to much comical effect as the spectator is always in on the joke. Her performance is not one of feigned "plenitude" and power through the appropriation of the phallus (huge hats, streamlined gowns), but rather feigned lack. Performing powerlessness, Blondie lets spectators know her "femininity", her weakness, is an act. She also lets them know that performing powerlessness is ultimately more effective than performing power, which can only be revealed as fraudulent.

In this respect, it is worth paying attention to the treatment of garments in the film. As Marshall Berman points out, Edmund Burke saw clothing as the primary symbol of society (1970, p. xxiv). In fact, Berman continues, many philosophers have associated authenticity with nakedness, and inauthenticity with clothing, veiling and draperies. Along this line, I have argued in the previous section that Lily Powers' increased adornment in furs and jewellery is linked with an increased inauthenticity. "In the gangster film", Colin McArthur notes, "clothes have always been important […] not only as carriers of iconographic meaning, but also as objects which mark the gangster's increasing status" (1972, p. 26). Blondie will acquire more expensive clothes as she moves up the ladder, but, as already mentioned, her clothes will never be luxurious, and she doesn't wear the usual accessories denoting money and success (Lily's furs, hats, jewellery and gowns). Emphasis on this emerges from the

presence of three other women who do wear these accoutrements of wealth. This may point to Blondie's continual link with the working-class, but I would maintain that it points, as well, to a different relationship with her image.

Blondie's predecessors—Tommy (*The Public Enemy* [William Wellman, 1931]), Rico (*Little Caesar* [Mervyn LeRoy, 1931]), Tony (*Scarface* [Howard Hawks, 1932]) and Joe (*Night After Night* [Archie Mayo, 1932]), were notoriously concerned with their physical appearance, with adorning themselves with the "signifiers of success" (Munby, 1999, p. 47). All three are shown being outfitted in new outlandish suits, revelling in their own image, and inviting compliments. They compensate for their meagre beginnings by *mimicking* wealth and power, which they do by adopting the behaviour and overall appearance they see displayed by men of a higher social standing. Their performance, however, generates laughter, for no matter how much they want to belong to the higher classes, they can never completely erase their humble origins. No matter how many signifiers of success they put on, they can never quite pull it off outside of their circle. Their performance never transcends grotesque posturing.

This stems from a misunderstanding of social markers: In *Little Caesar,* Rico seems to be admiring a painting for its price tag rather than its aesthetic quality. It is then revealed that what Rico was looking at all along isn't even the painting itself: he is mesmerized by its gold frame. It also stems from a misunderstanding regarding the nature of the image: Rico believes he can join the higher class simply by wearing its

attires, not realizing these leave his lower class personality intact. This is made explicit during *Little Caesar's* banquet scene: the guests are all dressed up, but they don't know how to behave or talk. *Blondie*, and countless other female characters,[128] on the other hand, have no problem navigating through the various steps of the social ladder given the proper attire.[129]

Rico's fascination with his own image is directly linked with his downfall. At the banquet given in his honour, a journalist shows up and asks to take photographs. Rico agrees, seeing this as a sign of having made it. Hearing of Rico's decision to let the photographer in, an older gangster leaves the room, wishing to keep his identity secret. Rico, on the other hand, poses for the newspaper, his posture and puffed up chest expressing excessive pride. The following morning, he will be severely injured by a drive-by shooting as he is getting multiple copies of the newspaper containing his picture. Spellbound by his image, Rico is oblivious to the oncoming car. Such fascination with surface and one's own image is also the cause of *Blondie Johnson*'s main male gangsters' downfall. Max is killed by machine guns hidden inside a mock fireplace/mini bar he admired seconds before. He is fooled by the spectacle and cannot see beyond it. Danny, on the other hand, is misled by his own illusions of power: his head gets too big and he forgets the precarity of his position.

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[128] Other significant examples are Loretta Young's character in Frank Capra's *Platinum Blonde* (1931), Greta Garbo's *Susan Lenox* and Apple Annie in *Lady for a Day* and *Pocketful of Miracles* (Frank Capra, 1933 and 1961).
[129] Another example of this in *Blondie Johnson* is when Danny sends her as a messenger to deliver a letter. When she asks him why she wants her to deliver the letter, he replies that she "can get around" without raising suspicion.

Danny exhibits a similar obsession with physical appearance as that found in Rico and Tony Camonte, an attitude mocked by Blondie who notes he's "all dolled up".[130] During a scene when he is being "retired" by his gangmates to be replaced by Blondie, he is wearing a particularly "feminine" silk polka-dot robe, an attire matching his "feminine" apartment (Figures 3.17-3.18). When contrasted with Blondie's level-headed, goal-oriented and no-nonsense attitude,[131] Danny seems to participate in the film's gender-reversal. He is presented throughout as vain, childish and not fully in control over his emotions. When Blondie realizes he has double-crossed her, she claims she will "put him right back where [she] picked him up: in the gutter", a clichéd-line usually directed at women rather than men. His "feminine" fragility is further confirmed as he lies wounded in Blondie's arms, asking her to hold him closer. In being presented with feminine traits Danny joins other popular gangster figures overly concerned with their physical appearance, personal style and consumer indulgence—all traits considered feminine.[132] Along this line, David Ruth maintains that the ever-present sense of homo-eroticism in popular gangster novels

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[130] The shooting script elaborates further, commenting on the time he spends at the barbershop and his cologne. The script also contains additional scenes with "the Swede" which were mostly cut out from the final film. In one of them, he also seeks other people's approval regarding his wardrobe.

[131] Blondie warns Danny on two occasions of the dangers of getting tangled with women: "Both those guys [Joe and Eddie] could go far -- but they got a couple of skirts slowing 'em up. You get what I mean?". Later on, she justifies her coldness towards Danny, claiming "I wanted you to get up on top first without being dragged up by a skirt". The word she uses to refer to women, "skirt", could just as well be a warning to women as well. After rejecting Danny's advances, she explains to Lulu and Mae that she has big plans, "and the one thing that don't fit with 'em is pants". "Skirts" and "pants" are thereby equated as terms referring to men and women.

[132] On-screen gangsters usually wear a fresh gardenia on their lapel.

and films of the era stems from the gangster's uncertain gender identity (1996, p. 90).

Figure 3.17 Danny in his dainty apartment.

Figure 3.18 Wearing polka-dot robe.

Blondie Johnson's gender-reversal, however, is not done to comical effect[133]; it is not a parody but rather a serious film.[134] The issue of gender is not presented as an obstacle or problem, and Blondie's being a woman is not an issue for her becoming a gangster. In fact, the film features two other female gang-members. Though they are, admittedly, presented as gangster molls, they also participate in the gang's activities under Blondie's orders, notably through the performance of gender and cinematic stereotypes: Matron-looking Mae Busch pretends to be Blondie's mother, while Japanese-born Toshia Mori impersonates a maid. A scene of the three women holding a secret meeting and splitting of money also insinuates that they have a lucrative side operation that the men don't know about. Leader Max Wagner tries to get rid of Blondie, but only because he feels threatened by her intelligence ("he doesn't like girls with ideas"). Blondie's gender, rather than presenting a problem

[133] This is the case, for instance, in Michael Curtiz's *Female* and Lloyd Bacon's *Kept Husbands*, both from 1931.
[134] The *New York Times,* who reviewed the film favourably, also takes the film seriously and does not see it as a parody.

(either for herself or for her male counterparts) is a solution—it is what allows her to get around and ahead. This solution, however, never lies in sex or seduction. More specifically, it lies in men's mistaken assumptions regarding femininity, rather than femininity *per se*.

This analysis of *Blondie Johnson* shows how Blondie is linked to the gangster-as-outsider on the basis of her being a woman. Like the immigrant, Blondie's access to the American dream is hampered by systemic social injustice and class inequality. The film emphasizes how women are better equipped to navigate through the various social strata and flow of modern life. Brute force may allow one to exercise a certain form of power, but unlike brains, it cannot open the doors to the upper class. Blondie shares with male gangsters an obsession with upward mobility and money, but the obstacles barring her access are not inherent to her inadequacies. Unlike her male counterparts whose identity appears unstable and shaky under all their posturing,[135] Blondie appears on the contrary to be more solidly grounded and stable: she doesn't need to put on a show. When she does though, through her performance of gender stereotypes, a distance is clearly established with the image, so that neither she nor the viewer may be fooled, confused or engulfed by it. While we laugh *with* Blondie as she fools naïve (upper-class) men, we laugh *at* the gangster's desperate and failed attempts at mimicking the upper class.

[135] Not only do Danny and Rico exhibit feminine traits, but Tommy's insistent misogyny is suspicious, and so is Tony's relationship with his sister.

As Blondie enters the gangster universe, she alters it significantly. While the three other gangster films discussed present the modern, urban world as one riddled with eroding masculinity (Ruth, 1996, p. 90) and doubts regarding the possibility of an authentic, stable self, *Blondie Johnson* introduces a figure unaffected by such erosions and doubt brought about by the fast-changing modern reality. This probably goes some way into explaining why her fate differs from that of her male counterparts: Blondie doesn't die. Rather than denouncing her survival as a sign of patriarchal domestication, I believe her longevity is coherent in that she represents a way out of, or, rather, through, the challenges of early 1930s urban liquid modernity: She can easily adapt to a rapidly changing social environment and navigate through various social classes.

The viewer's sympathy with Blondie's character may be gained through her use of brains rather than muscle, but it is also secured through other visual and narrative means. Blondie displays a work ethic that is much more likely to convey sympathy than that of her male counterparts. She is as tough as the other gangsters, but she displays more loyalty. Max and Danny both double-cross fellow gang members, thereby breaking the most important value held in the underworld. Max double-crosses both Louis, Blondie and Danny, while Danny double-crosses Max and Blondie. Moreover, Danny takes all the credit for Blondie's successful plan while Blondie makes a point of always repaying a favour.[136] Considering the importance of

[136] She tells a bartender she'll remember him in her will after he tells her Danny's identity. She also offers a business-partnership to a cabdriver, after they both successfully tricked one another, thereby establishing friendship.

loyalty in the underworld, Blondie is presented as a more loyal and trustworthy gangster than her male counterparts.

Indeed, like Nick "the barber" Venizelos in *Smart Money* (Alfred E. Green, 1931), Blondie's downfall is caused by a sentimental weakness—despite her knowing about the dangers of the heart. Thinking that Danny has become an informant, Blondie orders his killing. She later learns of Danny's innocence and she rushes to save him, only to arrive seconds too late. Although she could have fled the scene, she remains by his side until the police arrive. This might evoke female sacrifice or irrational sentimentality, but it can also be seen as a sign of the loyalty she displays throughout the film, and which affirms her moral superiority over the other gang members. Both Blondie and Danny are arrested and sentenced to six years in prison, vowing to start anew once they've served their sentence. This ending has been interpreted, in recent accounts of the film, as a conventional and patriarchal formulaic ending: "[A]s a woman," Thomas Doherty writes, "Blondie can be redeemed and domesticated by true love" (1999, p. 153). Similarly, David Ruth sees this film as a typical underworld picture in that "the modern woman" is shown to be in need of domestication (1996, p. 117). To claim that the ending "domesticates" Blondie is a long interpretative stretch. Love causes both Blondie and Danny's ultimate downfall. In the previous scene, Blondie rides in a cab driven by her friend Red. As he drives, he tells her of his marriage and child, to which she pays little attention, asking him repeatedly to "just go faster". This scene could have been filmed so as to symbolise her change of heart,

her warming up to the joys of holy matrimony and motherhood, but the filmmakers chose to emphasize her disinterest with the entire thing.

Blondie Johnson, I maintain, constitutes a challenge to gaze theory. This, however, goes beyond highlighting the extent to which the film's male characters are presented as inferior and passive, while Blondie is active and more likely to represent a surrogate ideal ego for the spectators. Gaze theory indeed invites us to pay attention to the syntax organising the terms (Doane, 1981, p. 34). The exact terms of the scenario in fact situate male and female characters in much differentiated positions with regards to the symbolic. Blondie displays a control over language that her male counterparts lack.[137] When Danny is asked to make a speech ("Go ahead, big shot, say something"), he can only mumble and quickly finds himself at a loss for words. Danny is referred to as a "Big shot" on two occasions, each time only to fail to live up to our expectations. Later on, Louis defers to Blondie: "You do the talking Blondie, I'm not so good at it". A third crew member, Joe, is criticized by Lulu for being "tongue-tied."[138]

Following Lacan's adequation of the symbolic with language, I would suggest that this superior control over language is symptomatic of an overall greater control over

[137] Blondie sharply delivers the wittiest lines of the film.

[138] This impaired ability to manipulate language, communicate and express oneself is also found in other gangster films. Gangsters talk with their fists, partly because they cannot talk otherwise. In *Night After Night*, Joe Anton (George Raft) receives daily private lessons to improve his speech and manners. Despite his earnest devotion to better himself, he makes very little improvement—constantly slipping back to improper grammar and slang—and can hardly fool the upper class company he longs to frequent.

the symbolic realm, as was evidenced in Blondie's masquerade. Not only are we privy to this knowledge, but the film aligns us more firmly with Blondie's position as bearer of correct knowledge (with a knowledge that is confirmed to be factually true with regards to the diegesis) as it displays with insistence the other characters to be in a state of confusion,[139] possessing knowledge we know to be incomplete or beliefs we know to be factually false. That the film positions the viewer in alignment not only with Blondie's perspective, but establishes this perspective as one of knowledge and mastery over the symbolic, it is important to point out, does not arise from a spectator's oppositional gaze, but clearly constitutes the film's privileged reading position.

What genders the gaze as male, according to Mulvey, is precisely the way in which the viewer and the camera's looks are subordinated to that of the male character, who acts as screen surrogate, ideal ego for the viewer. What makes this alignment pleasurable, furthermore, is its reproduction of the scopic binarism at work in patriarchy. Combining these two aspects (providing an ideal male ego and scopophilic pleasure), cinema becomes a heterosexual male fantasy. It is precisely this (gendered) position established by cinema that would distinguish it from other art forms, and make it a particularly powerful medium: cinema not only provides something to look at, it assigns a specific, gendered, place to the viewer whence to look (Mulvey, 1975, p. 25). Mulvey and Doane have both famously advocated for the destruction of cinematic pleasure by altering cinematic syntax so as to keep the

[139] The "Swede", whose presence seems unaccounted for, is constantly wandering about, unable to state his business.

materiality of the woman's body onscreen without subjecting it to the eroticizing male gaze (Doane, 1981, pp. 34-35). Doane, among others, suggests that this can be done through a "continual displacement of the gaze which 'catches' the woman's body only accidentally, momentarily, refusing to hold or fix her in the frame" (34). This assumes that the gaze is always already gendered male and that looking always necessarily involves objectification.

It is as chronotope, as a force around which gravitate the film's diegetic elements, that Blondie's character determines the terms of the gaze. Approaching her character—in its bodily materiality—as the knot or nexus of time and space organizing the film's syntax modifies greatly how we are to understand the various looks at play in the film. A chronotopic approach shifts the focus away from a general and unchanging theory of the gaze and towards an analysis of the spatiotemporal and axiological organisation established by the film. Blondie's reflexive manipulation of her image and successful determination of the terms of her existence afford her a mastery over the film narrative that her screen counterparts can only attempt to achieve. As the next film analysis will show, however, the Modern Woman chronotope (like all chronotopes and figures of popular cultures) was riddled with contradictions, contradictions inherent to the social context whence she emerged. As a figure generating both fascination and anxiety, she did not have free reign, and the extent of the changes she could bring about in restructuring the film's syntax were limited.

Working Girls

Conceived as "a page [torn] from the book of Modern Life", *Working Girls* (Dorothy Arzner, 1931) was marketed as a realistic portrayal of the exciting life of young women in the city. Paramount's press-book told exhibitors the movie would be an easy sell, for

> "Working Girls" is a title that says "YOU" to every daughter, sister, sweetheart—for every audience—for every town and city from the hamlet of a hundred and fifty to the hurricane of humanity that makes up the world's biggest cities. It is the story that takes the typical American working girl, her ambitions, her sacrifices, her repressions, her wants, her temptations—and sets them up in a Peacock Alley pageant colored with the brilliant iridescence of wisecracks, drama, romance and action. "Working Girls" is entertainment that every man and girl in your audience will understand; that fine bit of magic which everybody practices when he takes the weekly pay envelope—and stretches it over the loom of heart's desire. Unmistakably human, from start to finish. Good times—trying times—tragic times—hilarious times—secret times—and love time, with all hearts beating in perfect time.
>
> [...]
> Yearning for luxuries—hungering for romance—hidden ambitions in their throbbing hearts – wisecracks on carmined lips—LIVING, LOVING, LAUGHING, and SUFFERING—the small-town girls plunge into the maelstrom of metropolitan life!
> Where do they come from, these "Working Girls"? From Pendleville, Brindlessburg, Pottsboro? Yes – and FROM YOUR TOWN!
>
> And that 's the angle to drive home in your campaign: here is a story of where OUR hometown girls go, and of what they do, of the men they meet, when they go "on their own" to a big city!
> As a title, "Working Girls" can not be licked on a box-office gauge; it says "YOU" to every sweetheart, sister and daughter in your town; and try and keep the boy friends, brothers and fathers from being interested in that!

> It's YOUR story, and YOUR title: sell it the limit! The fair sex is your barometer of entertainment; when you appeal to women, you set the groundwork for box-office business.

Based on this, the publicity department encouraged local exhibitors to develop partnerships with local business schools for girls and women's workplaces:

> Working girls of **many factories** and other establishments having time-clocks with the numbers echoed on their pay envelopes, provide a fair percentage of your movie patronage. You can make "Working Girls" an occasion for returning some of their movie interest. It can be put over with almost any plant. The donation may be purely a theatre affair, or you can turn the ducats over to the superintendent or management in return for poster space on the bulletin boards which are always associated with time-clocks.
>
> **Pay Envelopes Pack Teaser**
>
> The title, "Working Girls" is instantly associated with that reputable American institution, the pay envelope. Hence, the pay envelope is something that will enhance the distribution of any copy or teaser on this picture, from heralds to money. Two-for-one in theatre admissions, is not good business. However, you may figure it worth while to pass out a quantity of pennies, which if accompanied by one of the limited number of envelopes in which they are distributed, one to each envelope, will be accepted as five cents on a balcony ticket, or ten cents on an orchestra seat.

Alternatively, the publicity department encouraged exhibitors to target girls' boarding houses, since part of the film takes place in such an establishment:

> There are a number of homes for "Working girls" like the Rolfe House [...]. These establishments with their alert membership, will be good places to anchor almost any kind of a campaign on this particular attraction, with a title that says "YOU" to practically the entire membership.[140]

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[140] Paramount Pictures press sheets, 1920-1965, Margaret Herrick Library, collection 217.

"Every girl", they further emphasized, "wants to go to the big city 'on [their] own', get a job and make good".

A light comedy, *Working Girls* opens with look-alike sisters June and Mae Thorpe (Judith Wood and Dorothy Hall) as they arrive in New York City from small-town Indiana (Figures 3.19-3.20). The film plays heavily on the similarities and differences between the two, both visually and narratively, an element which grounds the development of the film. For this reason, the movie has often been interpreted as a play in contrast between the two sisters' character development and the viewer's expectations. As Paramount producer B. P. Schulberg sums up the story to Colonel Jason Joy,

> the whole dramatic drive of this story, and the only reason justifying its production from a story of entertainment point of view lies in the ironic point that Mae believes she can take care of herself and that June cannot, with the surprise twist developing that June can take complete care of herself while Mae gets into trouble (PCA files).

Figure 3.19 Working Girls' first day in the city.

Figure 3.20 Mae and June looking alike.

19 year-old June is presented as having less education but more "experience" than her older sister Mae. Her pluckiness and hard-boiled demeanour leads the viewer into presuming early on that her fate will be that of a "fallen woman". Her sister repeatedly calls her "fresh"—impertinent—indicating her tendency to talk out of turn or to step out of her place. In contradistinction, Mae, 20, is depicted as a "good girl" with a slightly better education (she has attended high school) and much better manners. While June's prospects appear limited to suitors and married men, as would befit her "experience", Mae's more innocent and "proper" demeanour holds the possibility of a decent marriage. On their second day in the city, the girls both find work—Mae as stenographer to Dr. Joseph Von Schrader, June as telegram assistant in a department store—and love interests. It is precisely June's pluckiness which lands them both their jobs. Hearing that the telegram office needs a new clerk, June literally jumps into the position: she takes her place behind the counter and starts working until she is officially hired.

As the movie develops, so do the girls' respective characters. The girls' first date, however, serves to reinforce our initial expectations. June spends the evening with Jazz saxophone-player Pat (Stuart Erwin) and expertly orchestrates a series of situations during which she "extorts" various gifts: cigarettes, candies, orchids and perfume. June clearly knows what she can get and how to do so: she possesses the kind of knowledge we identified earlier as street knowledge. She comes home at the end of the evening with her hands full of boxes, to her sister's stern disapproval. Mae has, in contrast, come home "properly" empty-handed. The assumption at this point

seems to be that, of the two sisters, Mae is the one who acted properly, refusing to lead men on by accepting gifts. Rather than simply play with the two sisters' diametrically opposed characters and the viewer's expectations, as Schulberg indicated in his letter to Joy, I argue, however, that the film puts forward a different standard from which to evaluate "good" and "bad" behaviour.

Indeed, the movie doesn't simply play a trick on the viewer's assumptions by having Mae, rather than June, become pregnant: it presents the pregnancy as resulting from Mae's naïveté and "proper" class and gender behaviour. Mae doesn't dare question boyfriend Boyd Wheeler's (Buddy Rogers) intentions: she never asks him for anything and, more importantly, she doesn't ask whether he plans to marry her, since she "[doesn't] want to seem fresh". She becomes pregnant after Boyd lures her into his friend's "empty" apartment. Even though she knows they should not spend the night alone together, she is unwilling to put her foot down at any moment. As the camera pans away from their kissing to fade out, the viewers understand that Mae was right to worry. Significantly, the "empty apartment" will be contrasted explicitly in a disagreement between June and Mae. June is spending the evening with Pat in a new club, a venue Mae disapproves of ("you should stay away from these places"). Mae wants to introduce June to a "real gentleman"—a college man like Boyd. June retorts that if Boyd really wanted to eat, he'd take Mae to a restaurant, not a friend's apartment.

