

Class Acts:

A Sociocultural History of Women, Labour, and Migration in Hollywood

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Abstract

Class Acts: A Sociocultural History of Women, Labour, and Migration in Hollywood

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This project takes a gender-specific and sociological approach to the figure of the actress in Hollywood. Steeped in interdisciplinarity, it draws on cultural history, sociology, anthropology, performance studies, psychology, and feminist theory. The overall purpose is to examine Hollywood as a classed sociocultural system based on labor and sexual exploitation. The project begins with a survey of class within American culture, querying its place in the American Dream and in westward migration. From such a vantage point, the study asserts that women functioned as second-class citizens within the economic and social structure of the studios. The star system, which reflects Hollywood's hierarchical, male-centred organization, offered many actresses aspirational careers through the illusion of glamour, while in reality offering them ephemeral careers and exploitative labour conditions. Within such a conceptualisation of women as a class, the mistreatments of women who were star actresses are spotlighted, while they are also clearly situated upon a continuum of misogyny and precarity with women screenwriters, extras, and other employees. The project depends heavily on primary sources and includes testimonies from actresses and other women in Hollywood, especially found in memoirs and interviews. Such first-person accounts bolster the argument that within classical Hollywood, glamour and publicity served as twin cudgels of industrial and social control, working under management corruption, criminality, and sexual abuse. Within this context, the studios established an authoritarian and dehumanised working space for women, obscured by star discourse and publicity, and prone to all manner of abuse, exploitation, and disappearance. Finally, the project closes by raising questions of ethical imperatives towards historiographic justice, asserting that if the change sought by MeToo/Time's Up since 2017 is to solidify, the precise historical roots of today's system must be reckoned with first.

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Introduction

The Stars Look Down: Scholarly Innovations and Project Methodologies

“[T]he woman’s expertise concerning her own life’s story and her place of labor ultimately manifests itself in a kind of knowledge about the production of history, one that inherently intertwines fact and fiction, reminiscence and prophecy, the temporality and structure of film forms.”¹

-Amelie Hastie, *Cupboards of Curiosity: Women, Recollection, and Film History* (2007)

Overview of Thesis

The primary objective of this thesis is to analyse the ways in which actresses and other women working within the industrial system of Hollywood have experienced class and had class enacted upon them. This study is grounded in the premise that actresses in general may be considered as a particular type of class subject. The argument is that actresses have always maintained a working-class status vis-à-vis the male-centered hierarchies of Hollywood, regardless of the differences relative to their position within the star system, of different economic treatment depending on their contracts and roles, or of their visibility as public personae. To demonstrate my argument, this project draws on primary and secondary sources that bring forth first-person accounts of actresses and other women at various levels of the Hollywood system. The overall thesis draws on an interdisciplinary framework of analysis that includes feminist theory, sociology, and American cultural history.

The premise is that the star system, via its dual cudgels of glamour and publicity, has served as a sustainable façade for Hollywood’s vertically structured and male-run corporate management, based in labour exploitation, gender discrimination, and sexual abuse. The purpose of this analysis is to bring attention to actresses as the most vulnerable point in the socioeconomic chain of Hollywood’s exploitative and disparaging organisation of labour, masking the true workings of one of the world’s most visible and influential film industries with glamour. While especially focusing on the first decades of Hollywood’s and its development into the high studio era, the scope of this thesis draws a direct line through the history of American business, culture, performance, and film to the present day. The discussion of the corpus also incorporates the dramatic shifts that have occurred in most recent years, identifying the emergence of social movements like MeToo and Time’s Up as a watershed within the discourse on gender-based discrimination and abuse in Hollywood within the public sphere, as well as in moving image culture and scholarship.

¹ Amelie Hastie, *Cupboards of Curiosity: Women, Recollection, and Film History* (Durham, Duke, 2007) 3.

The project addresses the idiosyncratic class status of actresses in Hollywood, continuing and further expanding literature on this topic. Thus far, such literature has not expansively examined Hollywood at the intersection of gender, class, and race and from the viewpoint of labour. In examining actresses as engendered and intersectional workers within a specific industrial system in the modern U.S., this thesis project grounds itself in a critique of Hollywood that regards it as informed by a capitalist and male-centred ideology. While this examination looks to the entire history of Hollywood, concentration will be on the decades in which the classical studio system was consolidated (1920-1940s). It situates this period as Hollywood's apotheosis, the peak of its Fordist production, profits, and its virtually omnipotent control over American film production.²

The project employs a feminist approach to film studies, sociology, and cultural history to illustrate the gendered, hierarchical nature of Hollywood. The main argument is that, while the social status of Hollywood actresses may have seemed marked by upward mobility, class was instead a relative and illusory concept in the glamour-making machine of the star system. Indeed, the social status of most Hollywood actresses was quite fixed at a lower level, in comparison with that of other professional figures of the studio; most significantly, the male producers and executives. There may have been gradations, internecine hierarchies, and rises or falls among Hollywood actresses within the classical star system: yet these differences were incidental to the inherent second-class status to which actresses and other women in the system were subjected. This was the consequence of two circumstances: on the one hand, the low position of the actor in the Hollywood pay hierarchy, with only a few exceptions; and on the other, the disparity applied to all women, most particularly actresses, by the men in executive positions in the studios.

The glamorous façade of the star system merely obscured this reality. This means that actresses have always been-- and mostly still are-- mere labor force within Hollywood's corporate system, wherein power, wealth, and prestige have remained steadily male-centred and gender-exploitative.³ Crucially, the idea of stardom as a case of American social mobility is

² David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London, Routledge, 2003); Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995).

³ Derek Thompson, "The Brutal Math of Gender Inequality in Hollywood." *The Atlantic*. January 11, 2018; Stacy Smith, Marc Chouteiti, Angel Choi, and Katherine Pieper. *Inclusion in the Director's Chair: Gender, Race, and Age of Directors Across 1,200 Top Films From 2007 to 2018* (Los Angeles, USC, 2019); Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974); Anthony Slide. *Hollywood Unknowns: A History of Extras, Bit Players, and Stand-Ins*. (Oxford; Mississippi: 2012.)

also interrogated here as an illusion, as applied particularly to the top-tier actresses in this study. Even for these women, some of the most celebrated and famous stars of the last century, labour negotiation and exploitation remained issues. Their perceived social privilege was a cover-up for their exploited position as workers within the studios, as well as for the realities of their prior and ongoing lives. In fact, both glamour and class privilege have been-- and remain-- very largely illusory for Hollywood actresses.

In situating glamour at the centre of my critique of Hollywood's gender-biased studio system, I contend that stardom has frequently had a narcotising effect on aspiring actresses, as well as on women spectators. Thus, glamour has served as a crucial concept in Hollywood's star-making ideology. While publicly propping up reified images and ideals of social mobility, in reality it served to rein in actresses as second-class citizens, inferior to the men in the system. Laura Mulvey famously wrote that the star is "the glamorous (who) impersonates the ordinary".⁴ A primary objective of this thesis has been to counter this assertion. In fact, star actresses might appear ordinary onscreen in particular roles, but they are still perpetually made glamorous by the system of Hollywood production. Mulvey's assertion is based on a critique of the actress as the symbol of Hollywood's star-system model through the consideration of actresses' roles and screen personae. In my analysis, I will instead draw attention to the sociocultural reality that subtends the construction of the Hollywood actress as the epitome of Hollywood's glamour. In my consideration of the Hollywood actress as a marker of U.S. capitalist and gender-biased exploitation of its labour forces, I will try to demonstrate that the actress is, rather, the ordinary impersonating the glamorous. Specifically, while both male and female stars are in fact ordinary workers of this type, tasked with this impersonation, women performers are additionally fraught within the male-dominated system of American corporate film production. In order to make this argument, I will consider the experiential realities of actresses as working subjects, stressing both that many of the top female stars in Hollywood came from working-class, hardscrabble roots, and that even the most privileged were professionally and sexually exploited by studio producers and executives.

The periodisation of this project spans the origins of the social and industrial organisation that became known as "classical Hollywood" and the studio system (the 1910s), with its primary focus on the peak of the studio era (1920s-1940s). Throughout, industrial practices and women's experiences are paralleled with practices that remained in Hollywood from the post-studio 1960s to the present day. Case studies from the high studio era,

⁴ Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*. (Indiana: Bloomington: 1989.) 205.

particularly primary sources by women involved in the system, are central to the upcoming chapters. Later discussion will contend with some of the landmark court cases by actresses in the 1930s against exploitative working conditions, while engaging with scholars who have theorised about said cases in terms of their weakening of the very studio system itself.

Social change which stratified and weakened masculinist-corporatist power on grounds of gender and race coincided with the decline and demise of the studio system by the early 1960s. Yet even the fall of the studio system did not represent a period of emancipation for Hollywood actresses, but rather a moment of system overhaul that maintained Hollywood's male power capitalist system. There have been several identifiable moments of potential gendered social change in Hollywood over the last century, only to be followed by letdown or even backlash. These will be discussed addressed as such in sections throughout the thesis. Conclusions about the Hollywood actress in the post-studio era suggest future areas of both research and industrial shift in light of the gender parity debates of the past three years.

As further explained in the methodology section, this project traces the figure of the actress as labourer via a variety of sources, including detailed analyses of class as experienced by the women themselves. Such evidence points to intriguing distinctions between the actual class origins of individual actresses and their repackaged identities as presented in Hollywood publicity or the media. Yet at the same time, class origins only made differences in how women were treated on occasion, and in a few specific areas. The broader point that *all* actresses within Hollywood lived under second-class status holds. First-person accounts in the form of memoirs and interviews demonstrate that in terms of labour treatment, Hollywood's male corporate system made only minimal differentiation between a working-class woman aspiring to be onscreen and a classically trained woman from an upper-class background. Usually such differentiation, when it occurred at all, fell under the auspices of sexual availability. As the studio system coalesced, working-class women were either pushed out of the new film system by unemployment or erased by rigorous obscuring of class origins and retraining of any class markers like accent or mannerism. But the middle-class and even upper-class women given the chance to work in the system and become stars or working actresses did not, as Hollywood mythos would have us believe, become a new, favoured upper class. Instead, even the most successful actresses became Hollywood's new working class, forced to adapt to the standard exploitative and demeaning labour conditions. No matter how elegant and even powerful actresses and their lifestyles were portrayed by the Hollywood publicity machine, historical evidence from within the studios and from actress memoirs instead reveals the reality of casting

couch normalisations, sexual and workplace abuses, dangerous and unhealthy labour conditions, exploitative salaries, and normalised psychological trauma.

Thus the theoretical framework of the project is a consideration of the gendered sociocultural realities of Hollywood, through the previously neglected lens of class. Specifically, it is grounded in a trans-disciplinary feminist framework of analysis that applies a gender-informed critique to Hollywood as both capitalist and ideological system. In flattening all actresses to second-class status via the illusion of glamour, the Hollywood star system simultaneously reshaped and elevated the perceptible class markers of actresses. The impossibility of separating a woman's career in film from her class status applies to all women associated with the Hollywood star system, including major stars, "troublemakers", "washed up" or "washed out" actresses who faded and were forgotten, and even "nobodies", women who never succeeded in Hollywood careers at all. Beyond the histories of iconic stars, the labour approach in relation to class is also always present in the case of all the struggling actresses who never "made it" in Hollywood, or who had brief success before failing out of the business.⁵ The same methods of historical and feminist materialist inquiry may be applied, within proper contexts, not only to stars or actresses, but also to every woman working in Hollywood, from screenwriters to seamstresses, body doubles, make-up artists, and cleaning women.

As actresses moved up or down Hollywood's hierarchies of stardom and class reshaping, they were in constant interaction with women in other positions within Hollywood on a continuum. This reinforces the idea that as a labor force, women in Hollywood have functioned as part of a common collective, in spite of the glamour-filled, hierarchising narrative of the studio system. Film scholarship-- especially within feminist film studies--has increasingly moved towards this viewpoint in recent years. Jane Gaines, for instance, in *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (2018), notes that Second Wave feminist historians have typically spotlighted women directors and women in leadership roles and neglected actresses, while "[n]either was there much interest in lower-level women's jobs filled by extra girls, script girls, lab workers, and stenographers".⁶ This class-focused critique of Hollywood is intended as a corrective to such disciplinary overdetermination. For this reason, the project has particularly aimed at excavating archival and memoir evidence of instances of cross-class, cross-racial, and cross-professional solidarity amongst women in Hollywood. Some

⁵ In *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (Champaign, Illinois, 2018), Jane Gaines identifies Monica Dall'Asta's explorations of instances in the silent era where women created "exceptional failures" and "beautiful failures" as a "stunning alternative option" to standard feminist theorisations of the silent era (29).

⁶ Gaines, *Pink-Slipped*, 116.

case studies within this project bring to light shocking and forgotten instances of female solidarity within Hollywood's generally hierarchical lines. Thus, while the focus here is on actresses, discussions of class in relation to non-performing women in the Hollywood system remain ever-present.

The literature review will show how gender-based labour abuses have been primarily addressed in studies of female stars' contract litigations, yet very little thus far from the standpoints of class, race, ethnicity, or affect. Both performance studies and film studies have, relatively, just begun to investigate the role of actresses and other women in Hollywood from the perspective of labour. This project provides a knowledge contribution to this subject. Following the literature review, this introduction will illustrate the methodology and justify the selected periodisation. In particular, it will explain the choice of some primary sources such as, for instance, memoirs, fan magazines, and personal testimonies, sources that have been widely used within feminist film historiography for over three decades but are read to new, specific purposes here.⁷ Furthermore, the use of these sources is also a self-conscious, political choice on my part, as I consider them part of an alternative, non-institutional lineage in moving image culture.

Review of literature

It took until 1948 to identify the importance of the actress in Hollywood as a social archetype from a scholarly perspective. Simone de Beauvoir accomplished this in *The Second Sex* with an extensive section not just on the actress in culture, but with specific discussion of the American Hollywood star.⁸ de Beauvoir's book is better known as a pioneering text of women's studies, less so for the attention that it brings to the actress in Hollywood as a new and important cultural archetype of global womanhood. The discussion of the paradox of the woman Hollywood star as both envied and imprisoned makes de Beauvoir's text not only an early, but also extremely prescient reference in this review of literature. de Beauvoir's treatment of the Hollywood actress is all the more noteworthy when, as Hilary Hallett has pointed out, even to the present "most historians' unease with contemporary celebrity culture has complicated

⁷ Regarding the use of these types of sources see, among others: Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra, eds. *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema* (Durham, Duke, 2002); Julia Knight and Christine Gledhill, eds. *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future*. (Champaign, Illinois, 2015).

⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, Constance Borde, and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. *The Second Sex* (New York, Vintage, 2011).

historicizing and assessing what the fame of actresses has to teach about modern gender roles.”⁹

Kirsten Pullen’s *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and In Society* (2005) and *Like A Natural Woman: Spectacular Female Performance in Classical Hollywood* (2014) both also utilise case studies of what the author identified as “nodal moments” in the realities of both pre-cinematic and Hollywood women. Pullen employs these examples to demonstrate how the lived social reality of actresses did not match the fantastic lives sold in publicity.¹⁰ Pullen (like de Beauvoir) also addresses the blurred lines between performance work, working-class shift work, mistressing, and sex work that often marked the life of the pre-cinematic actress in both American and European contexts-- patterns that, contrary to the Hollywood myth of the “Dream Factory,” remained in place for filmic actresses throughout the last century. Evidence of such a “blurred lines” lifestyle of the Hollywood actress as part of an experiential chain from pre-cinematic historical archetypes will arise early in this project, via primary source reviews of actress memoirs and interviews.

In addition to illuminating key histories of performing women in culture, this thesis project is highly dependent upon American class theory, Marxist and non-Marxist interpretations of American capitalism, and feminist materialist theory. It utilises specific nuances of American history and culture to excavate and synthesize Hollywood culture and the fundamental *Americanness* of its industrial organisation. It situates Hollywood as a particularly male-centred, homosocial, gender-exploitative milieu, following Hortense Powdermaker’s anthropological fieldwork findings of it in *Hollywood, The Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers* (1950).¹¹ Utilizing Powdermaker’s interpretation of the studio era as one important model, I look backwards to the roots of Hollywood’s corporate culture, to return to the origins of its exploitative, misogynist, and racist traits.

Since Powdermaker’s 1950 book, scant similar work on Hollywood has been undertaken, meaning fieldwork-based social science that surveys Hollywood as an industrial/sociocultural milieu, able to be studied like any world culture.¹² There has in fact been what might be considered an alternative tradition of writings on stars as sociological subjects with unstable status, following in the vein of Powdermaker, from outsider critics and sociologists

⁹ Hilary Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley, California, 2013) 27.

¹⁰ Kirsten Pullen, *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and In Society*. (Cambridge: 2005) 5; Kirsten Pullen, *Like a Natural Woman: Spectacular Female Performance in Classical Hollywood*. (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2014).

¹¹ Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers* (Eastford, CT, Martino Fine Books, 2013).

¹² Ibid.

like Danae Clark, Francesco Alberoni, and Alexander Walker.¹³ However, such arguments on glamour as tool and the relatively powerless status of the star have not been at the centre of academic star studies, for a number of reasons to be discussed. One of this project's aims is thus to augment its premises with theory from the above, and thus to contribute to further reconfiguration of star studies towards the social sciences.

More specifically, while writers like Alberoni and Walker did in fact deconstruct the industrial and ideological nature of the base of Hollywood some time ago, this was work that came from outside of feminist film studies and lacked focus in gender. Thus additional, gendered theorization of the (woman) star as sociological subject and socio-economic actor is an ongoing job for film history.¹⁴ The approach employed in this thesis, then, looks specifically at women in this performance system from an industrial-sociological perspective, adding labour and class. It seeks to allow an entirely new understanding of women in Hollywood as labourers in Hollywood professions to emerge.

When film studies as a discipline first became intrigued by the subdiscipline of star studies in the late 1970s, the original impulse among scholars was to contend with stars in terms of image and semiotics.¹⁵ It is commonly agreed upon that the discipline of star studies as a scholarly field largely began with Richard Dyer, and the 1979 publication of his seminal *Stars*. It is universally acknowledged that he brought credibility and scholarship to a field which had previously almost exclusively consisted of fawning biographies and journalistic pieces. Prior to Dyer, writings on the star had mainly been seen as unscholarly, basically echoing the tabloid press or the Hollywood industry publicity machines.

Karen Hollinger, in her own 2006 study, *The Actress: Hollywood Acting and the Female Star*, successfully undertook a very thorough task of situating the field of star studies chronologically from theorist to theorist. In Hollinger's clarification, "Dyerian star studies" did not lack for development of performance theory in terms of the actor's body and subjectivity, as it

¹³ Danae Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors' Labor*. (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1995); Francesco Alberoni, "The Powerless 'Elite': Theory and Sociological Research on the Phenomenon of the Stars". In *Stardom and Celebrity*, eds. Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (New York, SAGE, 2007); Alexander Walker, *Stardom: The Hollywood Phenomenon* (Los Angeles, Stein and Day, 1970).

¹⁴ See Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (1996); Steven Ross, *Working Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (1998); David Thomson, *The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood* (2004); Allen John Scott, *On Hollywood: The Place, the Industry* (Princeton, 2005). Thomas Elsaesser, *The Persistence of Hollywood*, (2012); Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (2004).

¹⁵ See Richard Dyer, *Stars* (1979); Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975); Judith Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema* (1990); Richard de Cordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (2001).

never intended to work in such registers in the first place. Instead, the Dyerian mode of star scholarship came into being to identify ideological meanings of the star-- and to explore the semiotic relationship between the star, in their specific mythological meaning, and the spectator. These early inroads into scholarly star studies did not choose to examine the experiences of performing and working in cinema from labour, industrial, or sociocultural perspectives. Hollinger rightly situates Dyer as the "seismic shift" of star studies.¹⁶ But in her 2006 work, Hollinger also identified a fundamental gap at the heart of the dominant star studies that followed him:

... star studies' failure to adopt a political economy approach to stardom, which would place it within an industrial context, and study stardom as a job among others within the Hollywood film labor system.¹⁷

This is largely the reason why such semiotic and spectator theory-driven analyses have been the primary legacy of star studies onward and to the present day. Counter-assertion that perhaps stars, and women stars in particular, might exist on a continuum with either other women working in Hollywood or working women spectators would come later, largely from outsider, interdisciplinary perspectives. It was a decade and a half before such new, sociocultural modes of star studies theory began to emerge and eventually thrive in their own right within feminist film studies.

In addition to the sidelining of labour issues, early trends in academic star studies also gave far less weight to the, by nature, completely gendered differences in the experience of film stardom.¹⁸ These early forays into star theory laid a crucial foundation in thinking through the apparatus and significance of stars, but largely considered stardom as an ungendered phenomenon, or considered the star as male by default. Such focus on stardom as a discursive formation was very prevalent in mainstream star studies at this time. John Ellis, in his article, "Stars As a Cinematic Phenomenon" (1990), engaged in some discussions of labour, describing "stars-as-workers,"¹⁹ but he did not delve into how filmic culture treats performing men and

¹⁶ Karen Hollinger, "The Actress: Hollywood Acting and the Female Star", 35.

¹⁷ Ibid. 34.

¹⁸ See Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI Pub: 1998); Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St. Martin's: 1986); John Ellis, "Stars as Cinematic Phenomenon", in *Star Texts: Image And Performance in Film and Television*, Jeremy G. Butler (Detroit: Wayne State UP: 1991); Richard de Cordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: Illinois: 1990).

¹⁹ John Ellis, "Stars as Cinematic Phenomenon", in *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*, ed. Jeremy Butler, (Detroit: Wayne State: 1991) 306.

women differently. Instead, within this and other studies, the actor tended to be presented as a monolithic genderless type.

Following Dyer in the historiography of star studies, Richard de Cordova published *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (1990), which brings together cultural studies and film history to understand the early development of star discourse. de Cordova's primary engagement therein was not with gender, as his emphasis like Dyer's was on the overall symbolic and ideological values of stardom. de Cordova's work is particularly instructive as a window into the ambiguities of argument that surrounded the multiplicities of identity between the film actor and their image. Such questions have plagued film scholars for decades: what or whom is the "real" in film? Is it the image, character, or the living human actor? What about the star image? Where does one end and another begin? These problems of subjectivity and representation in visual culture were well articulated by Liz Conor in her 2004 monograph *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s*: "[m]odern visual technologies intensified the distinction between object and subject, but rendered ambivalent the status of the object when reproduced as image".²⁰ de Cordova's approach is thus most valuable towards this project's discussion of the discursive and economic elements implicit in star construction.²¹

Cultural studies, including star studies, emerged in the second phase of the discipline's development, and included a vast array of gender-specific approaches. Feminist film scholarship that came to prominence in this period is grounding to this thesis. Nevertheless, labour has not to date been a prominent feature of this field. Women's cinema, as Teresa de Lauretis has explained, was associated with either activist or experimental counter-cinema. The discussion of women performers has been mainly limited to textual analyses. Second-generation feminist film theory prioritised the critique of Hollywood as a system of representation, of which film stars were a part, starting from Laura Mulvey's aforementioned statement about women stars and glamour. Such critique shifted away the anthropological and economic focus found in de Beauvoir and Powdermaker's critiques of Hollywood to the psychoanalytic and the psychosocial. Such psychoanalytically informed readings proposed by, among others, Mary Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman, and Pam Cook touched on the theorization of the female star as a constructed image of male desire.

²⁰ Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Bloomington, Indiana, 2004), 24.

²¹ Richard de Cordova *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana, Illinois, 1990).

Starting from the 1990s, feminist scholars like Giuliana Bruno, Patrice Petro, and Judith Mayne began to write about women from historical viewpoints, simultaneously reflecting on the overlook by their predecessors of women's contributions to film culture.²² Jane Gaines, in her aforementioned book, has explained the trajectory whereby feminist film studies of the 1970s did not, surprisingly, opt into the "writing women into history" movement; in short, the leading scholars were either involved in postmodern theorisation, or influenced by "anti-historicism" driven by Marxist cultural studies' distrust of humanism and valorisation of historic individuals.²³ Nonetheless, the lack of concentration on materialist history explains only in part the scarce attention paid to female stardom and acting from the viewpoint of labour and class.

Danae Clark's *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors' Labor* (1995) marks a particular moment for sociological analysis of the role of the actors in Hollywood. A communication and cultural studies scholar steeped in Marxist perspectives, Clark chose to consider Hollywood as exploitative socioeconomic system, falling within the realm of an American capitalist-informed cultural industry. At the time *Negotiating Hollywood* was released, the work of *Cahiers du Cinéma* editor Jean-Louis Comolli that considered the star system in Marxist terms-- as a system of workers' exploitation— was both two decades old and a major outlier.²⁴ Clark's premise is simple and elegant. Moreover, it has lent itself to solutions to some nagging and complex problems that were points of contention in feminist film studies dominated by the psychoanalytic, the semiotic, and reception theory. It is without doubt that ever-increasing work on ethnographic and production studies, as well as research on actress relationships to capital, contracts, working conditions, and other material concerns of women in film done by the next

²² An exhaustive list of the publications produced within this important area of feminist historiography and theory would be impossible to compile here. These are some articles that helped to define the disciplinary output: Jane Gaines, "Film History and the Two Presents of Feminist Film Theory." *Cinema Journal* 44.1 (Fall 2004): 113-119; Patrice Petro. "Feminism and Film History." *Camera Obscura* Vol. 1 Issue. 22. 8 (January 1990) 8–27; Lauren Rabinovitz. "Past Imperfect: Feminism and Social Histories of Silent Film," *Femmes et cinéma muet : nouvelles problématiques, nouvelles méthodologies*. Spec. Issue of *Cinemas* 16: 1 (Fall 2005): 21-34; [1990] Catherine Russell. "Parallax Historiography: The Flâneuse as Cyberfeminist," Jennifer Bean and Diane Negra, eds. *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. (Durham, Duke University Press, 2002,) pp. 552-570; Janet Staiger, "The Future of the Past." *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 126-129.