Mae's judgments are based on social rules determining proper class and gender behaviour rather than experience. June, on the other hand, couldn't care less for what society thinks she should or should not do: her decisions are based on what she believes will benefit her and not other people. The movie highlights on several occasions how the proper behaviour of a lady and of the lower classes are in fact rules determined by those who will benefit from the "modest" behaviour in working class women and their deference to men of the upper classes. In Marxist terms, one could read *Working Girls* as a demonstration of class and gender alienation, as it shows how moral principles are set in place by the ruling classes in order to safeguard their position within a class-based, sexually imbalanced society (Engels, 1972). The film, however, does more as it contrasts the two sets of values held by Mae and June and ultimately shows the superiority of June's values. Mae is the more sensible of the two sisters, which is not achieved in the film by compromising her sexuality (Figure 3.21).

As detailed by Jonathan Stone (2008) Bakhtin was influenced by advances in science when developing the chronotope. More specifically, Bakhtin wanted to translate to the cultural sphere elements of Einsteinian relativity theory: the fact that time and space are always mediated and measured by an observer that is also part of the system under observation. Stone, however, makes a number of critical mistakes, some of which have already been pointed out by James Hirsh (2008). More importantly for the present discussion, Stone asserts the presence of "two Bakhtins" (2008, p. 406) and "a crucial difference between [Bakhtin's] use of relativity in

formulating the chronotope and in formulating polyphony" (p. 415). Essentially, for Stone, the full-fledged repercussions of relativity theory are only evident in Bakhtin's theory of polyphony, where various observers will have distinct voices and points of view. In his writings on the chronotope, Stone asserts, Einsteinian physics only "functions as a springboard" for his own concepts and ideas (p. 415). Thus, although Stone appears to agree with Caryl Emerson's strong defense of Bakhtin's anti-relativism (p. 408), he nevertheless concludes that Bakhtin "elevates and prioritizes readers and in doing so argues for their right to impose their own reality on the artistic worlds they are experiencing" (p. 417).

According to Stone, Bakhtin champions the reader as observer. This reading results in Stone's inability to locate an observer—an evaluative agent—*within* the work. Consequently, any emotional or evaluative coloring of time and space can only be brought on, according to Stone, by an external reader. Time and space are linked to observers, but not as chronotopes: the observer remains outside of spatio-temporal coordinates. This reading not only removes any axiological quality to the chronotope, but it also removes any unity the three dimensions (time, space, subjectivity) might have had and turns the chronotope into a rather innocuous truism: different readers will have equally valid interpretations of an artwork depending on their subjective positioning.

Figure 3.21 Mae, in the foreground, stays in the room in old frumpy house clothes waiting for Boyd's call. June, getting ready for work in background, disapproves.

As should be clear by now, my understanding of the chronotope goes counter to Stone's. By linking time, space and subjectivity, the Modern Woman chronotope is necessarily axiological; evaluative. In the previous chapter, I have shown how depictions of home and rural time and space are deeply coloured with emotions. In terms of the chronotope's axiological dimension, *Working Girls* could be said to operate a "transvaluation of values"[141] by putting forward life-affirming values as a preferable replacement to those held and enforced by religion and society, which are necessarily stale and life-negating (Kaufmann, 1956). The Christian values dominating the Western world were seen by Nietzsche as "harmful because … slavish, rooted in weakness, fear, malice" (Foot, 1973, p. 156). Christian morality may have originally had noble roots and intentions, but it has become appropriated by the weak who use it to control the stronger, more vital elements of society. This "slave morality", enforced by the weak, leads to *ressentiment* and decadence. Calling into

[141] "*Umwertung aller Werte*", also translated as "revaluation of values".

question "the value of these values", Nietzsche concludes that "the affirmation of life demands a revaluation of the dominant, life-negating values" (Reginster, 2006, p. 15)—values which condemn life and its vital needs. That Christian morality is life-denying finds its most evident example in its condemnation of sexual instincts.

In the film's "transvaluation of values", June finds herself aligned with Mae's employer, Dr. Schrader, who stands outside social class divisions. Immensely more educated than Wheeler, he is nevertheless not referred to as a "college man", for the title seems to refer to a specific social class rather than a level of education. Schrader's life is devoted to learning and the dissemination of knowledge, and his decisions are based on practicality rather than social conventions. The two environments in which Schrader appears are his library/office and a chop suey restaurant to which June takes him, and where he subsequently returns. The restaurant is filmed in a rather matter-of-fact way, without the excessive kitsch often associated with the role such places play in silent and early talkies—moral depravity of the underground, exoticism, life of the lower rungs, etc. On the contrary, the restaurant takes on the allure of a modest diner.[142] The choice of a chop suey joint for Schrader and June's "date" marks the place as, if not an outside, at least a margin to the norm. In this atmosphere, both June and Schrader find themselves quite at home:

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[142] While the higher-end Chinese restaurant-nightclubs, especially in California, were associated with week-end "slumming" and thrill-seeking, the early 20th century New York Chinese restaurants were associated with artists, writers and "Bohemians" looking for a cheap, tasty and filling meal (Coe, 2009; Spiller, 2004). Blondie and Danny also meet in a chop suey restaurant in *Blondie Johnson,* and Jerry (Joan Crawford) serves the take-out dish to Connie (Anita Page) in *Our Blushing Brides.* In all these films, the chop suey joint bears no connection with Chinatown.

June is a frequent customer, and Schrader is not only familiar with the items on the menu, but he orders in Cantonese.

A Chinese-American invention, chop suey emerged in San Francisco in the latter years of the 19th century, passing as authentic Chinese cuisine. The popular dish's use of unusual ingredients perpetuated the myth of its Chinese-origin (Barbas, 2003; Coe, 2009), while its relative blandness made the dish more amenable to the American palate. The craze for chop suey spread in Chinese restaurants throughout the United States between 1900 and 1920, to peak in the 1950s. The expression "as American as chop suey", in print as early as 1933,[143] is semantically rich. It translates the American pride in their ability to constantly reinvent themselves, but also in their aptness to appropriate foreign products and produce them better and cheaper.[144] The chop suey restaurant, like the dish, comes to represent the "civilized" Chinese and, by extension, America's superiority as a civilizing force. In *Man of the World* (Richard Wallace, 1931), the dish is presented as a powerful symbol of Americanism: A homesick William Powell claims chop suey to be to America what onion soup is to France. It's not so much the dish itself that the expatriate misses, "but what it stands for: home, America, friends, fellows I used to know, plain things without sauces."

Working Girls no doubt brings nuance to claims that class undermines the feminist discourse in Dorothy Arzner's films. Christine Gledhill, for instance, points out that

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[143] The expression appears in Herbert Asbury's *The Barbary Coast: An Informal History of the San Francisco Underworld* (1933).

[144] Another example of this was the American appropriation of Parisian couture (Eckert, 1978).

the feminist discourse voiced by Judy during *Dance, Girl, Dance*'s famous "return of the gaze" scene

> is also the assertion of a ruling-class discourse in terms of Judy's high art ambitions over/against the crude vulgarity of the burlesque, which also includes judgment on another woman, Bubbles. Judy's momentary power to stun her audience into silence lies in her class tones, the class authority of her role as a 'serious artist', as well as her high-toned moralism, behind which lurks the stereotype 'prude' contrasted with Bubbles 'good sport' (1984, p. 38).

In fact, class consciousness is central to *Working Girls*, for the subject is broached repeatedly. While Mae sees "college men" as the girls' most desirable prospects, June advises her to stick with men of her own class: "You don't want to be with someone who thinks you're not in his class", she warns Mae. The implications are that upper-class men won't respect her, because they will not see her as their equal. The transvaluation of values put forward in *Working Girls*, in return, is intimately linked with a critique of class. A feminist discourse, moreover, goes hand in hand with this critique of class by offering a new standard upon which to base one's "proper" behaviour: values of modesty and deferment to authority are shown to ultimately serve to keep working-class women docile and subservient.

This reading offers a counterexample to charges that Arzner's female characters "act out a socially constructed female desire" and "embrace what was expected of them" by "blindly respond[ing] to social expectations" (Casella, 2009, pp. 245, 248 and 254). In *Working Girls,* the female protagonists desire to better themselves and their working conditions. Their quest for marriage stems, not from a desire for love, but

from certain knowledge that, given their social and economic situation (lack of education and marketable skills), marriage is their best—if not only—option. Blind obedience to social expectations befitting working-class women is precisely what distinguishes the sisters and what causes Mae's troubles.

Perhaps on account of its lack of stars, *Working Girls* remains, to this day, unavailable to a large audience despite many visually stunning moments.[145] The film contains elements that were reprehensible under the Code and its production was under tight scrutiny from the Hays Office. Questionable were "scenes of seduction", drinking, pregnancy out of wedlock and, originally, an abortion.[146] In this respect, however, the film is no different from many other projects of the era. The quasi-abandonment of the film therefore remains puzzling. Indeed, *Working Girls* received very little publicity and never benefited from a wide release.

The liquefaction of social norms of inter-war modernity made possible not only a re-assessment of conventions, but also the putting forth of new values on which to

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[145] The UCLA Film & Television Archive holds a copy for onsite viewing.

[146] Moreover, Joy points out in a letter to Schulberg dated September 19, 1931, that there seems to be no justification within the story for the seduction and pregnancy, for "the girl eventually gets the man she wants and her only payment for breaking the conventional code is the shedding of a few tears" (PCA files). Additional scenes were altered or removed, for the Hays office were having unusual problems with the drinking scenes. To be sure, drinking was an element to which the Hays office consistently objected. But it seems like they were being unusually stringent with this particular film (they even requested that the word "gin" not be uttered), probably because it featured principally young women in a boarding house. Ultimately, it seems to have been the lightness of tone with which the out-of-wedlock pregnancy and shotgun wedding were addressed that was responsible for Paramount's quasi-shelving of the film (PCA files). Though these elements could be included in a film, they should serve dramatic, not comedic purposes.

ground American society. As documented by Warren Susman and Frederick Lewis Allen (1931, 1940) various groups challenged the Puritan tenets of American society: intellectuals, African-Americans, bohemians, children of immigrants and Marxists. Early 1930s woman's films, I argue, should be seen as a central cultural manifestation of interwar modernity, as they participate in discussions pertaining to national character. As a chronotope, the Modern Woman functions, not only as a simple knot of time and space, but on an axiological plane as well: "colouring with emotions and values" the events depicted. As my analysis of *Blondie Johnson*, *Baby Face* and *Working Girls* shows, the Modern Woman was not only associated with socially acceptable ideals, but also with much deeper structural change, changes which quickly raised concerns, alarm, and appeals for containment. It is therefore not a coincidence that the films which implied the most fundamental changes were neither well-received nor promoted. As the Modern Woman used her independence to affect changes that went beyond her place in the socio-economic order, her presence became, much like modernity itself, a source of anxiety.

Chapter 4 The Romance of Containment

“White women are enough trouble
in their own environment”
—*East of Borneo* (George Melford, 1931)

A thoroughly urban chronotope, the Modern Woman represents as much a source of exhilaration and pleasure as a source of anxiety. Her freedom and independence may have evoked a hopeful view of the future but they ultimately generated unease and apprehension. This was especially the case when the Modern Woman went “unchecked”, unattached. As a potentially harmful figure, the Modern Woman was variously contained; her deleterious effects controlled or kept at bay. Containment of the Modern Woman was effectuated in two important ways in early 1930s woman’s films: domestic containment and literal exclusion outside of the United States. In this chapter, we turn to romance and how it functions to domesticate and contain the Modern Woman.

A National Romance

Towards the end of *Reaching for the Moon,* Larry Day (Douglas Fairbanks Sr.), a successful banker and industrialist, stands on deck of the SS *L’Amérique,* contemplating suicide. Having lost everything during the Crash while at sea, and burdened by financial obligations, Day cannot come back to the United States. For the viewer, a suicide is not much of a stretch of the imagination, since we have witnessed

the bank's president kill himself only minutes before.[147] Day boarded the *SS L'Amérique* pursuing Vivian Benton (Bebe Daniels), a wealthy socialite. Unfortunately for Day, Vivian is already engaged to Sir Horace Partington Chelmsford (Claud Allister), an utterly uninteresting English nobleman many years her senior. What's more, even though she confesses to loving Day by film's end, his recent change in fortune would make their union socially impossible; she a millionaire many times over, and he penniless. Vivian, however, convinces him otherwise: "You're Larry Day. You couldn't be broke. I've known big men all my life: You could make 50 fortunes back". This proves to be a revelation for Larry, who interrupts her:

> Wait a minute: I've just discovered something, something I never realized. I know what "woman" means: she's not just the sort of a thing that you pursue and love and hold. She's something that leans over and whispers in your ear what you are, what you can do, and what you're going to do…

And indeed from this point on, with Vivian at his side, Larry becomes himself again: an energetic, bigger-than-life industrialist.

The film is set almost entirely aboard the "ultramodern French liner" packed with American travellers. Once at sea, the ocean liner becomes a floating fantasy space of wealth and leisure. With its overblown modern architecture, beautifully dressed people and constant partying, the liner is a giant open bar where everyone is invited. As in many other films of the era, for instance *Transatlantic* (William Howard, 1931) and *Transatlantic Merry-Go-Round* (Benjamin Stoloff, 1934), the ship's casting off is

[147] When Larry's secretary tries to reach him to let him know that "the panic is on", the viewer sees the president shoot himself in the background.

an event to be celebrated, a celebration that often continues for the duration of the crossing.

What makes for great dramatic effect in *Reaching for the Moon* is that while the viewers are aware of the financial collapse, the happy travelers remain in ignorant bliss. Indeed, they only find out about the Crash once they've reached their destination. Not only do they keep on dancing, drinking and playing silly games unknowing of the disaster at home, but they also drink a "potion" which makes them temporarily go mad and explode in the type of riotous anarchy typical of ribald comedy. The association between the excessive, careless partying of the upper class—who keeps on dancing long after the music has stopped—and national financial ruin is strongly suggested.

Despite the financial ruin, *Reaching for the Moon* ends on a positive note, with Vivian abandoning her pompous aristocratic fiancée for the vital, energetic, American swashbuckler. National sentiment is created through a caricatural opposition between the two men and is further emphasized with Chelmsford uttering "what a country!" several times in the film. What brings Day and Vivian together is their common approach to life: frank, independent, unafraid, daring and unhindered by tradition. They are, quintessentially, modern Americans about to take on the world. Their frantic wedding ceremony, delayed by Day's manic business dealings and further punctuated by his irreverential humour towards the reverend, only reinforces this. The film ends on a fade out, as Larry and Vivian walk towards the

camera, arm-in-arm and laughing, on their way to be wed and to leave, once more, for a crossing.

In *The End of American Exceptionalism*, David Wrobel investigates the context surrounding the revival of frontier and frontiersmen discourse during the 1920s and 30s. Following the 1920 census—which classified the United States as predominantly urban for the first time in its history—the country became increasingly urbanized and mobile. This "march of the modern age", Wrobel states,

> sparked apprehension about the future and a tendency to cling to a simpler, seemingly more virtuous past. The qualities of woodland wilderness and of heroic, unbridled pioneer individualism served as a kind of antidote to fears of impersonal technological progress in the 1920s (1993, pp. 98-99).

Frederick Jackson Turner's influential frontier thesis, first developed in the mid-1890s, re-surfaced when a collection of his writings was published in October 1920. The continued advance of the frontier in the early years of the United States, Wrobel explains, "had meant a steady movement away from the corrupting influence of the Old World" (p. 36). The pioneer was primarily conceived as individualist in character, but virility, rigor, a sturdy constitution, and an entrepreneurial nature coupled with a democratic spirit were also perceived to be typically "American" traits. The American pioneer, the story went, was a pragmatic individual unafraid of hard work. He also had little time to think, and so his devotion to bettering his physical environment was accompanied by anti-intellectualism and a certain disdain of culture (Susman, 1973, p. 33). When publishing his "thesis" in 1893, however, Turner had already claimed the frontier to be closed. His attitude was one of

nostalgia for better days, days which had defined the American character, the so-called American "exception". Faced with a "frontier-less" America, Turner expressed worries at the effects this new condition would have on an American character defined by the rugged individualism of the pioneer days. Doing so, Wrobel claims, Turner was in fact conveying a general feeling of anxiety that was already present in society and in the popular press.

Many, however, were not satisfied with looking towards the past to think America's future, and various attempts were made to revive, if not the frontier itself, then at least the frontier spirit. Herbert Hoover—then Secretary of Commerce—became a torchbearer for this second approach, most notably in his 1922 *American Individualism:*

> The American pioneer is the epic expression of that individualism, and the pioneer spirit is the response to the challenge of opportunity, to the challenge of nature, to the challenge of life, to the call of the frontier. That spirit need never die for lack of something for it to achieve. There will always be a frontier to conquer or to hold as long as men think, plan, and dare. […] The days of the pioneer are not over. There are continents of human welfare of which we have penetrated only the coastal plain. [….] The very genius of our institutions has been given to them by the pioneer spirit. Our individualism is rooted in our very nature (pp. 63-65).

American individualism, Hoover continues, stands as a third way, distinct from "autocracy—whether of birth, economic or class origin—and socialism" both remnants of "Old World societies" which would only contain "destruction to the

forces that make progress in our social system" (pp. 65-66). "Salvation", Hoover concludes, will come from a

> steady devotion to a better, brighter, broader individualism—an individualism that carries increasing responsibility and service to our fellows. Our need is not for a way out but for a way forward. We found our way out three centuries ago when our forefathers left Europe to these shores, to set up here a commonwealth conceived in liberty and dedicated to the development of individuality (pp. 66-67).

An imagined geo-politics is here closely linked with the American "national Symbolic" (Berlant, 1991).

As the United States struggles to come to grips with its identity in the unstable, fluid years of the Depression, romantic comedies operate this re-defining of the American national identity and imaginary by staging a contrast with the Old World of France and England. On the one hand, these films show American women's infatuation with France's loose morals and dangerous sexuality. The Parisian male's flexible and forgiving morals are certainly appealing to women who welcome the freedom, but it is also presented as potentially degenerate. The Frenchman's gentility borders "effeminacy", and he is often presented as a gigolo (*Man of the World* [Richard Wallace and Edward Goodman, 1931], *A Parisian Romance* [Chester Franklin, 1932], *Lady With a Past* [Edward H. Griffith, 1932]). On the other hand, romantic comedies also often feature British aristocrats. The British man is stiff, proper, and hopelessly boring. The American woman may be attracted by the title and prestige that a British prospect would bring, but this ultimately can't make up for the absence of chemistry

and sex appeal that the Latin Frenchman possesses. As these distinctions in character often intersect with national traits, the romance acquires political qualities.

In *Reaching for the Moon*, Vivian's choice for a romantic partner can be seen as serving, national, patriotic functions, as she ultimately inspires Larry's reinstatement atop the socio-economical pyramid. In this way, the movie could be said to join a long tradition of films—and other works of arts—in subjugating the woman's desires to the nation's. But I would argue that, as we saw in chapter one with *Street of Women*, romantic coupling isn't done at the expense of the Modern Woman. Larry's claim to finally know what "woman" means could be seen as a form of containment, but his following definition make her a source of knowledge: she tells him who he is and what he is to do. The film conveniently fades out as they are about to get married, leaving the viewers in the dark regarding their marital arrangements.

A Modern Pastoral

Although early 1930s woman's films often concerned independent, working women, romantic interest was an important component. In itself, a story of female independence through work was not (and still isn't) enough to satisfy audiences. The Modern Woman's ultimate quest would be to find true love and marry. Even when it isn't, a husband most often falls on her lap. Her life as a single or "kept" woman rarely endures by film's end. The romantic imperative results in a double paradox at

the heart of the woman's film: the independent woman could not go on as an independent woman and had to reintegrate domesticity; secondly, the young woman could not stay young forever, and yet her aging could not be represented.[148]

Domesticity, as we have seen in chapter two, was antithetical to the Modern Woman: she defined herself against Victorian values of the domestic sphere, the cult of true Womanhood, and the claustrophobic realm of family and reproduction. Although the Modern Woman's film usually closes on successful heterosexual coupling, details pertaining to the couple's lives are usually left out. The marital arrangement would no doubt involve the Modern Woman's return to the close realm of the home, to a life devoted to housekeeping and childrearing.

Although antithetical to the Modern Woman's very being, woman's films often feature their female protagonist's love for two opposed conceptions of masculinity: the modern, fickle, sophisticated, often Latin, male, and the rambunctious, uneducated, rough, hard-working American male. Although the modern male's eroticism is easily achievable, the films will often turn attractive qualities into demonic traits as a way of justifying the Modern Woman's turn away from him and into the traditional male's arms. The difficulty of the film is in finding ways of rendering the old-fashioned attractive to the viewers, and the female character's attraction to him believable. In order to do so, the narrative makes use of traits and

[148] While Victorianism valued Old Age (Adams et al., 2009), 1920s and 1930s America cultivated a cult of youth that restrained severely any long-lasting impact and influence the young woman could have.

values deemed American. Doing so, the narrative uses patriotic values for romantic purposes as much as it uses romantic attraction for patriotic and ideological purposes.

The pre-modern and its imagery are, finally, romanticised. The woman's return to pre-modern times is enacted through a strategy akin to the pastoral: an imaginary space is created as a salvation ground away from urban environments—a "place of grace"[149] free from the ills of modernity. A symbol of the modern, the Modern Woman had, like modernity itself, to be domesticated.[150]

Although the pastoral tradition is most often associated with the Renaissance, Annabel Patterson (1987) shows how each era creates its own version:

> It is not what pastoral *is* that should matter to us. On that, agreement is impossible [...]. What can be described and, at least in terms of coverage, with some neutrality, is what pastoral since Virgil can do and has always has done; or rather, to put the agency back where it belongs—how writers, artists, and intellectuals of all persuasions have *used* pastoral for a range of functions and intentions (p. 7).

An ideological operation, the pastoral represents first and foremost an idealized place located outside, highly contrasted with contemporary society. The pastoral is often understood as a three-step process: 1) withdrawal from society to an 2) elsewhere to live a simpler existence in accord with nature and 3) subsequent return to society. Whereas contemporary society appears changing, unstable, and complex,

[149] I borrow this term from Jackson Lears (1981).
[150] Terry Smith (1993) identified a similar "domestication of the modern" in mid-1930s American industrial design.

the pastoral represents immutability, purity and simplicity. Everything is as it should be, in sync with nature (p. 270). At first sight, then, the pastoral appears to be a spatial concept.

Friedrich Schiller (1966) and Renato Poggioli (1975), however, associate the pastoral with infancy and childlike, even primitive, behaviour. The concept here is understood as temporal rather than spatial: "All people who have a history have a paradise, a state of innocence, a golden age; indeed, every man has his paradise, his golden age" (Schiller, 1966, p. 211). Poggioli also indirectly relates pastoral yearnings to psychic needs or developments: "The psychological root of the pastoral is a double longing after innocence and happiness, to be recovered not through conversion or regeneration but merely through a retreat" (p. 1). "The pastoral longing" Poggioli believes "is but the wishful dream of a happiness to be gained without effort, of an erotic bliss made absolute by its own irresponsibility" (p. 14). This approach is also adopted by Harry Berger (1983), who sees in Spenser "the longing for paradise as the psychological basis of the pastoral retreat from life. This longing may be inflected toward wish-fulfilling fantasy or toward bitter rejection of the world that falls short of such fantasy" (p. 27). However one understands it, it is a mode that provides what Chris Hopkins calls "pastoral pleasures" (1998, p. 67).

Because the pastoral most often bears traces of an idyllic past, it functions as a place which, thanks to its isolation, has been spared the troubling elements perturbing originary peace: it persists untouched by the passage of time. Despite these strong

links with the past, the pastoral paradoxically carries the promise of a better future, free from conflicts and unsettling change (Ettin, 1984, p. 5). As Raymond Williams points out, however, this idyllic past is a "myth functioning as memory" (1973, p. 43). Contemporaries may look at pastoral images as representing a past, but these images, in fact, tell us more about contemporary dreams and fantasies.

What is shared by all contemporary pastorals is a strong critique of the urban environment as artificial and degenerate, and a fascination with an idealized countryside conceived as "natural". The pastoral setting's quintessential character, the shepherd,[151] is a simple, direct, plain-speaking and trustworthy figure (Alpers, 1982; Ettin, 1984, p. 38). The latter has been understood by pastoral theorists, especially those who regard it as an ideological mystification, as a binary construct, whereby the country is conceived as the opposite of whatever one finds deficient in the city.[152] This is precisely where the various versions of the pastoral will differ, for not only will each era see the country as answering its own set of problems, but this version of the pastoral will, in return, voice an ideological positioning.

The modern pastoral functions both spatially and temporally, and its ideological ties are visible when looking at the Modern Woman chronotope. As we have seen in

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[151] The pastoral, after all, derives from the Latin word for "shepherd", "*pastor*". Paul Alpers maintains that it is the "shepherds' lives, not landscape, [that] are at the heart of pastoral" (1982, p. 457).

[152] As Raymond Williams points out, the Latin origin of "country" is *contra*, meaning "opposite" or "against" (1973, p. 307). Ken Hiltner (2011) shows that in pastoral literature of the 16th and 17th century, the opposition was between "court and country" (68).

chapter two, several woman's films of the period (*Back Pay*, *Professional Sweetheart*, *The Purchase Price*) use the backward countryside as a nightmarish setting of women's forced domesticity and rigid, violent, patriarchy. This setting is anything but idyllic.

In the mid-1930s, however, the pastoral imaginary surfaces under the guise of the home, a domestic sphere hermetically sealed off from the deleterious effects of modern, urban decadence. The modern aesthetic in architecture and design gradually fade from the movie screen, morphing into "new traditionalism" a style popularized by none other than Cedric Gibbons. If we are to believe a survey of the "most popular movie sets of the last 20 years" by *House Beautiful* in 1946, the glamorous modern sets had all been "forgotten" as none made the list. Esperdy attributes this change in sensibility—and, we might add, amnesia—to the fear inspired by modern design and aesthetic (2007, p. 207).

In the next two sections, I look at two films, *Man's Castle* (Frank Borzage, 1933) and *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934) as deploying the containment of the Modern Woman through pastoral narratives. These films would not readily be classified as "pastorals" on the basis of their formal features: they do not take place in pastoral landscapes or feature shepherds and peasants working the fields. As I will show, however, these films serve to satisfy pastoral pleasures by appealing to a utopian place as an answer to urban modernity's ills. As Andrew Ettin puts it, while addressing the pastoral mode in literature,

> The further we get from shepherds and nymphs, fields and groves, the less sure we can be that we are still in the pastoral world; but the more we try to adhere to those restrictions, the less certain we can be that we are telling all that must be said about the limits of the pastoral mode and the influence of the pastoral genre on literature as a whole (1984, p. 2).

Man's Castle

While *Dancing Mothers* ends on a hopeful, if controversial, scene where the main female protagonist is "freed" and leaves home to sail abroad, Frank Borzage's *Man's Castle* romanticizes female domestic containment. Following Hervé Dumont's pioneering study of the director, Borzage has routinely been characterized as one of the screen's greatest romantics. The director's alleged disregard of day-to-day social reality in favour of a transcendentalist view of love is a claim that usually goes unquestioned.[153] Borzage's "absolute [disinterest] in the workings of everyday life" (Jones, 1997, p. 33) is reinforced so consistently among the various critics as a *sine qua non* for interpreting his films that it takes on the appearance of a defence mechanism. For instance, film critic Dave Kehr notes:

> Few love stories have achieved the emotional intensity of *Man's Castle*, and most of the other belonged to Borzage as well. He possessed the most delicate romantic sensibility in the movies, and his films are pervaded by a sublime spiritual quality that no one else has been able to capture. Leave your prejudices at home—this should be appreciated on its own terms.[154]

[153] See, for instance, Kent Jones (1997). A notable exception here is Robert K. Lightning (1998).
[154] http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/mans-castle/Film?oid=1061014

Kehr does not specify what these prejudices might be, or what they might pertain to, but his comments seem to urge the viewer to disregard any disturbing, "concrete" elements, for they are irrelevant in the face of the transcendental love that is allowed to emerge. In short, it's not so much that Borzage has "no interest in the workings of everyday life", but that these must be disregarded by the viewer in order to fully appreciate the film. In the case of *Man's Castle,* the "prejudices" one is to leave at home certainly concern the relationship between the two main protagonists, Trina (Loretta Young) and Bill (Spencer Tracy).

Young Trina is walking the streets of New York, starved, unemployed and homeless, when she meets Bill, a resourceful hobo. Trina's being alone in the park at night, trying to make it in the city, immediately establishes her as an easily recognizable popular character of the era: the young woman taking a shot at independent, urban living. Visual cues—she wears a cloche hat, bobbed hair and secretarial dress—also indicate a link with modernity. These elements mark her as a Modern Woman while others—a certain lack of resolve and pluckiness and an inability to take care of herself—mitigate this association. Taking Trina under his wings, Bill brings her to a hut in a Hooverville where a community of disaffected, down-on-their-luck individuals have made a living. The shanty town recreates a hermetic rural setting within the city: make-shift houses, lack of electricity and modern commodities, as well as "pre-modern" individuals in the likes of Flossie—the drunk with a heart of gold, the priest-turned-night-watchman Ira, and Bragg, the devious petty criminal.

This Far West-like setting contributes to make *Man's Castle* a hybrid or proto-Western, with its standard ensemble, pioneering spirit and isolated, self-contained environment. The film's most subversive genre-bending, however, pertains to romantic-comedy. Whereas the first scenes in the city have a light and romantic easiness, Trina's arrival in the settlement is overshadowed by sinister elements. After he introduces her to the gang, Bill invites Trina to join him in his daily skinny-dip in the river. He gets undressed first and dives in the water and then "convinces" her to jump in by threatening to throw her in with her clothes on. Trina undresses off-camera before diving in. The scene is inter-cut on four occasions with shots of Bragg looking on, hidden and unseen in the dark. The four shots of Bragg, totalling approximately twenty seconds transform what could have been a romantic scene into a perverse and ominous foreboding. This scene intimates that, although the community was initially presented as welcoming, Trina is not safe and should not be left alone. And indeed, from this point-on, she is always seen in company of either Bill or Flossie. On two instances, she is left alone: both times, Bragg will enter her home and make threatening advances.

The scene's insistent cross-cutting of Bragg (licking his lips at one point) may have been more awkwardly put together in the 1938 version (the only one we now have access to) than the original 1933 version. The scene was indeed modified to remove shots of Trina and Bill's naked silhouettes before they entered the water. But it is likely that the four shots of Bragg were present in the original, for this scene becomes

pivotal in the movie.[155] When Bragg finds Trina home alone, he lets her know he saw her on that night—and this frightens her. This knowledge gives Bragg power over Trina, as he threatens to tell others of her skinny dipping with Bill. Trina, however, seems even more frightened of Bill's potential reaction should he find out that Bragg has seen her naked. Later on, Bragg will try to rape her.

While Trina was broke after having been out of a job for over a year, Bill is a hobo by choice: he doesn't like to feel tied down and is constantly on the move. His homelessness is thoroughly romanticized: Whenever he needs money, he easily finds employment. His relationship with Trina compromises his freedom, and the tension that ensues constitutes Bill's main storyline. But although the movie is usually analysed solely in terms of this aspect, it would be fairer to say that the story is preoccupied with both characters. What usually goes unnoticed is how Trina's character clashes with similar characters of the era. Indeed, while the new girl in town is usually plucky, determined and unafraid when facing adversity,[156] Trina is helpless, afraid and resigned, sentiments that are only reinforced and amplified by Bill's constant bullying. Bill, indeed, seems only too happy to take advantage of

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[155] The shooting script does not allow us to determine how this sequence was originally cut.

[156] It is not unusual for the new-in-town girl to find work through determination and audacity. We have already seen examples of this in *Blondie Johnson, Beauty and the Boss* and *Working Girls*, with Blondie expertly conning a taxi driver and a gangster on her first day in the big city, Susie impersonating a server to enter and office which she will subsequently refuse to leave until she is employed, and June insinuating herself into a job without having been formally hired. In *Night Nurse*, Lora Hart (Barbara Stanwyck) charms a doctor as a way of getting accepted as a trainee nurse after having been turned down by the head nurse. In *Employees' Entrance*, homeless Madeline (Loretta Young) simply takes up residence in a department store where all the domestic commodities can be found.

Trina's tremendous insecurity. Once with Bill, Trina abandons any effort to find employment and instead devotes herself full-time to homekeeping. Every scene with Trina has her vigorously performing household chores: cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and ironing. Once inside the shanty home, she is seen in the city only twice and is quickly found by Bill who accosts her with "Who let you out?" before sending her home. Her hesitant and crackly delivery gives no indication whether she believes Bill to be serious or not. Bill, on the other hand, makes his way through the city, encounters various people and even has an affair with a performer (Glenda Farrell, channelling Mae West).

By presenting the successful heterosexual coupling resulting in the nuclear family as conditional to Trina's correct attitude towards Bill (assuring him total freedom to leave whenever he wants), the movie appears deeply moralizing.[157] Trina's ecstasy, as she washes Bill's shirts ("Bill is particular. Everything that goes near his skin has to be clean") has been described as "one of the most truly erotic tributes to the sanctified flesh of a lover in film history" (Callahan, 2006), but the discomfort visible on Flossie's face, coupled with Trina's shaky intonation, contribute to render this scene oddly tense. Such tension and anxiety is created throughout the film by Bill's steady verbal violence, a violence which threatens to morph into physical abuse at any moment. One could argue that his many threatening remarks are meant to be taken with a grain of salt, but Young's unusual frail and hesitant delivery reveal the

[157] Roffman and Purdy note that once together, Bill and Trina no longer suffer from hunger and poverty. They seem to be living a perfectly comfortable life, complete with curtains, and a hot dinner on the table every night (1981, p. 54).

serious nature of Bill's outbursts. If his remarks are only jests, she never risks calling his bluff. Along with the viewer, she can only maintain the illusion that he is joking by playing along and by not questioning his status. Two dialogues are particularly helpful to illustrate the particular dynamic at work between Trina and Bill (sentences in italics were removed for the 1938 cut and are now lost today).

Bill, coming home: "You're a heck of a lookin' woman for a guy like me"
Trina, at the stove: "Hm hm. I don't know if this is going to be a very good stew".
Bill: "Look at you. Skinny as a ramp.[158] *No hips, no thighs, no nothing. A man like me ought to have a woman that's a woman, a woman who's got something a man can grab a-hold of*".
Trina: "Yes sir that's just what I did: I put these potatoes in too soon".
Bill: "Who wants to hold grab of a lot of bones? That's all you are: bones. You know that don't you?"
Trina: "Yeah. But I'm young, kinda".
Bill: "That don't make no difference".
Trina: "Maybe it does. Maybe I'll sort of fill out after".
Bill: "Nah. You'll never look like a woman. You ain't got it in you to look like a one".
Trina: "That makes no difference as long as you're good to me".
Bill: "I ain't good to you. Don't get that idea in your nut. That's what spoils 'em, being good to them. You better step on it if you want to stay with me or get your teeth knocked out. Ummm I think I ought to knock 'em out anyway".
(…)
Bill: "Go on, go to work. And if that stew is burnt I'll pour it down your back".

Bill's constant admonishment regarding her weight seems to be an admonishment of the modern girl's "streamlined" figure. The "plump" woman was widely considered a figure of yesteryear, as is attested by numerous fan magazine articles[159]. Bill's desire for some "meat on her bones", and for a more "womanly" figure is therefore also a

[158] PCA documents claim the line to be "Skinny as a rail".
[159] "How Sylvia Changed 'Carol of the Curves' to Svelte Carole Lombard", *Photoplay*, April 1933, pp. 50-51.

wish for her to have not only a non-modern figure, but also one that emphasizes her feminine attributes.

Coming home once more after beating up Bragg for "hanging around Trina", Bill pulls Trina's hair and pokes her ribs.

Bill: "Did that hurt?"
Trina: "Not when you don't mean it".
Bill: "What would you do if I really slapped you hard?"
Trina, with a worried look on her face: "Bill you like being with me, don't you?"
Bill: "I ain't so nuts about you, you're pretty skinny. Come on let me go".
Trina: "Bill you ain't tired of me yet, are you?"
Bill: "Let me go I tell you, before I sock you".
Bill squeezes her hard with a mean look on his face, she jumps in surprise and a quick look of fear appears on her face.
We then see Flossie sitting in a corner of the kitchen. Bill was unaware of her presence.
Trina, apologetically: "He's awful strong. *He don't know his own strength, he don't. Look, Flossie, I'm black and blue all over where he just touched me. Look at that arm. Look at my legs, Flossie*".
Bill: "Come on, dish up the grub will you? I'm starving".
Trina: "Yes sir".

The "sublimity" of their love, its supposed awesomeness, only results from the grandness of the sacrifice and self-effacement that is demanded of Trina. Her docile "Yes, sir" is the concrete measure of that love. Those who criticize Borzage for mystifying love therefore miss the mark and refuse to see the tangible shape this love takes. As Dumont astutely points out, the Borzage predestined couple must meet two criteria, they must build a protective enclave, and they must love to the extent of forgetting themselves (2006, p. 16). This second aspect, I would claim, is visually represented in Trina's constant kneeling and bowing to Bill. It is hard for a contemporary reader not

to see an apology and romanticizing of domestic abuse when reading this critic's recent notes on the film:

> His way of showing affection to Trina is to insult and threaten her. This verges on the harsh, alright, but the way Loretta Young reacts shows that she fully understands that this is just his way of masking affection: it means "I love you". There's a risk that, accepting all this verbal abuse, Trina could seem like a doormat, but Loretta just GLOWS—she's receiving compliments and expressions of love with every insult. It's not masochism, it's just an ability to read Bill's true meaning (Cairns, 2008).

The movie culminates in Trina and Bill's somewhat reluctant and uncomfortable wedding after she tells him she is pregnant, and their eventual escape on a freight train.[160] Dressed in Ira's late wife's 19th century, "old-fashioned dress" (Figure 4.1), Trina is told the outfit "sort of suits her", even though no one would have any use for it nowadays. She was never cut out for this modern life, the film appears to say: Her initial attempt at urban independence was a mistake. Trina will remain in this dress for the rest of the film (even aboard the train), something which is remindful of *Beggars of Life,* in which the main female protagonist's containment through domestication is signified visually by her wearing proper, pre-modern feminine attire.

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[160] The wedding, which originally occurred in the seventh reel, was moved to the second for the 1938 re-issue to make Trina's pregnancy "legitimate". The current version circulating has the wedding back to where it originally stood.

Figure 4.1 Man's Castle's sad shotgun wedding between Bill and Trina.

Man's Castle represents a certain fantasy of a return to the pre-modern, a non-urban alcove within the city and the eventual return of the free woman to a rural home, with husband and child. Although the film is generally interpreted as representing the couple's transcendence of their physical reality and their mutual surpassing of their ego, it can also be seen as a return to pre-modern, patriarchal coupling as a solution to the period's uncertainty. Although most reviewers have primarily been concerned with Bill's spiritual development, it is important to note that both must go through transformations. Bill must give up his beloved freedom for Trina's sake, but it is only in these moments of earthly attachment that he is seen smiling and happy. Trina, similarly, must also give up her initial freedom and invest the domestic space. Both senses of responsibility within the couple are depicted concretely as a re-appropriation of traditional gender roles: his finding steady work to support his family, and her domestication (she kneels down and cries when Bill gives her an oven).

It Happened One Night

Released in 1934, *It Happened One Night* is often said to be the first Hollywood film to abide by the Production Code. Indeed, although dealing with a potentially controversial subject matter—an unmarried man (Peter) and a woman (Ellie) travelling through the country together, sharing the same room—*It Happened One Night* does so in a way respectful of the Code. While Ellie (Claudette Colbert) and Peter (Clark Gable) sleep in beds next to one another, a curtain is drawn between them by Peter, thereby safeguarding modesty and public mores.[161] The curtain is undoubtedly the most important trope in the film. Referred to as "the wall of Jericho", the curtain acquires mythical proportions. Commentators have seen in it a visual metaphor of both a woman's hymen and the newly enforced Production Code (Leff, 1991; Rowe, 1995). Adopted by the MPPDA on March 31, 1930, the Production Code's main *raison d'être* was to appease concerns expressed by various groups regarding film's deleterious effects on certain "impressionable" segments of society. Between 1930 and 1934, however, the studios only loosely enforced the Code. Although it covered a range of topics—religion, language, ethnic representations, alcohol, etc.—many of the Code's clauses sought to regulate the depiction of female sexuality on screen. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, sex left the compounds

[161] According to Richard Maltby, the production of *It Happened One Night* was relatively undisturbed by the Code Administrators. Columbia, Maltby claims, was known for its cooperative attitude and for catering to rural venues where "sophisticated" and racy pictures were less appreciated (1998, p. 133).

of the private realms to be discussed in the open. Sexualized visual representations—notably with the booming consumer-driven advertising—along with frank and more open discussions of various aspects of sex and marriage all contributed to an explosion of sex-themed popular entertainment: theater, vaudeville, comedy, burlesque shows, popular literature and movies all became hotbeds for acrimonious battles between performers, citizens, and regulators.[162] The stage and popular press were under the scrupulous lens of censorship, but much less so than film whose ability to circulate indiscriminately among all sectors of society—sex, class and age group—was perceived as unique and requiring more stringent regulation.

In *It Happened One Night*, we notice the central presence of one of Bakhtin's chronotopes: the road. The road, whose temporal dimension predominates, creates a fertile environment for random encounters, and the colliding and interweaving of various people's fates (1981, p. 243). Bakhtin believes the road chronotope offers a unique creative opportunity for "representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages—[to] intersect at one spatial and temporal point. People who are normally kept separate by social and spatial distance can accidentally meet". "The chronotope of the road", writes Bakhtin, "is both a point of new departures and

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[162] For a survey of popular representations of women and sexuality in newspapers, see Adams, Keene and McKay (2009). Censors and anti-obscenity activists' relationship with the theater and burlesque during the 20s and 30s have been documented respectively by Angela J. Latham (1997) and Andrea Friedman (1996), and censorship activism in popular literature is examined in Thomas F. O'Connor (1995).

a place for events to find their denouement" (pp. 243-244), and spectators expect the protagonist to make unexpected life-altering encounters.

As is attested by the *Variety* review, *It Happened One Night* was analysed as participating in the "long distance bus story" cycle, and was reviewed accordingly. The original story by Samuel Hopkins Adams (1933), contrary to the movie, is told from Peter's perspective, so that Elspeth is one (albeit a central one) encounter in *Peter*'s journey. The movie, as we will see, becomes a parallel story of Peter's and Ellie's mutual encounter on their respective journey. The film, indeed, opens with an exposé of both characters, as they set out on their journey to resolve their respective problems. The road from Miami to New York is what allows both characters from very different make-ups to meet, thereby collapsing social distance (M. V. Montgomery, 1993, p. 15) and creating a depression-era fantasy of a class-less society (Bergman, 1971, p. 133).