²³ Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped*, 11; see also Annette Kuhn and Jackie Stacey, eds. *Screen Histories: A Screen Reader* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1998); Diane Waldman and Janet Walker. *Feminism and Documentary* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1999).

²⁴ Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism (1)." *Screen Reader 1: Cinema/Ideology/Politics*. London: Society for Education in Film and Television, 1977; Jean-Louis Comolli, "Technique and Ideology", in *Comolli, Cinema Against Spectacle*, ed. Daniel Fairfax (Amsterdam, 2015).

generation of feminist film scholars, all owe much to the simple shift in perspective enacted in Clark's approach.

Coming to star studies from cultural studies, Clark was openly critical of it, attempting to trouble its margins rather than speaking as a member of the fold. In her introduction to *Negotiating Hollywood*, she immediately threw down the gauntlet when she declared that this book was not a book about stars in the traditional sense at all, and in fact barely fell within the field of star studies. Bothered by the supremacy of textual analysis and the shunting off of historical work, Clark wanted to discuss actor's roles and labour from a perspective left out of mainstream film studies courses. She was both attempting to reconfigure the concept of star and to interrogate the discipline of star studies and its semiotics via cultural studies methodologies instead. Clark asked frankly to whom do star studies belong-- to the textual and the psychoanalytic, or to the contextual and to those experiencing lived cultural struggle? From the beginning, her stance was abundantly clear. As a neo-Marxist, Clark found star studies disturbingly elitist and its chroniclers in thrall to the forces of capital and the studio mythologies. Film studies and especially star studies had refused to demand entrée behind the curtain of the dream factory to examine its material conditions, or to unearth its inequities.²⁵

The central premise of Clark's revisionist star theory was, to put it simply, to specifically argue for the actor as a worker in the filmic system. With this shift in focus, numerous things occur. Historical facts and artifacts in the way of contracts and salaries become ripe for film studies analysis. The dream factory mythos is critically wounded. The actor regains subjectivity and agency. The wall between spectator and star and the artificial subject/object divide is broken down in favour of, instead, a perspective of a continuum of working subjects. The scholar is no longer beholden to the speculative psyches of spectators or the possible symbols of the star to create coherent theories of film performance. Clark's shifts in star studies were not a mere tweaking of theory. Rather, they grew out of her belief that star studies must be changed into an ethical political project. In order to look at injustice, exploitation, and antisocial capitalism as a force, the scholar must have the tools to identify the actress as a sociohistorical actor with subjectivity and agency, working within a corporate system. She is neither an image nor a persona. She is not both at some moments, one at others, and arcane mélanges of even more identities at yet other times, as in some earlier film theory constructions. The actress is an individual working in an industry.

²⁵ Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood* (introduction).

Within this work, Clark articulated the cultural studies implications for the subjectivity of the cinematic actress. In addition, she was able to understand its implications for a vastly reconfigured relational field between star and spectator:

[A]s social subjects who must navigate the gendered, racialized, and otherwise politicized space of cultural practices, actors and spectators come to occupy similar positions and to experience similar struggles in terms of labor power and subject identity.²⁶

Within the text, Clark also accounts for instances of solidarity that go both ways on the continuum of actress and spectator woman, as when she writes that “actors and spectators form alliances that are vastly different from the narrow star (as-object)- viewer (as subject) relation posited by mainstream film studies”.²⁷ Such a cultural studies approach, inherently grounded in uncovering labour and class inequalities, also includes the recognition of the fact that the vast majority of actors never became stars at all. Therefore, their power relations with one another and with spectators were neither glamorous nor simple. Situating the actress in the working classes in this way, and not very far from her spectator at that, allows scholarship to establish not boundaries but commonalities between actress and fan, as well as between actress and women working in other areas of the Hollywood studio system, and even between successful actress and “failure”. It does permanent damage to the dream factory mythos, and also allows the feminist film historian to undertake new work in analysing the actress as working-class subject.

Clark conceded that the work of writing this history would be enormous, and in fact amount to the reconfiguration of a discipline and subdiscipline. To begin, the connection between the film actor's labour and their subjectivity is unique in comparison with any other profession, and this remains true even with a labour approach to film theory. Clark has offered conclusions that can help to dispel the crisis of meaning of the image for scholars, by encouraging historical analysis and acceptance of subjectivity. But what about the experiences of the actors themselves? Clark recognised that “as subjects caught between their positions as laborers and commodity images, they are involved in a conflict over the very terms of representation”.²⁸ Nevertheless she declared that:

a new understanding of the interrelationships among labor, subjectivity, discourse, and history is necessary if cultural studies is to account for the subjective role of film actors within the cinematic institution.²⁹

²⁶ Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood* 123.

²⁷ Ibid. 124.

²⁸ Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood* 119.

²⁹ Ibid. 118.

From the perspective of sociocultural and labour history in Hollywood, this changes the conception of the performer. A living human subject with agency performed labour by acting in a film. Their labour was the action. The filmic image is, fundamentally, the technological recorded document of that actor's labour in perpetuity. While there may be legal and economic disputes as to who qualifies as the owner of the image and is legally allowed to reshow it, be it the actor or their employers, the image remains, eternally, a reproduction, a facsimile. It does not take on a ghostly subjectivity of its own. The performer is an individual who has produced work for a system, just as a worker produces products that go out into the world.

Examining acting from the viewpoint of labour entails addressing legal and economic aspects involved in this area of cultural production. This has been an area of investigation in the institutional history of Hollywood since the 1970s, including studies focused on prominent actresses such as, for instance, Bette Davis and Barbara Stanwyck.³⁰ Yet incrementally over the next two decades, an increasing number of feminist film historians begin to work with this "new labour" methodology. By the 2000s, a new generation of film scholars had embraced the labour studies approach to stardom so completely as to make it a formidable sub-stream of feminist film studies in its own right. Articles, chapters, and then full-length monographs began to be published in which the entire overarching mode of star studies was labour and cultural studies.

American film historian Jane Gaines, in particular, became one of the first major figures of feminist film studies to strongly pick up on the industrial and labour approach and adapt it to new feminist methodologies. In the introduction of *Negotiating Hollywood*, Clark had cited Gaines as one of the only other scholars she knew of to be looking into material conditions over aesthetics and the fetishistic at this time. After Gaines' article "Dream/Factory" in 2000, there was possibility for more sea change in feminist film studies. This meant that more scholars began to analyse the star from the materialist labour point of view, and the star system from the perspective of production and industrialisation. Five years after *Negotiating Hollywood*, Gaines picked up where Clark left off, explaining that previously, a concern with film as industry had been considered work for communication and cultural theory scholars. Film studies had been meant to be separate, and to concentrate on auteurs, high theorisation, and formalist aesthetics.

³⁰ Tino Balio, *The American Film Industry* (ed.) (Madison, Wisconsin, 1976); Cathy Klaprat, "The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in Another Light." In *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison, Wisconsin, 1976); Janet Staiger, "Blueprints For Feature Films: Hollywood's Continuity Scripts." In *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio. (Madison, Wisconsin, 1976); Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (New York, Scribner, 1993); David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London, Routledge, 2003).

Gaines was instead here declaring that these divides had become artificial, explicitly citing "a new flowering of industry studies within film studies".³¹ Two years later, Gaines' essay "Of Cabbages and Authors" (2002) demonstrated her thinking and working in new sorts of industry studies across multiple publications.

Since Gaines' initial articles, the numbers of feminist film scholars taking notice of the labour studies approach to the star and to film history and incorporating it into their work have grown. The labour studies approach to stardom, and particularly female stardom, moved from marginal and neo-Marxist radical beginnings to a quite central methodology of feminist film history of the next decade's writing, taken up by scholars like Adrienne McLean, Karen Hollinger, and Diane Negra. In 2002, Negra wrote a labour studies single-star analysis article intriguingly titled, "The Vamp as Canny Laborer and Uncertain Commodity: Pola Negri in the Context of Industrial Production" for Jennifer Bean's anthology *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. It provides a good example of the shifts in the field at the time. In 2004, a first, book-length labour study of one star appeared, in Adrienne McLean's *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom*. Its arrival showed the growing viability of this approach to the star within feminist film studies and, perhaps, a move towards the same in mainstream film studies as well. The book broke particular new ground in relation to the star and the commodified body in performance via not only film acting but dance.

Early in McLean's monograph, she cites Clark's work as a strong source for her project. She discusses the unequal power relations that define the movie star, asserting instead the common experience of the actor and the spectator in terms of being labour subjects under hierarchical power. McLean's one-star analysis approach is an effective one in such a vast and multivalent task of centring labour in feminist film history. Within her work, McLean quotes Jackie Stacey, famous as ethnographer of the fan and fan culture, who had remarked that it is "puzzling" that "feminist work on Hollywood cinema has paid little attention to the stars".³² Today, this statement by Stacey is probably no longer accurate, demonstrating the evolution of the field. McLean's project, in its weight towards the historical and biographical, showed the progress of feminist film studies' turn to labour.

In 2006, Karen Hollinger published *The Actress: Hollywood Acting and the Female Star*. Such a text, with its interest in acting technique, embodied performance, and analyses of individual actresses, would probably not have come into fruition in the pre-1990s conception of

³¹ Jane Gaines, "Dream/Factory", 106.

³² In *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom*, McLean 14.

the actress as immobile image or passive object. In it Hollinger specifically speaks to Clark's legacy, saying that "although star studies have investigated many areas of stardom, two important dimensions have been neglected: stars as auteurs and stars as workers within the film industry"³³. Hollinger wrote that through her "alternative" methods, "Clark has contributed significantly to the study of acting as work by looking at what she calls the screen 'actors' subjectivity' as it is shaped materially by 'labor power practices'."³⁴

Thus from the mid-2000s onward, increasing numbers of scholars have undertaken labour studies of stars and industries. It is finally possible to make a legitimate case for the labour studies approach to the star as not only the most effective entrée into some of the problematics of star theory like class subjectivity, but the one that is the most aligned with feminist scholarship. Yet to the present day, class theory has still not been undertaken in terms of application to the Hollywood industrial-social system. Actresses have not yet to date been situated in the same working-class continuum as the spectator women who idolised them. The feminist film historian writings on the subject, while valuable, have not developed a specific theory of actress class-- and this is the intervention into the literature of the field that I am attempting with this project.

With respect to the concentric spheres of feminist film studies around this project, the ethnographic-cultural history approach of this thesis mirrors Jackie Stacey's *Star Gazing* by methodology. To date, much has been written by film historians working within feminist frameworks like Stacey and Shelley Stamp (*Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon*, 2000) about working-class spectators and women as consumers of popular culture. Their works provide a lexicon from which to evolve to a related discussion of the working-class woman as performer, actress, class subject, and migrant to new Hollywood. But instead of focusing on the now somewhat overdetermined spectator, I instead focus on the experiences and class subjectivity within the film industry of the women who worked in it in all capacities-- actress or not, success or not. New analysis is finally further informed by social and cultural historians who have looked at the actress in early film, not to say the new institution of film itself, from the perspective of migration and new industry and city for women: Hilary Hallett and Heidi Kenaga, among others.³⁵

³³ Karen Hollinger, *The Actress: Hollywood Acting and the Female Star*, 33.

³⁴ Ibid. 35.

³⁵ Heidi Kenaga, "Making the 'Studio Girl': The Hollywood Studio Club and Industry Regulation of Female Labour.", *Film History: An International Journal* 18, no. 2 (2006).

Such a turn and its consequences also extend out from the specific concept of stardom to a general remapping of the topography of feminist film history itself. If ways can be found to open up the field so that virtually all film is fair game for feminist analysis, and a film can have feminist merit through its woman-labour by a myriad of other positions rather than through a sole creator and director, as in the women's cinema model, the vibrancy and relevance of the discipline is only increased. An actress can be envisioned as a film creator and a filmmaker because she is a labourer.

To go even further, a methodology by which women who worked on a film in any capacity are valued and examined as labourers and class subjects opens yet more avenues for feminist film studies. If speaking in terms of labour, it becomes possible to interrogate the space of not only the actresses, but of the screenwriters, the costume designers, the seamstresses, the makeup artists, the secretaries of the producers, and the cleaning women at the studios-- a cross-class and intersectional approach to film history that has been advocated in both feminist film scholarship and popular and industrial culture in recent years.³⁶ On January 1, 2018, Time's Up released its manifesto for sea change for women in Hollywood, in the form of an open letter in the *New York Times*. One of the most adamant assertions of both the manifesto and the Time's Up charter is that it is impossible for such a campaign to bring about ethical change if it centres on multimillionaire star women and ignores women in working-class jobs in and out of the film industry. It argues that such an approach would not only be useless but elitist, reproducing of classist harms even as it might decry gendered abuses.³⁷ Rather, a cross-class approach vastly opens a space to talk about the labour of all creative/productive woman in film through this shift in focus in star studies.

This thesis thus proposes, vis-à-vis its materialist and neo-Marxist approach, an alliance between feminist film studies and first-person history as a kind of reclamatory historiography of film and filmic culture. This is a part of the concept of historiographic justice that emerges as a central concept by the final chapter of the project and its epilogue. It may hopefully prove particularly relevant in theorising a new, post-MeToo approach to Hollywood's history as of 2017. This is a truly democratizing, egalitarian, and liberating mode of enquiry, and one that is in line with the political ideology and aims of feminist scholarship. Patrice Petro has put the

³⁶ I would also note that in her chapter "Working in the Dream Factory" in *Pink-Slipped* (2018), Jane Gaines called for this inclusion of forgotten histories of not only women directors or screenwriters in the silent era, but of women clerical workers who have been completely erased.

³⁷ "Open Letter from Time's Up." *The New York Times*. January 1, 2018. Web.

question directly to feminist film scholars, “Can a feminist film history be confined to a history of film?”³⁸ This project answers Petro’s question definitively in the negative. In doing so, it demonstrates its historiographic commitment to evidence of labour conditions and classed abuses in all film histories of actresses and other women in the Hollywood studio system.

Finally, it is important to ground the discussion of previous influences and literature review of star studies, performance studies, and feminist film history in some useful, broader review of concepts from contiguous cultural studies approaches and theorists. The combination of accepted film and cultural historical research with theory from other disciplines potentially allows for inventive interdisciplinary scholarship. Said external theory serves here to both ground the politique and praxis of the entire project and to introduce concepts not just useful but necessary from outside of the disciplinary constraints of film studies alone. In specific relation to women and capitalism in filmic systems, it is indubitable that the Hollywood industrial social model shaped the formation of many other national film industries around the world. Thus, it is appropriate to contend with a slightly wider corpus of continental philosophy on gender, feminist theory, and performance studies’ theories of labour before moving on to the central theoretical ground of American social and labour history.

In particular, this thesis project incorporates concepts from materialist feminism and cultural theorists, parallel to that of historians of women, labour, and performance, to read women’s class position in historical Hollywood. Materialist feminism, in its reworking of male-oriented Marxist economic theory through Second Wave feminism, as well as its historical view that oppression is an inherent state for women in patriarchy, is an excellent lens through which to view gender in the Hollywood system. For Christine Delphy, a foundational materialist feminist, oppression of women is a materialist concern. Delphy has asked of the superstructural insistence that misogyny and patriarchy are social-personal problems and not financial ones, “Why do they do everything in their power to make it appear that women's oppression is restricted to the superstructural, to 'ideological factors'?”³⁹ As will be evident in chapter case studies, this quote resonates with the disciplinary and publicity practices of male power studio Hollywood at the height of its powers.

Foundational theory on the nature of masculinist-corporatist systems also draws heavily from the work of a somewhat unlikely source, American *fin de siècle* economist Thorstein Veblen. His ideas of the predatory nature of male business are applied to the Hollywood system, and are in fact foundational to all chapters going forward. Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu has

³⁸ Patrice Petro. *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History*. (Rutgers; New Brunswick: 2002) 44.

³⁹ Christine Delphy. “A Materialist Feminism Is Possible.” *Feminist Review*. 4.1 (1980) 101.

introduced several key discursive concepts across both class and gender studies to which I refer often in this project— habitus, *la domination masculine*, and real/symbolic forms of violence.⁴⁰ Bourdieu's concept of *la domination masculine*, formulated in the 1990s, is an excellent addition here, offering a varied perspective to feminist theorists working on gender and the status of women within male industrial systems. Understanding and moving past *la domination masculine* means looking at all institutions within any system. The fact that Bourdieu's most well-known work has been on class and can be situated alongside his related foray into gender is even more of note for the purposes of this project.⁴¹ This Bourdieusian approach also allows the thesis to situate Hollywood within its various broader fields-- American capitalism, entertainment and performance industries, publicity and tabloid journalism, the Los Angeles business and social communities, and organised crime. Finally, Bourdieu's well-known concept of habitus is particularly applicable to analysis of the system created and behaviours condoned by the studio heads, as is his conception of symbolic violence and its relation to overt violence.

As previously mentioned, this work is grounded in Simone de Beauvoir's discussion of Hollywood actresses, with *The Second Sex* (1949) as something of an *ur-text*. Feminist theorists specialising in disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy, and labour and performance history like Gayle Rubin, Luce Irigaray, Silvia Federici, and Judith Butler have all continued with work in the vein of what de Beauvoir started through later decades.⁴² A chronologically, geographically, and disciplinarily diverse group of feminist theorists have done revisionist scholarship on the social importance of the performing and/or bartered woman as feminine archetype, the performance of femininity, and the materialist body-use and exchange-value of actresses in industrial systems. Most specifically of the group in relevance to this project, Irigaray has written extensively on women's bodies in the marketplace, use-value, exchange-value, and exploitation-- all of which are most relevant in relation to discussion of actresses in a filmic economy. Irigaray is also well-known for her use of theatrical, performance, and choreographic language and metaphor in her theorisation of the woman's experience in

⁴⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (Palo Alto, Stanford, 2001).

⁴¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, Harvard, 1984);

⁴² Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex." In *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham, NC, Duke, 2011); Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell UP, 1985); Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York, Autonomedia, 2004); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. (New York, Routledge, 1993); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London, Verso, 2004).

culture.⁴³ Also of particular interest in terms of Hollywood's studio-era actresses is Federici's work on the reproductive body and labour, reworked towards the concept of the unproductive body. Forbidden marriages, forced abortion, and induced emaciation all demand new discussion as entertainment industry practices that precisely denied reproduction.⁴⁴

The thesis also relies upon further related spheres of feminist theory. It utilises more recent feminist analyses, born of Second Wave feminism and beyond, of bodily exploitation in beauty culture and regulation written by Naomi Wolf, Susan Bordo, and Lois Banner, among others. Wolf's consideration of cosmetic surgery and analysis of "the surgical economy" in relation to women's bodies as one that "constitutes... a category that falls somewhere between a slave economy and a free market"⁴⁵ is one that remains incredibly useful and relevant to the status of women in Hollywood, most especially in the studio era but arguably extending to the present. In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Culture, and the Body* (1993), Wolf's contemporary Susan Bordo offered a similar, specifically historicized interpretation of beauty practices in writing that "the social manipulation of the female body emerged as an absolutely central strategy in the maintenance of power relations between the sexes over the past hundred years".⁴⁶ Both Wolf and Bordo have been foundational in establishing beauty standards and body practices as cudgels employed by powerful men against agitating women— a concept to be addressed in depth in all upcoming chapters.

Where the body meets not only the economic but the social and political is an epistemological area which has been engaged with by both male and feminist theorists for decades. Obviously for the purposes of this work, such theorisation needs to be extrapolated in terms of gender. Judith Butler has notably written about both the socio-political aspects of embodiment and the performativity of everyday life, and any theorisation of the performer's body in culture would be remiss without her. Butler's concepts of bodies that matter and the grievable life are also very much applicable to traumatic case studies in upcoming chapters, as to the way the system effectively silenced and defeated particular and forgotten women after abusing them. In fact, the epilogue speaks to Butler's theorisation of the grievable life to both situate class in an intersectional context for women in Hollywood past and present, and to connect it to contemporary race theory. Such a perspective amounts to a thinking through of class away from

⁴³ Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell UP, 1985).

⁴⁴ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York, Autonomedia, 2004)

⁴⁵ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: Morrow: 1991), 39.

⁴⁶ Susan Bordo. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. (Berkeley: California: 1993) 143.

the disciplines of economics and political science: rather reimagining class in terms of which (white, male, “successful”) lives matter more than others (those of women, people of colour, and professional failures).

Mikhail Bakhtin notably situated the entire life as an act, one in which one creates the self in the realm of the aesthetic by way of the body and the encounter.⁴⁷ But how to move beyond Bakhtin to conceptualise a modern industrial system in which the (female) body becomes a factory construction of beauty for the profits of the capitalist bosses? Where the remaking of the body is not self-directed, but external? Since the initial Bakhtinian musings into the aesthetic body, ever evolving feminist work on body and beauty theory has been undertaken. Just as this thesis project argues strongly for the continuation of the turn to labour in feminist film history, there have been similar well-known labour turns in disciplines from philosophy to performance studies. Rosalind Gill in particular connects all three labour turns- the emotional, the aesthetic, and the creative.⁴⁸ Where Naomi Wolf identified beauty as a feminist issue in the 1990s, today feminist theorists like Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff, and Michelle Lazar are utilising concepts of affect and emotional labour to discuss the labour of glamour.⁴⁹ Interestingly, esteemed feminist film and cultural historian Lois Banner was a forerunner of this approach as far back as 1983, with her key work *American Beauty: A Social History Through Two Centuries of the American Idea, Ideal, and Image of the Beautiful Woman*.

The affective turn in feminist beauty studies and feminist aesthetics has further developed into several camps. The feminist Foucauldian approach is particularly apropos to this project, as it centres on control of the female body, and is notable for work from Bordo, Sandra Bartky, and Jana Sawicki. Other feminist body theorists continue to work with psychology and body image, or beauty in terms of feminist backlash-- specifically Naomi Wolf, Diane Negra, Susan Faludi, and Yvonne Tasker.

As concern with emotional capitalism and affect under power and production has grown, increasing theorization has been undertaken in these areas in the last decade by Eva Illouz, Brian Massumi, Mike Featherstone, and Claire Colebrook, among others. Such recent scholarly interest adds legitimacy to the assertion that this project must incorporate affect, trauma, and

⁴⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*. (Austin: Texas: 2011) 27.

⁴⁸ Rosalind Gill, in *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism*. Eds. Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill, and Christina Scharff (Heidelberg: Springer, 2017), 34.

⁴⁹ Ibid.; Michelle M. Lazar, “The Right to Be Beautiful: Postfeminist Identity and Consumer Beauty Advertising,” in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, ed. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, (London: Palgrave, 2011).

the experiential recountings of the first-person narratives of actresses who lived and laboured under the Hollywood system. To this point, this thesis project situates alongside the work of Jean McAvoy and Ana Elias, who have suggested explorations in affect that nevertheless do not neglect the sociocultural.⁵⁰ In this vein, this project contends that the way actresses experienced and felt the Hollywood system is key to understanding its systemic abuses.

Along these lines, the mining of both memoir and interview also allows for the employ of affective labour and trauma theory to excavate, parallel to labour history, an emotional archaeology of the actress and working woman in Hollywood through history. It offers a sharp contrast again to mainstream, masculinist histories of Hollywood and women in labour systems that have shown little concern for the experiential. This theoretical discussion of affect within systems of labour precarity and exploitation (especially from a performance studies perspective) is augmented with conceptualisation by Judith Butler, Jose Muñoz, and Tavia Nyong'o, amongst others.⁵¹ Before contemporary performance studies as a discipline was cementing theories of affective labour, Ernst Bloch was presciently occupied with the relationship between trauma, hope, and the use of one's own words and memoir as a politicised, gendered form of hopeful speech.⁵² Raymond Williams, too, was concerned with structures of feelings within patterns of historicity in the sphere of cultural theory.⁵³ All of these have become theorists of note to the interwoven foci of this project.

Following feminist studies of beauty and affective approaches to labour, the other major school of contemporary theory incorporated throughout this work are cultural studies approaches to creative labour; specifically, the understanding of creative labour and of creators as labourers. Popular amongst British academics, "the turn to cultural work" has gained more and more ground in the U.K. with work from, once again, Rosalind Gill, as well as important texts by Mark Banks and Stephanie Taylor. As Banks, Gill, and Taylor opened their 2014 anthology *Theorizing Cultural Work*:

After decades of being displaced in media and communication studies by a focus on texts and audiences, and in sociological research on work by the study

⁵⁰ *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism*. Eds. Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill, and Christina Scharff. (Heidelberg: Springer, 2017) 19.