Contrary to the story which begins with Peter and Elspeth's chance meeting on the night bus, *It Happened One Night* opens with a shot of sailors busy at work on a private yacht. We soon learn that a man and his daughter are the sole "vacationers" aboard, and that heiress Ellie is in fact being held against her will by her father for having wed a man to which he objects. A symbol of excessive and irresponsible opulence in many films of the era, the yacht is turned here into both a prison-house for Ellen, and an effective tool of patriarchal control for her father. The yacht, like the castle, is put to use by the all-powerful patriarch to control his rebellious daughter—

and her sexuality—as she enters adulthood.[163] The castle, incidentally, is another chronotope discussed in Bakhtin's "Concluding Remarks,"[164] a chronotope that has been particularly relevant for understanding the gothic woman's film. The castle comes to define the universe in which the characters evolve (usually, a couple, often newlywed), but also assigns them specific positions with regards to knowledge. Contrary to the road, which is oriented towards the future, the castle, "saturated through and through with the past" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 245). The past which inhabits the castle, in the woman's gothic, constitutes a particular form of knowledge: knowledge about the husband and his past, barred to the wife.[165] As she enters the castle, the woman's mastery over the symbolic realm, the validity of her perception and her assurance in the correctness of her belief are negated (M. Smith, 1988, p. 63). Most importantly, castles have functioned in women's gothic as an analogy for the women's entry into claustrophobic domestic entrapment and their disempowerment. The woman's gothic's castle therefore represents a powerful

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[163] The Medieval castle was a predominantly masculine environment, but many illustrious women were held captive in towers to control their sexuality, reproduction or political ambitions.

[164] The others being the road, the threshold, the provincial town and the salon.

[165] The quintessential example of this narrative being Charles Perrault's *Bluebeard* and its subsequent incarnations, including Fritz Lang's loose adaptation, *Secret Beyond the Door* (1947). Other examples abound in film, for instance, *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940), *Gaslight* (George Cukor, 1944), *Experiment Perilous* (Jacques Tourneur, 1944) and *My Name is Julia Ross* (Joseph H. Lewis, 1945). *When Strangers Marry* (William Castle, 1944) and *Undercurrent* (Vincente Minnelli, 1946) could also be seen as modern and suburban variations of the female gothic.

chronotope of post WWII patriarchy[166] as it situates the female character under the husband's and the castle's control.

While captive, Ellen's only means of regaining some measure of agency is to embark on a hunger strike. This refusal of food immediately becomes a grave concern not only to her father, but to an entire ship populated strictly by men, older men, under her father's command. Indeed, the sailors witness and eavesdrop with surprising interest on the verbal confrontation between father and daughter (Figure 4.2). Exasperated, her father proceeds to eat a steak, hoping the sight and smell of food will make her change her mind. After he taunts her with the food, she sends it flying, which results in his slapping her in the face, to both their surprise. Ellen escapes, leaving the ship by diving into the sea and effectively swimming to shore. Sailors are sent to "catch her", but to no avail. As they come back empty handed, they apologetically declare: "She got away from us Sir."

Much about this first scene serves to establish the film as one concerned with a woman "on the loose" in a world populated, dominated and—the film seems to imply—belonging to men. The woman on the loose is portrayed as an event so extraordinary within the film's logic that it is presented as a matter of national concern. A Florida newspaper headlines "Ellen Andrews Escapes Father", the subtitle claiming: "Rich Father Spreads Dragnet to Keep Her from Joining Her Aviator

[166] Karen Anderson cites the "rush to the altar" preceding WWII—women marrying men they barely knew and, quite often, knowing little regarding sex—as a possible cause (1981, p. 84).

Husband in New York". Her father does indeed seem capable of deploying a virtual/metaphorical dragnet over society: within minutes, he has all roads, airports and bus stations in Miami surveilled by both official and "undercover" policing agencies. Yet Ellie manages to successfully obtain a bus ticket for New York through the help of a benevolent older woman. It is once aboard the night bus that she meets Peter Warne (Clark Gable), to whom we have just been introduced, and who we know simply as "the King".

"The King" has been introduced to us through a confrontation set in a manner strangely similar to the confrontation between father and daughter. This time, Peter is on the telephone in a verbal duel with his boss—who bears an uncanny resemblance to Ellie's father. Like the first confrontation, this one is also witnessed by a large group of interested men (Figures 4.2-4.4). The outcome of this second shouting match is, however, very different. Whereas Ellen has "won"—if only temporarily—by escaping her father, Peter only manages to save face in front of the hordes of men who are limited to his half of the conversation. While Peter leads them to believe that he has asserted himself to his boss and got his way, we know that his boss has in fact dismissively hung up the phone after firing him. Peter is jobless and broke, but this fact is not yet registered where it matters—with the community of men. This is a significant detail because we, the viewers, know that Peter's social status is compromised. The presence of onlookers allows Peter to be "the man"—"the King"—even though we know he is only posturing.[167] After he hangs up the

[167] And the men are, like Peter, drunk.

phone, the men shake his hand, shouting “make way for the king” and “long live the king” as they escort him to “his chariot”, the night bus (Figure 4.5).[168] This sets up for us, as for him, the expectation that what must be regained—what must be secured more safely—is his former power. This expectation is partially satisfied immediately after he boards the bus. Unable to find a decent seat, he initiates another confrontation, this time with a different figure of authority: the bus driver. Peter easily wins, for the driver doesn’t have Peter’s wit and quick comeback. Once more, this victory, cannot quite serve to solidify Peter’s standings. The bus driver is indeed presented as too an unequal a match. Even though the occupants will heartily side with Peter by laughing at the jokes he makes at the expense of the driver, the spectators cannot be convinced.

Figure 4.2 Sailor eavesdropping.

Figure 4.3 Men listening in on Peter “making history”.

[168] This scene once again references the medieval universe of the chronotope of the castle without appealing directly to it. I should also mention that Ellen’s husband is also named “King”, further reinforces the allusions to kings duelling for a woman.

Figure 4.4 The presence of onlookers is reinforced in this counter shot.

Figure 4.5 The men escort their king.

This series of duels—there has been three in the first 8 minutes of the film—is what sets up and prepares us for Ellen and Peter's initial encounter. At this point, we fully expect them to enter into a duel as well, and, as duels have it, one will have to come out on top. More significantly, we also know that the stakes are different for both of them. Peter is out to re-establish his former social status and other people's deference to him. His confrontations so far have been of the kind colloquially known as "pissing contests", juvenile ego-driven battling whose finality is to establish an "Alpha male" among the pack through childish showiness. Ellen, however, is on a quest to affirm her independence and freedom from her father and, as she will explain in a scene, from minute control over every aspect of her life. Ellen has never been able to go out of the house alone, and this escape has been a dream of hers for a long time. She seems to have already partially reached this dream of independence as she managed to escape her castle by crossing a significant body of water.

Ellen and Peter's duel will occupy the rest of the film, but this duel quickly takes a surprising turn as the balance seems heavily tipped from the start. As critics have

noted, after running into Peter, Ellen becomes particularly inept and is in constant need of Peter's rescue and protection. Peter therefore seems to win this duel early on: he, earning his status as leader of the pack, and she, losing her independence and freedom.

Why then, we may ask, must the story go on? After all, the spectators have no reason to be invested in Ellen joining a husband they haven't met, and Peter's motivation for tagging along with her is dimly established. In fact, the justification for their travelling together will take a back seat as the movie focuses on the intimate and minute details of their travelling. The terms under which this travelling takes place are significant: she is chased down and must hide from everyone, and he helps and protects her. Her ineptitude at taking care of herself initially comes from the fact that she is broke after being unable to manage her money wisely. Peter puts her on a budget, takes control of their finances, prevents her from making frivolous purchases, and assumes the role of provider. His proprietary rights over her are furthermore asserted through a quip on their first encounter: As Ellen sits on Peter's seats, he claims "That on which you sit is mine", which can be (and was) taken to refer to her ass under the guise of referring to the seat.[169]

Stanley Cavell sees Ellie's eating of Peter's (literal) carrot the significant turning point of the story, an event that occurs three quarters into the story. "Eating the

[169] This represents a conservative version of the much more subversive remark delivered by one girl to another in *Sinners in the Sun*: "Excuse me, but you're sitting on something I want".

carrot" Cavell claims "is the expression [of] her acceptance of her humanity, of true need—call it the creation of herself as a human being. No doubt he is also won because eating the carrot is an acceptance of him, being an acceptance of food from him" (1981, p. 93). The eating of the carrot, moreover, is significant because it occurs following two refusals of food offered to Ellen by her father and Peter (Ellen having initially refused the raw carrot on account of her hating "the horrid thing").

Cavell therefore makes hunger, as well as the offering and the taking of food the central, philosophical element of the film. And the film does take on a new romantic turn after the carrot has been eaten: the scene confirms what we've suspected all along and will occur shortly thereafter—that Peter and Ellie will become a law-abiding couple. But Cavell makes light of the other three instances of food prior to the eating of the carrot, instances where Ellen precisely does not refuse food offerings. Rather, it is Peter who refuses food to Ellen.

The first instance of this refusal occurs early on, while they are still on the bus. Hungry, Ellen orders a box of chocolate from the bus cart. This is the first instance where Peter will assert himself as being in control of her finances and spendings and, ultimately, what she can and cannot eat. The chocolate, Ellen is told, is a frivolous way of spending the little money she has. This control over her spending seems, however, to play only a symbolic role as we will never see her wallet again or hear of the $1.34 she supposedly has left. Whether Peter uses this money for lodging and food is unclear, as we are not told how he pays for them. What we do know, however,

is that he will eventually steal from others and lie to provide for them both. And while we know exactly how much she has, through his keeping close records, we are left in the dark as to how much money, if any, he has.

Peter's second denial of food to Helen occurs just prior to the eating of the carrot. On their second day together, they must abandon the bus (someone has recognised Ellen) and they decide to hitch a ride. Peter "teaches" Ellen on the subtleties of hitchhiking. His intention is clearly to assert his superiority with regards to getting around in the world, but the scene culminates in his ridicule, as he is unable to lift a single ride. Reading this film as a duel whose issue is to determine who can best get around is not overreaching given the importance of such confrontations early on in the film, and the fact that Ellen is clearly set up as a spectator for his show. The manner in which Ellen wins this match, however, is significant: she lifts a ride, not by asserting the power of the thumb, but that of the limb—by showing off her leg in a manner reminiscent of chorus girls. Apart from the scene of escape that occurs early on in the film, this is the fist time that Ellen manages to get herself out of trouble on her own. That she should use her legs in this way lets us imagine how she might get around if she ever makes it to New York City. Peter is visibly annoyed, but it isn't clear whether the source of his annoyance is his losing the duel, or whether it is in the manner in which it was won by Ellen. We are quickly clued to the second possibility shortly afterwards, after they have found their ride. The driver of the car stops at a gas station and suggests having breakfast. Ellen immediately accepts, but Peter stops her much like he did when she ordered a box of chocolate. The violence

of his reaction, this time, points to something else, and links it with the previous hitchhiking scene:

Peter: What were you going to do? Gold-dig that guy for a meal?
Ellen: Sure I was. No fooling, I'm hungry.
Peter: If you do, I'll break your neck.

Cavell points out that this denial of food, by being morally grounded, aligns Peter with Ellen's father (p. 92 and 94). It could be argued, however, that this alignment is grounded not so much on the moral character of their control over Ellen's food intake, but, rather, on the patriarchal nature of this control. Indeed, both are directly participating in patriarchy, a patriarchy that is trying to curtail Ellie's newfound independence and places them in control of "loose" women. Shortly afterwards, Ellen will wilfully take the infamous carrot and eat it while Peter sternly looks on (Figures 4.6 and 4.7). Significantly, just as there are three men in her life, there are in fact three carrots in her hand, out of which she picks a single one. Pointing out her posture and demeanour as she nibbles on the carrot ("hunching down inside herself, "overcoming something"), Cavell reads this scene as her "acceptance of equality with him, since he has been living on that food" (p. 93). For Cavell, Ellen finally accepts her human condition by accepting Peter's food, and this is what signals their change of heart: Peter falls in love with her and Ellen can now also admit her love of him.

Figure 4.6 Ellie eats Peter's raw carrot...

Figure 4.7 ...while he looks over sternly.

It is curious that Cavell should make this eating of the carrot so significant while he has little to say about the meal they actually did share together in a previous scene. Indeed, during their first morning at the car park, Peter cooks breakfast for Ellen, a breakfast Ellen will enthusiastically accept and enjoy (Figure 4.8). Why then, if hunger and the taking and offering of food plays such a significant role in the film, not grant more significance to this scene? Why does this breakfast not constitute a turning point in the story?

Clearly, it is not as meaningful as the carrot because, contrary to the carrot, it does not symbolise her submission and acceptance of something she initially rejects (figs. 4 and 5). And it is precisely this that makes the carrot take on a more significant role than the egg (let alone the fact that while the carrot may be a phallic symbol, the egg is a symbol of female fertility). During their breakfast together, Ellen is particularly spry. She talks with much energy about herself, her life, the reasons why she left her father, and her dreams. This is when we get to learn more about the importance independence and freedom have for her, and the control under which she has lived

her life. Interestingly, Ellen's revelations to Peter are refused by him. Ellen shares herself; one might say that she is trying to teach Peter about herself, but that he makes an effort not to listen to her. This is an attitude Peter affects throughout the movie: after denying the legitimacy of her desires (chocolate) and her feelings (after she tells him she's hungry, he tells her it's only her imagination), he now denies the legitimacy of her experience. This scene, one could say, is significant precisely because it is she who offers him something (herself), offers to teach him something which he refuses. What's more, Peter seems annoyed by how much she is enjoying her breakfast, as if he was counting on the fact that she would dismiss it just like she had dismissed the carrot. One could hypothesize that his sour mood stems from a failed attempt at having his food refused. Instead, his breakfast has resulted in a situation of equality whereas he has become feminized, maternal, and she feels free to share herself with him. In fact, although Cavell address this breakfast scene only in passing, he writes that the carrot is of particular importance precisely because it is raw, "which means that he has provided it, out of his masculine capacity, but not prepared it, out of his feminine capacity" (p. 94).[170] Perhaps, then, this is why he focuses on the carrot rather than the egg.[171]

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[170] Cavell feels compelled to quote an anthropological observation by Margaret Mead found in Claude Lévi-Strauss' *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, according to which "As a father's claim to his child is not that he has begotten it but rather that he has fed it, so also a man's claim to his wife's attention and devotion is not that he has paid a bride-price for her, or that she is legally his property, but that he has actually contributed the food which has become flesh and bone of her body" (qtd. in Cavell, 1981, p. 94).

[171] As Daniel Boorstin (1973) notes, diet took on eminently political significance in the 18th century, "when a monotonous diet marked the lower classes [and] variety of food was a delight, a dissipation and a privilege of the wealthy". French cuisine was considered effeminate and aristocratic, in contrast to the hearty, wholesome, and

Figure 4.8 After their first night at the car park, Ellie and Peter have breakfast. The mise-en-scène presents Ellie in a diminutive manner, as she often looks up to Peter.

Cavell sees in *It Happened One Night* the creation of an equality between men and women through a happy conversation. I believe, however, that the film presents this equality as being problematic. The equality, as I've shown, is there from the very beginning. The early scenes are filmed by Capra so as to establish a parallel between the characters: each is engaged in a personal quest for autonomy. This is an important contribution by the filmmakers, since this aspect is absent from the original story *Night Bus*. As the film unfolds, the filmmakers have Peter achieve his self-assertion at Ellie's expense—by denying her desires, experiences and knowledge: he will win his duel, assert himself as leader of pack/couple, through a control of her finance and her body.

simple meat and potato. "'Democratic' enthusiasm", Boorstin claims, "made a virtue of crude and tasteless food, and obsession with the delights of the palate was considered a symptom of Old World decadence" (p. 323).

In this respect, the crossing of the river midway through the film is highly symbolic. On their way to the auto park, Peter and Ellie encounter a river blocking their way. Although the river is quite shallow, Peter assumes that Ellie's feet should not touch the water, and he carries her across over his shoulder (Figure 4.9). In her quest for freedom, en route to New York City—and after having expertly dove into the sea and swam to shore[172]—Ellie now crosses the river by being carried over Peter's shoulder.[173] As if the symbolism wasn't strong enough, this haul provides the perfect excuse for Peter to give Ellie a paternalistic spanking (Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.9 Peter carries Ellie over his shoulder.

Figure 4.10 Peter spanks Ellie as a way of settling an argument.

As we saw in chapter 2 with *Professional Sweetheart* (Figure 2.8) the spanking was not new. In fact, it seems to have been used in very specific situations: a modern woman getting "modernity" spanked out of her by a working class man. In *Air Hostess* (Albert Rogell, 1933), Kitty (Evalyn Knapp) is playfully spanked by her

[172] Not to mention that Colbert was by then (in)famous for bathing and swimming completely naked (*The Sign of the Cross* [Cecil B. DeMille, 1932]; *I Cover the Waterfront* [James Cruze, 1933]; *Four Frightened People* [Cecil B. DeMille, 1934]).
[173] In Samuel Hopkins Adams' source material, the short story "Night Bus", the two must also cross a river, but they use a boat. The fact that the river is also present in the series of obstacles that the story presents points to its importance.

husband—"the boss around here"—until she agrees to give up her career, while in *The Naughty Flirt* (Edward F. Cline, 1931), it is a woman's overt sexuality that is thusly punished (Figures 4.11 and 4.12). The image was probably perceived as particularly appealing, since it served as promotional material for *Loose Ankles* (Ted Wilde, 1930), even though the released film contains no such scene (Figure 4.13).

Figure 4.11 Modernity spanked out of her.

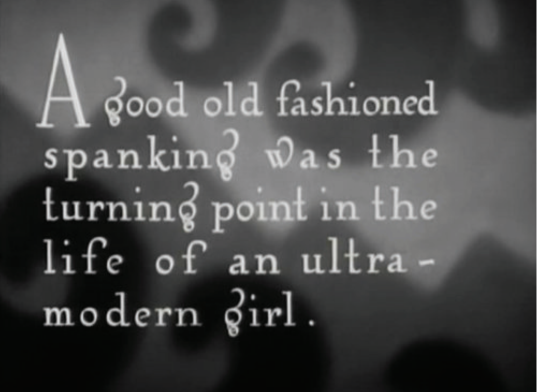

Figure 4.12 *The Naughty Flirt*.

Figure 4.13 Promotional photo for *Loose Ankles* (Ted Wilde, 1930).

This second body of water could be compared to the Jordan River, which the Israelites had to cross after leaving Egypt—the land of bondage—before arriving to Jericho. Indeed, the crossing of the Jordan River is the last hurdle on the road to

freedom[174] as it was the last step in the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land. Additionally, the Jordan River is part of a strong national myth, where it symbolises the dividing line between "the ordered world to the west" and "the apparent chaos to the east" (Havrelock, 2011, p. 1).

Contrary to the Israelites, Ellie will never reach her destination and make it to New York City. To pursue Cavell's suggestion that she is aligned with the Israelites (p. 81): she will not get to set the city on fire and gain her freedom. As the headline cheerfully proclaim, "Ellen Andrews Returns Home" and now insists on a church wedding. This is presented, as I already indicated, as a matter of national concern, as if the nation was finally safe from this woman on the loose, a lioness out of her cage. Once at home, crying in her father's arms, she claims that Peter was right: she needs to stop going around in circles and settle down.

This settling down will proceed from a second escape, as she leaves her husband (now husband-to-be) standing at the altar. This time though, no panic ensues from her escape, because we know, along with her father, that she is on her way to wed Peter. Although she has escaped, her escape has been facilitated by her father and

[174] The Jordan is referenced in *Show Boat*'s popular "Ol' Man River". The song, written in 1927, was popularised on stage in 1928 and 1932, and in the part-talkie 1929 film. Through its lyrics, it establishes a link between the Mississippi, a symbol of African-American slavery, and the Jordan : "Let me go 'way from the Mississippi / Let me go 'way from the white man boss / Show me that stream called the River Jordan / That's the old stream that I long to cross". The spiritual song of African American origin, "Deep River", also references the Jordan ("Deep River / My home is over Jordan / Deep River, Lord / I want to cross over into campground).

she is attached to Peter: she is no longer on the loose. Significantly, we will never see Ellen and Peter together as a couple and the movie does not end with their embrace. Capra seems to be making a point of directing his camera away from the couple. First, by showing only the cabin in which they are located with covered windows, second, by keeping his camera low to the ground to film only the toppling blanket/wall of Jericho. By leaving us outside, Capra seems to be making a chilling point (chilling to feminists, anyways) about domestic enclosure and the exclusion of public scrutiny over "private" matters.[175] If, as Cavell claims, equality there is (and I believe I have raised significant doubt regarding that) we certainly do not see it. We see the wall of Jericho falling, but we do not get to see who famously blows the trumpet.[176] Cavell claims—and this claim is important for his argument—that Ellen has the trumpet, since Peter claims he has no trumpet. But the fact is that neither of them has a trumpet, but the trumpet will be provided at the end by the (male) owner of the car park. This last scene, seen in Figure 4.14, in a way, places both Ellen and Peter's destiny under the control of this older, rural couple, also reaffirming patriarchal order: the woman erects the wall of Jericho by providing the line and blanket, and the man provides the trumpet necessary for the toppling of the wall (a toy trumpet, it turns out). The toppling of the wall, moreover, only occurs after

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[175] Perhaps the discomfort is also due to Capra's recurring suicide and attempted suicide scenes (*The Way of the Strong* [1928], *Dirigible* [1929], *Ladies of Leisure* [1930], *The Miracle Woman* [1931], *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* [1933])—scenes emblematic of Capra's undercurrent of despair. It must also be said, however, that Capra was never inclined to show explicit scenes of love-making in his films.

[176] In "Night Bus", Ellie buys a toy trumpet and sends it as a gift to Peter by mail. They reunite, and the trumpet is heard. Although we similarly do not know who blew the trumpet, the story leaves the impression that Peter did, since the trumpet is Ellie's gift to him. She bought the trumpet so that *he* may use it.

Ellen’s father gives explicit permission once annulment of Ellen’s first wedding has officially been granted.[177]

Figure 4.14 Ellen and Peter's room is visible in the background, the window well lit but completely covered with curtains.

As Richard Maltby points out, *It Happened One Night* was not an immediate popular and critical success when it opened in the major cities, but became a huge hit as it moved into the peripheral and second-run markets. Not only were critics indifferent to the story but, more importantly, they did not quite understand the particular logic behind it, something which was more readily understandable to other markets. Its release also coincided with efforts on various fronts to re-establish order both in Hollywood—with firm commitments from the MPPDA and the Hays Office to enforce the code—and in society in general with the expansion of the Federal government.

Gabriel Over the White House, released a few months earlier, presented a different solution on how order could be re-established. The film was not only more overtly

[177] This is done through an exchange of telegrams between Peter and Ellen’s father, which reinforces the sense that Peter is now in full control of the affairs of the couple.

violent and assertive, it was also more directly political. *Gabriel* concerns itself not with a patriarchal control of women on the loose, but rather with a strong, authoritarian, control over the country, a control all the more disquieting that it is God-given: the arch-angel Gabriel takes possession of the President's body. The film had been a problem for its studio precisely because of the direct political aspect. The two films are very different in style and tone, but both could be said to participate in what Jeffrey Herf (1984) calls "reactionary modernism" in their use of religion and biblical archaeology. During these years, the field of biblical archaeology was very much preoccupied with the status of the wall of Jericho. Indeed, during the 20s and 30s, raging debates between "modernists" and "fundamentalists"—a result of advances in historical and scientific research which challenged biblical teaching—divided American Christians of various denominations. Fundamentalists (or conservatives) believed science and historical research to be in opposition to religion, believing the two to be incompatible. In order to safeguard morality, biblical teaching had, therefore, to be protected from damaging, nihilist, science. Modernists (or liberals), on the other hand, sought to demonstrate that science and religion could accommodate each other, or at least not interfere unduly into each other's field of expertise. Modernists believed, moreover, that moral teachings of the New Testament could survive scientific and historical attacks on the Old Testament (White, 1968). At a vernacular level, the conflict became one between literal and figurative interpretations of the Scriptures (p. 117). In this context, the wall became a source of conflict between science (archaeology) and religion. Conservative religious groups were firm in their belief that the events surrounding the fall of the wall of

Jericho were not simply allegorical, but had really happened as the bible described it, something which archaeologists could dispute.

In 1928, reputed archaeologist John Garstang began archaeological expeditions at Jericho, his interest being principally with the wall. His goal was precisely to prove the archaeological and historical veracity of the biblical story. This led to numerous errors of interpretation in which the Bible was taken as a factually accurate tool to explain his findings, an approach he bitterly regretted later on. His expedition in the early 1930s proved, however, that the fall of the wall had been caused by an earthquake, not the sound of the Israelites' trumpets. But this, he claimed, only proved the veracity of the biblical story, for the earthquake itself had been an act of God. Israelites did blow their trumpets, but mistakenly attributed the fall of the wall to their trumpeting as the miraculous earthquake occurred at the same time.

It is not unreasonable to hypothesize that the symbolism and associations linked with the wall of Jericho extend to include these scriptural interpretations as well, which might have been more readily a stock of people's knowledge outside of major centers, and that *It Happened One Night* ultimately claimed both a control of women on the loose by male figures along with providing a divine justification for this new order, thereby providing a stronger legitimacy for this new order. This seems to be a much more significant trope in understanding *It Happened One Night* than the "melting of social classes to form a classless society" that is said to mark both romantic comedy and this film in particular (Schatz, 1981).

Upward and downward mobility had been a constant theme for the woman's films of the early 1930s. Women frequently moved from high class to the slums and back up again or, conversely, raised themselves up from humble beginnings into high society. In this regard, *It Happened One Night* is no different. My argument is that rather than signalling a melting of social classes to form a classless society, *It Happened One Night* explicitly enacts the romance of a woman's downward mobility and, perhaps more significantly, a control of her (dangerous) mobility through domestic enclosure and her abdication of proprietary rights. This is justified, within the film's narrative, by the denial of her experiences and knowledge and her depiction as childish and in need of parental care and control, but also as a sexual being on her way to gold-dig New York City by showing off her legs.

As previously mentioned, we never see Peter and Ellen together as an "official" couple. A question lurks at film's end—when Capra limits the viewer's knowledge by situating the camera outside the cabin: What kind of dress is she wearing in there? Is she wearing one of the luxurious dressing gowns she would normally wear, or is she wearing a stenographer's outfit? It is difficult to reconcile her wearing her own clothes (beautiful and expensive gowns) and the diminutive behaviour she adopts with Peter. If she is with Peter in that cabin, she must be wearing separates bought off the racks. Once again, domestic bliss proceeds, *It Happened One Night* tells us, from Ellen's renouncement of money and propriety—two elements which, many feminists point out, enhance agency and have been an important tool for women's

emancipation within capitalist societies[178]—and Peter's proprietary right over the household.

As mentioned before, the film is as much about Peter as it is about Ellen: it is as much about transient and humiliated men on a quest to stick it to their boss as it is about women on the loose on their way to independence in urban cultures. The film in fact stages both characters' resolution as a solution to each other's "problem": she was in need of paternal control and protection just as much as he was in need of someone whose helplessness would elevate him to saviour and hero. The domestic cabin with barred window provides the location where both solutions are realized. Given Ellen's previous unpleasant trip to the showers and encounter with the outside world one can also imagine that she won't be coming out too often. *It Happened One Night* can therefore be analysed as participating in a particularly powerful way in the taming and containment of the Modern Woman chronotope. This, as Richard Maltby argues, is done through the simultaneous "containment of the heroine" and "recreation of patriarchy" (1998, p. 150). This, in turn, emerges as an answer to the turmoil and incertitude of America's liquid modernity as the country's Depression seemed to appear permanent, and radical solutions were being envisaged under the guise of a return to the pre-modern, stronger patriarchy, conservatism, and religion.

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[178] See Combs (2006), Deere and Ross (2006), and Dickenson (2006). It is important to mention that many feminists have also criticised this liberal strategy, showing that it only serves to reinforce other forms of exploitation and exclusion. For general discussions on propriety and ownership as a means of non-gendered emancipation, see (Dickenson, 1997). For a co-operative view of emancipation through ownership, see Sen (1999).

It Happened One Night's recreation of patriarchy is enacted more subtly through a chronotope which binds time, space and the character of the Modern Woman. This character finds herself at the center of numerous films of early 1930s Hollywood. Ellie, however, bears closest resemblance to *No More Orchids'* (Walter Lang, 1932) Anne Holt. This earlier Columbia vehicle, also starring Walter Connolly as the young woman's father, seems in many respects to be a trial-run for *It Happened One Night,* not only on account of it being an early screwball, but because of their shared chronotopicity. The two women, rich heiresses, begin their journey aboard a yacht. However, while Ellie was prisoner, Anne is holding everyone hostage as the yacht is not allowed to leave shore until she is ready. Like Ellie, Anne falls in love with a penniless working-class man, whom she pursues relentlessly. Their union is not dependent on her subjection, but on her father's suicide, whose death atones for the financial mismanagement of his bank.

As mentioned above, *It Happened One Night*'s reassertion of patriarchy is achieved by preventing Ellie from reaching New York City, and, we could say, from reaching modernity altogether. The Modern Woman, we have seen, was essentially an urban phenomenon; her creation and sustainment as a modern subject dependent on the urban setting. By preventing Ellie from reaching the city, Peter is in fact preserving pre-modern America—as does the film, by orchestrating a constant deferral of the city. No wonder the ending strikes the viewer as dark and dreary. One is tempted to extend Marx's pronouncement to the effect that some "may wish to get rid of modern arts, in order to get rid of modern problems" (1969) and see in this film an attempt at

getting rid of the Modern Woman to get rid of modernity. Fulfilling "the pastoral impulses toward containment and simplicity" (Ettin, 1984, pp. 12, 20), these films represent one such way of taming modernity and the Modern Woman. In the concluding chapter, I explore a second way Hollywood got "rid of modern problems"; the Modern Woman's casting off and her literal social exclusion.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

"You have nothing to worry about baby:
You have me, a big ocean liner, and in a
few days you'll have Paris".
—*Brief Moment* (David Burton, 1933)

"Lack of hominess" has often been seen as one of the main tropes of the 30s, 40s and 50s' noir universe. "Before the 1940s", Elizabeth Wheeler argues, "noir already had an unhomelike sense of place, but this unhominess took on a strong cultural charge during and after the war's displacement" (2001, p. 24). The noir hero's urban solitude is contrasted against the warm, domestic sphere of normalcy he is unable to enter. Noir erects an impermeable separation between, on the one hand, the domestic/feminine/safe realm and, on the other, the urban/masculine/dangerous one, thereby re-establishing (and eroticizing) the old Victorian separation of the spheres. The masculine experience of the modern city *cum* homelessness and domestic nostalgia, best exemplified in noir, has been analysed on numerous occasions.[179]

In early 1930s woman's film, the Modern Woman can be seen as searching for a home that is not synonymous with domestic enslavement. She is also involved in discussions around modern marriages, where marital arrangement will not compromise her freedom and individuality. Unable to be at home in America without compromising themselves, many chose to leave for what was believed to be a more

[179] See, for instance, Dean MacCannell (1993).

welcoming—or at least, forgiving—land. Women of financial means could afford to escape social opprobrium by sailing away, usually to Europe—the Europe of anonymity and Latin permissiveness—where they would find a more forgiving social setting. We have already seen *Our Dancing Daughter's* Diana set sail for Europe after her free demeanour caused her to lose her old-fashioned boyfriend and *Dancing Mother*'s Ethel leaving husband, daughter, and boyfriend behind as she headed for Europe to start a new, independent, life. Dr. Mary Stevens (*Mary Stevens, M.D.*, Lloyd Bacon, 1933) sails for Europe to deliver her baby after becoming pregnant out of wedlock, so that she may come back and pretend to have adopted him. Most often, women sail to avoid society gossip and to live a more authentic, modern, life.

Exploring upper class American accounts of European travels at the turn of the 19th century, Maureen E. Montgomery (2010) has detailed how the transatlantic crossing functioned as a double marker of distinction: first, as an indicator of culture and prestige for the elites within American society and, second, as an indicator of democratic republican identity once abroad. In early 30s woman's films, Europe functions, additionally, as an escape from social and familial obligations and surveillance. Europe may be an old society of traditions and hierarchy, but not for the American woman who freely roams its territory as a tourist.

In this context, sailing can prove freeing, liberating. After spending her life in provincial Zenith, raising her children and making a home for her industrialist husband, Fran Dodsworth (Ruth Chatterton) is finally reborn as she sails for Europe,

finally able to live the life she always wanted. She can cling to her fading youth by forgetting she has a husband and daughter at home, and a granddaughter on the way. We should, however, bear in mind the ideological connotation of exile in the American context: The United States conceived itself as a welcoming land and a land of refuge (*terre d'accueil*) for immigrants, not as a place people long to escape (Greenfeld, 1992, p. 470).

In other cases, however, women are cast away, shunned, chased. This is often the case in "fallen women" narratives and maternal melodramas, where a woman's sexual behaviour is condemned and punished with her literal and physical social exclusion. *Blonde Venus'* Helen Faraday/Jones (Marlene Dietrich) is forced to travel to more and more remote places following her infidelity, until Paris (always a forgiving territory for American women) allows her to redeem herself. *Madame X*, similarly, will be forced to leave good society, and then France altogether, following an alleged extra-marital affair. In *Bright Lights* (Michael Curtiz, 1930), Louanne (Dorothy Mackaill) must also flee after killing a man who attacks her. Since the assailant was met as she danced provocatively in a club, *Bright Lights* also links the woman's forced escape to the dangerous unleashing of her sexuality.

Cast Away

Exotic locations became very popular in Hollywood films of the 20s and early 30s, with comedies and parodies such as *Four Frightened People*, *Aloma of the South Seas*

(Maurice Tourneur, 1926), *Diplomaniacs* (William Seiter, 1933) and *Down to Their Last Yacht* (Paul Sloane, 1934), documentaries and exploitations such as *The Blonde Captive* (Clinton Childs, 1931), "ethnographic" films such as *Moana* (Robert J. Flaherty, 1926) and *Tabu* (F.W. Murnau and Robert J. Flaherty, 1931), musicals and dramas such as *White Shadows of the South Seas* (W.S. Van Dyke and Robert Flaherty, 1928), *Aloha* (Albert S. Rogell, 1931), *Trader Horn* (W. S. Van Dyke, 1931) and *The Savage Girl* (Harry Fraser, 1932), romances such as *Never the Twain Shall Meet* (Maurice Tourneur, 1925; W.S. Van Dyke, 1931) and *Bird of Paradise* (King Vidor, 1932), and, of course, action adventure flicks such as *Tarzan the Ape Man* (W.S. Van Dyke, 1932), *Tarzan and His Mate* (Cedric Gibbons and Jack Conway, 1934) and *Mutiny on the Bounty* (Frank Lloyd, 1935) and jungle horror such as *Ingagi* (William Campbell, 1930), *Kongo* (William Cowen, 1932) and *King Kong*.

Part of the appeal of islands and other exotic locations was undoubtedly the possibility of filling the screen with "tits and sand,"[180] a sure-way to sell movie tickets. The South Seas, however, had already proven popular in the high-circulation literature of Herman Melville's *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847), Jack London's *Adventure* (1911) and *South Sea Tales* (1911), and Nordhoff and Hall's *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1932).[181] Locations such as Pago Pago, finally, gained greater popular interest with the publication of Margaret Mead's controversial bestseller *Coming of Age in Samoa* in 1928.

[180] Hunt Stromberg, qtd. in Mark Vieira (2010, p. 84).
[181] For an extended discussion of South Seas literature, see Rennie (1995). Rennie shows that an idea of the South Seas was in circulation throughout Europe before Europeans began making voyages to the region.

Analyzing how race and gender function in these "exoticist" films,[182] a number of important claims have been made: (1) *Lure and danger of paradisiacal primitivism*. Many of the island films continued a tradition, already present in the 10s and 20s, of depicting an idyllic primitive world (*Aloha Oe*, 1915; *The Hidden Pearls*, 1918; *The Shark Master*, 1921). Typically, this paradise-like setting offers civilized men and women the bounty of nature and the lure of unbridled sensual energy. Soon though, the white adventurers learn of the dangers of "going native", of abandoning oneself too completely to the charms of wilderness. The films can be seen as morality tales for viewers, who might also be tempted at times to abandon civilization to follow their animal instincts; (2) *Feminized Other.* The island (as much the land itself as its inhabitant) is eroticized and feminized, so that the explorer's adventures, his "penetration" of "virgin" territories, allow him to regain a lost masculinity, virility, and prowess.[183] Accordingly, inter-racial romances generally feature a white man and a native woman—most often a Caucasian woman in drag and body paint; (3) *White woman in the jungle.* A less common but more risqué narrative, that of the white woman (whose whiteness is emphasized with fair skin and peroxide hair) in the jungle, surrounded by apes and natives, invokes at once "cross-species sexual union" and miscegenation (Berenstein, 1994); (4) *The Polynesian as a more acceptable racial Other.* As Brawley and Dixon note, contemporary reviewers were

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[182] I borrow this term from Colleen Kennedy-Karpat (2013), who uses it to describe adventure, jungle, exotic and colonial films.

[183] See Said (1978), Shohat (1991), Bhabha (1994), Henrietta Moore (1994) and Torgovnick (1997). For an excellent account of how heterosexist assumptions have influenced both Western fantasies of the South Seas and the critique of those fantasies, see Wallace (2003).

aware of the basic contradiction at the heart of the films (that it titillated with something which it would eventually warn against), but this titillation was perceived as more acceptable to an American audience when it featured Polynesians, for while Other, Polynesians were also “not black” (2012, pp. 22-23); (5) *White woman as weakest link.* As pointed out by Mary Ann Doane, white women are often made to represent civilization’s liminality, “the weak point in the system, the signifier of the always tenuous hold of civilization” (1991, p. 214). In jungle films, the white woman is linked to the civilized Western culture on the basis of her “race”. “As a woman”, however, “she is linked to darker forces and is always on the verge of falling backwards on a white-biased evolutionary scale” (Berenstein, 1994, p. 319); (6) *Colonialism*. The importance of a colonial discourse is a matter of some debate, but most share Hans Jürgen Wulff’s opinion, for whom “the basic design of the hero of adventure fiction must [...] be derived from the actual historical context of colonialism” (2012, p. 20n2). Although Americans rarely think of their country as a “colonial” power, the asymmetrical relationships Hollywood depicts in its interactions with South Sea island inhabitants serve to show that a colonial / imperial gaze becomes entangled with narratives of American exceptionalism (A. Kaplan, 2002). After annexing Hawaii in 1898, and gaining Spain’s Pacific islands at the end of the Spanish-American war the same year, the United States augmented its colonial portfolio with what would become the American Samoa, and the United States Virgin Islands, while other colonial powers, such as France and Britain continued their hold over Tahiti and New Caledonia, among others. A colonial discourse is therefore not entirely out of place when addressing films set in these

locations. As we look more closely at island dramas featuring a modern woman, it will be important to keep these claims in mind even though island dramas typically do not stage a significant encounter with a racialized Other.

While jungle films such as the tremendously popular *King Kong* and *Tarzan* situate men and women in a state of wild and threatening nature, the island dramas depict an American community of outcasts, usually transplanted in the nebulous and elusive "South Seas". Whether in the South Seas or the jungle, however, the island dramas essentially take place in a non place or, to borrow from Deleuze, in "any-place-whatevers". The average American would not have known what these exotic locations were supposed to look like, so their knowledge of these environments would be constituted first and foremost from representations circulating in popular culture. As a purely imaginary and ideological location, it is not so much "where" the "South Seas" are located that matters, but rather what the location means in the American cinematic imagination, and what roles it comes to play in the early 1930s woman's films.[184] To come back to our definition of the Modern Woman as a chronotope linking time, space and body, this means that the spatial and temporal meaning of the South Seas will be determined, at least partially, by the Modern Woman.

[184] This approach is proposed by David W. Kupferman (2011) in his recent analysis of "Micronesia" in recent Hollywood films.

It is helpful to think of the islands, or the South Seas, as "imagined geographies". According to Edward Said, "imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away" (1978, p. 55). The "imaginative" component infuses geography with both knowledge and power, as the explorer defines itself through the other, and *vice versa* (Gregory, 1995, p. 474). And yet, through these films, the viewers learn very little about the inhabitants or the environment of the islands,[185] as the films focus on the interactions of its American expatriates. As Justin Edwards points out, travel narratives work to heighten, rather than destabilise, national identity; "the characters who travel in American movies are often more self-consciously national than those who stay at home, in that travel calls attention to differences in race, gender and sexuality" (2001, p. 15). This is especially the case in the island dramas featuring the Modern Woman. Indeed, the small community of American expatriates form, in these films, a microcosm of America and acquire a certain allegorical quality.

Sadie and Gilda

One such series of films was inspired by Somerset Maugham's short story "Miss Thompson" (later retitled "Rain"): *Sadie Thompson* (Raoul Walsh, 1928), *Rain* (Lewis Milestone, 1932) and the much tamer and least successful *Miss Sadie Thompson*

[185] For Peter Mason (1996), the process of rendering something exotic is achieved precisely by emptying it of its specificity and presenting it as a blank slate onto which the observer can project its own iteration.

starring Rita Hayworth (Curtis Bernhardt, 1953). An all-black picture set in the Caribbean was also produced in 1946, *Dirty Gertie From Harlem U.S.A.* (Spencer Williams, starring Francine Everett), with significant adjustments to the storyline. Maugham's story, originally published in *Smart Set,* had gained popularity—and notoriety—through John Colton and Clemence Randolph's successful stage adaptation in 1923. The play was originally performed to a sold out audience at the Maxine Elliott Theatre throughout 1923 (Mantle, 1923), and then at the New Park Theatre 648 times between December 15, 1924 and March 1, 1926.[186] Although the play adaptation had gone through "the Formula"[187] and been declared unfit for the screen, Gloria Swanson's sheer determination, obstinacy, and negotiation skills[188] allowed her to produce the film on the pretence that it was based on Maugham's magazine story rather than the play,[189] and on the condition that the church and clergy be left out.

In both early film adaptations, the Sadie Thompson character allowed its screen interpreters—Gloria Swanson and Joan Crawford—to put out what has often been

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[186] (http://www.playbillvault.com/Show/Detail/4868/Rain).

[187] The "Formula" was a mechanism put in place by the MPPDA to vet source material, to ensure that "only books or plays which are the right type are used for screen presentation" (http://mppda.flinders.edu.au/history/mppda-history/will-hays-and-the-1920s/).

[188] The details of which can be found in the film's PCA file, Adolph Zukor's correspondence, Hunt Stromberg's scrapbook and Swanson's personal papers, all available at the Margaret Herrick Library.

[189] The film, however, is much closer to the play than to the short story, as it involves marines and a love story between Thompson and a Sergeant. The play and its three filmic adaptations, moreover, grant a much more central importance to Sadie, who only appears late in the original story.

described as the best performance of their respective careers.[190] Maugham's Sadie was a thin—almost static—character, who shocked her fellow boarders with her mere presence and visual appearance. The writer's constant return to Sadie's "fat legs" ("her fat calves in white cotton stockings bulged over the tops of long white boots"; "her fat legs bulging over the tops of them"; "her fat legs bulged in their cotton stockings") creates the impression that her mere bodily excess is a source of discomfort in her fellow lodgers. The film adaptations gave Sadie a compellingly strong—too strong for some[191]—street-wise persona, witty lines and quick comeback. Rather than bodily excess, Sadie's strong personality on screen— her assertiveness and obstinacy—is expressed through her costume and make up: she refuses to hide who she is and flaunts it defiantly (Figures 5.1 and 5.2). Moreover, onscreen Sadie moved from simply being an instrument serving narrative purpose (expose the missionary's hypocrisy and unwittingly cause Davidson's demise) to a full-fledged subject.

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[190] While Swanson was immediately and universally praised, Crawford's performance was originally the object of mixed reviews and has only recently been reassessed. Crawford has herself named *Rain* as her worst picture, a reaction that might be explained by the terrible work condition during filming (Lewis Milestone simply ignored her, and the rest of the cast—established stage actors—did nothing to make her comfortable) and the large amount of fan mail decrying her move from morally grounded shop girl to prostitute (Quirk & Schoell, 2002, pp. 62-64). *Screenland*, however, called it her "greatest performance" ("Watch your Step Ann Dvorak!").

[191] Discussing the failure of *Rain*, Alexander Walker hypothesizes that it was due to Crawford's "masculine" will: "She is a woman here with power over men—and part of that power is the disconcerting discovery a male makes that the power is the same gender as himself. It proved too unexpected a change, too raw a demonstration, for Crawford's fans to accept in 1932" (Walker, 1983). This argument is only partially convincing, however, as the audience for a film like *Rain* was most likely predominantly feminine.