⁵¹ Judith Butler, "Performativity, Precarity And Sexual Politics." *AIBR: Revista De Antropología Iberoamericana* 4, no. 3 (2009); Jose Muñoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 3 (2006): 675-88; Tavia Nyong'o, "Situating precarity between the body and the commons", *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*. 23.2 (2013).

⁵² Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (Cambridge, MIT, 1995).

⁵³ Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (New York, Verso, 1989).

of industrial and service labour sector, the labouring lives of people working in the cultural and creative industries are now firmly on the research agenda.⁵⁴

Nearly all of the themes of this project echo such theoretical currents.

In 2018's *Race and the Cultural Industries*, Anamik Saha has situated creative labour theory as a new, amalgamated discipline, emerging in the last decade in response to the need for a post-Bourdieuian sociology of art as cultural production.⁵⁵ His book speaks to concerns that go back to Raymond Williams, suggesting the importance of moving past discussion of aesthetics and meaning to understanding of how works are created. This would obviously be a resonant approach for my own thesis, in its focus on how Hollywood's production conditions impacted its labourers. As Allison Trope notes in the specific case of Hollywood in 2011's *Stardust Monuments: The Saving and Selling of Hollywood*, "[m]uch of the storytelling and mythmaking around Hollywood centers on the spectacle and monumental, often leaving its industrial and institutional politics to the margins".⁵⁶ Not all creative industries, let alone film industries, have formed under the same lines by any means-- either in terms of economy, or of abuses and hierarchies. Saha, in his general discussion of creative labour theory, has noted how these new approaches are meant to distance from Adorno and Horkheimer's "crude fatalistic vision" of one singular culture industry, in favour of "culture industries".⁵⁷ Such a distinction is relevant to the early part of the thesis, as it examines the specific conditions under which Hollywood was born and developed into its recognisable industrial-cultural iterations over the studio period. It is acknowledged by its notable scholars that this emergent discipline lacks historicity, and has to date been almost exclusively contending with the present. Thus in particular, this project attempts to add a historical dimension to the emerging body of work in creative labour.

Others have recognised that the affective turn, now so common across disciplines, actually began in theatre and performance studies in the 2000s before gaining ground in other disciplines. The project incorporates theory from performance studies surrounding the links between performativity, precarity, and affective labour brought to the fore in performance

⁵⁴ Mark Banks, Rosalind Gill, Stephanie Taylor, *Theorizing Cultural Work: Labour, Continuity, and Change in the Cultural and Creative Industries* (London: Routledge: 2014), 1.

⁵⁵ Anamik Saha, *Race and the Creative Industries* (London: Wiley: 2018), 49.

⁵⁶ Allison Trope. *Stardust Monuments: The Saving and Selling of Hollywood*. (Hanover; Dartmouth, 2011) 4.

⁵⁷ Saha, *Race and the Cultural Industries* 57.

studies recently by scholars like Rebecca Schneider, Nicholas Ridout, Shannon Jackson, and others.⁵⁸ The nature of labour that includes bodily performance, seductive performance, and gendered performance, and its power imbalances and exploitations, must be grounded in understanding of the emotional labour of such positions. How they relate to material issues of capital, labour, and class are uniquely drawn through here. It is natural for this project to operate in this area, especially alongside the case study theme of male executive power abuse and actress trauma. Scholarship on affect produced in the last decade is another reinforcement of the political justification of a project that validates the traumatic experiences of women who live through abusive systems.

Further, this thesis is meant to spur interdisciplinary approaches to history. It turns a much-needed cultural history lens on performance studies. This work takes the position of historians Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites in their study *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918* (1999), who note that “curiously enough, historians of art, music, and theater have seldom entered or been invited into the broader historical discourse”.⁵⁹ Roshwald and Stites then went on to call for the necessity of not bracketing off histories of arts and entertainment; but rather to look to mass culture and popular culture to bridge the gap between political history and cultural history. While such work has assuredly been undertaken since their plea,⁶⁰ it has still been primarily done within fields like theatre, performance studies, and music rather than in more traditionalist history departments; the need for respect for and incorporation of the arts into the latter still remains.

The thesis is essentially grounded in social science and economic scholarship through its foundational use of Powdermaker and Veblen, and in its apposite critique of masculinist histories of business and capitalism. Yet where a pure industrial history might focus on contracts and data to critique such systems, this interdisciplinary cultural history approach instead deliberately foregrounds instead what women said, wrote, and did about their own contracts and

⁵⁸ Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider. "Precarity and Performance: An Introduction." *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, no. 4 (2012): 5-9; Shannon Jackson, "Just-in-Time: Performance and the Aesthetics of Precarity." *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, no. 4 (2012): 10-31; Jose Muñoz and Lisa Duggan. "Hope and Hopelessness: A Dialogue." *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19, no. 2 (July 2009).

⁵⁹ Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites, *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918*. (Cambridge, 1999) 4.

⁶⁰ Mark Franko and Annette Richards, *Acting on the Past: Historical Performance Across the Disciplines* (Middletown, CT, Wesleyan, 2000); Tracy Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage, 1800-1914* (Cambridge, 2007); Clare Cochrane, *Twentieth Century British Empire: Industry, Art, and Empire* (Cambridge, 2011); Mark Franko, *Choreographing Discourses: A Mark Franko Reader* (London, Routledge, 2018); Kim Solga, ed. *A Cultural History of Theatre in the Modern Age* (London, Bloomsbury, 2019).

contacts with men in the business. Foundational here are theories of social history that have looked to histories of the everyday and the pragmatic, which have strengthened as approaches in recent decades. As one of the many proponents of this type of social history, Eugen Weber, has reminded:

History [was] not just the epic of collective deeds, but the tissue of the times; not just what happened, but to whom and how; not just wars and politics, the doings of a relatively restricted group, but the way people lived - humbler and middling people, and the rich as well - their food, their housing, the warp and woof of their existence.⁶¹

While far from the first historian to shift from extraordinary people to the history of everyday life within systems, Weber's status as a cultural historian doing this work within in the milieu of twentieth century Los Angeles resonates with the project's perimeters. Foundational film historian Miriam Bratu Hansen affirmed such an approach by including in her seminal 1991 *Babel and Babylon* Ralph Waldo Emerson's axiom that there is no history, only biography.⁶² Particularly in a project with an ethos of repositioning the forgotten stories of women's abuses in everyday life, a kind of MeToo-ing of history, such a re-centering of the everyday and away from "truth" as written exclusively by or about powerful men and measured by wars, governments, or corporate and legal records is absolutely vital. Along these lines, this project is intent on challenging and disrupting a male-centred and male-absolving view of Hollywood history, an underlying goal through all chapters and choice of sources.

This literature review has hopefully demonstrated that an alternative reading of the status history of women in Hollywood must do two things simultaneously. Firstly, it must carefully trace film studies, specifically in the sub-disciplines of film history, feminist film history, and star studies, for the precise scholarly understandings of the star and women in film that now beg revisiting. Secondly, such work must not at all limit itself to scholarship from the discipline of film studies. Instead, foundational research should and must be drawn from varied fields. Feminist theory, sociology, economics, performance studies, cultural studies, history, and philosophy are all vital within the major questions of this project.

Periodisation

⁶¹ Andrew Yarrow, "Eugen Weber, Authority on Modern France Dies at 82", *New York Times*, May 22, 2007.

⁶² Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard: 1991), 167.

The specific, classed nature of this project focuses upon Los Angeles via not only its utterly unique position as the first world metropolis in history powered by film and performance, but also by the highly American and yet quite singular corporate structure it then developed. I argue that the emergent class moment I am identifying for actresses in Hollywood cinema is very much predicated upon the unusual cultural nature of southern California in the early twentieth century. Migratory, geographic, corporate, ethnic, and gendered circumstances of power allowed the studio system not only to take hold and become dominant for decades, but to create a uniquely unimpeachable structure whose power was underwritten, specifically, by masculinist practices and misogyny.⁶³

At the same time, in both film studies and cultural studies there is awareness that there have been a multitude of Hollywoods, each with different semiotic meetings, different sub-identities, and different relational dynamics. Periodisation and understanding of shifts throughout the studio era and beyond are most well-defined through the use of primary sources. This is why, as the themes of this project coalesced, I ultimately came to focus most tightly on the decades of ascendant, peak studio dominance as the centre of its case studies. Conceptualisation on periodisation from de Cordova, Hansen, Petro, and Vivian Sobchak has been useful in delineating this necessary aspect of the project.⁶⁴

As this thesis makes a specific argument about the male-centred, corporatist nature of the studio system, the studio era is an ideal framework to use for the body of the work in its case studies. This sets the centre of my focus and the bulk of the case studies from approximately 1915 to 1950. This approach allows for case studies to begin in the early, more egalitarian Hollywood of the 1910s, to contrast with the encroaching studio capitalist era that began in earnest in the 1920s. More specialised focus to the “high studio period” takes the project through the peak of beauty, body, performance, and publicity industrial precision in the high-water years of the studio system, and thus is especially built around the 1920s and 1930s. While the primary focus of the project occurs over the above two decades, the epilogue briefly

⁶³ See Thomas Schatz, *Historical Dimensions: The Development of the American Film Industry* (2004); Allan John Scott, *On Hollywood: The Place, the Industry*. (2005); David Thomson, *The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood*. (2005).

⁶⁴ Richard de Cordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana, Illinois, 1990); Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. (Cambridge, Harvard, 1991); Patrice Petro, *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History* (New Brunswick, 2002); Patrice Petro, *Idols of Modernity: Movie Stars of the 1920s* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2010); Vivian Sobchak, "Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir". In *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*., edited by Nick Browne (Berkeley, California, 1998); Vivian Sobchak, *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event* (New York, Routledge, 1996); Vivian Sobchak, "What Is Film History? Or, the Riddle of the Sphinxes." In *Reinventing Film Studies*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (New York, Oxford, 2000).

touches on future work to be done on the post-studio era from the 1960s to the present. The final section utilises some of my 2014 Los Angeles oral history fieldwork, and asks critical questions about how current phenomena fit into the thesis of class and women as labourers in the Hollywood economy. It also offers some specific realms of inquiry towards which to point future, ongoing scholarship. Finally, the work concludes speaking to the radical shift and potentialities brought about by the unforeseen MeToo revolution of 2017.

Similarly, the choice of the case studies should also be contextualised and justified. The selected examples do not mean to assert universal truth about actresses in the studio system. Instead, they provide a diversified sampling of the conditions of actresses throughout the history of Hollywood. To this effect, the corpus includes primary and secondary sources on major stars, peripheral or obscure starlets, and aspiring actresses. Performance historian Kirsten Pullen has explained the importance of biography in scholarship on the lives of actresses via her use of “nodal moments”—specific contested points in the case studies that return as thematics through the lives of many of the women.⁶⁵ As she asserts in justification of her subjects and this methodology in *Like a Natural Woman* (2014), “case studies are a crucial methodology for investigations of the interplay between stardom and ideology”.⁶⁶

Materials, sources, and methodology

A sociological understanding of the Hollywood actress as a labour subject crucially involves drawing on primary sources based on interview and memoirs. This section strongly asserts the need to recognise women’s own writing and voice. This type of evidence amounts to a form of reclamative history, reconstituting the Hollywood actresses through her own testimony and opinion. In addition to the primacy of memoir and interview, this project relies on primary sources fan magazine articles, newspaper pieces, and even gossip columns as evidentiary of cultural milieu— but with much skepticism towards their specific historical facts or the times they purport to speak in actress voices. Thus, this study does draw from primary source fan magazines such as *Photoplay*, *Look*, and *Movie Mirror*, amongst others. These magazines are highly historically instructive as relates to the social coding of the good life, the acceptable life, and the transgressive, alternative, or bohemian life. Their normativity and pedagogy make them

⁶⁵ Kirsten Pullen. *Like a Natural Woman: Spectacular Female Performance in Classical Hollywood* (New Brunswick: Rutgers: 2014) 22.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

today particularly rich and weighty as cultural texts when it comes to historical and gendered matters of class.

There are challenges in employing such sources in historical work, and they must be addressed openly. The largest problem intrinsic to this specific project is how, precisely, to provide an accurate social, class, and gender history of Hollywood, a cultural industry known for mastering the art of concealing its politics, motivations, and working conditions. In other words, the question of how to study an industry and culture that was specifically built on lies and concealment from its foundation, while reading through its own inaccurate texts as source material, is baked into the methodological concerns of such a study. Thus, particular attention is given to the methodological problem of how to utilise non-traditional sources like fan magazines, gossip columns, and even hate mail for scholarship purposes. Studio documents as well are highly questionable sources when it is known just how much they were filled with untruths and cover-up; at times the lies and conspiracies found in them become part of the history itself. In terms of studio publicity materials, fan magazine articles, and many studio documents, I would assert that they are best utilised against the grain-- reading them assuming falsehood, and interrogating instead what systemic value they are reifying or wrong they are obscuring.

Traditional historical and film scholarship is central to the project's research. At the same time, the use of cultural-textual evidence from film, television, literature, social media, and digital humanities platforms engaged in history are employed here in the register of social justice through historic reclamation projects. The reading of gendered Hollywood class will be particularly interwoven with the analysis of both filmic texts and fiction. Textual analysis of a few choice films that speak to women and class or draw attention to the class of the actress-performer augments both the cultural and labour studies and figures into discussions of performance, affective labour, and conflation of actress and character. Such analysis employs some of the Hollywood film texts that are ripe for gendered class analysis; texts that speak to discussion of class, or those in which the actress' class status is prominent in either subject matter, characterisation, or performance (*The Saturday Night Kid* (1929), *Baby Face* (1933), *Stella Dallas* (1937), *The Women* (1939), *Fifth Avenue Girl* (1939)).⁶⁷ The chapters also work into actress case studies some discussion of filmic texts from various periods that speak to the problem of the actress in economy, class and society in Hollywood. This list includes surveys of

⁶⁷ *The Saturday Night Kid*. Dir. Edward Sutherland. Perf. Clara Bow, Jean Arthur, James Hall. 1929; *Baby Face*. Dir. Alfred E. Green. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, George Brent, Donald Cook. 1933; *Stella Dallas*. Dir. by King Vidor. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, John Boles, Anne Shirley. 1937; *The Women*. Dir. George Cukor. Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford, Rosalind Russell. 1939; *Fifth Avenue Girl*. Dir. Gregory La Cava. Perf. Ginger Rogers, Walter Connolly, Verree Teasdale. 1939.

“backstage” films such as *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933), *Moulin Rouge* (1934), and *Stage Door* (1937).⁶⁸ Finally, this interwoven, interdisciplinary textual analysis is also augmented by fictional literary accounts of the dystopian milieu of Hollywood in its situation in greater Los Angeles, such as *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1935), *The Day of the Locust* (1939), *What Makes Sammy Run?* (1941), *The Last Tycoon* (1941), and *The Little Sister* (1949).⁶⁹

Actress recollection as central primary source, spoken and written

Similar methodological justifications and concerns about truth and accuracy are raised around the use of actress biography, memoir, and interview. In recent years, feminist film historians like Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight have illustrated new feminist historiographic practices via the use of such sources.⁷⁰ Jane Gaines has described this specific work required of feminist film history as going beyond drawing attention to women directors or themes of women's issues in films. Rather, in Gaines' equation, feminist film history must now be a multistep process of “recovery, revision, restoration, and crucially, rectification of wrongs”.⁷¹ Within this process must sit an understanding that inaccuracies, concealments, and omissions will be intrinsic. As Gaines notes, feminist film historians have never and do not now pretend to reach a state of perfect truth. The methodology employed in this thesis follows the model of the editors of the Columbia Women Pioneers Film Project in dealing with these common issues in scholarly film historiography, when they write that “we now approach memoirs as a construction, or a blend of memory, fact, and fictionalization”.⁷² Similarly pertinent is feminist film historian Ruth Barton's explanation that we use memoir “not to assert the primacy of the individual's own

⁶⁸ *Gold Diggers of 1933*. Dir. Mervyn LeRoy. Perf. Warren William, Joan Blondell, Aline MacMahon. 1933.

⁶⁹ Horace McCoy, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (London, Profile, 2011); *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* Dir. Sydney Pollack. Perf. Jane Fonda, Michael Sarrazin, Susannah York. 1969; Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust* (New York, Time, 1965); *The Day of the Locust*. Dir. John Schlesinger. Perf. Donald Sutherland, Karen Black, Burgess Meredith. 1975; Budd Schulberg, *What Makes Sammy Run?* (New York, Modern Library, 1952); F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Last Tycoon* (Richmond, UK, Alma, 2018); *The Last Tycoon*. Dir. Elia Kazan. Perf. Robert De Niro, Tony Curtis, Robert Mitchum. 1976; Raymond Chandler, *The Little Sister*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2016.

⁷⁰ Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight, eds. *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future* (Champaign: Illinois: 2015); *Moulin Rouge*. Dir. Sidney Lanfield. Perf. Constance Bennett, Franchot Tone, Tullio Carminati. 1934; *Stage Door*. Dir. Gregory La Cava. Perf. Katharine Hepburn, Ginger Rogers, Adolphe Menjou. 1937.

⁷¹ Jane Gaines. “Silent Era Women: Even More Global Than We Thought”. *Women, Film, Culture, and Globalization* conference. Concordia University, Montreal. September 4, 2016. Conference paper.

⁷² Gretchen Bisplinghoff. “Gene Gauntier.” Columbia Women Film Pioneers Project. <https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-gene-gauntier/> Accessed January 9, 2015.

interpretation of her life story but to explore the intertextuality of biography and performance".⁷³ In sum, it is contended that the personal details present in each memoir are of lesser import than the broader composite they provide of lived industrial/economic/sociocultural realities for women labourers in Hollywood.

History that takes into account and includes women through their own voices is, quite literally, a revisionary, political act of scholarship. Biographies and memoirs read against the grain of the glamour ideology of Hollywood and with a new focus towards class and labour issues are heavily utilised here. Uncovering of the ways that actresses have constructed their own personae or written or erased their own histories through memoirs is particularly important as relates to this project's work on class. Case studies devote most attention to actresses whose memoirs engage specifically with their class origins and status or their experiences as labourers-- Louise Brooks, Frances Farmer, Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Ava Gardner, and Ginger Rogers, to name a few. Memoirs, oral history, and other actress speech are especially important from non-white actresses in terms of intersectional racial reckoning with white supremacist studio Hollywood, and thus the viewpoints of women like Lupe Velez, Hattie McDaniel, Meareane Jordan, and Theresa Harris are invaluable.

In terms of the primary sources employed in this thesis project, another unique contribution to scholarship lies in its oral history methodologies. In 2014, I was awarded a two-month travel fellowship by my home institution, Concordia University, to go to Los Angeles for doctoral research. Within the research process I was able to interview twenty-six women of all ages and levels of success who have worked in various positions over decades of Hollywood history. The women interviewed had a fascinating variety of circumstances: fame or anonymity, great wealth or impoverished precarity, and success or struggle and failure. The interview aspect of this project focused on actresses but also included a large sample of women in all other careers in film- directors, producers, screenwriters, editors, agents, assistants, coaches, and composers, among others. The living archive of women and marginalised peoples, in the form of interview and stories that contradict and reshape the mainstream historical record, is a priceless and non-renewable resource. Interviewing elderly women, who have a base of knowledge about women's lived experience in the early twentieth century, for example, blurs the distinction between past and present. It also blurs the line between the scholarly and the everyday experiential. All of these unique and challenging primary sources are employed in service of the central point of the thesis: they aim to demonstrate precisely how labour and class

⁷³ Ruth Barton. "Before She Was Mary Kate:': Maureen O'Hara's Contradictory Career." in, editor(s) Sean Crosson and Rod Stoneman, *The Quiet Man ... And Beyond*, Dublin, The Liffey Press 2009, 214 - 223.

conditions perpetuated highly unequal power relations and exploitation upon women working in Hollywood.

Notes on some semantic choices

Class Acts, as a title, is evocative of the fundamental questions of the performing woman as class actor. It reminds that this archetypal performing woman, in both historical and contemporary contexts, is always both enacting class and having class enacted upon her as she navigates sociocultural and industrial milieus. Its doubled and other meanings in colloquialism and wordplay that comment on class in the Hollywood milieu will be addressed in later chapters.

It is also necessary to include in this brief section on linguistic choices a clarifying note on terminology in regard to the choice of the word “actress” throughout the thesis. The twenty-first century’s preferred reference for women performers is “actor”, as a principle of gender neutrality. Today it is largely agreed-upon terminology as part of the acknowledgement that women performers should never have their labour devalued, sexualised, or differentiated as lesser than that of male performers given the privilege of being called “actors”. In the majority of performing circles, the term “actor” denotes craft and seriousness of profession and using it to describe women performers is characterised as, finally and correctly, giving them their due. This linguistic shift, born of Second Wave feminism, meant to shake off the title of “actress” with its perceived tawdry associations of sexual availability and other pejoratives. At the origins of the scholarly discipline of star studies, Richard Dyer took a clear stance against the term “actress”, writing in 1979, “[t]he term ‘actress’ to me seems to have strong connotations that both belittle and trivialise women actors”.⁷⁴ I choose, to the contrary, to maintain the term “actress” within this work.

This choice is employed while still respecting and with full awareness of contemporary shifts in language in industrial contexts, applied in line with feminist progress. There are several good reasons for maintaining the gender-differentiating term “actress”. The most important lies in the paramount importance for historians to diligently avoid anachronistic slippage. To that point, I maintain the term “actress” not only because this project is a social and cultural history, and performing women were known as “actresses” for the majority of the time period to be discussed in this text. I also maintain the word because this thesis deals with precisely the class

⁷⁴ Dyer, *Stars* 9.

and labour problems that arise alongside everything “actress” has meant in society throughout time, particularly to men with power: a public, working woman, generally conventionally attractive, sexually available, or otherwise on the market. For centuries, the term has also connoted the worst misogynistic perceptions of perceived feminine traits-- dishonesty, untrustworthiness, the tendency to scheme, engage in dramatics and histrionics, emotionality, narcissism, or attention-seeking.

The history of the actress in culture is a vital aspect of understanding the broader place of women within social history. As this work is intrinsically informed by the paradox of the actress position in societies and engages with these pejorative generalizations, it is imperative that the terminology be historically and linguistically accurate and thus not updated for more egalitarian times. We must contend with precisely these stereotypes and injustices in order to reclaim a different history for a group of women in a historical labour milieu. I note that important scholars of film history, cultural studies, and performance studies like Rosamond Gilder, Kirsten Pullen, and Tracy Davis have also chosen to maintain the term of “actress” for similar reasons of historical accuracy.⁷⁵

I have also chosen to maintain the term “American” within this thesis to refer to the culture, history, and identity of people from the United States of America. Recognising that the adjective “American” is contentious in global and postcolonial/Latin American studies contexts, I choose to retain it here as descriptive. This choice has been taken due to the persistence of ideas of Hollywood as “American cinema”, “the American Dream”, and a specific concept of capitalist-masculinist “Americanness” that I attempt to define and uncover within the Hollywood industrial system.

⁷⁵ See Rosamond Gilder, *Enter the Actress; the First Woman in the Theatre*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931); Kirsten Pullen, *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2005.); *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture*. (London: Routledge, 1991).

Chapter 1

Way Out West: History/Theory, Gender/Race, and the United States of Class



Franklin Avenue, Los Angeles, c. 1900

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“When man’s place was maintained by brute force, it made him more brutal: when his place was maintained by purchase, by the power of economic necessity, then he grew into the merciless use of such power as distinguishes him to-day.”¹

- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (1898)

The introduction’s literature review attempted to demonstrate that there has been a slow climb, over many decades and across quite a few disciplines, towards scholarship that would analyse women in Hollywood as labour and class subjects. Yet while scholarship has had its own interests and movements, a parallel disinterest in women in Hollywood as exploited workers was a much stronger force from the sociocultural and industrial arenas. A combination of the two may be why it took until 2017 to witness a serious sea change in terms of women and labour conditions there, in the form of MeToo and its corollary Time’s Up movement. It is true that women have attempted to speak about injustices of the Hollywood system for decades; in fact, much of the case study material in this thesis excavates precisely such writing and speech. It could be said that such charges have been hiding in plain sight for decades within the popular culture; and that in such a broadly misogynistic American space, women were simply not listened to with a level of seriousness prior to the Weinstein moment and all that has followed it.

Yet additionally, the problem of recognition of women’s subordinate status in Hollywood has not been one of mere messaging. Rather it has been one stymied by the lack of acknowledgement, for decades, as to how fundamentally and structurally chauvinistic the Hollywood system has been at its base-- not merely in terms of personal relations, but in its fundamental economic underpinnings. In actuality, in this case it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the United States and American experiment to begin to understand the country’s curious relationship to class at all, before then applying it to gender. Such a reckoning also requires exploration of the history of class in the American social sciences. Both also begin to offer insight into some of American society’s parallel difficulties with gender and race. Further, an exploration of the way class has operated as a masculinist force in American history and culture does indeed segue into the roots of Hollywood. It helps to offer a much more complete understanding as to how Hollywood as both industrial and social space became what it did, and how such an organisation endured into the current century.