Figure 5.1 Confrontation between Sadie (G. Swanson) and Davidson (L. Barrymore).

Figure 5.2 Sadie's entrance (J. Crawford).

On their way to various South Sea islands, the McPhails (a doctor and his wife), the Davidsons (a devout missionary couple) and Thompson find themselves waylaid in Pago Pago for ten days following an epidemic on their now-quarantined boat. The McPhails and the Davidsons became fast friends on the boat, the McPhails deferring to the Davidsons on the ground of their superior moral standards, moral authority and extended travelling experience in remote, unfamiliar locations. As part of their missionary work, the Davidsons are tirelessly colonizing remote islands, coercing local populations to adopt Western customs, values and morals. Dancing and alcohol consumption have been forbidden in an effort to replicate similar policies of the reform and temperance movements in the United States, whose population must "live in the day of the new commandment — 'Thou shalt not commit enjoyment'." Thompson, who was travelling in second class, is only introduced to the foursome at the inn they are forced to share. The issue of class is therefore of great importance in this narrative as the two "groups" are separated from the start on that basis, a spatial separation that continues once at the inn: the two couples boarding in the bedrooms

upstairs, Thompson lodging in a storage room downstairs. Similarly in *Safe in Hell*, Gilda travels to the island hidden in the cargo area. These films bring to consciousness the underbelly that had been kept from view in upper-class/classless fantasy of ocean voyages.

Sadie's familiarity with the marines—whom she entertains in her room with alcohol, dancing and loud music—irks the Davidsons' stern religious and reformist fibre and prompts Alfred (Lionel Barrymore / Walter Huston) to exert pressure on the governor to have her sent back to the United States, where he rightfully suspects she is wanted. It is also assumed by the Davidsons that Sadie is a prostitute, an assumption that is neither refuted nor confirmed. Subject to the political influence Davidson's networks are capable of exerting, the governor has no choice but to abide. In a desperate attempt to save herself and aided by Davidson's obsessive devotion to the cause, Sadie converts to religion. Both Davidson and Thompson are, from that point forward, possessed, ghostly shells: Davidson wholly driven by a curious obsession, Thompson mechanically praying with an empty look in her eyes. Following several nights of "praying" in Thompson's room, Davidson is found dead on the beach with a razor blade in his hand, his throat slit. Thompson's concurrent return to her old cheeky self and her comments to the effects that all men "are filthy, dirty pigs" let the viewers imagine what likely caused Davidson's suicide. The viewer's suspicions that Davidson's devotion was not altogether healthy, and that his

motivation was not entirely religious in nature, are thus confirmed.[192] Sadie reclaims her old identity by going back to her old off-the-rack dress, tacky jewelry and heavy makeup.

Following a very similar storyline, *Safe in Hell* (William Wellman, 1931) also has a prostitute, Gilda (Dorothy Mackaill) settle on a Caribbean island to escape the law. Like Sadie, Gilda's troublesome interactions once on the island are not with the local indigenous population, who turn out to be kindred spirits[193], but with fellow male expatriates who have nothing better to do than watch her every move and try to win her over (Figure 5.3). The "only white woman on the island", Gilda is an object of desire from the moment she arrives. Particularly insistent is Bruno, the "Hangman" in charge of maintaining law and order on the island. When he finds out she'll be leaving the island shortly, he frames her for murder. As the jury deliberates, he offers her a choice: death or six months under his personal supervision. She chooses death.

[192] Some have interpreted Thompson's sudden religious conversion as a cold, calculated ploy meant to drive Davidson to his death, but neither the written nor the screen material give much credence to this interpretation.

[193] Nina Mae McKinney and Clarence Muse, two African-American actors, are the only trustworthy and sympathetic characters in the film. Interestingly, and uncharacteristically for the period, these two characters are also acted in a non-stereotyped fashion, and they speak standard American and British English not in the clichéd filmic "Negro dialect". Frank Thompson (1983), Wellman's biographer, was unable to ascertain who was responsible for this creative decision.

Figure 5.3 Fellow lodgers waiting for Gilda to come out of her room.

It is highly unlikely that very many, if any, "fallen women" actually left to re-locate on island territories in an effort to escape American law enforcing agencies. The cinematic island of early 1930s woman's films is a constructed, imaginary space fulfilling specific narrative functions, a space that, furthermore, establishes definite power relations through a double opposition: between, on the one hand the "civilized" United States and the "uncivilized" islanders and, on the other, colonizing men and the American woman.

In *Sadie Thompson*, *Rain* and *Safe in Hell*, the Modern American woman finds herself aligned with the local islander population, most notably in her irreverence towards traditional forms of authority and disregard of Puritan morals and values as they both clash with white, male, American colonizers. While the woman meets her demise, as is the case in *Safe in Hell,* a discourse on the futility of colonizing the insular population takes on a double meaning in light of the parallel established between the indigenous and the Modern Woman. Concurrently, however, we see in

these films, perhaps more explicitly than in any other exoticist films, the island as a convenient locale for "expulsion of all that is effeminate" and, by extension, "the cultivation of all that is masculine" (Newsome qtd. in Hyam, 1990, p. 72). The Modern Woman may return to a place that—on account of it being a feminized place—is more welcoming and accepting, but she can rarely escape the colonizers altogether, since the island remains a masculinising space. This island, however, remains a space of gender "production", so we should avoid placating a stable gender binary whereas the West is masculine and the East feminine. As Teresa de Lauretis emphasizes, subjectivity is a process, "an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction" (1984, p. 159).

Solid modernity, as mentioned in the introduction, is likened by Bauman to a garden on account of its concern with population control and the ordering of time and space. "Modernity", Bauman claims, "was born under the stars of acceleration and land conquest, and these stars form the constellation which contains all the information about its character, conduct and fate" (2000, p. 112). Nazi Germany—the ultimate garden state—built walls and ghettos in an effort to control movement and territory. Its expansionist aspirations, however, were shared by all modern powers:

> To conquer space was the supreme goal—to grasp as much of it as one could hold, and to hold to it, marking it all over with the tangible tokens of possession and 'No trespassing' boards. Territory was among the most acute of modern obsessions, its acquisition among the most compulsive of modern urges—while guarding the boundaries figured high among the most ubiquitous, resilient and relentlessly growing modern

> addictions. Heavy modernity was the era of territorial conquest (p. 114).

Colonialism, a compulsive obsession with territorial conquest, was fuelled by an equally compulsive aversion to "empty space" and "blank spots",

> islands and archipelagos as yet unheard of and unadumbrated, land-masses waiting to be discovered and colonized, the untrodden and unclaimed interiors of continents, the uncounted 'hearts of darkness' clamouring for light (p. 114).

Although solid modernity relied on time being pliant and malleable for its rapid conquest of space, once a territory was seized, uniformity and inflexibility was required: "Space was truly 'possessed' when controlled—and control meant first and foremost the 'taming of time', neutralizing its inner dynamism: in short, the uniformity and coordination of time" (p. 115).

Colonizing efforts in the early 1930s island dramas featuring the Modern Woman are, however, anything but successful. Davidson's efforts at imposing linear time (by dividing the day into measurable units devoted to specific activities) over the flow of nature appear futile, as the constant beating of the rain proves a powerful reminder of the weight of nature following its own course undisturbed. As colonizing efforts are visibly futile, these films can be read as expressing doubts with regards to the production of patriarchy and woman's subordination to masculinity. Beyond masculinity, however, the colonizing efforts are associated with other adjacent terms of the Old World: repressive Christianity, conservatism and stern morality and Victorian sexuality (in the case of *Rain/Sadie Thompson*), political corruption and laissez-faire parasitic capitalism (in the case of both *Rain* and *Safe in Hell)* and

abusive male sexual domination (more explicitly so in *Safe in Hell*, but one could read *Rain/Sadie Thompson* in this light as well).

Gilda may die by the end of *Safe in Hell*, but her death is ultimately also a victory: she chooses to die rather than be subjugated to the prison warden, who wants to make her his plaything. Having been a prostitute, Gilda's choice isn't meant to preserve her virginal purity—it isn't grounded in social mores—but her agency: she decides who she has sex with.

The island is, in many ways, an imagined space fit for the Modern Woman on account of its looser morals, absence of religion and traditional, patriarchal, authority figures. In both *Red Dust* (Victor Fleming, 1932) and *Picture Brides* (Phil Rosen, 1934), two types of women are contrasted as they reach the island: an upper-class and a hard-boiled, modern woman. In both cases, the modern woman makes a life on the island while the upper-class woman leaves for the United States, unable to adapt to the harsh island life. The Modern Woman's "victory" is a mixed one: in the island she finds a home—a land and a man—where she is accepted for who she is and doesn't have to hide. Her "loose" morals do not constitute a problem on the "uncivilized" island nor for the hard-boiled man who has seen far worse. But all this is only possible through her physical exclusion on a remote island and away from the space of American modernity.

Crossing

As we briefly saw in the previous chapter with *Reaching for the Moon*, the ocean liner constitutes a powerfully compelling environment that is intimately tied to the Modern Woman chronotope[194]. The liner becomes a powerful but paradoxical symbol in early 1930s: its modern architecture, wealth and sophistication make it an alluring, contained, space. This excessive wealth and comfort is, however, only one side of the liner's Janus face. In *Dance, Fools, Dance, Transatlantic* and *Reaching for the Moon,* wealthy passengers learn about the Crash while at sea partying. In the early horror *Terror Aboard* (Paul Sloane, 1933), Maximilian Kreig sets to kill every passenger to avoid having to go back to the United States and face the consequences of the Crash. In 1930s woman's films, furthermore, the ocean liner functions as a paradoxical space: both as an enticing, liberating environment for the Modern Woman, and as a vehicle to ship her away.

The transatlantic crossing may be a way of reaching other continents but it comes to occupy a significant place in woman's films of the early 1930s. The crossing exemplifies perhaps more than any other mode of transportation the idea according to which the journey is more important than the destination.[195] Populated mostly by Americans, the cinematic ocean liner suspends, in different ways, social conventions,

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[194] The ocean liner's attraction for women finds confirmation in the October 13, 1931 *Variety* review of *Monkey Business* (Norman McLeod, 1931). The reviewer writes that the film's "only concessions to feminine audiences are a few striking costumes and luxurious glimpses of an ocean liner (p. 14).
[195] Tellingly, Cunard's slogan is "Getting there is half the fun". In these films, however, getting there is often all the fun there is.

much like the modern design of the fashion-show floor rooms did. As the saying goes, "everyone is in the same boat": Equality reigns aboard, everyone seeming to belong to the same class regardless of actual fortune. Indeed, the second class is conspicuously absent. What prevails is a shared sense of taste and sophistication, visually represented through manners and clothes. That social classes do not exist on ocean liners does not mean that it is a working-class environment.[196] It is in fact an effortless, sophisticated milieu. The ocean liner therefore creates a double fantasy of classlessness, but also of a certain naturalness to this class-free sophistication. This becomes particularly important for women, not only because it guarantees the pedigree of their male encounters, but perhaps more importantly because their own credentials will not be questioned. The ocean liner thereby becomes an ideal space of social masquerade.

More than a modern mode of transportation, the ocean liner is a meeting place: people travel incognito and meet kindred spirits. For women in particular, the journey aboard the ocean liner allows the liberating experience of shedding the burden of their social identity; familial, conjugal and social ties. *One Way Passage* (Tay Garnett, 1932) depicts the ill-fated love of two Americans: Dan (William Powell), a con artist headed for prison—where he is set to hang—and the terminally

[196] In the off-screen cruising industry, the turn towards the working-class clientele and a democratisation of the ocean liner environment will occur in the 1960s (Vogel & Oschmann, 2013).

ill Joan (Kay Francis).[197] Their momentary bliss rests on the respective secret that their days are numbered, and that their romance cannot continue on dry land. Although they are both set to die once in the United States, they are determined to enjoy life to the fullest in the meantime. Joan will consequently happily continue dancing, smoking and drinking despite her doctor's admonishment that by doing so, she is cutting her "last months into weeks, and weeks into days". Two more imposters are also travelling on the liner. Skippy (Frank McHugh) and Betty (Aline MacMahon). Both add a comedic note to a movie's sombre premise as they try their best to free Dan from the police officer shepherding him to San Quentin.

No miracle intervenes to save the two, and the movie ends on a promise to meet again at Agua Caliente on New Year's Eve, a promise neither can keep. Despite its unusually sombre ending, the film was well-received as a poignant romance. It was in fact re-made, practically unchanged, only a few years later (*'Til We Meet Again*, Edmund Goulding, 1940). What makes up for the film's unhappy ending is a parallel romance between con artist Betty and Steve (Warren Hymer), the police officer escorting Dan. Although rarely top-billed, both MacMahon and Hymer were very popular at this point of their careers, so the importance of this subplot romance should not be underestimated.[198] This parallel romance is similarly premised on Betty's false identity—she conceals her lengthy criminal record by pretending to be a

[197] The nature of Joan's illness is never revealed, but the doctor's incessant requests seem to indicate that Joan suffers from a bad case of too much partying ("No more parties. No more cigarettes. No more dancing. And no more cocktails").
[198] Mordaunt Hall describes MacMahon's performance as "excellent" in this picture (*One Way Passage* film review, *New York Times*, October 14, 1932).

Russian countess—and their containment on the liner; Steve is unable to verify her identity. Betty and Steve are perfectly matched, but only as long as Steve is unaware of Betty's past and occupation. The containment and anonymity of the liner will in fact allow Betty to start a new life on a clean slate, as they both fall in love and retire together to a chicken ranch.

By completely hiding mainland United States from view,[199] and by associating the liner's docking in San Francisco with death, the movie subtly hints at the dire conditions of the Depression. While four of the five main characters manage to escape it (two by dying, the other two by retiring to a farm), the movie closes on Skippy, drinking alone at a bar, with a blank look on his face (Figure 5.4). The long tracking shot, which only reveals him in passing after showing a crowd loudly ringing in the New Year, is all the more disturbing to the viewer that his character is that of a happy clown throughout the film. This image of McHugh not only clashes with his character in *One Way Passage*, but more forcefully with the happy-go-lucky character the typecast actor was associated with. The actor was indeed unmistakably brought in to add comedic interludes. As the camera catches him head-on before pursuing its course, McHugh looks straight into it (Figure 5.5), in a direct address that strikes on account of its unusual character—classical Hollywood excluding the direct look. As soon as this happens, however, the camera speeds up to continue its

[199] The liner makes a stop in Hawaii on its way to San Francisco.

course and resume narrative development by landing on two bartenders commenting on the raucous party, “I’ll sure be glad when this thing’s over.”[200]

Figure 5.4 Skippy, barely recognizable.

Figure 5.5 Looking straight into the camera.

The scenario of a doomed ocean liner romance premised on anonymity is also at the center of *Forbidden* (Frank Capra, 1932) and *Chained* (Clarence Brown, 1934). In *Chained*, Diane (Joan Crawford) and Mike (Clark Gable) meet aboard an ocean liner and quickly fall in love. The two emote undeniable chemistry, but their love makes all the more sense that their vitality sets them sharply apart from the bulk of the vacationers. They engage in numerous activities requiring speed and vigour. Mike’s energy not only matches Diane’s, but is a symbol of his youth, a youth that contrasts with the married man Diane has been involved with for years, Richard (Otto Kruger).

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[200] The shooting script describes in great details how this scene should be filmed: “…we CUT TO a fast TRACKING SHOT that runs parallel to a nightclub (…). The place is packed with well-dressed revellers (…). We SWOOP PAST them all to the far end of the club which is nearly deserted. Two bartenders stand together, polishing glasses at a bar. At one end of the bar, a lone figure sits on a stool. We don’t recognize him at first. But then we abruptly leave our parallel track and RAPIDLY GLIDE IN and PAST the man for a brief, seconds-long glimpse: it is Skippy as we have not seen him before –well-groomed in a black tux, nursing a drink but looking very sober, lost in thought. In a moment, he is gone and we catch a short view of the partying mob behind him.”

The generational gap doubles a class distinction: Mike is a self-made-man and a hard, manual-labour worker, a modern frontiersman living in a modest but hearty ranch in Argentina. Richard, in contradistinction, is an old-fashioned, salt-and-pepper businessman married to a society lady—two frequent archetypes of the period. Diane's character is associated with speed, movement, vitality and the traversing of space throughout the film: she is first seen driving a racing boat, then swimming, speed-walking, riding a horse and running. Diane and Mike also play table tennis and shoot clay pigeons.

Back with Richard in New York, however, she appears lifeless and lethargic, devoting her time to attending stuffy, highbrow cultural events. She is turning into a socialite, a copy of Richard's ex-wife. The choice Diane is presented with, to follow a young, energetic, modern frontiersman to run a ranch or stay behind with a dull, upper class middle-aged man who leads a stale, impotent life, is ideologically loaded. Diane might be staying with Richard out of a sense of loyalty and responsibility, but, given their lavish lifestyle, one also understands that she is attracted to a life of luxury that Mike cannot provide. Try as she may, however, Diane remains unhappy, and Richard eventually understands why. The revelation occurs as the three find themselves in a secluded cabin; Mike having chased the couple in an attempt to confront Richard. Once they meet, Mike cannot find the courage to destroy the old man's life and he simply leaves quietly. Richard, however, immediately understands that the two are in love. As Diane asks for forgiveness, Richard tells her he doesn't blame her: "I've had more happiness with you in this last year than most men have in their whole life"

he tells her. "I see that I had no right to that happiness: I stole it. But it isn't too late to make amends". The scene of their sad embrace cuts to Diane and Mike riding horses at the ranch. Diane's ultimate departure for Argentina—with Richard's blessing (they keep in touch and visit)—while unlikely, has the advantage of amicably suspending the class war on display; the old world accepting to make way for the vitality of modern youth.

In both cases and in many others, the ocean liner comes to represent the instability of liquid times. Its guests *willingly* accept to let go of their firm social attachments, and so the place comes to represent the fantasy of an effortless, smooth sailing through liquid modernity. The travellers might not know exactly where they are and which way is north, but they know there is a captain steering the ship, taking them home. A sense of direction might not be clearly visible, but travellers can rest easy knowing they will arrive at destination safe and sound. The destination—"Europe"—is often so vague that it does not even seem to matter. It is in fact, *an idea* of Europe more than Europe itself. Indeed, when they do reach a European destination, it seems to have very little to do with actual countries in Europe. Europe is, essentially, a fantasized land of modern sophistication.

In "Spaces of Containment and Revenue Capture", Adam Weaver (2010) analyses how modern cruise ships operate as spaces of containment. Weaver's argument is that this containment is desired by cruise ship operators, who generate revenues by transforming the tourist into a captive consumer, but also by the tourist, who not

only experiences this containment as an "environmental bubble" but also views it as a sign of prestige and security. Developed by E. Cohen (1972), the term "environmental bubble" seeks to explain how tourists adjust to strangeness and familiarity during their travels. By surrounding themselves with familiar elements (by socializing only with tourists from their own country who speak the same language and eating familiar foods, for example) travellers create around themselves an environmental bubble and avoid transcultural contact while travelling. Like the modern cruise ship, the ocean liner of 1930s Hollywood constitutes an environmental bubble which, in effect, creates a space of containment. However, rather than containing the Modern Woman to prevent her from "spreading"—as we saw in the previous chapter—the ocean liner becomes a space *protected from* the outside world.

The ocean liner, however, can never become a home: Its transitoriness is constitutive. Passengers must eventually reach dry land and resume their lives. While it allows one to sail through liquid modernity's uncertainty with a relative degree of assurance and abandon, it can never become the ground for solid anchoring. The ocean liner's transitoriness, its suspension in time and space, was depicted in early 1930s Hollywood woman's films. In *One Way Passage,* for instance, the couple shares what seems to be their only intimate moment (and possible lovemaking) while docked in Hawaii. This is also the case in Leo McCarey's *Love Affair* (1939). Aboard a transatlantic liner, Terry (Irene Dunne) and Michel (Charles Boyer), who are both engaged to be married to financial security, meet and fall in

love. While romance and flirting occurs onboard, their relationship never solidifies while at sea. During their journey, the ocean liner docks at Madeira, where the two visit a chapel and Michel's grandmother, who expresses her wishes for the two to be married. It is in these various moments on dry land, as well as after arriving at their final destination, that the pair's relationship solidifies.

The ocean liner conveys, in a modern form, the imaginary of the desert[201]: it bears close resemblance to the Old Testament's crossing of the desert, whereby Jewish slaves became free people as they underwent their journey from Egypt—the house of bondage—to Canaan—the land of freedom. Michael Walzer (1985) has argued that the Exodus can be considered the first revolutionary text of Western societies, since it stages how individuals and people can leave a state of oppression, liberate themselves, draw up the conditions of their new communal existence, and found a new society as a free people. As Walzer points out, however, it is not necessarily the text itself which is revolutionary, but the later interpretations, which re-focused the narrative away from divine intervention and around human agency. As a "metaphor for a transforming politics", the narrative's focus shifts from destination to journey (Benbaji & Sussmann, 2013, p. 154). The revolutionary nature of the text comes, indeed, from the idea of a new beginning, of the re-founding of a society upon a tabula rasa, but also from the narrative's linear rather than cyclical progression (Walzer, 1985). The Exodus' revolutionary narrative occupied a significant place in

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[201] Although her essay pertains to texts ranging from 1856 to 1992, Rachel Bouvet's *Pages de sable* examines closely important aspects of the imaginary of the desert as deployed in francophone literary as well as travel writing.

the popular imaginary surrounding the founding of the United States and subsequent liberation struggles.[202]

Cast Off

In *Forbidden,* a small-town librarian, fed up with her uneventful life, spends her savings on a cruise, aboard which she will literally re-invent herself as a Modern Woman (Figures 5.6 and 5.7). When asked by the bank clerk where she intends to go, she simply answers "someplace where they don't know me".[203] The movie, which starts off strong and closer to the Capra and Swerling's signature Cinderella narrative,[204] becomes a formulaic weepy as it closes in on the most pathetic aspects of Fanny Hurst's *Back Street.*[205] Travelling incognito, Lulu (Barbara Stanwyck) adopts

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[202] The original seal designed by the first committee to design a Great Seal (which consisted of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams) featured a scene from the Exodus. The United States, commonly known alternatively as the "New-English Jerusalem", "American Jerusalem", "God's American Israel", and "American Canaan", was perceived by many early Americans as following the Providential design (Greenfeld, 1992, pp. 407-409).