¹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (London, Forgotten, 2015) 166.

A large part of the famed myth of the American Dream, one that had developed over a century and came to be so heavily leaned-upon by the studio founders for their own purposes, can be traced back to Revolutionary-era political thought and philosophy. In the late eighteenth century, Thomas Jefferson actively attempted to standardise his position that class did not exist in the new American experiment. In his “Etats Unis” (1786), Jefferson made the fantastical assertion that “[n]o distinction between man and man has ever been known in America... the poorest labourer stood on equal ground with the wealthiest Millionaire”, and that beggars were unknown in the new nation.² Going further, Jefferson claimed a beatific lack of class consciousness in the hearts and minds of all Americans when he wrote that “of distinctions by birth or badge”, Americans “had no more idea than they had of existence in the moon or planets”.³ These are American self-conceptualisations of a classless society that have carried over through three centuries.

While Jefferson was at the time of this writing the American minister to France, his assertions were no doubt informed by those espoused by Thomas Paine a decade earlier, in his famed *Common Sense*. As historian Nancy Isenberg writes of Paine in her recent revisionist study that offers a corrective to a classless notion of American history (one from which this project draws heavily), *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (2016):

In two breezy paragraphs, he coupled the distinctions of class and sexual difference as phenomena beyond present political concern. They were differences derived from nature, effects that had come about by accident. They simply were. Class disparities did not rise to the level of justifying revolution....⁴

As a capitalist, Paine thought that commerce and its accompanying hierarchical strata were natural, and that it was only monarchy that was unnatural. As Isenberg explained, Paine “presumed, incorrectly as it turns out, that class would take care of itself”.⁵

In fact, as Isenberg deftly lays out in her work, “[b]eyond white anger and ignorance is a far more complicated history of class identity that dates back to America’s colonial period and British notions of poverty”.⁶ Class distinctions, hierarchies, poverty, and injustice were present in the white American occupying colony from the foundation of Jamestown. With a quote that could have been reworded into modern English and been perfectly at home at an Occupy Wall Street protest in the 2010s, we might far precede Jefferson and turn to John Smith in his 1624

² Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*. (New York, Penguin, 2016) 97.

³ Ibid. 98.

⁴ Ibid 79.

⁵ Ibid 84.

⁶ Ibid xiv.

Generall Historie of Virginia: “This dear bought Land with so much blood and cost, hath onely made some few rich, and all the rest losers”.⁷

Thus, as the United States was still beginning to solidify its central myth encapsulated under the self-made man, the Horatio Alger story, and the obsession with bootstraps, Isenberg explains that as early as the 1780s, literally the first years of the new nation:

Wealth was being transferred upward, from the tattered pockets of poor farmers and soldiers to the bulging purses of a nouveau riche of wartime speculators and creditors- a new class of ‘moneyed men’.⁸

By the 1850s, during the long period of the genocide of Indigenous peoples, the doctrines of American expansion promised any industrious white man the start of a new life with his own land. Isenberg noted that, in reality, laws were being passed that rewarded speculators who never lived on the land they purchased.⁹ In actuality, there was faint hope for the landless to ascend to the landed class.

A primary concern of this dissertation is placing Hollywood within the larger context of American systems of inequality across gender and race. Intersectionality is a fundamental perspective in my analysis, given that the exploitation of gender and racial minorities in the workplace-- a prominent issue in Hollywood-- has been and still remains a vastly overlooked issue in American public discourse. It can be safely argued that much inequality has sustained itself because the U.S. has steadfastly maintained its foundational myths on opportunity and classlessness. Situating the American mythos in 18th century and frontier discourses, Isenberg has explained that “American dislike for the idea of class is deeply rooted in the colonial and revolutionary experiences of this first new nation of the modern era”.¹⁰ Americans became deeply invested in a populist/nationalist self-conception that positioned them ideologically as the antipodes of European class-based society. In this self-conception, almost everyone was middle-class, poverty was nonexistent, and hard work could get one anywhere. One can see how by the later nineteenth century the symbolism of the Alger story and Ellis Island were a perfect fit for Americans’ vision of themselves. As a result of these myths, Isenberg explains, “Americans lack any deeper appreciation of class”,¹¹ or of “the curious and complicated story of America’s class identity”.

⁷ Ibid 26.

⁸ Ibid 96.

⁹ Ibid 112.

¹⁰ Ibid 3.

¹¹ Ibid xiv.

Isenberg goes a step further in identifying this deep-seated American attitude towards class, noting that “Americans do not like to talk about class. It is not supposed to be important in our history. It is not who we are”.¹² Yet crucially, Isenberg explains that while eschewed in American myth, class distinction remained an overdetermined prejudice and bias in reality. As she puts it, As she details, “not only did Americans *not* abandon their desire for class distinctions, they repeatedly reinvented class distinctions”.¹³ Hence, she concludes, “[i]n the face of social upheaval, as so many old boundaries and prejudices shifted, Americans generally denied what they remained: highly class conscious”.¹⁴

Furthermore, American exceptionalism has always been built on myths that have been borne out less by reality than by contradictory ideologies. For instance, the belief that the U.S had no classes somehow existed side by side with the idea that its upper class should be genteel and philanthropic. In *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theatre in the Nineteenth Century* (2010), Gillian Rodger cited Martin J. Burke’s assertion that “Americans have long found ways to delineate class distinctions while also maintaining that they are committed to a classless society”.¹⁵

Values around class, mobility, and money in the new American context continued to evolve and coincide with “modern” ideas. In *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (1998), Joan Rubin explained how dating back to the colonial period, American upper-class status (again, to be discreetly considered nonexistent) was not just meant to be gauged by manners, elegance, and wit in beautiful homes. This was considered mere “drawing room performance” and European style finery.¹⁶ *American* aristocracy should combine these mere practices with character traits like tolerance and reason. Vulgar flash and fashion for fashion’s sake were looked upon with disdain, while good taste and “gentility” were all-important.¹⁷ This philosophy of gentility reached its peak in the Arnoldian era of the mid-nineteenth century. Though British, Matthew Arnold’s exhortation of good living and good culture, turning against hedonism and over-emphasis on industrialisation, became massively influential in the U.S.

This schizoid approach to class even extended to actual pathological levels of denial in more than one of the modern works consulted in this project. Isenberg has commented upon the phenomenon of upper-class Americans, in particular, being uncomfortable with talking about

¹² Ibid. 7.

¹³ Ibid 310.

¹⁴ Ibid 236.

¹⁵ Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima* 201.

¹⁶ Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*. (Raleigh, North Carolina Press, 1998) 1.

¹⁷ Ibid. 4.

class, suggesting that even the very use of the term “class” itself is decidedly *not* upper-class.¹⁸ Subjects report being ashamed of their secret feelings of superiority toward their fellow Americans. Steven Ross opens the introduction to his *Working Class Hollywood* (1998) with a somewhat shocking anecdote from biographer Stephen Birmingham. When Birmingham was young, he mentioned something about lower-class people to his mother, at which point she slapped him: “‘There are no classes in America!’ Then she said, ‘of course there are, but we never *talk* about it’.”¹⁹

Such deeply internalised historical positions have accounted for quite a few peculiarities of the American populace and social structure, from low union membership to the use of “class warfare” as a highly effective insult and stopgap to numerous political debates. In recent decades the Jeffersonian conceit that the United States is and has always been a classless society has become a particular right-wing canard, with Isenberg scathingly calling out the perpetuation of the myth by far-right, eugenics-promoting academic Charles Murray in his 2012 book *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010*.²⁰

In fact, Americans are as adept as any peoples of the world in judging people by markers like clothing, education, and level on the social ladder, as well as at placing themselves somewhere on that ladder; they just prefer not to say it out loud. In *Working Class Hollywood*, Ross cites E.P. Thompson’s assertion that class “is a cultural as much as an economic formation”.²¹ Thus American cultural history is quite marked by this confused denial of class; one that somehow exists simultaneously astride a Bourdieusian understanding of elites and hierarchies, money, power, and access, and manners, lifestyles, and habitus.

In addition to discomfort and outright denial, Gillian Rodger posits in *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima* that “[o]ne of the difficulties in discussing social class in the United States is its extremely fluid nature”.²² This fluid nature will become a massively important point as this thesis situates women’s class status in Hollywood in east to west migration, and in the transitory nature of the city of Los Angeles. Later sections of the thesis introduces the class order shaken by the first global stars of the 1920s and delve more into the ambivalent concept of a new American “parvenu aristocracy”.²³

¹⁸ Isenberg, *White Trash* 9.

¹⁹ Steven Ross, *Working Class Hollywood*. (Princeton, NJ, 1998) 5.

²⁰ Isenberg *White Trash* 4.

²¹ Ross, *Working Class Hollywood* xiii.

²² Gillian Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater in the Nineteenth Century*. (Champaign, Illinois, 2010.) 201.

²³ *Ibid* 72.

By the later nineteenth century and the vast and suspiciously acquired fortunes of the robber barons, the American landscape around class and aristocracy had changed yet again. In a rhyming of history that occurs many times in the chapters of this project, later chapters situate the massive fortunes made by the emergent moguls in Hollywood in lineage with those of the robber barons decades before. Excavating Hollywood's corporate structure allows one to classify it as based upon similar nineteenth century exploitative practices, ones that Lois Banner has called "the conquest of the resources of a continent by industrial buccaneers".²⁴ In *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (1982), Alan Trachtenberg also delineated the social structure that enabled the era of the robber baron and prefaced the studio founders as a new robber baron class:

In railroad monopolies, combinations, conspiracies to set rates and control traffic, lobbies to bribe public officials and buy legislatures, the nation had its first taste of robber barons on a grand scale.²⁵

It was an American era of empires created via family dynasties and speculators, while built on the backs and deaths of immigrant workers. About the railroad barons of the later nineteenth century, Louis Hacker has written, "[t]hey pursued their game of war on each other with zest and without mercy".²⁶ An 1886 congressional committee described Rockefeller's unconstitutional Standard Oil and its 90% market share thusly: "its settled policy and firm determination is to crush out all who may be rash enough to enter the field against it;... it hesitates at nothing in the accomplishment of this purpose".²⁷ As Trachtenberg went on to note, "[t]he more colorful methods included threats, fraud, chicanery, and open violence".²⁸

The Gilded Age robber baron class not only anticipated the new Hollywood power elite in their use of conspiracy, crime, and collusion with government, but also in their Veblen-defined *modus operandi* of conspicuous consumption. Within her truly interdisciplinary studies of fashion, beauty, and film, Lois Banner has also written about the history of the American upper class. Banner situates the massive fortunes of the Gilded Age and its accompanying palaces in Newport and the Hudson Valley as built on speculation and, once again, postwar plundering (this time the Civil War).²⁹ She describes a byzantine business world peopled by men "absorbed

²⁴ Lois Banner, *American Beauty: A Social History Through Two Centuries of the American Idea, Ideal, and Image of the Beautiful Woman*. (New York, Knopf, 1983).

²⁵ Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*. (New York, Hill & Wang, 1982) 57.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 81.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 85.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Banner, *American Beauty* 163.

in the details of the intricate corporate structures they had created”,³⁰ with wives who shaped their own insulated high society. As Trachtenberg remarked upon this American Gilded Age elite:

Their power to attract attention, even as objects of criticism and scorn as well as envy” derived from the massive and elegant structures they erected, from homes to museums and libraries.³¹

This was the era of philanthropy, and the democratising of high culture via museums, parks, orchestras, and libraries for the people. Civic buildings were no mere altruism: “[s]uch display made perfectly plain who ruled the society”.³²

Such class grounding situates the sociocultural foundations on which Hollywood was able to form. Even as its founders came from completely different class and ethnic backgrounds than the nineteenth-century robber baron philanthropists, said founders also learned how to obscure both origins and criminality with high style and the trappings of power. Moreover, this type of economy prefigured Hollywood’s in its imposing of a vertical structure modelled on that of previous successful American industries: ruthlessly exploitative and discriminatory to all but white men.

In addition, many American social scientists have contributed over decades to the consolidation of a positive image of the nation’s male-centred capitalism, again reinforcing the false idea of the American classless society. W. Lloyd Warner, for instance, writing in the 1940s identified “the century of the common man”.³³ Even into the 1960s, most Americans granted that there might be “influence” in society, but not groups of elite businessmen who held the majority of power.³⁴

This ideology is alive and well across American culture today, both preached in suburban megachurches and part and parcel with the worship of Wall Street. As one corporate executive explained to economic sociologist G. William Domhoff within his research in the 1980s: “three out of four feel that the role of profits is very clear- it's for the good of the country... It's moral to have a profit system because then, truly, the deserving get rewarded”.³⁵ Such a kind of corporate Calvinism sets the structure where those in charge are meant to be in charge, and is not a far leap to the understanding that they can do no wrong. Besides a

³⁰ Ibid 164.

³¹ Ibid. 14.

³² Ibid. 87.

³³ W. Lloyd Warner, *Social Class in America*. (New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1960).

³⁴ G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America?: Challenges to Corporate and Class Dominance*. (New York, McGraw-Hill, 2014) 22.

³⁵ Ibid.105.

perhaps-unconscious religious foundation inculcated into Domhoff's executive interviewee, this intrinsic belief in the goodness of capitalism and the goodness of American order have other roots as well, some that again return us to Jefferson and beyond. Domhoff has cited the laissez-faire liberalism of Locke, Hume, Montesquieu, and the Founding Fathers as "the underlying principles of the American belief system".³⁶ As Domhoff explained:

[t]hese principles emphasize individualism, free enterprise, competition, equality of opportunity, and a minimum of reliance on government... Popularly speaking, these values are known to most citizens as plain "Americanism".³⁷

In fact, these can all be recognised as qualities of "Americanism" that, unchecked, can end in extreme exploitative systems or sociopathy. This analysis provides a base from which to approach the way the Hollywood system formed and treated its less-equal members.

The persistence of such contradictory class myths makes this project all the more necessary and pressing. American self-identity has clearly never been honest about the most basic structures of its own society, in terms of class, gender, or race. It is naturally even more difficult within such a society, then, for a conception of women as an abused, exploited class in the capitalist male system to be accepted. Based on the above discussion of the Calvinist roots of American society, the status quo is not a far leap to a kind of gender Calvinism accepted by both many men and many women. In such a conception, men are in charge because they are supposed to be in charge, and their decisions and actions must be right, just, and proper. As these are some of the notable cultural assumptions well-shattered with the MeToo moment of 2017, it's especially of note within the upcoming chapters of this project.

While Europe of the nineteenth century produced Marx and Weber, the American class system was not even seriously studied by sociologists until the 1920s. As the sociologists who undertook this work were all decidedly American and decidedly anti-Marxist, their work is not critical of the system but rather supportive of it. American social scientists of the period were particularly assertive about the supremacy of capitalism and urban development in American life. In 1933, Adolph Berle published *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*, which highlighted not only the modernity but also the Americanness of the emerging corporation.³⁸

³⁶ Ibid. 98.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Adolph Berle, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (New Brunswick, NJ, Transaction, 1991).

In 1949, W. Lloyd Warner published one of the first major studies on the topic, *Social Class in America*. In fact, much of the mainstream male American social science literature discussed here coincided with and ran parallel to the peak of the studio system.³⁹ Warner's Americanness-- his optimism and his white male cheerfulness in the face of horrific gender and racial inequality-- are front and centre in this scholarly sociological work. First, it was vital to establish, in this McCarthyist moment, that one was emphatically not a Marxist just to not be branded politically suspect for studying social structures in the first place. Warner asserted that he did not take the Marxist position that capitalism causes class, but rather that class is something that happens naturally. It is not something to be eradicated. In fact, the American social sciences relating to business have retained this decidedly centre-right vantage point to this day.

Such very positive, pro-American Dream discourse is striking in a contemporary reading. Warner advocated that the reader study class to make it work for them. Not doing so was at an individual's peril; without understanding the class structure and how it use it to one's own advantage, an individual could wind up with a ruined life. On the positive side, one can fulfill their dreams with the information they glean on how to work the class system. Warner's "advice" would not be out of place in the self-help line of a Norman Vincent Peale. Those not born into elite families were also not to worry. Many leading businessmen come from modest backgrounds today, Warner explained. Class is fluid and the American Dream is flourishing. In keeping with white male business writing of the American mid-century, there is virtually no mention of women or people of colour within the volume.⁴⁰

G. William Domhoff published the first of his *Who Rules America?* series in 1967, continuing to produce updated volumes and sequels into the present decade. The series is an interesting mix of the sociological and the popular; in fact, Domhoff's first book was a best-seller. The very first line of the introduction of the first book includes an axiom well-established above as to the American belief in a classless society, but with a slight twist. "Class and *power* are terms that make Americans a little uneasy", Domhoff declared.⁴¹ Domhoff was notable for a slightly counter-cultural position. The first book's general premise was that Domhoff would prove, contrary to other American sociologists, that there was in fact a ruling elite. Yet on closer inspection, Domhoff's position does not deviate a great deal from that of his peers. Upon

³⁹ Warner, *Social Class in America*.

⁴⁰ Warner, *Social Class in America*.

⁴¹ Domhoff, *Who Rules America?* 1.

identifying a ruling class, he felt quite benignly towards them pursuing and protecting their own interests, in their use of tools from country clubs and the Social Register to politics and lobbying.

Domhoff demonstrated how many American social scientists have been extremely uncomfortable with deconstructing (white, male) power and influence within their own country. Time and again their position is shown to be a sympathetically conservative one, refusing to question possibly malevolent elements within American corporate structures. From my position as a twenty-first century feminist materialist cultural historian attempting to uncover the American labour system and its gender and race abuses, Domhoff's following statement can only be read as a disappointment that needs correcting: "[i]n the words of sociologists, social mobility and a formal system of equality in all areas of political and social life make class a relatively unimportant area for Americans".⁴²

In *The Concept of the Corporation* (1946), Peter Drucker, with conclusions not dissimilar to Domhoff's, rooted the moral development of the American corporation in the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer, the Natural Rights of Man, and the free market.⁴³ Again, it is evident how a very specific chain of thinkers and questionable values were enshrined as normative, correct, and untouchable, creating the corporation as not only an economic force that spreads its values into the culture, but a moral one as well. Further chapters of this thesis demonstrate how in the case of the Hollywood studio system, the values that were entrenched and spread were well-centred in, among other things, abuse of women, white supremacy, and criminal business practices.

Analysis of Hollywood as a capitalist system has by now surely been well-delineated by numerous cinema scholars over the decades (Balio; Schatz; Ross, et al.).⁴⁴ This took time, however. Auteurist schools of film studies have frequently resisted the blurring of discussion between artistic output or cultural product and unjust conditions. As Richard Maltby has written of his own *Hollywood Cinema* (1995), "[i]nitially, at least, theory also distanced academic cinema studies from any concern with the economic and industrial issues that have framed much of this book's consideration of Hollywood".⁴⁵ Frankly, such recalcitrance to discuss conditions, and the insistence of separating the film product from its capitalist creators, was a

⁴² Ibid. 5.

⁴³ Peter Drucker, *The Concept of the Corporation*. (New York, Signet, 1983) 29.

⁴⁴ Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (New York, Scribner, 1993); Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York, Pantheon, 1988); Steven Joseph Ross, *Working Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton, 1998).

⁴⁵ Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995) 527.

boon to the system to keep doing things as it always had in terms of gender and race, unchallenged.

It is then useful, rather, to turn to current interdisciplinary scholarship from other fields for new ways of looking at how capitalist conditions specifically determine the creative output they send forth, and their impact on creative workers. Due to said entrenched traditions and cultural assumptions, it is not surprising that it was the 1990s, in fact, before what Anamik Saha has termed “getting to grips with the particular nature of cultural production under capitalist conditions”-- what Bill Ryan (1992) calls the “corporate form of production”⁴⁶-- was even undertaken. This turn to labour and capitalism in creative contexts in anglophone culture did not emerge in the U.S. to critique its own corporate models; rather, it has risen to some prominence in the U.K. and Australia.

Scholars like Keith Negus, Ryan, and now Saha have produced conceptual models that allow for critique of the ways in which creative industries like film and music are channeled under capitalist production. Negus, according to Saha, has endeavored “to see how class divisions, lifestyles and habitus intersect with corporate practices”.⁴⁷ A musicologist, Negus has sought to understand the processes of industrial practices in creative industries-- processes which then go on to inform cultural practices, and seep into the cultural representations sent out at large into the public. These are excellent approaches to apply to excavating gender and racial biases within the Hollywood system, specifically (particularly post-2017). Such a methodology can be perfectly applied, for example, to the politics of “the casting couch” and the sexual availability required to obtain roles, and how that then informs actresses, characters, and portrayals transmitted to the public. This is a particular analysis that I apply in Chapter Five. I feel it is safe to conclude, however, that a country lacking a scholarly tradition of the effects of capitalism on creative workers was, not coincidentally, one of the most retrograde in terms of gender and women in its film industry until the surprising turn of events in 2017.

Truly, a review of the literature of American class and business theory reveals a remarkably consistent level of willful blindness towards the business aspects of cultural industries. Such literature concurrently betrays an almost total myopia in terms of gender. Each of the above-mentioned texts from the 1930s to well past the women’s liberation movement and into the 1980s and 1990s is *completely* focused on the mobility of men. In the 1960s, E.P. Thompson wrote in *The Theory of the Working Class* that “[c]lass is defined by *men* as they live

⁴⁶ Anamik Saha, *Race and the Cultural Industries*. (Hoboken, Wiley and Sons, 2018) 113.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 126.

their own history, and, in the end, that is its only definition” (emphasis mine).⁴⁸ The first scholarly book to be titled, notably and intriguingly, *Men and Women of the Corporation* was written by business professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter in 1977, at the peak of the women’s liberation decade.

A literature review of the above works of sociology and American class theory finds little content about women at all, except via marriage and as wives. In Warner’s 1955 study, his chapter on marriage determined a wife’s status solely from the status of her father. It was never suggested that she might come to a marriage with an already established career of her own, let alone choose not to be married. Warner’s discussion of women’s class mobility in American culture was as follows:

Many of them have used marriage, the oldest and most acceptable way available to women, to advance themselves to the top levels of American society... Marriage was their way to success.⁴⁹

Within brief discussion of women in “pink collar industries”, such content focused on women like secretaries and telephone operators, with nothing on women in service or beauty industries that might blur into performance or showplace positions (those requiring a certain aesthetic and sexualised standard, from modeling to hostessing to airline “stewardesses”).

In fact, none of these twentieth century class theorists, economists, or sociologists recognised the Hollywood film industry as a unique corporate structure, or the entertainment industry as a key one in the United States at all. The fact that such a quintessentially American industry, a truly American global business phenomenon, was ignored by American economists and sociologists for most of the twentieth century, is itself remarkable. A few historians and sociologists can be seen as exceptions to this rule. Drucker did understand that that the modern American corporation was “not based on raw materials or gadgets but on... organisation not of machines but of human beings”--⁵⁰ a position that, while not feminist materialist itself by any means, does at least resonate with both feminist work and labour in performance industries.

Steven Ross, while lacking a gendered position, did begin to get at why a class perspective on Hollywood was necessary as far back as his 1998 text *Working Class Hollywood*. Ross recognised both the lack of scholarship on class in general in the U.S., and in particular, that the illusion of glamour has kept people from doing any analysis of class in such a

⁴⁸ David Bright, *The Limits of Labour: Class Formation and the Labour Movement in Calgary, 1883-1929*. (Victoria, UBC, 2011) 52.

⁴⁹ Warner, *Social Class in America* 187.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 25.

lofty and yet mysterious industry as Hollywood film. While Ross' study does not specifically engage with the experiences of women as working-class subjects in Hollywood, it is still of use in placing a class lens on Hollywood's industrial culture in ways rarely done previous to the 1990s. Ross' work paved the way for studies like Jerome Christensen's 2012 *America's Corporate Art: The Studio Authorship of Hollywood Motion Pictures (1929-2011)*. Texts like Christensen's began to examine the industrial structures of Hollywood with increasing care, and have situated the studios themselves as both business actors and film auteurs.

Thorstein Veblen has become increasingly important to this project for several reasons, in some ways situating its theoretical underpinnings much as de Beauvoir and Powdermaker gird its case studies of women. Veblen in fact held a unique and sophisticated understanding of the relation between class, capitalism, and women in American society, unique among his contemporaries. As one of the only male American theorists of his period to look at capitalism and class in the American system from neither a collaborationist nor a Marxist perspective, but from his own unique American-historicist one, Veblen's work is well in line with the themes raised here. His willingness to deconstruct American society's inequities, at a time when his fellow white male social scientists were by and large championing the system, in fact caused him to be professionally ostracised. Veblen was attacked from both right and left, and generally stood alone.