[203] She ends up sailing to Havana, like in Capra's previous film, *Ladies of Leisure,* but on a French ship. Since she remains aboard the ship for the duration of the trip (except for a bizarre horse-riding scene), the cultural coloration is decidedly European.

[204] The phrase "Cinderella Man" is used in both *Platinum Blonde* (1931) and *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), but the narrative formula is also operative in *Lady for a Day* (1933) and its 1961 remake *Pocketful of Miracles.* Joseph McBride points out that Capra was considering titling *Mr Deeds…* "Cinderella Man" before a contest held by the Columbia Studios publicity department decided otherwise.

[205] From which it is admittedly inspired: "I fancied I could write, anyway. So, with a very large assist from Fannie Hurst's *Back Street*, I wrote an "original" story, *Forbidden.* In spite of scriptwriter Jo Swerling's valiant efforts to write in some "bones," *Forbidden* ended up as two hours of soggy, 99.44% pure soap opera" (Capra, 1971, p. 134). Hurst's pathos, however, contains thinly veiled acerbic social critiques which are sorely missing in Capra's film.

an entirely different identity: she loses her glasses, perms her hair, and sports elegant, daring, and expensive clothes. The change in wardrobe and setting seems to suffice to provide Lulu with a much preferable vantage point in life, one from which she hopes to finally meet love. Love, however, will prove to be a double-edged sword. Indeed, *Forbidden* follows a long line of early 1930s woman's films in equating romantic love and pregnancy with a woman's ultimate undoing. Lulu meets love in the shape of Bob Grover (Adolphe Menjou), a married man with political ambitions. While they share their dreams and desires, they agree on hiding their true identity, referring to one another as "66" and "99"—their respective room number.

As in most other ocean liner narratives, a gloomy atmosphere of imminent doom, however, hovers over these chance meetings, for the ocean liner is sure to arrive ashore, and life will inevitably regain its rights. Lulu seems to suspect Bob's marital status, as she is the one who insists on their keeping the details of their "real life" secret.[206] Lulu will eventually become pregnant, and thus will commence her life in the "back street" of Bob and their daughter's successful life.[207] Contrary to *Back Street*, however, Lulu remains employed throughout the film: after leaving the library, she moves to the city (where Bob also lives), and takes a job in the archive department of a newspaper (Figure 5.8). There, she meets Al—one of Capra's many reporters—who knows nothing of her relationship with Bob and is hopelessly in love

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[206] Taking no chances, however, Bob gives her a fake name. Once pregnant, she will try to look him up, presumably to check on his situation, but the fake name will lead her nowhere.
[207] In typical maternal melodrama fashion, Lulu leaves her daughter with Bob and his wife to save his career, marriage and reputation life.

with her. When he sees her one day with her daughter and Bob, she pretends to be a governess to keep her situation a secret. A complicated plot follows this contrived development. Lulu gives her daughter up to Bob and his wife to save his political ambitions and her daughter's reputation. Free from child, she returns to the paper to become a successful love-advice columnist. Despite an initial break up with Bob, Lulu resumes their secret relationship following his insistent pleading. After what appears to be about fifteen years, Bob will announce his intention to make their relationship public. To prevent him from doing so, Lulu accepts Al's longstanding marriage proposal. Al eventually uncovers the truth behind his unhappy marriage, but Lulu shoots him dead in tawdry melodramatic fashion to prevent him from going public. Found guilty, she spends a year behind bars before being pardoned by Bob, who dies quickly afterwards.

Figure 5.6 Lulu the romantic librarian…

Figure 5.7 Morphs into a sophisticated modern woman once aboard the ship.

Figure 5.8 Lulu and Holland, at the paper.

Raymond Carney, who is very sympathetic to Capra, sees this ending as a strong romantic moment. Capra, he believes, "seems to suggest, especially in the case of Lulu […] that to have gotten nothing at all may actually be to have gained everything" (1986, p. 182). For Carney, *Forbidden* is fundamentally a movie about hunger, about the desire inhabiting its characters, and their pursuit to satisfy this desire.[208] This interpretation is grounded in a key scene aboard the ship, where Bob describes what he calls his "worm"; the dream or ambition that "gnaw and gnaw inside of you and keep you on the go". Carney's lesson regarding the value of self-abnegation would, however, only seem to apply to Lulu, as Bob obtains everything he wants without having to compromise anything: a successful political career, a child that his wife could not provide him, a good home and a discreet mistress who also doubles as devoted political counsel.

[208] In this respect, *Forbidden,* with its clashing of individual "hungers", could be the obverse of *It Happened One Night'*s romance, voiced by Peter: "Boy, if I could ever find a girl who's hungry for those things--".

Despite this, Capra seems to have mixed feelings, at best, regarding these "worms". Perhaps in this film more than in any other (with perhaps the exception of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*), he shows both the appeal and exhilaration of following one's desire to the very end, to the detriment of everything else, even one's own well-being. But Capra also shows the ultimate silliness, even meaninglessness, of such stubborn pursuits: Lulu wastes her life on a selfish man, sacrificing her child and marrying a man she does not love; and Al is portrayed as an increasingly spiteful man who will stop at nothing to quash Grover. The "hunger" propelling each character can hardly be seen as a desirable trait. In fact, Lulu likens it to a "poison". It is also no small detail that Capra seems to make a point of not exploring each character's personal worm. Although the *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *Meet John Doe* filmmaker excels at portraying political convictions in a compelling and enthralling fashion, *Forbidden* provides no insight into Grover's political positions. Similarly, we never find out why Al is so determined to kill Grover's political career, something he set out to do before he even knew about Lulu's relationship with him. Set against these parallel worms, Lulu's devotion to Grover becomes a symptom of the human condition and acquires universality.

Charles Maland therefore misses Capra's (slightly depressing) point when he claims that "one feels more anger and pity toward a woman who seems never to have confronted her own human needs and desires, living (…) in a pure yet self-destructive romanticism" (1980, p. 58). It is precisely by sticking to Grover that Lulu remained true to her human desires. She denies this pursuit in the last fifteen

minutes of the film, when she decides to marry Al. Both she and Al appear supremely unhappy as they share a meal in a stuffy, overdressed apartment that is completely out of character for both of them. They clearly are trying to live up to certain expectations of what a successful career would look like to a *parvenu* like Al. They are both living what appears to be an inauthentic life, one that conforms to conventions but that is untrue to their desires. Up to this point, however, the viewer had no indication that Lulu might be unhappy in her life as Grover's mistress. It is not Lulu who suffers throughout the film but, rather, conventions and propriety.

According to Raymond Carney,

> Lulu Smith lives her life alone, slinking from one shabby apartment to another, as the "other woman", in the shadow of Robert and his wife and her own daughter. The Jamesian principle of a central character's 'having gained nothing from the entire affair' could never be more aptly illustrated. Over the twenty—or—thirty-year period of the story, from her blooming youth to her haggard old age, Lulu is Bob's devoted mistress, confidante, counsellor, and closest friend. Living in cheap apartments, able to see Robert only furtively and fugitively at night, Lulu lovingly follows his rise in politics from district attorney to governor of the state but is never able to stand in the limelight with him and never able to meet him in public for fear of wrecking his career. It is a sordid, sneaking life for her, and one of hypocrisy, guilt, and self-hatred for Bob…" (1986, p. 182).

Carney is projecting quite a bit here. The viewer, in fact, does not see much of what Lulu and Bob's life together is really like, since an ellipsis of approximately 18 years occurs between the moment when she gives up her daughter, who looks to be about two years old, and when she decides to marry Al as her daughter is about to get married (she looks to be about twenty). Lulu is also seen changing apartments once, when she is trying to escape Bob to hide her pregnancy, and these two apartments

are actually surprisingly roomy and nicely furnished for a single working woman. Lulu works daily at the newspaper, wears elegant clothes and is seen outside the apartment (and indeed, with Bob in a park). It would be a mistake to undermine how different Lulu's life is from that of other "fallen women", a category she does not squarely fit in.

Contrary to what Raymond Carney claims, Lulu is by any account a successful career woman, living an independent and seemingly satisfying life. Her attempt at living life according to her understanding of happiness, by following her own desires, as articulated aboard the ocean liner, proves a difficult feat once on dry land, as both Bob and Al are determined to uphold conventions: Bob by coming clean with his affair, and Al by exposing it. As Lulu stands by Bob's deathbed, she appears to have had no regrets: "your honors have been my honors, your success, my success". Lulu has lived, vicariously, the successful life of Bob and her daughter—details of which she meticulously keeps in a scrapbook— much like a legal wife and mother. Contrary to a legitimate wife and mother, however, Lulu has also lived an independent life through a successful and rewarding job at the paper. As Jeanine Basinger points out, the

> movie plot in which a woman has to give up her child provided a two-way street of response for viewers who were mothers, perhaps feeling burdened with the difficulties of raising their own children. A woman on film who sacrifices a child suffers and is ultimately punished, reassuring the women watching. At the same time, the woman on film who gives up a child suddenly has freedom. Often, she finds a better life of riches, success, adventure, and, in the end, even an opportunity for love with another man or the same man who caused her problem in the first place. The viewer could watch a woman get free of the

burden of mothering without having to feel guilty about it (1993, p. 395).

Although Basinger does not cite the film, *Sarah And Son* (Dorothy Arzner, 1930) probably presents the clearest example of this dynamic. After her husband steals her child away to sell him into adoption for money, Sarah Storm (Ruth Chatterton) works her way up from abject poverty as a cabaret entertainer to world-renowned opera singer. An independent woman after the loss of her son, she is able to travel to Europe to train and gain fame and fortune, something which would have been impossible had she had to care for her infant son.

The impression of a "wasted life" in which *Forbidden* engulfs the viewer in the last few minutes is nevertheless undeniable. The movie indeed ends on a depressingly heavy note which clashes with the previous breezy comic interludes, interludes which are undoubtedly the film's strongest elements.[209] Following Bob's death, Lulu is shown walking down the street, sad, alone, and dressed in black (Figure 5.9). This finish is something of an anomaly for Capra, but is entirely in line with maternal melodramas of the period.

The impression of a life wasted is created by a manipulation of plot duration, which then creates a distinct experience of time in the viewer through the visual representation of the woman's body. The overall narrative structure is typically

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[209] The film contains numerous scenes of comical yet romantic play acting between Lulu and Bob, and between Lulu and Al. Among these, a pantomime scene between Lulu and Bob, which precedes Bob's marital status revelation, is one of the most poignant scenes in all of Capra's filmography.

threefold: a first act devotes much screen time to the young woman's coming of age, with an emphasis on a bright, hopeful future on account of her great beauty and intelligence; a second begins with the young woman's tragic mistake—a mistake that always involves her sexuality in some way (falling in love and/or having sex, trusting the wrong man, becoming pregnant)—and ensuing debacles. Finally, the third act typically shows a visibly aged woman many years later, her seemingly bright future never having materialised (Figures 5.9-5.12). An ellipsis of several years is key in creating the impression that her life has been empty, but also in producing shock as the viewers see what used to be a beautiful woman now visibly damaged by years of hardship. Indeed, maternal melodramas of the period almost never fail to conclude on a ruined, desolate woman on the brink of death.[210] The many women who gained fame for their portrayal of fallen women in maternal melodramas were usually commanded for their ability to play aged characters convincingly, and, indeed, the third act of these films would usually be considered the strongest, heaviest, and most poignant part of the film. These scenes have not aged particularly well and now appear overly sentimental. But even though the genre already appeared old-fashion and out-dated as the films were released,[211] in the early 1930s these scenes rarely failed to garner the critic's praises. In the case of *Madame X*, most critics who

[210] This is so even before the Code demanded moral compensation for a woman's sin by her demise and death.

[211] Katharine Zimmermann calls the movie a "semi-fossilized old melodrama", while Richard Watts Jr. says the film is "frankly old-fashioned in its manner" and "the most shameless of the sentimental melodramas" (Hunt Stromberg Scrapbook 6, Margaret Herrick Library). For more on this, see Lea Jacobs (2011)

expressed reserve with the film's heavy melodrama nevertheless commanded the film's courtroom scene.[212]

Clearly, these scenes of suddenly aged women made a strong impression on viewers and accounted for much of the powerful dramatic effect of the films. This strong impression relies, in large part, on the contrast that is created by the close proximity of the woman at two different stages in her life: one young and full of promise, the other nearing death, none of her promises fulfilled. *Back Street* (John M. Stahl, 1932) foregrounds this by ending on a dream sequence whereby Ray (Irene Dunne) replays a scene of her youth—this time "righting" the wrong of the crucial mistake that ruined her life—minutes before dying, old and alone (Figure 5.10).

This enacts the structure of sympathy in film (Chandler, 2013), whereas both viewer and central female character are aligned to mourn together a lost object. In the present case, the lost object is the Modern Woman which, I have argued throughout this dissertation, is at the center of the 30s woman's film. The loss is made all the more tangible in that it is inscribed on her body. It is therefore an important characteristic—shared by many maternal melodramas, but other woman's melodramas as well—that a structure of sympathy is established in a triangular

[212] For instance, Edwin Schallert writes "But why attempt to recite again the story of 'Madame X'? There is no other so capable of touching the heart. As a film with dialogue, 'Madame X' reveals no sensational innovations. It is perhaps even a bit primitive as an expression of the new craft. But its meaning is deep, because it is decisively and simply told […]. One scene is a consciously tragic as any that has perhaps ever been seen on the screen. It is, of course, the famed courtroom episode" (Hunt Stromberg Scrapbook 6, Margaret Herrick Library). The courtroom scene was consistently singled out as the film's most effective one.

formation between the aging female character and the viewer over the lost object of the Modern Woman.

Figure 5.9 Lulu leaving Bob's deathbed.

Figure 5.10 Ray reminiscing before dying.

Figure 5.11 Madame X: "This woman is dead!"

Figure 5.12 Jacqueline Fleuriot (G. George) standing trial for murder.

Forbidden does not deviate from this tradition in terms of its manipulation of time through plot and screen duration. Seeing an excessively aged Barbara Stanwyck,[213] minutes only after seeing her in her prime is a somewhat traumatic experience. And

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[213] Women aged incredibly fast in Hollywood; a 35 year-old woman would often look to be about to expire. Although it is difficult to date the various narrative events in the film (the fashions do not change and there are no attempts at differentiating what happens at the beginning of the film from what happens at the end so the story seems to be unfolding in an ever-present 1931), one can surmise that no more than 30 years can separate the moment when we first see Lulu in her hometown library, and when we last see her leaving Bob's death bed. This would make the "old" Lulu about 55 years old, but she looks to be at least in her late 60s.

although Lulu gives no indication of having been disappointed by the life she chose as a working woman and mistress to a successful politician, the extreme ellipsis of 18 years creates a sense in the viewer that nothing worthy of note has occurred during all this time. As Lulu walks down the crowded street, alone, visibly sad and dressed in a sombre outfit, one cannot escape the impression that Lulu regrets having given up her daughter and wasted her life on Bob.

In the Introduction, I evoked Robin Wood's comprehension of film genres as acquiring consistency through their common struggle with ideological tensions. In early 1930s woman's films, this tension finds embodiment in the chronotope of the Modern Woman. Her link with American modernity makes her both a compelling source of fascination and hope, and an abject source of anxiety calling for her containment and expulsion. Visually and narratively enmeshed with modernity, the Modern Woman—and, by extension, modernity—were made attractive by converging with national and patriotic traits, which, in turn, served to contain them both.

Modernity and the Modern Woman were seen as a way through the difficult years of the Depression through a re-definition of American identity, distinct from Old World Puritanism. The Modern Woman is at the center of various narratives affirming or re-affirming values deemed "American": a strong work ethic and democratic equality and solidarity. The values with which she was associated, however, also ran much

deeper and at times spilled over what the national imaginary could contain. Discussions pertaining to marital arrangements capable of accommodating gender equality, for instance, were common in many films of the era. With *Baby Face* and *Working Girls*, notably, we saw the extent to which accepted values could be subverted.

As the Depression deepened, the Modern Woman and the uncertainties of modernity became associated with the abject and were contained and expelled, a gesture that is a source of both relief and mournful sadness. More often than not, the fallen woman's narrative orchestrates a sexualized woman's disappearance and social effacement as a condition to her offspring's success. This is the case in *Stella Dallas* but also in *The Sin of Madelon Claudet* (Edgar Selwyn, 1931), where a school official tells Madelon (Helen Hayes) that the only thing preventing her young son from achieving professional success is her questionable past. She vanishes from his life forever, secretly providing for his education with the little money she makes from prostitution. Similarly, brothel owner and prostitution ring leader "Frisco Jenny" (Ruth Chatterton, of the 1933 movie by the same name) chooses to be sentenced to death rather than revealing that she is the district attorney's mother, a fact that would presumably ruin his promising career. These movies paradoxically stage the sexualized woman's effacement at the same time as they affirm her as the origin of upper class, respected, society men and women.

Perhaps more than any other films, *Born to Be Bad* (Lowell Sherman, 1934) explicitly stages a Modern Woman's sacrifice and erasure in favour of an upper middle class society. Letty (Loretta Young), a young, single mother working as a call girl is shown to be an unfit mother, teaching her son how to get around in the world by stealing and lying. Letty thereby represents the natural progression of con-artist characters seen in many films of the era. Thanks to her parenting, her son is a gangster in the making, complete with thick New York accent, mastery of street slang and petty extortion tricks. By film's end, she is made to recognize she should give her son up to a childless, wealthy, upper class couple. Leaving her son behind she pretends to be leaving with a man who "has a suite on a boat and is willing to take [her] to Paris to show [her] a marvellous time."[214] Leaving him behind to a well-to-do couple, the Modern Woman doesn't simply disappear: she also does her part in cracking down on crime.

For Mick LaSalle, the Production Code's main objective and effect was to "prevent women from having fun" (2000, p. 3). There is certainly some truth in that statement, but the Code did much more than prevent women from having fun: it effectively ushered out the chronotope of the Modern Woman. Before the Code entered into strict application in 1934, however, there were already signs of Hollywood's difficult management of the Modern Woman chronotope and attempts to contain it. Indeed,

[214] She is actually going back to working in a bookstore, but the fact that she uses this narrative to convince everyone that she really *is* bad and does not care about her son shows how pervasive it was in popular culture.

the Modern Woman's development should not be seen in a linear progression from birth to death.

Analyzing the woman's films through the Modern Woman chronotope allows us to better understand aspects of the "structure of feeling" (Williams, 1961, 1980) characterizing American inter-war modernity. The chronotope becomes a point of entry to understand the subjective experience of the "culture of a period" (Williams, 1961, p. 48). A particularly powerful chronotope, the Modern Woman entertained a privileged relationship with American modernity, embodying its ideals and challenges, arousing both hope and anxieties. Bringing this experience to the fore does not evidence so much an "alternative modernity" as a specifically feminine address as part of the ebb and flow of re-definition of the American modern identity. Indeed, the chronotope itself does not reveal a "feminine experience" running parallel or underground to standard accounts of inter-war American culture. The chronotope itself, rather, was a contested concept subject to ideological battles, expressing both centripetal and centrifugal forces, forces pulling modernity towards centripetal solidity and centrifugal liquidity.

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A Parisian Romance. Dir. Chester M. Franklin. Perf. Lew Cody, Gilbert Roland, Marion Shilling, Joyce Compton. Allied Pictures. 1932.

A Shriek in the Night. Dir. Albert Ray. Perf. Ginger Rogers, Lyle Talbot. Allied Pictures. 1933.

Adam's Rib. Dir. George Cukor. Perf. Katharine Hepburn, Spencer Tracy. MGM. 1949.

Aloha. Dir. Albert S. Rogell. Perf. Ben Lyon, Raquel Torres. Tiffany Productions. 1931.

Aloma of the South Seas. Dir. Maurice Tourneur. Perf. Warner Baxter, William Powell. Famous-Players-Lasky. Paramount. 1926.

American Madness. Dir. Frank Capra, Allan Dwan (uncredited). Story Robert Riskin. Perf. Walter Huston, Pat O'Brien, Kay Johnson. Columbia. 1932.

An Unseen Enemy. Dir. D.W. Griffith. Perf. Lillian Gish, Dorothy Gish. Biograph. 1912.

Anybody's Woman. Dir. Dorothy Arzner. Story Zoe Akins. Perf. Ruth Chatterton, Clive Brook, Paul Lukas. Paramount. 1930.

Baby Face. Dir. Alfred E. Green. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, George Brent, Theresa Harris. Warner Bros. 1933.

Back Pay. Dir. William A. Seiter (uncredited). Story Fannie Hurst. Perf. Corinne Griffith. First National. 1930.

Back Street. Dir. John M. Stahl. Story Fannie Hurst. Perf. Irene Dunne, John Boles. Universal. 1932.

Back Street. Dir. Robert Stevenson. Story Fannie Hurst. Perf. Margaret Sullavan, Charles Boyer. Universal. 1941.

Beauty and the Boss. Dir. Roy Del Ruth. Perf. Marian Marsh, David Manners, Warren William, Charles Butterworth. Warner Bros. 1932.

Beggars of Life. Dir. William A. Wellman. Perf. Louise Brooks, Wallace Beery. Paramount. 1928.

Behind Office Doors. Dir. Melville W. Brown. Perf. Mary Astor, Robert Ames, Ricardo Cortez. RKO. 1931.

Big Business Girl. Dir. William A. Seiter. Story Patricia Reilly. Perf. Loretta Young, Ricardo Cortez, Joan Blondell. Warner Bros. 1931.

Bird of Paradise. Dir. King Vidor. Perf. Dolores del Rio, Joel McCrea. RKO. 1932.