More precisely, Veblen is so vital to this project due to its evolution. It became evident to me throughout the research process that a study of the labour history and labour conditions of women in Hollywood could not simply be feminist, if that meant being focused on the experiences of the women themselves alone. To understand the women in the system, the system itself must first be analysed. How did American capitalism work as an exploitative force? How did, as Veblen identified, predatory male capitalist patterns in the American industrial system mirror centuries of patriarchal abuse of power? What was the class hierarchy and aspirational system entrenched in American culture in the early twentieth century with which the immigrant studio founders merged but also disrupted, via their new wealth and new industry in Southern California? While de Beauvoir and Powdermaker allow us to theorise the women of the system and to reinforce their findings with case studies and primary sources, as is discussed later, Veblen does the same for the "bad actors" of this project-- the studio founders and executive class, and the post-studio white male power forces in Hollywood.

A plurality of students of class and American sociology would be most familiar with Veblen for his work on the leisure class and his coining of the phrase "conspicuous consumption". This phrase arose from his study of the new American Gilded Age quasi-

aristocracy, in the 1899 sociological masterwork *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. In international cultural studies circles, Veblen is commonly read as a sort of American forerunner to Bourdieu. He is also known for his massive interdisciplinary influence, admired in his own time for his keen observation of American power and class by artists and writers, while disrespected by his own scholarly peers. Less well known, however, is Veblen's writing on the history of women in culture and on patriarchy: work which has been described by Nils Gilman as his "neglected feminism".⁵¹ Many of Veblen's views on women and male dominance can be seen as proto-feminist, especially modern and radical positions for a male social scientist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

While Veblen's peers were celebrating the American exceptionalism of the industrial-capitalist era, he was instead combining economics with history and sociology to develop theories of the inherent predatory nature of capitalism. He saw as inevitable the tendency for the person with power to become evil and corrupted, displaying cruelty and arrogance and taking to a predatory life. Veblen described earlier predatory civilisations as those built by unjust kings with slave labour, and then proceeded to lay out the case for why modern people in a democracy should not assume that those ways were mere artifacts of the past.

But unlike those on the left in his period, Veblen was not using Marxism or other European-influenced theories to formulate his own work. Veblen was working with a theory of a sort of anti-American Dream that he specifically situated in the post-Civil War period, and in the nation's glorification of hyper-capitalism and greed. Veblen's cultural critique of the post-Reconstruction U.S. reads very similarly to many leveled at American culture in the "greed is good" universe of the Reaganite 1980s. Just as criticism of that period looked to identify the villains of the time, Martha Banta explains that for Veblen, "the study of economics must take into account the brutal pattern of force, conflict, and power, in which the main players are ruthless predators, not admirable citizens".⁵² In this mode of business analysis, Veblen was thinking about Wall Street but anticipating Hollywood.

Eventually, Veblen's last and most important work coincided with the rise of the nascent film industry itself (1914's *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts*). In it, he described the state of American business as "savage":⁵³ predatory, amoral, and unmoored from decency. This conclusion directly preceded the well-worn twentieth century pop culture

⁵¹ Nils Gilman, "Thorstein Veblen's Neglected Feminism." *Journal of Economic Issues*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 1999.

⁵² Martha Banta in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. (London, OUP, 2007) xv.

⁵³ Thorstein Veblen, *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts*. (London, Routledge, 1990) 35.

caricatures of the Hollywood studio head, executive, or agent in numerous works of fiction and film, from Budd Schulberg's notorious Sammy Glick in *What Makes Sammy Run?* (1941) to the character of sociopathic studio head Stanley Hoff in *The Big Knife* (1955).

Particularly unique in Veblen's case, however, was just how highly gendered his critique of predatory capitalism was for a male sociologist of his time. Banta explained Veblen developing what we would now call a masculinist consciousness, setting him apart from his contemporaries. Veblen went on to explain how the masculinist habits of capital acquisition could allow a "propertied" man to not work, while those around him (both male and female) did-- thus creating men, he concluded, as the world's first leisure class.

Along these lines, Veblen was concerned with "the sorry plight of women".⁵⁵ In seeking the historical roots of such a plight, he connected it with his conceptualisation of the inherent exploitation of masculinist ownership. Veblen explained that the earliest form of ownership was ownership of women by men in early societies, offering the example of women within Neolithic tribes holding equivalent values to so much farm acreage or cattle. Ownership also grew with the seizure of female captives as trophies, and Veblen posited that the institution of slavery initially grew from this gendered reality. In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen analysed the biblical story of The Rape of the Sabine Women, and felt it should not be discarded as mere myth. As Banta remarks, "[n]o matter what refinements have been added to contemporary modes of seizure, men continue to appropriate women to affirm their sex's prerogatives".⁵⁶ The fact that the notorious MGM, in the middle of its high studio era, made a light-hearted musical (*Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, 1954), in which the plot centred on the abduction of six girls for the purpose of marriage by six brothers and included a song called "Sobbin' Women" to play on the tale, gives so much credibility to the themes of this project that it can be noted here without further analysis.

On the whole, however, in seeking a feminist materialist base to the problem of exploitation of women's labour and bodies in American corporate structure, especially Hollywood, we would do better to develop a genealogy and tradition of feminist social theorists and philosophers on the subject. These are researchers who deal with gender as both historical-social mode in the vein of Judith Butler, but also in the economic mode of a Virginia Woolf, the less common approach today.

Scholars from both European and American traditions have facilitated two centuries of discourse and exchange on these topics. It has never been the case that women have not been

⁵⁵ Ibid xviii.

⁵⁶ Ibid xix.

active in economics or recognising themselves as class subjects; rather, that such work was marginalised, ignored, or forgotten. Few mainstream economists today would be aware that the first baccalaureate in France ever awarded to a woman was to one Julie-Victoire Daubié in 1862, for her work on women's poverty and the disparities of the labour market.⁵⁷ In 1898 in the United States, Charlotte Perkins Gilman published the iconoclastic *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*.

Gilman was nearly the only American writer, man or woman, to take on the same themes from Veblen's radical writings of the day on economics and business. As a woman herself, her assertions were doubly radical for the period. Gilman connected the business and economics spheres of the times with male control, painting a picture of a society based on "the brutal ferocity of excessive male energy struggling in the marketplace as in a battlefield".⁵⁸ As Gilman also said, "In the economic world, excessive masculinity, in... fierce competition and primitive individualism... have reached a stage where they work more evil than good".⁵⁹ Gilman's writings and thinking on masculinity, violence, and capitalism are best understood in the context of the American cultural landscape. In particular, the concerns of this work demonstrate her dismay at the robber baron ascendancy of her country and its justifiers-- the like of Herbert Spencer and his social Darwinism, or the corollary assertion of the inherent goodness of "survival of the fittest" as doctrine.

To Gilman's incisive worldview, humans as a species should have outgrown winning at the expense of vanquishing others in both economics and gender by now, and moved on to orderly economic progress. But they had not, and this is where their socioeconomic problems lay. Gilman suggested that humans have combined the human sex-relation with the human economic-relation, causing social destruction.⁶⁰ Going further and more scathingly, Gilman explained how the tendency to competition and domination led, in men, to the abuse of power and tendency to rulership:

The lust for power and conquest, natural to the male of any species, has been fostered in him to an enormous degree by this cheap and easy lordship. His dominance is not that of one chosen as best fitted to rule or of one ruling by successful competition... it is a sovereignty based on the accident of sex, and holding over such helpless and inferior dependents as could not question or oppose.⁶¹

⁵⁷ James McMillan, *France and Women, 1789-1914: Gender, Society, and Politics*. (New York, Routledge, 2002) 117.

⁵⁸ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (London, Forgotten Books, 2015) 119.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 69.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 106.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 337.

The most famous interdisciplinary feminist materialist of all may be Virginia Woolf. In 1938, Woolf published the seminal *Three Guineas*. The work explicitly addressed gender and fashion, cultural relations, and power in culture to conclude that men and women amount to two distinct economic classes. Feminist film historian Laleen Jayamanne has argued that “Woolf’s 1938 argument anticipates Monique Wittig; both thinkers interlock the money economy and the sexual economy”.⁶² To Jayamanne’s linkage from Woolf to Wittig, I would add to the chain the previously discussed Luce Irigaray and Christine Delphy, as well as, in a slightly different strain of thought, Judith Butler.

I now move on to a brief discussion of the two major theorists whom, aside from Veblen, are most grounding to this thesis. Both are women who could be classified as, among other things, interdisciplinary social scientists. The first is Simone de Beauvoir, whose precedence in this project as sweeping theorist of woman in history and culture and intermediary between philosophy, theory, and history has previously been discussed. The second is Hortense Powdermaker, who will only be introduced briefly here as her 1950 anthropological study *Hollywood, the Dream Factory* and its central thesis are foundational to this project and discussed at length in Chapter Three, in terms of a unifying theory of Hollywood and the centrality of exploitation to its structure. Both of these women, alongside Veblen, are united as to the common themes in their work that make them intellectual forerunners of this project. All three provide excellent grounding from slightly different directions to the gendered industrial sociology at hand. All three also provide unique foundational theorisation for the themes of exploitation, ownership, and second-class status for women that run through all the case studies of this thesis.

As mentioned in the introduction, even those familiar with de Beauvoir’s 1949 masterwork might have missed that in the nearly 1000 pages of *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir devoted a full section to the commodified status of the actress as product in media culture. More remarkably, she was not looking back to Parisian dancehall performers in fin-de-siècle Paris or the continental courtesan. Despite writing her massive tome in WWII France, de Beauvoir was specifically connecting modernity and the treatment of the showplace woman with the phenomenon of the Hollywood star. She recognised that there was something to be gleaned about the status of women in modern culture from the paradoxical position of the *American* movie star actress. As de Beauvoir identified:

⁶² Laleen Jayamanne, *Kiss Me Deadly: Feminism and Cinema for the Moment*. (Bloomington, Indiana, 1996) 64.

We know that Hollywood stars fall into slavery. Their bodies are no longer their own; the producer decides on their hair color, weight, figure, and type; teeth are pulled out to change the shape of a cheek. Diets, exercise, fittings, and makeup are daily chores. Going out and flirting are 'personal appearances'; private life is just a moment in their public life.⁶³

She continued on, explaining that in the male/female power dynamic central to the Hollywood system, the star was “representing capital to exploit in a man's arms”.⁶⁴ de Beauvoir's most relevant comments for my purposes here are those that focus on the construction of the ideal actress body by the male capitalist studio system for its own profit. In this conception, the actress under contract became a sort of constructed entity, created and controlled by her studio masters.

In a project so heavily invested in exploring the Americanness of the Hollywood system (in its capitalist successes, abuses, and their links), Powdermaker and Veblen are, opposite de Beauvoir, somewhat twinned-- as both American social scientists and in their conclusions on American sociology, economics, and class. Hortense Powdermaker was an American anthropologist who determined to make an ethnographic study of the Hollywood cultural milieu at the height of the studio system, using the same methods and benchmarks she employed when living with and researching Indigenous tribes in New Guinea. She spent a year, from 1946 to 1947-- coincidentally the same year de Beauvoir was publishing on the Hollywood actress, with no indication that they were aware of each other's work-- in a one-year fieldwork study in Hollywood. In this yearlong residency, Powdermaker interviewed people of all professions and at all levels of power, success, or failure. She sought to uncover how this new culture, so quickly globally influential, had arisen; and further, what its values were, and how it was then transmitting them to the broader culture at large through the mass communication of film. Powdermaker's primary importance to this thesis is her startling conclusion that asserted Hollywood was no less than a totalitarian system within a democratic nation. In this conception, one of the things that characterised it as such was its bedrock condoning of the buying, selling, trading, and “owning” of people. I would take Powdermaker's ownership hypothesis a step further, situating this conclusion as one naturally descendant from recognition of the country's genocidal history. I would contend that these genocidal antecedents seeped into the cultural values of American society at large in the treatment of the poor, women, and people of colour.

It is extremely significant that both de Beauvoir and Powdermaker were drawing the same conclusions at the same time in this pre-Women's Liberation Movement era. While both

⁶³ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. (New York, Vintage, 2011) 615.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 741.

the public and film critics alike were largely enthralled by the glamour mythology of the “dream factory”, while male social scientists were championing ever-growing American capitalism, it was women intellectuals who were the first drawing attention to more hard-nosed realities around this system. These included the nature of the seven-year contract and the body, beauty, and sexual enslavements of the star.

In a century of scholarship critical of the Hollywood system, theorists have found fodder in its politics, its ideologies, and its personal relations as just several problematic aspects among many. Certainly, a great deal of non-scholarly writing, from memoirs to films to novels, has been produced on the evils of Hollywood. As it is now many decades since Dyer helped to move star studies away from fawning biographies, there is indeed a school of film studies and film history that has rigorously, critically analysed Hollywood. It includes one of my major themes here-- how Hollywood has obscured its ideology through various obscurant forces such as glamour. Scholars in the post-Dyerian era did begin to examine stardom as economic apparatus, as I noted in the introduction’s literature review. The unique angle of this project to that point is a reworking of such critique from a feminist materialist cultural studies base. This includes a thorough excavation as to how that glamour was used *against* women in the system, or to control them as labourers.

Hollywood has already been theorised extensively in film studies for its American ideology, its imperialism, its exporting of Americanism⁶⁵; in other words, its Americanness on a global scale. The industry has been both celebrated and excoriated in both professional and academic circles as the quintessential American export industry, and the only truly American art form (itself a well-debated assertion). Allison Trope has written that “In many ways, Hollywood symbolically functions as a nation-state, instilling ideologies, even feelings, among its followers”.⁶⁶ Thomas Elsaesser has noted that while American films were so globally successful at pretending at universality, they were actually “prioritizing not only the ‘American way of life’, but what one could call the American way of thinking about life”.⁶⁷ In 2005’s *On Hollywood: The Place, the Industry* Allen John Scott described this view of Hollywood’s success as:

⁶⁵ Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York, Pantheon, 1988); *Historical Dimensions: The Development of the American Film Industry* (London, Routledge, 2004); Allen John Scott, *On Hollywood: The Place, the Industry*. (Princeton, 2005) Thomas Elsaesser, *The Persistence of Hollywood* (New York, Routledge, 2012); Jerome Christensen, *America’s Corporate Art: The Studio Authorship of Hollywood Motion Pictures (1929-2011)* (Palo Alto, Stanford, 2012).

⁶⁶ Alison Trope, *Stardust Monuments: The Saving and Selling of Hollywood*. (Hanover, Dartmouth, 2011) 23.

⁶⁷ Elsaesser, *The Persistence of Hollywood* 110.

a progressive, if contested, penetration of American cultural norms and idioms into other social environments as Hollywood's massive machinery of production, distribution, and marketing has gone about its work.⁶⁸

Iris Barry, British émigré, long-time head of film curation at MOMA, and influential leader of one faction of film history, deftly moved Will Hays and other all-American types to the championing of her Film Library by consistently referring to cinema as the “peculiarly American contribution to the arts”.⁶⁹ Barry's speeches regularly played to this theme of film as demonstrative of American exceptionalism, as when she remarked that “it is the one medium of expression in which America has influenced the rest of the world”.⁷⁰ Trope explained that with this savvy and calculated approach:

Barry positioned these potential Hollywood donors as a part of American history, the American art scene, and even the American educational system. She also assured them that the Film Library would help ensure their place and stature in America's future.⁷¹

On the scholarly side, this assertion is still prevalent today. Thomas Elsaesser wrote in 2012's *The Persistence of Hollywood* that:

One can say that while cinema has been produced in almost every country in the 20th century, it is nonetheless the American art par excellence, like tragedy was for the Greeks, the medieval cathedrals were the expression of both Europe and the Catholic Church, or the still life, the portraits and paintings of domestic interiors were the peculiar art of the Dutch Golden Age.⁷²

At the same time, the savviest operators in the worlds of both production and curation knew that in the age-old “art versus business” debate, the answer was always “business first”. This chapter moves into exploration of the cultural change to Hollywood upon the influx and fusion of East Coast money to West Coast production, particularly in the early booming years of the studio system. As Barry admitted, “[w]e also had had to realize that the way into open water lay not through Hollywood, but through New York, where real control of the industry resided in the big corporations, the lawyers, the banks”.⁷³ In 1984's *American Film Now: The People, the Power, the Money, the Movies*, James Monaco put it succinctly:

Film in America has always been better understood as industry rather than as art. The febrile business atmosphere surrounding movies, the hype and glitter, the cashflow structure and balance sheet have been in large part responsible for

⁶⁸ Scott *On Hollywood* 165.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 21.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 18.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 23.

⁷² Thomas Elsaesser, *The Persistence of Hollywood*. (New York, Routledge, 2012), 82.

⁷³ Trope, *Stardust Monuments* 24.

the vitality for which American movies are known... American filmmakers have been characterized as employees first, artists second.⁷⁴

If starting from the premise that, for all its financial and ideological success, Hollywood was built on much abuse and exploitation, this project is also compelled to ask: what exactly is wrong with American society that Hollywood could have developed as it did, in terms of class, gender, and race, at all? And continued in such veins of open misogyny, racism, and bartering of people far after other avenues of corporate America changed their outward faces?

In each upcoming chapter, I argue that the studio founders established and continued to use several tools to not only dominate the market, but to hide the inherent abuses of their system: patriotism and a right wing, business-oriented political position, sentimentality, and, above all, glamour. Dyer's realisation that the starlet discovery at the soda fountain counter became as mythic as Lincoln's log cabin in terms of Americanness was an important one, and is discussed at more length in Chapter Two. Sentimentality, too, is particularly intriguing for the aims of this project, especially in relation to its connection to fascism, and in light of Powdermaker's conclusions on a totalitarian Hollywood.

As I have explained in this review of American class and capitalist structures, Hollywood has not typically been situated in the (white, masculinist, corporate) Americanness of its business practices. Very little study has been done from the angle that such practices are both steeped in American history and part of what led naturally to a misogynist and white supremacist Hollywood system. Elsaesser delineated in detail three of the schools of thought currently at play here:

There are those for whom this question is part of a larger one, which goes beyond Hollywood's cultural imperialism, and touches on the 20th century as the "American Century", on the nature of the United States as an "Empire", while being both engine and vehicle of "globalization", that is, affecting and affected by the increased and accelerated circulation of goods, services, human labor, bodies and lives. There are those who try to analyse the particular "culture industry" which is Hollywood, but from the "cultural geography" perspective of place and placelessness, as much as from the socio-economic vantage point of "post-Fordist" industrial practices of outsourcing and the vicissitudes of finance capitalism. And there are even some who take the longer, quasi-anthropological view...⁷⁵

⁷⁴ James Monaco, *American Film Now: the People, the Power, the Money, the Movies*. (New York, New American Library, 1984) 29.

⁷⁵ Elsaesser, *The Persistence of Hollywood* 78.

Elsaesser's text here goes on to situate the latter group as asking no less than what Hollywood has done to help or hinder human progress. In this camp, I would place de Beauvoir, Powdermaker, other feminist materialists, and myself.

Jane Gaines has noted that the emergence of finance capital as the preferred understanding of the formation of Hollywood in this period has been entrenched in film historical circles for some time now. Film historians like Janet Staiger look to correctly date when advanced (finance, monopoly) capitalism conquered Hollywood, and ask questions like, "how does the financing of film production and the shift to advanced capitalism affect the mode of production and the films?"⁷⁶ In other words, Staiger's school (alongside David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson) asks us to understand production so we can understand why films looked and worked as they did, and their production of meaning.

My concern with the triumph of monopoly capitalism does not lie with how it changed the look or ideology of films, with the final product, so much as with the malevolent conditions for the workers and the social-industrial system it created. It is my contention that the former work has been done extensively, and now attention should be turned to the latter. I propose that the camp that goes beyond questions of capital, to more existential questions of the social meanings and damage done by Hollywood (to women and people of colour, for example) is the one that should currently and finally be more in ascendance, post-MeToo. Considering this project is a genealogy, often in first person, of the abuses this system has heaped upon women for a century, it will certainly come down on the side of Elsaesser's question as to the hindering of human progress.

Within a monograph crucially important to the broader project of understanding women in film history in 2018's *Pink-Slipped: What Happened To Women in the Silent Film Industries?*, Jane Gaines cited Philip Rosen's call that historiography begin to historicise itself.⁷⁷ This includes both interrogation of things that went on within the system, and the conclusions and interpretations that film historians have accepted over the decades. Gaines in particular is working in postmodern meta-history and "metaphilosophy of history"⁷⁸. This is an approach that

⁷⁶ Janet Staiger, "The Labor-Force, Financing, and the Mode of Production", in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. (London, Routledge, 2003) 552.

⁷⁷ Gaines, *Pink-Slipped* 5.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 6.

works particularly well in critiquing the tendencies to erasure and whitewashing prevalent in masculinist histories of film, as well as in applying a MeToo lens to the century of Hollywood history.

Such a need to challenge perspectives includes the work of both mainstream film scholars like Kevin Brownlow and David Thomson, but also of feminist historians and film scholars like Katharina Van Ankum and Anke Gleber, and even of forerunners in cultural film history like Patrice Petro and Hilary Hallett. This is part of an overall repositioning of the field that I perceive is required, post-2017. In particular, a disciplinary reshuffling that seems to me to be taking place comes down to some questions surrounding “agency feminism” and “optimism versus pessimism” paradigms (raised in later chapters).

Additionally, I would like to offer both some clarification on periodisation, and stake my claim for certain years based on the terrain of this project. Different scholars have calibrated their “beginning of Hollywood” years based upon their own disciplinary concerns. Some of the most popular have become enshrined. I will explain why I have reason to take issue with mainstream film history on some dates in light of the perspective of this project, and the years I choose to bracket.

With their ubiquitous *Film Art* series of 1979 and beyond, standard-setting film historians David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson situated 1917 as the beginning of classical Hollywood, and the discipline largely followed suit. Not only did this contribute to the exoticisation and ghettoisation of the films of the previous two decades, but feminist scholars like Jennifer Bean have also questioned 1917 on grounds of corporate-masculinist reinforcement.⁷⁹ Such a “beginning” for Hollywood pushed out, unsurprisingly, many hundreds of works by women.

Preeminent Hollywood film historian Miriam Bratu Hansen placed the “classical mode of narration and address” between 1907 and 1909, while tracing the beginning of classical mode and exhibition to 1915.⁸⁰ But these dates are, crucially, concerned with questions of narrative structure and public presentation. My concerns, on the other hand, are with migratory and cultural milieus, as well as with economic and industrial histories. So, for example, I agree with Hansen on the importance of both the years 1909 and 1915 for this film history-- but for different reasons than she offered. 1909 saw the first eastern movie companies arrive in the village of

⁷⁹ Jennifer Bean, Introduction, *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. Eds. Jennifer Bean and Diane Negra. Durham: Duke UP, 2002, 8.

⁸⁰ Anne Morey, “So Real As To Seem Like Life Itself: The *Photoplay* Fiction of Adela Rogers St. Johns’. In *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. Eds. Jennifer Bean and Diane Negra. Durham: Duke UP, 2002.

Hollywood (after the first camera crew had arrived to scout in 1907),⁸¹ and thus is obviously a massively important year for this study. Even more crucially for a critique of the Hollywood capitalist system, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1915 that “the exhibition of motion pictures is a business pure and simple, originated and conducted for profit”.⁸² This year and ruling thus forever changed the structure and direction of the industry, as well as its relationship to its creative workers and their rights. Richard Maltby reached similar conclusions about the significance of the 1915 ruling in his 1990s film historical scholarship and its role in cementing a Hollywood culture. In *Hollywood Cinema* (1995), Maltby wrote that the “1915 Supreme Court ruling which denied the cinema First Amendment protection encouraged the industry to avoid political controversy”⁸³-- helping to entrench the decades-long cozy relationship between right-wing political forces and studio heads.

This chapter looks in depth at the counter-teleological shift from a period of feminist liberation in Hollywood to one of ever-consolidating masculinist-capitalist power. In so doing, I would argue, like Maltby, that 1915 thus stands firmly not only as the correct marker year for the beginning of Hollywood. Further, that the legal precedents of 1915 had swift, dramatic, and nearly permanent consequences for, specifically, women in the Hollywood system-- performers, writers, and directors.

Finally, I would like to ruminate briefly and fight a likely-losing battle upon the term “New Hollywood”. Within both film studies and popular culture, the term has been utilised since the 1960s and 1970s to refer to a renaissance of artistry in post-studio American film. I will discuss some of the serious problematics of this period, not least of which were its misogyny and violence, in the epilogue. But here I would simply remark that it seems unfortunate to me that the term has calcified around films from the later twentieth century, when it was so naturally suited to be used literally. As a cultural historian looking at geography and migration and not a film studies theorist, I would assert that the unique status of Los Angeles as the first world metropolis built around performance industries is remarkably noteworthy in study of its film industry, yet often goes unmentioned. No other city in human history can make that claim. The newness of this space and the industrial and social conditions that sprung up there in bizarre and hybrid ways formed a completely novel milieu by 1950. Therefore, a New Hollywood was

⁸¹ Ezra Goodman. *The Fifty-year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961) 342.

⁸² Jennifer Bean, "Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body." *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 16.3 48 (2001): 9-57, 18.

⁸³ Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995) 306.

certainly born from 1909-1915 onwards-- though I recognise it will be nearly impossible to christen it so in terms of film history.

Even a cursory understanding of American history built, ironically, on Hollywood film and 1950s television would recognise much of the country's self-image as based upon the migratory movements of the nineteenth century. From immigrants landing in New York Harbor to pioneers going west in wagon trains, the young United States was filled with moving people. New cities were being built up along eastern to western matrices. In *American Beauty*, Lois Banner linked this "chaotic social situation"⁸⁴ with both possibility and class confusion: "the fluid class structure of American society made aspiration universal and, at the same time, the drawing of social distinctions difficult".⁸⁵ In fact, as Nancy Isenberg explained in *White Trash*, "[h]istorically, Americans have confused social mobility with physical mobility. The class system tracked across the land with the so-called pioneering set".⁸⁶ This would suggest a United States in which people *thought* they were leaving class in Europe or at least in the older Eastern Seaboard cities, but were in fact carting it out west along with their other belongings. Joan Didion once archly remarked, "I have never been sure what the epitaph 'nouveau' can possibly mean in America, implying as it does that the speaker is gazing down six hundred years of rolled lawns".⁸⁷ She was logically right, but nevertheless also wrong. Against all logic, the concept of "old money" in the U.S. is tangible. This is an American paradox.

Nowhere was this new and ambivalent blend of culture more evident than with those white migrants who made it all the way to the U.S. Pacific coast. As Sternheimer wrote in *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream*, "California uniquely embodies notions of the American Dream, with its seemingly endless sunshine".⁸⁸ Beginning in 1872, when New Yorker Charles Nordhoff wrote his invitational travelogue *California: For Health, Pleasure, and Residence*, white Americans (especially from the Midwest) began to move to the sparsely populated Southern California.⁸⁹ More testimonials and advertisements for land followed, and were wildly successful. Fiction, too, romanticised the taming of the west with masculine vigor and white man's capital, with novels and films like *The Winning of Barbara Worth* (1911;

⁸⁴ Banner, *American Beauty* 70.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Isenberg, *White Trash* 319.

⁸⁷ Joan Didion, *The White Album: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979) 76.

⁸⁸ Sternheimer, *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream* 23.

⁸⁹ David Thomson, *The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood*. (New York: Knopf: 2005) 28.

1926).⁹⁰ Between 1890 and 1915, the population of California jumped six times, reaching one million in that latter year.⁹¹ This amounted to “a major internal mass migration in the United States”.⁹² During the 1920s, the state of California added the entire population of “back east” states like Virginia or Iowa.⁹³

In fact, the class-blind optimism of the California travelogue genre was inherently based on several falsehoods. Hollywood as a white supremacist milieu will be discussed in more detail in later chapters and the epilogue. However it is worth noting here that beginning in the 1880s, literature to draw white people to Southern California played upon pastoral imagery of a romanticised Old Spanish past, while in reality disenfranchising and displacing the region’s native Indigenous and Latino populations. As David Thomson wrote in *The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood* (2005) of the Los Angeles hydrological project famously and macabrely mythologised in *Chinatown* (1974), “Indians and farmers there were put out of business so that the city should drink, wash its cars, and play”.⁹⁴ And in a grim harbinger of what kind of industry this would become and the care that white male capitalists have taken for the environments they conquered: even in the early teens, the very first generation of Hollywood filmmakers was already polluting their new home, by dumping their “hypo” mixing fluid down city sewers at night.⁹⁵ The filmmakers were fined and threatened with jail time, but still the metaphor is a stark one.

The famed “water wars” of the 1910s and 1920s also reflected many of the destructive tendencies of the male capitalism of southern California, but in this case the metaphor was ecological. The great Owens Valley water scheme, in particular, holds interest for this project’s intersectional approach to Los Angeles’ systems of exploitation, and not only its overtones of racial injustice. Extremely interesting ethical-environmental scholarship has been done on this formation in recent years, with historical works like Karen Piper’s *Left In the Dust: How Race and Politics Created a Human and Environmental Tragedy in L.A.* (2015).⁹⁶ To my purposes in this project, all of these malevolent threads connect with misogyny as well, and a blunt theorisation of Los Angeles as a field of sexual assault. A sort of metric of the rape culture of

⁹⁰ Kathryn Olmstead, *Right Out of California: The 1930s and the Big Business Roots of Modern Conservatism*. (New York: The New Press, 2015) 109.

⁹¹ Ibid. 32.

⁹² Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915*. (Oxford, 1986) 5.

⁹³ Olmstead *Right Out of California* 5.

⁹⁴ Thomson *The Whole Equation* 39.

⁹⁵ Paul Zollo. *Hollywood Remembered: An Oral History of Its Golden Age*. (Taylor: Lanham, MD: 2011).

⁹⁶ Karen Piper, *Left in the Dust: How Race and Politics Created A Human and Environmental Tragedy in L.A.* (London, St. Martin’s, 2015).

Hollywood can be placed in the culture and topography of the very use of the land itself, at the same time the film industry was settling. Capitalist greed and malfeasance were combining with racist and classist abuse to increase Los Angeles' white male capitalist power structure and thrive. The corruption of the city government, the newspapers, and a criminal businessman's "syndicate" made the deal possible. Even Will Rogers made such a connection in the 1920s, noting graphically that "the federal government... held Owens Valley while Los Angeles raped it".⁹⁷ Notorious engineer and city father William Mulholland opened his pilfered St. Francis Dam at Owens Valley in 1926 with the famous and ominous lines, "There it is. Take it".⁹⁸ Predatory, white man Manifest Destiny overtones aside, the lines were actually chilling, as the dam famously failed two years later. The disaster killed over four hundred people in the shadow of young Hollywood, the worst disaster of its kind in American history.

Los Angeles' identity in the early twentieth century was based in these at times conflicting markers: newness, hybridity, and questionable practices. San Francisco, by contrast, was older and more sophisticated for a California city, and practically continental or Eastern in comparison. It was populated with mansions, fortunes, and society people all mimicking the social structures of the East Coast. San Francisco also had a sturdy reputation for arts and culture. In contrast, the Midwesterners who had arrived in Southern California were more of the teetotaling and Bible-fearing type. This meant that the "elite" formed in young Los Angeles was a very different sort. In fact, in *On Hollywood*, Scott paraphrased Benjamin Hampton's 1931 assertion that:

San Francisco should have had a clear locational advantage over Los Angeles as a center of motion picture production, for the puritanical atmosphere of Southern California in the early years made it distinctly inhospitable to the early motion picture industry and the people associated with it.⁹⁹

The peculiarities of history that rendered this counterfactual unworkable came down to both simple banalities like weather and other, more complicated political and business factors.¹⁰⁰ The ultimate choice of Hollywood's geographical space would come to play out in numerous situations, from the social cohesion of the new "movie people" to factors in the culture-shifting Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle scandal.

Where San Francisco was sophisticated, Los Angeles was not. Hollywood itself was sleepy, pastoral, and a full seven miles from the city-- an hour's journey. The anecdotes of some

⁹⁷ Ibid. 14.

⁹⁸ Piper, *Left in the Dust* 30.

⁹⁹ In Scott *On Hollywood* 13.

¹⁰⁰ Zelda Roland, "How Did Hollywood End Up In... Hollywood?" *KCET*. November 7, 2017.

of the giants of silent cinema who arrived there first are not only charming, but seem impossible when one considers what Hollywood became just a decade later. Money was a particular issue in the small village. In interviewing Cecil B. DeMille for *The Fifty-year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (1961), Ezra Goodman obtained the following fascinating oral history:

DeMille observed that he never thought that there would one day be an imposing bank where he had once shot movies on an open-air stage in the midst of orange and lemon trees. 'I was even in doubt then if there'd be a bank in Hollywood.... We used to cash our checks in those days at Hall's grocery store on Hollywood Boulevard.'¹⁰¹

DeMille went on to explain how "land was worth nothing", there was free citrus fruit to be picked off of countless trees, and a good lunch at the Hollywood Hotel cost fifty cents. DeMille rode through Hollywood on a horse from home to his first studio, a barn, each day. Numerous elderly stars and workers interviewed for Paul Zollo's 2011 *Hollywood Remembered: An Oral History of its Golden Age* (2011) recounted the horse path down the middle of Sunset Boulevard.

This raises a point as to both the geographical and cultural realities and imaginaries of Los Angeles that seems quite obvious at first glance-- but is worth situating if attempting a real understanding of this region and how its class, race, and gender politics impacted or worked in tandem with the early film industry. It also reminds, as Scott and many film historians have written about already, what an unlikely and bizarre place Hollywood was. Los Angeles is not only geographically west, but at the time that the first easterners were arriving, was very much situated in what they would think of as the Old West. Zollo's interviewees recalled that they were marked as Hollywood people because they had paper money, which Westerners thought of as fake. Dating back to the nineteenth century times of California as territory and not state just a few decades past, they were accustomed to dealing only in gold and silver. Silent-era crews and actresses from the East recalled conditions of filming that were as difficult as those of the pioneers, who in relative terms had passed through the same places not very long before— perhaps as recently as forty years prior. Colleen Moore explained, "the West was really the West", and recalled a time her film crew witnessed one cowboy shoot another while on location.¹⁰²

The western genre grew out of the eastern city-slickers' fascination with the material in their new home, and pure profit expediency. Filming western scenes and making western storylines was cheap. Eastern companies would hire men on the spot to be local colour in

¹⁰¹ Ezra Goodman. *The Fifty-year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961) 368.

¹⁰² Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 99.

background scenes, while eastern directors like Harry Carey and John Ford enshrined the genre so much that it was a powerful (if lesser-discussed) factor in pushing out women writers and directors as the business solidified. Making westerns even more attractive to the studios, locations were everywhere, and they cost nothing.

As Brownlow explained in the western episode of his famous silent-era 1980 docuseries *Hollywood*, the western cowboy was part of a living history that was only then just coming to an end. These western men showed up *en masse* in the city and obtained work in the movies, which helped to contribute to a circular pattern of genre. They could ride and shoot and dress like cowboys because they actually were. There were the rare cowgirls like Winna Brown, who could work quite regularly but, like the men, were not paid well. As Anthony Slide explained in 2012's *Hollywood Unknowns: A History of Extras, Bit Players, and Stand-Ins*, "Brown, who was noted for her riding skills... seldom earned more than ten dollars a day, and sometimes was paid five dollars for each fall from a horse".¹⁰³

In Tony Villecco's *Silent Stars Speak: Interviews with Twelve Cinema Pioneers* (2001), aged cowboy Henry Walthall recalled, "Most of us treated picture acting as... a mere meal ticket".¹⁰⁴ As one elderly cowboy extra interviewed for Brownlow's documentary recalled, "five dollars a day was hard to resist. Big shots lived in the hotel. We lived in the barracks".¹⁰⁵ Where most people arriving for extra work in Hollywood film were dazzled by glamour and fame, the cowboys were more likely using the movies to make a bit of money and live semi-lawfully. In one episode of the Brownlow series, Colonel Tim McCoy recounted how there were actual criminal cowboys on the run from the law living and working in Hollywood, and that "there were probably more shootings down there in Gower Gulch in Los Angeles than in Dodge City".¹⁰⁶

The reputations of the cowboys preceded them. There were in fact signs around Hollywood rentals declaring "No Cowboys, No Movies". Chapter Two later looks extensively to the history of the Hollywood extra girl, and her semiotic and sexualised meaning in the city. In terms of class and status, the cowboy could in some ways be read as her counterpart. Clearly the two disreputable types of arriviste were linked from the beginning in the conservative local public's mind. Still, considering the gendered parameters of this project, the fact that a large group of criminal males consistently arriving in the city was not considered much of a social

¹⁰³ Anthony Slide. *Hollywood Unknowns: A History of Extras, Bit Players, and Stand-Ins*. (Oxford; Mississippi: 2012.) 137.

¹⁰⁴ Tony Villecco. *Silent Stars Speak: Interviews with Twelve Cinema Pioneers*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001.) 174.

¹⁰⁵ *Hollywood*. 'Out West- Episode 9.' Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

problem, while independent young women's arrivals caused a moral panic, is telling as to 1920s patriarchy.

If the ex-midwesterner, respectable Angelenos were not trusting enough to rent rooms to grizzled cowboy extras, they were even less interested in welcoming the new "flickers", or "movies". At least cowboys were a fixture of the West. To these elderly, WASPy retirees, religious and anti-alcohol, the new bohemian show people from the East were an eyesore and a horror in their small town. Far from bringing glamour, the "movies" were looked down upon and experienced open discrimination. In Bridget Terry's 2000 documentary of screenwriter Frances Marion *Without Lying Down*, she went so far as to use the word "vermin" in terms of how the locals treated the "movies" in their streets.¹⁰⁷ One interviewee in Brownlow's docuseries went even further in saying, "I knew what racial discrimination was, because I was a movie".¹⁰⁸

Diana Serra Cary, child star of the 1920s known as Baby Peggy in her heyday and Peggy Montgomery as teenage extra and in some later-life interviews, was the last living silent star until her 2020 death at age 101. She was interviewed for Villecco's oral history collection under Serra Cary, her pen name. She had a clear and complex recollection of the history and class politics at play in her youth:

Hollywood was founded in the 1880s. The founding fathers of Hollywood were strict prohibitionists, or non-drinkers. I remember seeing them as very proper, like the "American Gothic" painting. They watched from their porches and verandahs as we shot our films on their lawns. They used to call us 'camera Gypsies'... These were the original citizens of Hollywood. In those days it was made up of newcomers from Iowa who had come West and had no connection to anything theatrical at all. Mostly retirees... They watched us with a certain degree of distaste and disapproval.¹⁰⁹

Cary painted an excellent portrait of the middle-class disapproving denizens of Hollywood in her interview. But the elite of Los Angeles and Hollywood were another story-- also fully disapproving of the new "flickers" but showing it in more concrete ways than mere stern looks. They kept picture people out of the upper-class hotels and clubs, a power structure move that will be discussed at length in terms of the Jewish studio founder class and Veblen's concept of the parvenu aristocracy. As David Thomson has noted:

There was an aristocracy in Hollywood, or an upper class: the farmers, the early oil tycoons, and the real estate emperors, the generation that had made the place. And they did not invite picture people to join their clubs.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *Without Lying Down: Frances Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood*. Dir. Bridget Terry. 2000.

¹⁰⁸ *Hollywood*. 'In the Beginning- Episode 2.' Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

¹⁰⁹ In Villecco *Silent Stars Speak*, 7.

¹¹⁰ Thomson *The Whole Equation*, 36.

As for the hotels, the Beverly Hills Hotel was for the very rich, who were adamant about keeping the “riffraff of Hollywood” out of their establishment.¹¹¹ In response, the picture people built their own hotel-- the Hollywood Hotel. Silent star Patsy Ruth Miller, whose memoir *My Hollywood, When Both of Us Were Young* (1988) is an important primary source to this chapter, broke into film after being invited to a “movies” dance she almost wasn’t allowed to attend, while visiting Los Angeles from St. Louis. It was at the Hollywood Hotel, “the gathering place for the movie colony. It was rather eyed askance by mid-Western families such as mine”.¹¹²

Screenwriter Frederica Sagor Maas is equally foundational to this chapter, and indeed overall project, as a first-person witness to the silent era. Maas was Ivy League-educated and one of the countless people in early Hollywood who came from east to west, watching and living the small town becoming an entertainment metropolis in real time. Uniquely, she became one of the keenest observers of the earliest Hollywood years, using her excellent writing skills and fine anecdotal detail. This chapter puts to use Maas’ important memoir *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*, which she remarkably wrote and published at age 100 in 1999, at the urging of film historian Kevin Brownlow. (Even more remarkably, Maas did not die until 2012, living to the age of 111.)

Many of the “movies”, then, were living at the newly built Hollywood Hotel. Not only did locals resist renting to them, but both locals and movies alike expected that the new business would remain transient and probably fold quickly. As Maas wrote, “In the early days in Hollywood, unfurnished apartments or houses were a rarity. Everything was temporary”.¹¹³ Maas recalled the exclusive Hotel Del Coronado in San Diego as similarly looking down on picture people and attempting to keep them out, even when “movies” would venture south for holiday weekends.¹¹⁴

Both the stars and the studios pushed back hard on their image with the locals as the 1920s unfolded, instead trying to present themselves as clean-living, domesticated, and stable, in comparison with traveling theatre folk. As early as the utopian teens, the serialised fiction of the fan magazines attempted to sell a wholesome Hollywood, opposite the bad old ways of bohemian, immoral, transitory show people. In this discourse, the movie stars of the 1910s were presented as doing charity work and having quiet evenings in the family home, not part of any cafe society nightlife (of which there was little to choose from in Hollywood anyway). Studio

¹¹¹ Ibid. 51.

¹¹² Patsy Ruth Miller *My Hollywood* 19.

¹¹³ Frederica Sagor Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim: A Writer in Early Hollywood* (Louisville; Kentucky, 2010) 50.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 90.

people were healthful, stationary neighbours, not people who traveled all the time or stayed up all night and slept all day. In fact, Richard de Cordova included an anecdote in *Picture Personalities* in which silent star Don Lockwood presented himself as a teetotaler and offered a nearly eugenicist-adjacent argument against performing bohemians. Lockwood explained that instability remained in the business because it was still contaminated with dirty show people-- but not to worry, soon they would be weeded out.¹¹⁵

In fact in its early manic transience, the entire town and new industry developed a slapdash, false glitter feel that translated to the very architecture. A sense of aesthetic weirdness enveloped the space. All of the mixing of people and classes from everywhere with various styles and theatrical effects were thought to have produced both a substance-free town and one filled with vulgarity and bad taste. Certainly many visitors to Los Angeles even in the present have experienced the surreal effect of seeing a red carpet in the flesh, after years of seeing them on television as the height of glamour. One might walk down a Hollywood street and stumble upon a red carpet setup with reporters and stars in formal evening dress, to notice that just out of frame the carpet is flanked on two sides by an auto repair shop and a convenience store, with itinerant people milling around and not paying attention at all. This quintessentially Los Angeles experience is apparently of a type that has been present in the business from the beginning.

As early as 1910, the characters in the Stewart Edward White novel *The Rules of the Game* recognised the Los Angeles they had come to as a new kind of city in human history, finding it already filled with psychics, hustlers, and quacks of all sorts. As White archly wrote, “[t]he class that elsewhere is pressed by necessity to the inexpensive dinginess of back streets, here blossomed forth in truly tropical luxuriance”.¹¹⁶

The often chintzy craftwork and aesthetic of studio productions seemed to be a major culprit in the pervasive style of this type. Just as the studio backlots might see a Roman soldier, a cowboy, and a medieval princess eating or playing cards together, the city took on a similarly hallucinatory aesthetic look. With nothing bound by eastern standards or taste, all sorts of whimsical and cheaply constructed buildings were erected. When interviewed for Zollo’s book, elderly star Karl Malden said of Los Angeles even to the present, “[i]t’s a facade; they just build the front, the hell with the back”.¹¹⁷ The crumbling Babylonian-inspired ruins of part of Griffith’s

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ In Thomson *The Whole Equation*, 35.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 75.

set for *Intolerance* (1916) famously stayed up and rotted for twenty years at Hollywood and Sunset.¹¹⁸

Budd Schulberg, a scion of Hollywood and a crucial novelist and chronicler of it, is a highly insightful primary source for this work in both his fiction and his memoirs. Schulberg is another writer who figures heavily in this project for his wit, candor, keen eye, and value as a first-person witness and deconstructor of the Hollywood system. A son of the first generation of the Hollywood power elite, his father was B.P. Schulberg, head of production at Paramount in the 1920s. Schulberg thus had a front-row seat to the founding of the industry and its personalities. In both his fiction and his memoirs, Schulberg was fearless in exposing the industry and the Hollywood community and what he saw as their fundamental flaws. Before his later screenwriting career, Schulberg's debut novel (*What Makes Sammy Run?*) was such a scathing takedown of his native industry that an enraged Louis B. Mayer wanted him deported, and blamed his father B.P. for allowing him to publish it. With the fictionalised but excoriating *Sammy* and then later-life memoir *Moving Pictures, Memoirs of a Hollywood Prince* (1981), Schulberg provided some of the most excellent commentary on the Hollywood structure and milieu, both fictionalised and real, in use in this project. In his novel *The Disenchanted* (1950), Schulberg mocks the mythos that had developed around tacky places like the Garden of Allah apartment complex from the fabled 1920s era:

(A) rchitecture had seemed to be an extension of the studio backlot with private homes disguised as Norman castles or Oriental mosques, with gas stations built to resemble medieval towers, and movie houses that took the form of Egyptian temples and Chinese pagodas. In that lavish heyday of the parvenu... everything was built to look like something it wasn't...¹¹⁹

In 1919, there were still more movie studios in New York than Los Angeles. Just one year later 85% of American films were being made in Hollywood. This shows that rapid stratospheric change is not even a strong enough term for the cultural shift to the city and region. Allen John Scott preceded my gendered geographical-industrial approach to understanding how Los Angeles happened in the first place, in his 2005 *On Hollywood: The Place, the Industry*. Making a broader point about all metropolis cities and cultural formation, but utilising Los Angeles and its creative industries, he explained the necessity to look to “the geography of economic activity”--¹²⁰ how a city's modern production systems created the capital and labour that formed it into a metropolis.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 20.

¹¹⁹ In Zollo *Hollywood Remembered*, 316.

¹²⁰ Scott *On Hollywood*, xi.

But while Hollywood was still unsophisticated, vulgar, and socially conservative around alcohol and renters, greater Los Angeles as a small but real city was quite decidedly right-wing. These specific conservative regional qualities too would impact both the treatment of the movie industry, and the way the migrated Independents adapted to local culture for their own advantage and formulated their new business. From the financial perspective and deeply ironically in consideration of the region's ultimate development, early film critic Vachel Lindsay saw Southern California as a kind of financially unspoiled paradise, writing in 1915 that "[i]t has not the sordidness of gold, as Wall Street has".¹²¹ This quickly became a remarkably dated observation.

Another right-wing identity marker lay in Los Angeles'-- with its aforementioned roots in western individualism (for the white businessman)-- notoriously anti-union politics. The publisher of the *Los Angeles Times* in the decades leading up to the birth of Hollywood was Harrison Gray Otis, a far-right conservative and fervent anti-unionist known as General Otis. He wielded a great deal of power in the city, and decried no less than the death of Los Angeles if unions should ever be allowed to take hold. In the 1890s the Chamber of Commerce had pushed the city slogan "Home of Contented Labor".¹²² Labour organisers who came to the city were at times charged with vagrancy and syndicalism and prosecuted, at others run out of town into the desert, vigilante-style, and left covered in paint.¹²³ In this violent climate, the city showed a marked difference from San Francisco, a strong union town rooted in leftist labour politics. In fact, Los Angeles' white masculinist-capitalist elite saw their town as a shining example of a free (anti-union) zone, surrounded by others cities that were scourges of unionism.¹²⁴

Such labour and class tension came to a terrible head in 1910, when two brothers, labour radicals, bombed Otis' Times building and killed twenty people. The later nineteenth American century had been marked by bloody labour skirmishes in Pennsylvania mining country and Chicago's Haymarket Square. But as Vincent Brook stated in his 2013 *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles*, with the Times bombing L.A. became "the bloodiest arena in the Western World for Capital and Labor".¹²⁵ Even into the 1930s, Los Angeles' police chief was open in his violence and corruption, equating all labour activists with "Reds" and scoffing at his department's treatment of them: "[t]he more the police beat them up and wreck

¹²¹ Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 54.

¹²² Vincent Brook, *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles* (New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers, 2013) 77.

¹²³ Olmsted, *Right Out of California* 19.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 35.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

their headquarters, the better. Communists have no constitutional rights and I won't listen to anyone who defends them."¹²⁶

Such was the local environment of class warfare in which the eastern entrepreneurs of the new industry of film laid their new industry. Where Scott and other film and cultural historians have asked, "Why L.A. and not San Francisco?" for their Hollywood hypotheses and offered myriad answers, the cities' respective relationships to labour were indeed factors for the hyper-capitalist early film entrepreneurs. For the sake of profits and employee control, there was no way they wanted to set up shop in a union town if they could help it-- and they didn't.

Other illegal, unethical, underhanded, and perhaps proto-totalitarian tactics became commonplace and accepted in the industry. They were so numerous as to fall into categories: union-busting by the creation of toothless pseudo-unions, phony benevolence, environmental destruction, gangsterism. In *Working Class Hollywood*, Steven Ross has detailed the birth of the MPAA.¹²⁷ When national American unions began to make inroads with studio employees, with IATSE winning some strikes that greatly troubled the studio heads in 1919 and 1920, the studios countered by creating the MPAA. It functioned as a sort of dummy prestige front, or "genteel company union",¹²⁸ with no real power to keep actual labour organising from endangering the studio kingdoms. As Ross has explained noted of the MPAA:

It failed to establish any credibility as a labor organization... in the wake of the Great Depression, when the studios demanded that workers across the board take deep pay cuts, it steadily gave ground to independent unionization movements.¹²⁹

In *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (1988), Thomas Schatz considered the role of studio founders', particularly Louis B. Mayer, in the creation of the MPAA to be a long-term, successful right-wing coup.¹³⁰ The MPAA worked on the "open shop" model, which in today's far-right American doublespeak is known as "right to work". The MPAA also allowed the studios to install spies against any attempts at on-site labour organising, as there was a generalised fear of not only ordinary worker unrest but infiltration by communists and "Bolsheviks". Scott and other Hollywood historians have further argued that it is impossible to see the founding of the MPAA as separate from the conservative turn caused by the Hollywood power elite panicking around the scandals of the 1920s. They situate its formation

¹²⁶ Ibid. 35.