Blonde Venus. Dir. Josef von Sternberg. Perf. Marlene Dietrich, Cary Grant. Paramount. 1932.

Blondie Johnson. Dir. Ray Enright. Perf. Joan Blondell, Chester Morris, Claire Dodd, Mae Busch. Warner Bros. 1933.

Born to Be Bad. Dir. Lowelll Sherman. Perf. Loretta Young, Cary Grant. 20th Century. United Artists. 1934.

Brief Moment. Dir. David Burton. Perf. Carole Lombard, Gene Raymond, Monroe Owsley. Columbia. 1933.

Bright Lights. Dir. Michael Curtiz. Perf. Dorothy Mackaill, Frank Fay. First National. 1930.

Bringing Up Baby. Dir. Howard Hawks. Perf. Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant. RKO. 1938.

Broken Blossoms. Dir. D.W. Griffith. Perf. Lillian Gish. D.W. Griffith Productions. United Artists. 1919.

Central Park. Dir. John G. Adolfi. Perf. Joan Blondell, Guy Kibbee. Warner Bros. 1932.

Chained. Dir. Clarence Brown. Story Edgar Selwyn. Perf. Joan Crawford, Clark Gable, Otto Kruger. MGM. 1934.

City Girl. Dir. F.W. Murnau. Perf. Charles Farrell, Mary Duncan. Fox. 1930.

Counsellor at Law. Dir. William Wyler. Play and screenplay Elmer Rice. Perf. John Barrymore, Bebe Daniels, Doris Kenyon, Thelma Todd. Universal. 1933.

Craig's Wife. Dir. Dorothy Arzner. Play George Kelly. Perf. Rosalind Russell, John Boles, Billie Burke. Columbia. 1936.

Dance, Fools, Dance. Dir. Harry Beaumont. Perf. Joan Crawford, Clark Gable. MGM. 1931.

Dance, Girl, Dance. Dir. Dorothy Arzner. Perf. Maureen O'Hara, Lucille Ball, Ralph Bellamy. RKO. 1940.

Dancing Mothers. Dir. Herbert Brenon. Play Edmund Goulding. Perf. Alice Joyce, Clara Bow. Paramount. 1926.

Diplomaniacs. Dir. William A. Seiter. Perf. Bert Wheeler, Robert Woolsey, Marjorie White. RKO. 1933.

Dirigible. Dir. Frank Capra. Adaptation Jo Swerling. Perf. Jack Holt, Ralph Graves, Fay Wray. Columbia. 1931.

Dirty Gertie from Harlem U.S.A. Dir. Spencer Williams. Perf. Francine Everett. Sack Amusement. 1946.

Dodsworth. Dir. William Wyler. Story Sinclair Lewis. Perf. Walter Huston, Ruth Chatterton, Paul Lukas, Mary Astor. Samuel Goldwyn. United Artists. 1936.

Double Harness. Dir. John Cromwell. Perf. Ann Harding, William Powell. RKO. 1933.

Down to Their Last Yacht. Dir. Paul Sloane. Perf. Mary Boland, Polly Moran. RKO. 1934.

East Lynne. Dir. Frank Lloyd. Perf. Ann Harding, Clive Brook. Fox. 1931.

Employees' Entrance. Dir. Roy Del Ruth. Perf. Warren William, Loretta Young, Alice White. Warner Brothers. 1933.

Ex-Lady. Dir. Robert Florey. Perf. Bette Davis, Gene Raymond, Frank McHugh, Monroe Owsley, Claire Dodd. Warner Bros. 1933.

Experiment Perilous. Dir. Jacques Tourneur. Perf. Hedy Lamarr, George Brent, Paul Lukas. RKO. 1944.

Faithless. Dir. Harry Beaumont. Perf. Tallulah Bankhead, Robert Montgomery. MGM. 1932.

Female. Dir. Michael Curtiz, William Dieterle (uncredited), William Wellman (uncredited). Perf. Ruth Chatterton, George Brent. Warner Brothers. 1933.

Forbidden. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, Adolphe Menjou. Columbia. 1932.

Four Frightened People. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Perf. Claudette Colbert. Paramount. 1934.

Frisco Jenny. Dir. William A. Wellman. Perf. Ruth Chatterton. Warner Bros. 1933.

Gabriel Over the White House. Dir. Gregory La Cava. Perf. Walter Huston, Karen Morley, Franchot Tone. MGM. 1933.

Gaslight. Dir. George Cukor. Perf. Ingrid Bergman, Charles Boyer, Angela Lansbury.

MGM. 1944.
Girl Missing. Dir. Robert Florey. Perf. Glenda Farrell, Ben Lyon, Lyle Talbot, Guy Kibbee. Warner Bros. 1933.
Grand Hotel. Dir. Edmund Goulding. Story Vicki Baum. Perf. Greta Garbo, John Barrymore, Joan Crawford, Wallace Beery, Lionel Barrymore. MGM. 1932.
Hallelujah. Dir. King Vidor. Perf. Nina Mae McKinney. MGM. 1929.
Havana Widows. Dir. Ray Enright. Perf. Joan Blondell, Glenda Farrell, Guy Kibbee, Allen Jenkins, Lyle Talbot. Warner Bros. 1933.
Heroes for Sale. Dir. William A. Wellman. Perf. Aline MacMahon, Loretta Young. Warner Bros. 1933.
His Girl Friday. Dir. Howard Hawks. Perf. Cary Grant, Rosalind Russell. Columbia. 1940.
Hold Your Man. Dir. Sam Wood. Perf. Jean Harlow, Clark Gable. Story Anita Loos. MGM. 1933
Honor Among Lovers. Dir. Dorothy Arzner. Perf. Claudette Colbert, Fredric March, Monroe Owsley, Ginger Rogers. Paramount. 1931.
I Cover the Waterfront. Dir. James Cruze. Perf. Claudette Colbert, Ben Lyon. Reliance. United Artists. 1933.
I'm No Angel. Dir. Wesley Ruggles. Story and screenplay Mae West. Perf. Mae West, Cary Grant. Paramount, 1933.
I've Got Your Number. Dir. Ray Enright. Perf. Joan Blondell, Pat O'Brien, Allen Jenkins, Glenda Farrell. Warner Bros. 1934.
Illicit. Dir. Archie Mayo. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, Ricardo Cortez, Natalie Moorhead, Joan Blondell, Charles Butterworth. Warner Bros. 1931.
Ingagi. Dir. William Campbell. Congo Pictures. Road Show Pictures. 1930.
Inspiration. Dir. Clarence Brown. Perf. Greta Garbo, Robert Montmogery, Lewis Stone. MGM. 1931.
It Happened One Night. Dir. Frank Capra. Story Samuel Hopkins Adams. Screenplay Robert Riskin. Perf. Claudette Colbert, Clark Gable, Walter Connolly. Columbia. 1934.
Kept Husband. Dir. Lloyd Bacon. Perf. Dorothy Mackaill, Joel McCrea. RKO. 1931.
King Kong. Dir. Merian C. Cooper (uncredited), Ernest B. Schoedsack (uncredited). Perf. Fay Wray. RKO. 1933.
Ladies of Leisure. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, Ralph Graves, Lowell Sherman, Marie Prevost. Columbia. 1930.
Lady for a Day. Dir. Frank Capra. Screenplay Robert Riskin. Perf. Warren William, May Robson, Guy Kibbee, Glenda Farrell, Walter Connolly. Columbia. 1933.
Lady with a Past. Dir. Edward H. Griffith. Story Harriet Henry. Perf. Constance Bennett, Ben Lyon, David Manners. RKO. 1932.
Let Us Be Gay. Dir. Robert Z. Leonard (uncredited). Perf. Norma Shearer, Marie Dressler. MGM. 1930.
Little Caesar. Dir. Mervyn LeRoy. Perf. Edward G. Robinson, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Glenda Farrell. Warner Bros. 1931.
Lonesome. Dir. Pàl Fejös. Perf. Barbara Kent, Glenn Tryon. Universal. 1929.
Loose Ankles. Dir. Ted Wilde. Perf. Loretta Young, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Louise Fazenda. First National. 1930.

Love Affair. Dir. Leo McCarey. Perf. Irene Dunne, Charles Boyer. RKO. 1939.
Mr. Deeds Goes to Town. Dir. Frank Capra. Screenplay Robert Riskin. Perf. Gary Cooper, Jean Arthur. Columbia. 1936.
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. James Stewart, Jean Arthur. Columbia. 1939.
Madame X. Dir. Lionel Barrymore. Perf. Ruth Chatterton, Lewis Stone. MGM. 1929.
Madame X. Dir. Sam Wood, Gustav Machaty (uncredited). Perf. Gladys George, Warren William. MGM. 1937.
Madame X. Dir. David Lowell Rich. Perf. Lana Turner, John Forsythe, Ricardo Montalban. Universal. 1966.
Man of the World. Dir. Richard Wallace, Edward Goodman (uncredited). Perf. William Powell, Carole Lombard, Guy Kibbee. Paramount. 1931.
Man's Castle. Dir. Frank Borzage. Adaptation Jo Swerling. Perf. Spencer Tracy, Loretta Young, Marjorie Rambeau, Glenda Farrell. Columbia. 1933.
Manhattan Tower. Dir. Frank R. Strayer. Perf. Mary Brian, Irene Rich. Remington Pictures. 1932.
Marie Galante. Dir. Henry King. Perf. Spencer Tracy, Ketti Gallian, Helen Morgan. Twentieth Century Fox. 1934.
Mary Stevens, M.D. Dir. Lloyd Bacon. Perf. Kay Francis, Lyle Talbot, Glenda Farrell. Warner Bros. 1933.
Meet John Doe. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. Gary Cooper, Barbara Stanwyck. Frank Capra Productions. Warner Bros. 1941.
Merrily We Go to Hell. Dir. Dorothy Arzner. Perf. Sylvia Sidney, Fredric March. Paramount. 1932.
Miss Pinkerton. Dir. Lloyd Bacon. Perf. Joan Blondell, George Brent. Warner Bros. 1932.
Miss Sadie Thompson. Dir. Curtis Bernhardt. Perf. Rita Hayworth, José Ferrer. Columbia. 1953.
Moana. Dir. Robert J. Flaherty. Famous-Players-Lasky. Paramount. 1926.
My Name is Julia Ross. Dir. Joseph H. Lewis. Perf. Nina Foch, Dame May Whitty, George Macready. Columbia. 1945.
Night After Night. Dir. Archie Mayo. Perf. George Raft, Constance Cummings, Mae West, Alison Skipworth. Paramount. 1932.
Night Nurse. Dir. William A. Wellman. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, Joan Blondell, Clark Gable. Warner Bros. 1931.
No More Orchids. Dir. Walter Lang. Perf. Carole Lombard, Lyle Talbot, Walter Connolly. Columbia. 1932.
One Way passage. Dir. Tay Garnett. Perf. Kay Francis, William Powell, Aline MacMahon, Frank McHugh, Warren Hymer. Warner Bros. 1932.
Our Blushing Bride. Dir. Harry Beaumont (uncredited). Perf. Joan Crawford, Anita Page, Dorothy Sebastian, Robert Montgomery. MGM. 1930.
Our Dancing Daughters. Dir. Harry Beaumont. Story Josephine Lovett. Perf. Joan Crawford, Anita Page, Dorothy Sebastian, Johnny Mack Brown. MGM. 1928.
Our Modern Maidens. Dir. Jack Conway. Story Josephine Lovett. Perf. Joan Crawford, Anita Page, Douglas Fairbanks Jr. MGM. 1929.
Party Husband. Dir. Clarence G. Badger. Perf. Dorothy Mackaill. Warner Bros. 1931.

Picture Brides. Dir. Phil Rosen. Perf. Dorothy Mackaill, Regis Toomey, Alan Hale. Allied Pictures. 1934.
Platinum Blonde. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. Jean Harlow, Loretta Young. Columbia. 1931.
Pocketful of Miracles. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. Glenn Ford, Bette Davis. Paramount. 1961.
Possessed. Dir. Clarence Brown. Play Edgar Selwyn. Perf. Joan Crawford, Clark Gable. MGM. 1931.
Professional Sweetheart. Dir. William Seiter. Perf. Ginger Rogers, Zasu Pitts, Frank McHugh, Allen Jenkins. RFO. 1933.
Rain. Dir. Lewis Milestone (uncredited). Perf. Joan Crawford, Walter Huston. Feature Productions. United Artists. 1932.
Reaching for the Moon. Dir. Edmund Goulding. Story Irving Berlin. Perf. Douglas Fairbanks, Bebe Daniels, Edward Everett Horton. Joseph M. Schenck. United Artists. 1930.
Rebecca. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Story Daphne Du Maurier. Perf. Joan Fontaine, Laurence Olivier. Selznick International Pictures. United Artists. 1940.
Red Dust. Dir. Victor Fleming (uncredited). Play Wilson Collison. Perf. Clark Gable, Jean Harlow, Mary Astor. MGM. 1932.
Red-Headed Woman. Dir. Jack Conway. Screenplay Anita Loos. Perf. Jean Harlow, Chester Morris, Lewis Stone. MGM. 1932.
Sadie Thompson. Dir. Raoul Walsh. Perf. Gloria Swanson, Lionel Barrymore. Gloria Swanson Pictures. United Artists. 1928.
Safe in Hell. Dir. William A. Wellman. Perf. Dorothy Mackaill. Warner Bros. 1931.
Sarah and Son. Dir. Dorothy Arzner. Perf. Ruth Chatterton, Fredric March. Paramount. 1930.
Scarface. Dir. Howard Hawks, Richard Rosson. Perf. Paul Muni, Ann Dvorak, Karen Morley, George Raft. The Caddo Company. United Artists. 1932.
Secret Beyond the Door… Dir. Fritz Lang. Perf. Joan Bennett, Michael Redgrave. Diana Production Company. Universal. 1947.
Secrets of a Secretary. Dir. George Abbott. Perf. Claudette Colbert. Paramount. 1931.
Shanghai Express. Dir. Josef von Sternberg. Perf. Marlene Dietrich, Clive Brook, Anna May Wong. Paramount. 1932.
Shopworn. Dir. Nick Grinde. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, Regis Toomey, Zasu Pitts. Columbia. 1932.
Sin Takes a Holiday. Dir. Paul L. Stein. Perf. Constance Bennett, Basil Rathbone, Zasu Pitts. Pathé. 1930.
Sinners in the Sun. Dir. Alexander Hall. Perf. Carole Lombard, Chester Morris. Paramount, 1932.
Skyscraper Souls. Dir. Edgar Selwyn. Perf. Warren William, Maureen O'Sullivan, Anita Page. Story Faith Baldwin. Cosmopolitan. MGM. 1932.
Smart Money. Dir. Alfred E. Green. Perf. Edward G. Robinson, James Cagney, Evalyn Knapp. Warner Bros. 1931.
Stagecoach. Dir. John Ford. Perf. John Wayne, Claire Trevor, Andy Devine, John Carradine. Walter Wanger Productions. United Artists. 1939.
Stella Dallas. Dir. Henry King. Perf. Belle Bennett. Samuel Goldwyn. United Artists.

1925.
Stella Dallas. Dir. King Vidor. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, John Boles, Alan Hale. Samuel Goldwyn. United Artists. 1937.
Street of Women. Dir. Archie Mayo. Perf. Kay Francis, Roland Young. Warner Bros. 1932.
Street Scene. Dir. King Vidor. Play and adaptation Elmer Rice. Perf. Sylvia Sidney, Estelle Taylor, Beulah Bondi, David Landau. Samuel Goldwyn. United Artists. 1931.
Susan Lenox <her Fall and Rise>. Dir. Robert Z. Leonard (uncredited). Perf. Greta Garbo, Clark Gable, Alan Hale. MGM. 1931.
Tabu: A Story of the South Seas. Dir. F.W. Murnau. Murnau-Flaherty Productions. Paramount. 1931.
Tarnished Lady. Dir. George Cukor. Perf. Tallulah Bankhead, Clive Brook. Paramount. 1931.
Tarzan the Ape Man. Dir. W.S. Van Dyke. Perf. Johnny Weissmuller, Maureen O'Sullivan. MGM. 1932.
Ten Cents a Dance. Dir. Lionel Barrymore. Screenplay Jo Swerling. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, Ricardo Cortez, Monroe Owsley. Columbia. 1931.
Terror Aboard. Dir. Paul Sloane. Perf. John Halliday, Charles Ruggles, Jack La Rue. Paramount. 1933.
The Awful Truth. Dir. Leo McCarey. Perf. Irene Dunne, Cary Grant. Screenplay Vina Delmar. Columbia. 1937.
The Bitter Tea of General Yen. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, Nils Asther, Toshia Mori, Walter Connolly. Columbia. 1933.
The Blonde Captive. Dir. Clinton Childs, Ralph P. King, Linus J. Wilson, Paul Withington. 1931.
The Crash. Dir. William Dieterle. Perf. Ruth Chatterton, George Brent. Warner Bros. 1932.
The Crowd. Dir. King Vidor. Perf. Eleanor Boardman, James Murray. MGM. 1928.
The Divorcee. Dir. Robert Z. Leonard. Novel Ursula Parrott. Perf. Norma Shearer, Chester Morris, Robert Montgomery. MGM. 1930.
The Easiest Way. Dir. Jack Conway. Perf. Constance Bennett, Adolphe Menjou, Anita Page. MGM. 1931.
The Greeks Had a Word for Them (a.k.a. *Three Broadway Girls*). Dir. Lowell Sherman. Perf. Joan Blondell, Ina Claire. Play Zoe Akins. Samuel Goldwyn. United Artists. 1932.
The Lady Eve. Dir. Preston Sturges. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, Henry Fonda. Paramount. 1937.
The Man with Two Faces. Dir. Archie Mayo. Perf. Edward G. Robinson, Mary Astor, Ricardo Cortez, Mae Clarke. Warner Bros. 1934.
The Mayor of Hell. Dir. Archie Mayo, Michael Curtiz (uncredited). Perf. James Cagney, Madge Evans, Allen Jenkins. Warner Bros. 1933.
The Miracle Woman. Dir. Frank Capra. Screenplay Jo Swerling. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, David Manners. Columbia. 1931.
The Naughty Flirt. Dir. Edward F. Cline. Perf. Alice White, Myrna Loy. Warner Bros. 1931.

The Office Wife. Dir. Lloyd Bacon. Story Faith Baldwin. Perf. Dorothy Mackaill, Lewis Stone, Natalie Moorhead, Hobart Bosworth. Warner Bros. 1930.
The Philadelphia Story. Dir. George Cukor. Perf. Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant, James Stewart. MGM. 1940.
The Public Enemy. Dir. William A. Wellman. Perf. James Cagney, Jean Harlow, Joan Blondell. Warner Bros. 1931.
The Purchase Price. Dir. William A. Wellman. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, George Brent, Lyle Talbot, David Landau. Warner Bros. 1932.
The Reckless Hour. Dir. John Francis Dillon. Perf. Dorothy Mackaill, Conrad Nagel, Joan Blondell. Warner Bros. 1931.
The Savage Girl. Dir. Harry L. Fraser. Perf. Rochelle Hudson. Monarch. 1932.
The Sign of the Cross. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Perf. Claudette Colbert, Fredric March. Paramount. 1932.
The Sin of Madelon Claudet. Dir. Edgar Selwyn. Perf. Helen Hayes, Lewis Stone. MGM. 1931.
The Song of Songs. Dir. Rouben Mamoulian. Perf. Marlene Dietrich. Paramount. 1933.
The Story of Temple Drake. Dir. Stephen Roberts. Story William Faulkner. Perf. Miriam Hopkins, Jack La Rue. Paramount. 1933.
The Way of the Strong. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. Alice Day, Margaret Livingston. Columbia. 1928.
This Modern Age. Dir. Nick Grinde. Perf. Joan Crawford, Pauline Frederick, Monroe Owsley. MGM. 1931.
Three Wise Girls. Dir. William Beaudine. Story Wilson Collison. Perf. Jean Harlow, Mae Clarke, Marie Prevost, Natalie Moorhead. Columbia. 1932.
Today. Dir. William Nigh. Magestic. 1930.
Torch Singer. Dir. Alexander Hall, George Somnes. Perf. Claudette Colbert, Ricardo Cortez. Paramount. 1933.
Trader Horn. Dir. W.S. Van Dyke. Perf. Edwina Booth. MGM. 1931.
Transatlantic. Dir. William K. Howard. Perf. Edmund Lowe, Lois Moran, Greta Nissen, Myrna Loy. Fox. 1931.
Transatlantic Merry-Go-Round. Dir. Benjamin Stoloff. Perf. Gene Raymond, Nancy Carroll, Jack Benny. Edward Small Productions. United Artists. 1934.
Trouble in Paradise. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Perf. Miriam Hopkins, Kay Francis, Herbert Marshall. Paramount. 1932.
'*Til We Meet Again.* Dir. Edmund Goulding. Perf. Merle Oberon, George Brent, Pat O'Brien, Frank McHugh. Warner Bros. 1940.
Under 18. Dir. Archie Mayo. Perf. Marian Marsh, Anita Page, Warren William. Warner Bros. 1931.
Undercurrent. Dir. Vincente Minnelli. Perf. Katharine Hepburn, Robert Taylor, Robert Mitchum. MGM. 1946.
Upper World. Dir. Roy Del Ruth. Story Ben Hecht. Perf. Warren William, Mary Astor, Ginger Rogers. Warner Bros. 1934.
Way Down East. Dir. D.W. Griffith. Perf. Lillian Gish. D.W. Griffith Productions. United Artists. 1920.
What a Widow! Dir. Allan Dwan. Perf. Gloria Swanson, Lew Cody. Gloria Productions. United Artists. 1930.

When Strangers Marry. Dir. William Castle. Perf. Dean Jagger, Kim Hunter, Robert Mitchum. King Brothers Productions. Monogram. 1944.
White Shadows of the South Seas. Dir. W.S. Van Dyke, Robert J. Flaherty (uncredited). Perf. Monte Blue, Raquel Torres. MGM. 1928.
Working Girls. Dir. Dorothy Arzner. Screenplay Zoe Akins. Perf. Judith Wood, Dorothy Hall. Paramount. 1931.