¹²⁷ Ross, *Working Class Hollywood*.

¹²⁸ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 397.

¹²⁹ Ross, *Working Class Hollywood* 31.

¹³⁰ Schatz, *The Genius of the System* 100.

very much in the same climate that brought about the installation of Will Hays and the enshrinement of the Production Code.

Such obsessional strong-arming around unionism, maximum obedience, and profit above all demonstrated that while the studio heads might not always have been businessmen on the right side of the law-- Joseph Schenck even famously went to prison in the 1930s for tax evasion and jury tampering-- they were always, first and foremost, businessmen. One of the greatest ironies in a century of Hollywood by way of American popular culture is the enduring right-wing myth of "Hollyweird"-- a bohemian, immoral enclave of bizarre people nefariously trying to corrupt the values of the rest of the moral, "real" United States. This myth first kicked into gear in the years before the Arbuckle scandal, at which time it roared to primacy and has existed ever since. The deepest irony of the myth is that, in making no distinction between the bohemian or counter-cultural lifestyles of some of the "show people" workers in the system and the right-wing corporate traditionalists at the top, the deeply conservative nature of the capitalist managerial class in Hollywood has always been obscured. This lazy stereotype has been one driven by, in turn, antisemitism, ignorance, and parochialism, and it endures to the present day especially in right-wing circles. Those who have fallen prey to it and continue to do so were never up to the intellectually nuanced task required for serious thought: separating the masculinist-capitalist, profit-driven, fundamentally conservative management class of executives and producers from the more bohemian creative labourers among casts and crews.

Ross has included the following primary source in his own study: "The producers are themselves employers,' observed one radical critic in 1920. 'They think as employers, and their product reflects the employers' position'".¹³¹ I would add that they also thought of themselves as employers with accents, and as members of a three-percent ethnic minority, in a country with quite openly expressed antisemitism (to be discussed in detail in Chapter Three). They were trying to run their business under the radar in spite of their outsider status, not kick off an egalitarian revolution. This is partly why arguments that they used film to indoctrinate the public with radical, left-wing ideas have always been, plainly, nonsensical.

Thus, despite a milieu of increased social freedom where it suited the pleasure of male power elites, namely in the form of gambling houses and brothels, the hyper-conservative nature of Los Angeles cannot be understated. This encompassed the use of illegal practices and corruption in tandem with press and police power to stop social organisers. Nor can the way the new arrival studio founders played along with the regional status quo be ignored in

¹³¹ Ross, *Working Class Hollywood* 134.

understanding the formation of a Hollywood culture. This is a point reinforced over and over in the dictatorial dealings the studio heads had with their employees-- especially women. They themselves adopted some of the quasi-fascist tactics available to the Southern California white male elite to maintain their own power, eventually becoming equally adept with the networks of corruption, criminality, and crushing of enemies already in place in the region.

With opportunities for money and new lives for all sorts of people arriving in California from the East, gangsters began to make the same trek. Prohibition and the Hollywood boom of the 1920s naturally only exacerbated this inevitable trend: where mass migration occurs, criminality will follow. But in the case of 1920s Los Angeles, the criminals could supply illegal alcohol, a moving party that neither the city fathers nor the studio heads were really interested in stopping. The Hollywood scene as one in which both executives and actors mingled with gangsters is a reality that comes up repeatedly in primary sources. As Mae West recalled, “[s]how business was soon invaded by the hoods and bootleggers, who had money and little taste for art or travel or opera”.¹³² At the same time Lindsay was extolling the clean and unspoiled nature of Hollywood, organised crime was, inevitably, taking an interest in Southern California, too.

Furthermore, pimping, a major theme of this project in terms of the buying and selling of women’s bodies for male profit, was a highly profitable vice for both pimps and the paid-off police. One American city’s vice commission of the time reported that “[w]e find that we are dealing more with a problem of men than of women. Commercialized vice is a business conducted largely by men, and the profits go mainly to men”.¹³³ Case studies connect the street-level vices of pimping and trafficking to the “legitimate” and normalised practices of procuring actresses for sexual favours for executives. When we begin to delve into the studio’s structures of both business and abuse, it is certainly not a stretch for a radical feminist film historian to incorporate the conclusion of silent star turned writer, critic, and insider chronicler of the dystopian Hollywood system Louise Brooks as at least somewhat accurate-- that what “they” created in Hollywood was really one big, glorified pimping ring.

One of the key contributions of this project lies in the use of memoir and oral histories to compile an irrefutable body of gendered crime— numerous case studies in future chapters will demonstrate instances in which actresses at the pinnacle of success in the public’s eye were treated as pieces of sexual currency or menial labourers behind the scenes, or suffered brutal

¹³² Mae West, *Goodness Had Nothing to Do with It: The Autobiography of Mae West*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959) 70.

¹³³ Shelley Stamp, *Movie-struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon*. (Princeton, 2000) 93.

and egregious sexual and physical violence. In these future chapters, there are also many examples evident of studio and city power working in tandem to silence and effectively crush women who threatened the system in any way. To that end, one of the major themes found in all chapters of this project is the tendency for masculinist-capitalism to turn sociopathic, breaking laws and enacting crimes for its aims. Thus the interlocking bonds between local elites and government administration, media, studio executives, and criminals engaged in gangsterism are all extremely relevant to a gendered analysis of the system. In fact, they have everything to do with women locked out of power in an industry and city, as well as with women being exploited and abused. As has been typical of male power elites in cities around the world in modernity, corruption and inequity *against* (minorities, women, leftists, activists) went hand in hand with corruption *for* (police graft and violence, bribery, protection for crooked politicians and criminal elites, the overlooking of crimes of male vice).¹³⁴ Emergent interdisciplinary scholarship on the border of social science and social philosophy that critiques the inherently criminal nature of capitalism has recently been done by Jay Barney and David Schmitz.¹³⁵ With this project, I incorporate such perspectives, but rely even more heavily on similar ones from feminist perspectives, as discussed in terms of Perkins Gilman in this chapter and more contemporary feminist economic theorists in future ones.¹³⁶

The ways in which masculinist capital overlooked and overcame ethnic tensions is indicative of its powers. The first successes were primarily “foreigners”, Jewish émigrés from Eastern Europe who had done business with and against one another in New York before making the move to California. Their Jewishness might have been suspect to the antisemitic western male power structure of L.A. at first, but their wealth and prominence soon bought them entrée into those same circles of crime and injustice. The capitalist studio heads were both trying to solidify their business and prove their status as men of the American white elite, to be trusted by the system, in spite of their minority ethnic status. In Chapter Three, which deals with ethnicity, race, Americanness, and othered women in Hollywood, I also dive deeply into the paradoxical and othered status of the studio founders as both non-American and American, white and non-white, amassing great wealth and power while dealing with antisemitism at the

¹³⁴ For self-referential Hollywood meta-history, an entire genre dealing with such themes precisely in relation to the corrupt Los Angeles milieu has emerged with *Chinatown* (1974), *L.A. Confidential* (1997), *The Black Dahlia* (2006), and numerous other films.

¹³⁵ Jay Barney and David Schmitz. “Behind Every Fortune Is an Equally Great Crime.” *Capitalism Beyond Mutuality?: Perspectives Integrating Philosophy and Social Science*. Ed. Subramanian Rangan. Oxford, 2018. Print.

¹³⁶ Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston, Beacon, 2016); Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York, Autonomedia, 2004).

same time. Such an exploration of the white male power structure of Hollywood from its roots as one also shaped by a defensive ethnic monoculture parallels with some of the findings of Powdermaker and other Hollywood theorists. It helps to explain more about the problematic milieu that was created and then transmitted its values throughout its community, and indeed, through the U.S. and the world via its film product.

Later twentieth-century sociological and cultural theory became interested in moments of class shift or class fracture, in which arriviste groups rise to create new social elites.¹³⁷ But Veblen, living through such moments rather dramatically in the American case at the turn of the century and documenting them in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, had been more scathing. His term for jump-up businessmen and their social climbing families was “the parvenu aristocracy”. In Veblen’s conception of the leisure class, one of their markers is, very specifically, that they don’t work. To this point, I would argue that no one in Hollywood was *actually* of the leisure class, then— it is well understood that it was a business of hustlers from top to bottom, holding on to their positions through ulcers and extreme neuroticism no matter how famous or powerful they seemed. (Powdermaker delved into this key characteristic of the Hollywood social milieu, its state of perpetual high anxiety, extensively in *The Dream Factory*.)

But if no one in the film industry was of the leisure class, then what do we make of the founders’ giant mansions, swimming pools, and polo ponies that made them global objects of envy? I would situate them firmly in Veblen’s parvenu aristocracy, trying to project the markers of inherited wealth while actually working frenetically to build such fortunes. Yet while working frantically themselves, the founders did also build a society on the exploitation of other’s labour. This put them somewhat on the way to an elite, of sorts; again, the concept of a parvenu aristocracy works well here. Additionally, the unique status of the studio founders as becoming such a fabulously wealthy elite class, but one who knew they would not be accepted by the American upper class due to their ethnic minority status and lack of education, marked them as very specifically different again.

One of Veblen’s markers of a parvenu aristocracy was that it is one that lacks the traditional markers of the upper class. In the American context, he cited such markers being the study of Latin, education in the Ivy League, and the acquisition of the rarest fine art. A parvenu aristocracy will then sets out to acquire the replacements of these things they cannot obtain merely with money— thus turning to jewels, horses, yachts, servants in uniform, and the like.

¹³⁷ Sumiko Higashi, "The Decline of Middlebrow Taste in Celebrity Culture: The First Fan Magazines." *Women and the Silent Screen* conference. University of Pittsburgh. September 17, 2014. Keynote Address.

Thus under Veblen's conception, while the Hollywood power elite was not a leisure class, they could certainly be situated as a parvenu aristocracy. What that meant for the way they ruled their society and controlled their workplaces, and the class status it left for their "glamorous" employees, will come clearer by the end of this chapter.

Just as the early Hollywood capitalist elites were happy to latch onto conservative American positions on labour and unions that better suited their business interests, they fully signed on, both by natural temperament and as a form of their own business savvy, to what Banner has called "America's well-known anti-intellectualism".¹³⁸ As both U.S. business on the whole and the Hollywood film industry in particular boomed throughout the 1920s, both the business school and man-on-the-street, conventional "modern" American wisdom was, "who needs culture?" As Banner explains in *American Beauty* (1983):

This was the 'flip side' of the dissociation of culture and wealth: status, one might conclude, belonged not to those refined, dutiful individuals detached from commercial pursuits but to those in business, literate or not, whose 'know-how' showed them to be the masters of modern conditions.¹³⁹

In the nineteenth century Henry Adams had asked of the cultural development of the U.S., "[c]an a great civilization be built upon or maintained upon the philosophy of the counting-house and the sole basic idea of a profit?"¹⁴⁰ Based on the wild success of Hollywood by the mid-1920s, both Hollywood and Wall Street would seemingly have answered in the affirmative. The executives both publicly and privately disavowed the "long hair stuff" -- art, culture, creativity, and progress-- that their creative workers did value.

An example of such a divide between culture and education on the one hand and profit and the lowbrow on the other is evident in an anecdote from Frederica Sagor Maas' memoir. An educated woman, Maas came from a different stratum than the salesmen who had become her bosses when she arrived as a screenwriter. She had particular tactics in dealing with these executive men, who had so much power and yet so little education. In the early years of film, she would speak in the most lofty film-speak she could think up to the new "producers", noting:

The process usually worked in the early days because most producers knew nothing or nearly nothing of the writing process; the more erudite it sounded, the more they were convinced that they were getting their money's worth.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Banner, *American Beauty* 31.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 30.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 32.

¹⁴¹ Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* 66.

Maas at least gave credit to some of the uneducated executives for cleverly surrounding themselves with literate people. She reserved the most ire for those she considered the worst in the mediocre Hollywood management mode. One Sol Wurtzel, Fox executive, was particularly scathingly and incisively sketched in Maas' recollections. She painted a somewhat comic but yet telling picture of many of the problematic themes of 1920s Hollywood-- nepotism, discrimination, lowbrow ignorance, antisocial corporatism-- all combining in the figure of one man. Unlike some of the other executives, Wurtzel was impossible to crack with appeals to creative artistry, or even basic literacy. Maas explained that he:

was held in contempt by his equals... He held contempt for anything he did not understand or did not want to understand. Not a literate man, he hated reading so much he would never read the scripts or books or stories that were bought. Everything had to be synopsisized.¹⁴²

Such was the reputation of Wurtzel with his peers that B.P. Schulberg wittily coined the phrase "from bad to Wurtzel" in describing the downward arc of any particularly schlocky or hacky project.¹⁴³

Maas perceived that Wurtzel hated her husband and fellow screenwriter Ernest Maas as part of his inherent distrust for both educated people and the high-minded content they might produce. As Maas quoted Wurtzel:

I run the studio around here. My pictures make money. What we don't need around here are Thalbergs with crappy ideas for fancy, arty stuff. This is a business. If you want art go to a museum. To hell with that highbrow, high-faluting crap!¹⁴⁴

This anti-intellectualism as populist business strategy was pervasive in Hollywood's early years. In a later-life interview with Ezra Goodman, producer/director Mack Sennett declared, "[a]ny little success I have had was because I was one of the mob and catered to the mob".¹⁴⁵ Sennett's style, like Wurtzel's, was deliberately anti-intellectual, and also helped to form the roots of writing and pitching that have stuck around to the present day. Frank Capra recalled starting on Sennett pictures on which "writers" were placed into groups of two, but didn't actually write anything. Everything was spoken.

Within a remarkably short time, nuanced layers of class developed in this new space, imbued as it was with a questionable patina of glamour. The whole world was growing

¹⁴² Ibid. 142.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Goodman, *The Fifty Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 345.

accustomed to seeing a new aristocracy in Hollywood, as a fantasy of stars' lives was sold to the public via the publicity apparatus. As Thomson noted in *The Whole Equation*:

early on, movie people had the money and the privilege to pick out the best lots, the most fashionable architects and the art dealers and so on who would give them class. They were mocked for that sometimes...¹⁴⁶

In reality, the stars were not at the top of this new class hierarchy at all. We can instead see a near-aristocracy of management, but one that still fell short, and a doubly stressed, precarious imposter aristocracy of the workers, propped up by illusory, industrial-strength glamour and financially strained. This chapter and future chapters engage with how such a fundamentally insecure society, built on acting and performing offscreen as well as on, created the systems of oppression that it did.

In an era of so much new money and with the predominant mentality towards conspicuous consumption, such questions of how to be rich and look rich were in the air. This was true on both American coasts, as well as in literature and film. The quintessential American work of literature on class and the American Dream, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, was published in 1925 and dealt extensively with such themes. (The fact that a struggling Fitzgerald would spend the last years of the 1930s, before his untimely death, as a screenwriter in Hollywood renders him someone very representative of the cultural moments with which this project contends; thus, he naturally appears at several points throughout.) Fitzgerald's James Gatz turned Jay Gatsby is the ultimate parvenu aristocrat of the Jazz Age. The novel abounds with subtle and clever class markers: white-tie parties at which no one knows the host, grand libraries filled with books that, on closer inspection, had never been taken out of their packaging, starlets with the last names of famous industrialists. Mack Sennett, to take one example, was lampooned as a mildly ridiculous Gatsbyesque figure by his contemporaries. Frank Capra offered later-life anecdotes of Sennett's huge, Gatsby-like library of unopened books, in contrast with his liveried butlers in highest formality.¹⁴⁷

Gatz/Gatsby's phenomenal rise as bootlegger-cum-society host captured something else in the air of the early American century, and the Hollywood founder class' cozy relationships with both corrupt politicians and organised crime: that such masculinist circles of success frequently overlapped as measures of their success. D.W. Griffith, too, seemed to pick up on this nodal moment when he titled one his early Biograph films *One Is Business, The*

¹⁴⁶ Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 38.

¹⁴⁷ *Hollywood*. 'Comedy Is A Serious Business- Episode 8.' Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

Other Crime (1912). An understanding of American business and class formation of the early twentieth century has to be grounded in understanding of masculinist capital and corruption. They were the keys to success, in the film world and beyond.

Because the history of emergent Hollywood has typically not been undertaken with an eye to labour, and even less so with an eye to class, viewing the mass migration of women to Hollywood as part of broader social trends of modern working women has not been included in its standard narrative. The girl who came to Hollywood with dreams of becoming a star has been an unmistakably dominant trope for a century, and it will be explored extensively in later case studies of actresses. But what about all the young women who came not with dreams but to *work*, in the mode of labourers, as identified by Clark (1995), or Hallett (2013)? Californian migration figures into the broader trend of the times of women leaving farms and small towns behind to make their own money, going to work across the cities of the western world. As Jane Addams wrote in 1909 of this phenomenal movement of modern, free, independent women:

Never before in civilization have such numbers of young girls been suddenly released from the protection of the home and permitted to walk unattended upon city streets and to work under alien roofs; for the first time they are being prized more for their labor power than for their innocence.¹⁴⁸

Veblen, as not just economist and sociologist but unlikely proto-feminist, also wrote about these New Women. He theorised them as primarily economic social types, their demands for both emancipation and work representing direct challenges to the power elite.¹⁴⁹

Yet something even more unique was happening specifically in American migration to southern California in the 1910s. In the new city of Los Angeles, young, modern women saw the promise of a chance to live not just independently but in new modes. Cultural historian Hallett has written extensively about Hollywood's "feminization of western migration" in *Go West, Young Women!* (2013), noting that the new situation in which "female migrants outnumbered male ones... effect[ed] a 'stunning' reversal in western migration patterns".¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ In Jennifer Bean. *Flickers of Desire: Movie Stars of the 1910s*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2011) 10.

¹⁴⁹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class. With an Introd. by John Kenneth Galbraith*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973) 357.

¹⁵⁰ Hallett *Go West, Young Women!*, 11.

Going against all traditions of the western boomtown, Los Angeles had— seemingly overnight— become a uniquely more feminine space than any other western city. “There are more women in Los Angeles than any other city in the world and it’s the movies that bring them,” one shopkeeper asserted bluntly in 1918.¹⁵¹ Further, one in five of these new women were divorced or widowed, making them a relatively older and more experienced demographic than traditional female urban migrations to date. These were not country girls seeking service positions in the city, but often sophisticated women looking to start new lives and careers on the West Coast.

In the 1910s, women who arrived to work creatively in Hollywood as actresses, writers, or even directors found, remarkably, a still open industry, one in which they could gain footholds, forge bonds of solidarity with one another, and thrive. In a quote that is quite remarkable both in its breaking of teleological assumptions and in light of the century of horrors women have endured in Hollywood after this era, screenwriter Lenore Coffee remarked, “[r]emember, this was the day of *women*”:¹⁵² Screenwriter and journalist Adela Rogers St. Johns was emblematic of this spirit of liberation and the New Woman in the new city. St. Johns went even further when she wrote that in this day of Pickford, Swanson, the Gishes, and the Talmadges, “Hollywood was a matriarchy”.¹⁵³ First person accounts recall Mary Pickford’s powerful alliance with her chosen writer and friend, Frances Marion, that wielded them both enormous success and wealth; Pickford in her later-life memoir *Sunshine and Shadow* (1955) called Marion “the pillar of my career”.¹⁵⁴ Pickford also made publicly feminist remarks on women’s rights, declared that women in the business help one another a great deal, and noted that she owed all her success to women.¹⁵⁵ Marion wrote over 200 films and was Hollywood’s highest paid screenwriter for many years. Star director Lois Weber was known not only for her films with women’s social themes, but for her hiring and mentoring of women.

There is a small sub-text about migration, class, the American Dream and *women* in the quintessential meta-Hollywood narrative *A Star Is Born* (original 1937) that is easily missed, and this aspect is exactly in line with the perimeters of this project as to these themes. An early title card reads “Hollywood, the beckoning El-Dorado... metropolis of make-believe in the California Hills”.¹⁵⁶ One unusual scene involves Esther Blodgett’s exchange with her grandmother.

¹⁵¹ Ibid 12.

¹⁵² Ibid 57.

¹⁵³ Ibid 43.

¹⁵⁴ Mary Pickford (*Sunshine and Shadow*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955) 39.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ *A Star is Born*. Dir. William A. Wellman. Perf. Janet Gaynor, Fredric March, Adolphe Menjou. 1937.

Esther's grandmother makes a comparison between the hardy pioneers of the Old West making their way across the continent in wagons, and a young woman following her dreams west to Hollywood. Where older people in books or films of the period usually function to discourage young people away from Hollywood, Esther's grandmother exhorts bravery. In this (and resonating with Hallett's *Go West, Young Women!*), Tino Balio has written that Esther's grandmother "self-consciously links the idea of Hollywood to the foundation myths of American national identity, and her granddaughter's destiny to the archetypal experience of the frontier".¹⁵⁷ Seeking stardom, like going west, was now become part of the American experience and the American birthright in this view— even for a woman. Understanding logistics and odds of failure was less important than taking part in the American Dream itself, by believing in it.

Thus, the new Hollywood (in its pre-masculinist-capitalist state) was a space imbued with suffragist politics, by nature of its many New Woman inhabitants and creative workers. Even the newspapers wrote fawning, quasi-anthropological dispatches from "the first city where 'Movie Actresses Control Its Politics'".¹⁵⁸ Women in Hollywood were voting, bobbing their hair, and drinking and smoking, while also doing half the writing and editing in the movie industry. There was every reason to hope that this social experiment in a new space was going to become a permanent and progressive way of life.

In Bridget Terry's 2000 documentary about Frances Marion, *Without Lying Down*, film historian Tony Macklin described the forgetting of how large a role women played in the beginning of the Hollywood film industry as a kind of historiographic "amnesia".¹⁵⁹ Going further, traditionally few mainstream theorists or film historians have remarked upon the fact that women were representationally more powerful and successful in film in the 1910s than in all the decades to come. Even fewer have asked how or why this shifted. As famed and preeminent film historian Kevin Brownlow replied simply in Terry's documentary, he didn't know why it happened.¹⁶⁰ As mainstream film historians or business experts have been of little help, it is of

¹⁵⁷ Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (New York, Scribner, 1993) 153.

¹⁵⁸ Mark Garrett Cooper. *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood*. (Champaign: Illinois, 2010) 78.

¹⁵⁹ *Without Lying Down: Frances Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood*. Dir. Bridget Terry. 2000.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

use to turn to women business historians and feminist film scholars to try to interpret this turn of events.

If Hollywood began with such potential for a modern emergent urban performance space, it nonetheless ultimately took all the foundations of capitalism and sexual exploitation as its underpinnings instead. Why this dramatic turn, rather than the attainment of any utopian possibilities of creative egalitarianism? Crucial revisionist research has in fact been done in recent decades by feminist film historians like Cari Beauchamp and the Women Film Pioneers Project. Such feminist work has established how early film did in fact offer a climate of gender equity and women's creative leadership and power. Jane Gaines has identified this possibility as specific to the financial and industrial realities of the cultural moment. As Gaines wrote in her seminal 2002 chapter "Of Cabbages and Authors":

a concise explanation of the reason that women were able to work in the motion picture industry in Europe and the United States: no one knew that motion pictures would become big business. This was not yet a significant industry and with so little at stake (so little power, so little capital), much more could be entrusted to women.¹⁶¹

A decade later, Gaines went on to develop this as a political-financial hypothesis, connecting the capitalist pushing of women out of the business to the victory of the industry's own masculinist-corporatist self-congratulation. Gaines wrote that "[a] more political approach might think in terms of knowledge apportionment, a rationing of the women credited in the industry story of triumphant corporatization".¹⁶²

In recent years, Gaines has demonstrated a still more nuanced evolution on this, one of her signature subjects, away from star workers to ordinary workers. In 2018, Gaines explained that "this narrative of ascendancy and disappearance due to economic change has become the accepted explanation as to 'what happened' to powerful women".¹⁶³ Yet then, in the vein of Clark's labour focus and the class focus of this project, Gaines rightly reminded that such a narrative in feminist film history could betray something of a fetishisation of women directors and stars. After all, no one disputes that women on the lower rungs as stenographers, cutters, readers, or cleaners never "went away" at all. Thus Gaines was quite correct to clarify that:

[I]ower-level workers have not been the measure of women in the industry... Admittedly, these lower-level workers now make our original 'What happened to them?' query seem elite and narrow.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Jane Gaines, "Of Cabbages and Authors." In *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. Eds. Jennifer Bean and Diane Negra. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002) 105.

¹⁶² Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped*, 22.

¹⁶³ Ibid. 144.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 132.

Additional feminist research from the business history side has also identified the period up to 1920 as a window which closed as the industry's potentials were made evident, allowing for traditional masculinist-capitalism to establish total dominance. Business historian Karen Mahar came to the same conclusion that I earlier posited in identifying the importance of the Supreme Court decision of 1915 in the industry's trajectory. Film became a fully front-and-centre corporate industry, and concerns for creativity were pushed aside. Women then had to coexist and work with and for men who, whether they knew it or not, not only had no interest in their ideas of gendered social change, but were actively and with hostility not going to allow them to come to fruition. Mahar explained that "[b]anking interests came to town, and defined women as 'unfit to handle large numbers of people or large numbers of capital.' They preferred to deal with male executives".¹⁶⁵

From the perspective of feminist cultural history, I see this moment around 1920 as the predominant moment of Hollywood's lost potential, the beginning of a slide to an increasingly reclassified and regendered dystopia. (It was not, however, the only such moment; similar nodal points to be discussed in the epilogue include the end of the studio system and the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement). Thus a shift from a liberatory utopian moment to a realist-oppressive reactionary one can be identified. Taking this to its conclusion, we might say that the early halcyon days ended when male corporate capitalism, in the form of the studio system and its alliance with finance capital, pushed out and erased women from positions of authority. Such widespread demotion then ushered in an era of exploitation of women's labour, abuses, and sexual misconduct.

Going deeper into the American business zeitgeist of the 1910s and 1920s allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the logic that pushed women out of power in the American film industry. It is key to grasp this logic, as it arguably still foundational to Hollywood's deeply problematic power structure even today. Without such a look backward, it is likely impossible to really understand the masculinist-capitalist-white supremacist underpinnings of Hollywood, or to recognise that in fact the entire system is still moored in such.

Firstly, the masculinist-capitalist configuration of early Hollywood must be understood in the context of the preeminent corporate ethos of its day: Fordism. Where today's trendy business bros can be heard in Silicon Valley, Tribeca, and Toronto extolling the virtues of disruption, their 1920s counterparts would have been wheeling around preaching, conversely,

¹⁶⁵ In Alicia Malone, *Backwards and In Heels: The Past, Present and Future of Women Working in Films*. (Coral Gables: Mango, 2017), 44.

the gospel of integration-- hierarchisation, standardisation, vertical integration, and the assembly line. Many would have some picture of these concepts as cultural markers of this historical period. Even a mass audience would recognise, then and today, Chaplin's themes of dehumanisation and alienation in the gears and assembly line scene in *Modern Times* (1936), for example.¹⁶⁶ But what was the gendered aspect of Fordism?

Mark Garrett Cooper's *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood* (2010) presented a fascinating study, in which he identified Fordism as one of the primary factors in the 1920s disenfranchisement of women in Hollywood. By focusing on a single studio (Universal) over the span of a few short years, Cooper extolled the reader not to merely wave away the shift with a generalised "patriarchy" as simplified reason.¹⁶⁷ After all, both Cooper's study and other first-person accounts and scholarly histories paint a very different picture of a creative and familial 1910s atmosphere. Yet American society had been no less patriarchal five years prior.

In *On Hollywood*, Scott situated Inceville, Thomas Ince's early 1910s studio, as a forerunner to where the standardised and no longer freewheeling business would go. Ince, Scott posited, began to install discipline over the creatives and thus,

"[o]n these foundations, an advanced division of labor started to make its appearance in the motion picture industry, and the elements of a modern managerial model of production were installed".¹⁶⁸

Cooper stated that in the case of Universal, the studio also opted for a new, clear-cut division of labour-- more divisions and hierarchy supported by more capital.¹⁶⁹ He uncovered through primary sources how Universal deliberately moved towards the business school-recommended practices of the day for-- and this is key-- any standard American product-delivering corporation. In other words, tandem with the 1915 decision that ruled Hollywood to be a business and not an art, the businessmen running it opted to design its new consolidating structures on the model of a factory producing Model Ts or anything else: a factory of film. In *The Genius of the System*, Schatz compared the new Southern California setups to factories moving to be closer to needed resources.¹⁷⁰ Yet the matter of both product and raw material being not only sunshine and space but human emotions, bodies, and physical activity *did* make

¹⁶⁶ *Modern Times*. Dir. Charles Chaplin. Perf. Charles Chaplin, Paulette Goddard, Henry Bergman. 1936.

¹⁶⁷ Cooper, *Universal Women*.

¹⁶⁸ Scott, *On Hollywood* 22.

¹⁶⁹ Cooper, *Universal Women* xiii.

¹⁷⁰ Schatz, *The Genius of the System* 20.

this business unlike any other. Schatz noted that performers were “employees... who could not be trained and regulated like other craftsmen and technicians”.¹⁷¹

James Monaco in *American Film Now* wrote that “(t)he ‘factories’ were built: elaborate production facilities which borrowed the assembly-line principle from Detroit”.¹⁷² Janet Staiger has explained that:

[w]hat advanced capitalism did do to the mode of production was to intensify the existent mode by reasserting the production hierarchies of management. The standard became even more the standard.

Staiger continued that “[w]ith the shift to advanced capitalism, the manager-run company reaffirmed the control of the management structure and hierarchy”.¹⁷³ As Jan-Christopher Horak has noted of Hollywood, “[a]fter 1917, the film industry as a whole... conformed to American industrial norms by practicing a division of labor, scientific management, and consumer advertising”.¹⁷⁴ With such a close focus as Cooper, Balio, and Staiger (among others) have offered, we can see the deliberate policies and the reasonings behind them. This is the window-closing moment from play and expansion to gender and patriarchal reification in plain view.

As Tino Balio noted of 1919 in *The American Film Industry*, “Richard A. Rowland, president of Metro Pictures, had proclaimed that ‘motion pictures must cease to be a game and become a business’”.¹⁷⁵ Mary Pickford herself seemed to glean the negative shift as growing from mass industrial change. She wrote in her autobiography *Sunshine and Shadow* (1955):

Where there had been an intimate little family group, threshing out its problems in a warm, personal spirit of teamwork, there was now a huge machine- cold, critical, automatic, and impersonal.¹⁷⁶

Indeed, Pickford’s eventual founding of United Artists with her famed contemporaries was the creatives’ response to management and capital’s offensive.

Monaco, on the other hand, dismissed Hollywood as simply “a quaint and rather charming parody of a classic American industrial system”.¹⁷⁷ I would instead argue that the ways the studio tried to Taylorise human bodies and performances led to many of the abuses of this

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 42.

¹⁷² James Monaco. *American Film Now: the People, the Power, the Money, the Movies*. (New American Library, 1984) 30.

¹⁷³ Janet Staiger, “The Labor-Force, Financing, and the Mode of Production”, in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. (London, Routledge, 2003) 555-558.

¹⁷⁴ Jan-Christopher Horak in Steven Ross, *Working Class Hollywood* 121.

¹⁷⁵ Tino Balio, *The American Film Industry* (Madison: Wisconsin, 1976) 162.

¹⁷⁶ Pickford, *Sunshine and Shadow* 105.

¹⁷⁷ Monaco *American Film Now*, 30.

system that are still enshrined today. Such an understanding of the system leads one directly on the same path as Powdermaker, when in the late 1940s she pronounced Hollywood, both industrially and culturally, a totalitarian system.

Other studios had different feelings regarding the move to Fordism and its all-powerful managerialism, though all eventually fell in line. When Louis B. Mayer and Irving Thalberg merged to form MGM in 1924, the conscious model was the making of a film factory in order to keep production moving at all times. Mayer, who was no technician, nevertheless found, as a natural autocrat, ways to use the factory system to his advantage. David O. Selznick, more of a creative genius type of producer and independent outlier, disdained the new factory setup. He dismissed Paramount studio head B.P. Schulberg as a mere “mill foreman”.¹⁷⁸

In fact, this type of managerialism was an inevitable fixture of the move to masculinist industrial production. Managerialism was, in fact, another business school concept that rose to universal acceptance in the late nineteenth century. A further example of the misogynistic logical fallacies abounding at the time, managerialism was based on standards of masculine leadership. Hierarchy and supervision were in, creativity and collaboration were out. This meant that traits associated with men were inherently correlated with and elevated to those of good managers. At the same time, ordinary social convention dictated that all managers must be men. If a woman were to want to be a manager, she would be excluded on these grounds. But what if she had all the traits of a good manager? She couldn't possibly. She's wasn't a man.

In fact, I would argue that not only was it so natural for companies like Universal to go in a Fordist direction because they perceived it to be optimising of profit, but also because it fit psychologically with the deepest held gender stereotypes of virtually all early twentieth century American white men (save, perhaps, Thorstein Veblen). A business set up on the model of the theatre might have valued and listened to women to some degree, and seen them acquire some power. Women had been able to rise in the theatre and acquire power for centuries, to varying degrees. But a business set up like a factory? Certainly not. Factories have foremen, not forewomen. (The deeper irony that this was the one factory setup that could not run without women seemed lost on these men, in terms of their lack of respect for the women in the system. Unlike gas, coal, or even brassieres and cosmetics, the film industry *required* women-- not only as consumers, but as creative producers.)

Rather, the Hollywood film industry felt quite confident that it had no need for women as executives or directors. Perhaps a few writers could stay, but not many were necessary. Yet by

¹⁷⁸ Schatz, *The Genius of the System* 78.

nature, the business could never eliminate the need for women's presence in the form of onscreen bodies. So the women who remained visible in the system were actresses, their Fordist role ornamentation-- to look beautiful and, in many cases, to be sexually available. The crux of the 1917 to 2017 system in a paragraph.

Earlier I brought up the paradox of the mythos of "Hollyweird" in contrast with the reality of studio capitalists' right-wing, conservative politics. Previously mentioned scholars like Steven Ross, Kathryn Olmsted, and Vincent Brook have raised the irony of the cementing of Hollywood's leftist reputation, in contrast with its actual hyper-capitalist realities, from the beginning.¹⁷⁹ In this chapter introducing a circa-1920 gendered power collapse, I am contending with the lost counterfactual of a Hollywood not built on masculinist capital that relegated women to second-class status, but what could have been a creative space of equals regardless of gender.

In a slightly different but related vein, historian Ross mourned another counterfactual of class in his 1998 *Working Class Hollywood*. Ross wanted to establish that what he called "a conservative popular cinema",¹⁸⁰ based in corporatism and capital, was not an inevitability of Hollywood but nevertheless what it became. In doing so he looked to forgotten socially progressive and pro-labour film produced before the studios cemented total control by the mid-1920s. Both the government and the emerging Hollywood industry had every interest in putting a stop to such "destabilising" films. Far from being foreign leftist agitators, the new studio heads showed themselves to be executives who would decisively squash films with themes of class conflict or social justice activism. As Ross asserted, the relative silencing of films dealing with "workers, unions, radicals, employers, capitalism, and socialism... also affected the way Americans today think- or fail to think- about questions of class and class identity".¹⁸¹

As Ross has explained, "[a]t the same time that worker filmmakers were trying to heighten class consciousness, Hollywood producers were suggesting that class no longer mattered".¹⁸² The move instead in the 1920s to heartwarming films built upon hijinks and romance which ended in "love and harmony among the classes"¹⁸³ was a deliberate one. And while Hollywood was producing films about love and high luxury to obscure class consciousness, corporations like Ford were producing films for its workers that were anti-union, pro-corporate paternalism, and alarmist as to "the Bolshevik menace". With both Hollywood and

¹⁷⁹ Ross, *Working Class Hollywood*; Olmsted, *Right Out of California*; Brook, *Land of Smoke and Mirrors*.

¹⁸⁰ Ross. *Working Class Hollywood*.

¹⁸¹ Ibid xv.

¹⁸² Ibid 9.

¹⁸³ Ibid xii.

business “promot[ing] the ideology of classless Americanism”,¹⁸⁴ Ross’ counterfactual of a class-conscious and progressive American cinema stood no more chance than my feminist egalitarian one.

In David Thomson’s estimation, Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby* presented a riotously good-time U.S. but with a capitalism and identity problem. As he has noted of the *Gatsby* universe, “something central has gone wrong. American energy is betrayed already”.¹⁸⁵ This quote from Thomson is straightforward enough in his work, but for my own I would coopt it towards gender injustice. Within the confines of this project, the centrality that had already gone wrong was the re-hierarchisation that happened to New Women who tried to make their way in the new West, accepted for a few brief years only to be shut out. Fitzgerald, Ross, Kathryn Olmsted (*Right Out of California: The 1930s and the Big Business Roots of Modern Conservatism*, 2015) and I have all been fascinated by the intersections of class, wealth, and gangsterism in the American 1910s and 1920s to varying degrees. Here I take it further, suggesting that the “betrayal of American energy” that took place in the era was all to the benefit of capitalists and against women, through the successful employment of the specific corporate methods delineated above.

As the system tightened to male control, some of the first-person primary source accounts already introduced in this chapter clearly illuminate the frustration and dismay of the gendered woman’s experience in Hollywood of the era. Frederica Sagor Maas went from riding high as one of Hollywood’s most successful screenwriters to being fired and impoverished because she disagreed with a male writer on the direction of a script. In the meeting, two producers grew enraged with her, with one of them, Harry Rapf, demanding, “[a]re you telling me I don’t know my business?” Maas explained that he then “put me in my proper place” by calling it *his* story, though she had written every word.¹⁸⁶ Shortly thereafter, Rapf fired her after designating her a “troublemaker”. In Maas’ explanation, “[a] troublemaker was defined as anyone who defied (however unwittingly) the authority vested in executives and producers”.¹⁸⁷ She realised Rapf had even more of the last laugh when she went to see the last film she had written before her dismissal, a Norma Shearer vehicle, and found her name to have been taken off the credits entirely. Maas’ lesson was that “[o]ne did not lightly challenge authority in the movie business”; though she did not say it, being seen as doing so was both scandalous and likely doubly hazardous for the career security of a woman writer. Her subsequent slide in

¹⁸⁴ Ibid 224.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. 43.

¹⁸⁶ Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* 94.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid 106.

financial difficulties was highly traumatising; she described it as “painfully demeaning- a nightmare for me”.¹⁸⁸

This male executive demanding of female creative genuflection and obedience can thus be seen as beginning in the early 1920s, but certainly as something that heightened in the peak studio years as the men became ever more powerful. Such a panicked power hierarchy can be read as residing in the great insecurity of this new managerial class of male producers and studio executives. What some like Hallett have grouped under a broader showdown of producers versus stars cannot be understood without its gender dynamic front and centre.

Some film historians have likened 1920s Hollywood to a rocket careening out of control. Or, to mix metaphors, this was a public-driven craze that simply hadn’t stopped, and no one was driving the ship. In Thomson’s words, “[i]t’s not even clear that the business employed people skilled enough to know where it was going, let alone guide or steer it”.¹⁸⁹ It is disappointing but unsurprising that in such corporate situations, a mediocre manager will typically try to apply more discipline and demand more fealty. It is also unsurprising that openness in terms of gender would be one of the first victims of executive insecurity.

Thus, we may conclude that the logical fallacies of scientific managerialism were the first, non-community specific reasons for women to be pushed out of power in early Hollywood. The second major reason was more specific to this new industry; in fact, it was the direct result of an industry built along the lines of a male ethnic monoculture: nepotism. I will argue in the following section that nepotism was the primary male sociopathic practice that barred women not only from power but also even from respect in Hollywood, before moving on to other forms of masculinist sociopathy (corporate, sexual) already well-cemented by the 1920s.

Incidentally, the word “sociopathy” used to describe foundational male behaviours in the Hollywood structure from its origins to the present is strong, and this is deliberate. It is meant to remind that such behaviours have been antisocial and pathological, showcased by the elite white American male in power, lacking empathy or care for other humans, especially those considered lesser because of their class, gender, or racial status. Hence, sociopathic as, literally, social pathology in beliefs, behaviours, and practices.

Recent business and social psychology research has confirmed that moving up a corporate chain is commensurate with losing empathy for others. In a 2015 *Harvard Business*

¹⁸⁸ Ibid 108.

¹⁸⁹ Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 182.

Review article, “Becoming Powerful Makes You Less Empathetic”, business professor Lou Solomon cited research from social psychologist Dacher Keltner that people with power not only lose the ability to empathise but also to read emotions and to adapt to other people. The same article described the research of neuroscientist Sukhvinder Obhi, which has found that “power can actually change how the brain functions”.¹⁹⁰ Solomon asked how “the line where power turns to abuse of power happens: ‘Slowly, and then suddenly’”.¹⁹¹

Applying such to the Hollywood system, we can turn to Powdermaker, who wrote that “organizational roles carry characteristic images of the kinds of people that should occupy them, thus encouraging incumbents to turn into those kind of people”.¹⁹² Contemporaneously to the reigns of the studio founder class, we can also find a remarkably incisive quote in relation to the psyches of the studio founders and their impact on the structural climates of the studios they created, from economic philosopher Friedrich Hayek. In *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), Hayek famously asserted that:

The probability of the people in power being individuals who would dislike the possession and exercise of power is on a level with the probability that an extremely tender-hearted person would get the job of a whipping-master in a slave plantation.¹⁹³

Management theorists of the comfortable white male American twentieth century asserted of the corporate system a benign rule that tended to work out. One of countless examples of such good faith thinking on American capitalism could be characterised by Peter Drucker’s assertion that “[i]t is probable that the minimal ethical efficiency needed to keep society going is fairly low”.¹⁹⁴ In light of the rampant misbehaviour and abuse caused by a century of American male personal pathology in labour contexts brought to light in the time of MeToo, this incredibly naïve position has been quite demolished.

In other words, these are generally not monsters who were born as such (although some Hollywood rulers with whom I contend in future chapters, like Eddie Mannix, seem to qualify as psychopaths rather than sociopaths), but those who were made so by the system they created. If we accept Neal Gabler’s strong premise of 1988’s *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* that the “moguls” created a sort of new fiefdom which they ruled,¹⁹⁵ then we

¹⁹⁰ Lou Solomon. “Becoming Powerful Makes You Less Empathetic.” *Harvard Business Review*. April 21, 2015.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 250.

¹⁹³ Friedrich von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London, Routledge, 1980) 112.

¹⁹⁴ Drucker, *The Concept of the Corporation* 117.

¹⁹⁵ Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York, Crown, 1988).

must ask how Lord Acton's historical axiom on absolute power corrupting absolutely fits in to that.

Many of the primary source, first-person accounts by women and workers in the system are excellent for observing both the psychology of the Hollywood power structure and the visible shift in some men as they gained omnipotence in the system. Such dehumanisation started early. In an interview with Ezra Goodman, director King Vidor recalled that Irving Thalberg conducted a story conference throughout star Mabel Normand's funeral, from the limousine to the pews of the church in the memorial service.¹⁹⁶ Frederica Sagor Maas recalled the initial good rapport between herself and B.P. Schulberg, as within the Hollywood structure of the 1920s, they were both considered East Coast intellectuals. Differing from the other studio founders, Schulberg was college educated from New York and had been a writer and reporter. Maas described Schulberg as starting out literate, kind, and sensitive, but becoming increasingly arrogant with power. She described walking in on the "family man" Schulberg having sex with a starlet in his office, and becoming a desperate gambler who brought his gambling buddies on as "producers" to pay off his debts.¹⁹⁷

Some nepotism could fit into the business-speak of the cultural zeitgeist of the day. Men had always chosen to elevate their peers from elite universities, fraternities, religions, or social clubs to positions of power around them, and this was nothing new from WASPs to good old boy networks. Nepotism as practice was certainly not unique to the Hollywood founder generation or any particular immigrant group to the U.S. As Alan Trachtenberg has delineated in *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (1982), the most successful families of the Gilded Age from the Rockefellers to the Harrimans and Hills operated under complex schemes of incorporation, trusts, foundations, and inheritance to keep not only wealth but power within families.¹⁹⁸ But such robber baron fortunes were already generational and in need of protection, rather than in primary acquisition stage.

In the 1920s, however, business management theory began to twist reasons as to why it was scientific to choose people (men) from the same social group.¹⁹⁹ Such theory could then be extrapolated down to family members. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter explained of twentieth century business development in *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977), "clusters of brothers, nephews, cousins, and sons-in-law of top executives appeared everywhere".²⁰⁰ Advice to young

¹⁹⁶ Goodman, *The Fifty-year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 169.

¹⁹⁷ Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* 147.

¹⁹⁸ Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America* 86.

¹⁹⁹ Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York, Basic, 1977) 51.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

men in magazines might earnestly offer how to try to marry the boss' daughter or how to make such a marriage most advantageous. Nearly every cross-class romance film seemed to have a plot in which the secretary was trying to marry the boss' son, or the young up-and-coming man couldn't be with the woman he really loved because he was engaged to the boss' daughter.

In the new Hollywood milieu, fortunes and family power were still in the nascent stage of building and hard work. In the Hollywood case and in theory, nepotism was an understandable strategy for the new studio founder class, who attempted to use it as a particular tool to protect themselves from outsiders and antisemitism. The studio founders had mostly risen from poverty and were just getting started-- a dynamic to be explored more in depth in the epilogue as to how it enabled oppressive systems still in effect today. But in practice, this nepotism meant that there were scores of men running around studio lots, barking orders, trying to force women to sleep with them, with little education and absolutely no qualifications than some distant cousinship to a studio founder.

The upside to such a business model was a firm grip on control by the masculinist power structure and thus, it was believed, the ability to efficiently and profitably make a great deal of films. In reality, this was not how the industry played out. These were the years in which power transferred not just from women to men but from creatives to capital, and such a move to "business efficiency" came about with the weakened position of the director and actor and the rise of the producer.

Certainly, Fordist and modern industrial practices were introduced to Hollywood studios early, and were of the type that would have been recognisable to Veblen and other business theorists and economists of the day. As Janet Staiger explained in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (2003):

'Efficiency experts' and 'production-line' practices appeared in the U.S. film industry by 1912 and became the order of the day around 1914. With this came the 'central producer', the modern manager of a well-organized mass production system which was now necessary...²⁰¹

Furthermore, the modern American film business as it developed first in New York and then in Los Angeles did not escape the Taylorism craze of scientific management of the 1910s. As Staiger explained in relation to the worker in the studio system:

Two aspects of these management practices are significant for what happened in film's mode of production: the application of scientific management to the worker in the production line and to the management of the firm.²⁰²

²⁰¹ in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. Eds. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson (London: Routledge, 2003) 223.

²⁰² Ibid.

With so many male relatives in need of work, including those with no understanding of film as either art or business, the term “producer” became a catch-all one. Frederica Sagor Maas described working in a script department that went from dynamic and creative to one that was increasingly unpleasant, staffed with a motley crew of people who needed favours as “readers”-- sisters of writers, sons of senators, and barely literate mistresses of executives.²⁰³ Nepotism lent itself equally to both abuse and mediocrity, it seemed. The portrait Maas offers here of one department really illuminates some of the atrocious systemic and foundational Hollywood practices that would plague the treatment of creatives, workers, and women for the next century.

Numerous first-person accounts from across the industry of the time derided the ever-increasing ranks of the know-nothing producer. Even the popular media knew enough to mock the nepotistic foundations of many of the most famous studios of the day; Laemmle’s Universal, for example, was teased in print as “families of Laemmles”.²⁰⁴ While comical anecdotes on this Hollywood industrial reality abounded from stars, writers, and even in jokes in the popular press, it was actually a major contributor to the loss of excellent, competent women and the rise of mediocre and abusive men. And what’s more, even business-trained men, not just unqualified relations, were on shaky ground managing anyone in this new industry that no one truly understood.

The power and pathologies of the studio heads are a major subtheme of this project in their own right. Louise Brooks explained that in her estimation what the studio heads loved more than anything was to “walk around and rule. To keep the actors down”.²⁰⁵ Cecil B. DeMille described Adolph Zukor as someone who enjoyed power for power’s sake, someone trying to turn the tables on the world.²⁰⁶ Mayer liked to remind his studio “family” that they were “all his children”.²⁰⁷ Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. explained of Mayer in his 2001 Vellecco interview in *Silent Stars Speak*, “I was terrified of him as most people were. He wasn’t really nasty [to work with] but in a subtle way, very strong, and people were very frightened of him.”²⁰⁸ David Thomson,

²⁰³ Ibid. 42.

²⁰⁴ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 70.

²⁰⁵ Brooks, *Lulu in Hollywood* (New York, Knopf, 1982).

²⁰⁶ In Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 173.

²⁰⁷ Vellecco, *Silent Stars Speak* 95.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

speaking of Mayer's greed, cruelty, and vanity, opined rather archly that these are qualities that get great movies made. This is a conclusion that is both unhelpful cliché, and reinforcing of systems of masculinist abuse against creative workers. In fact, dictatorship is no way to run a creative production industry, either in terms of quality or ethically speaking. We know this today, and yet its traces are only just beginning to be removed from the Hollywood of the 2020s. The various types of sociopathy inflicted by these men upon the system and especially upon the women in it, which still inform its current pathologies, will be discussed in the following sections.

The behaviours and models of industrial methods that became normative in the Hollywood of this time are not at all native or unique to film industries, Hollywood specifically, or even American business methods. They appear in every society. But the common thread is masculinist domination. I would suggest that through the application of theorists of industry and sociology, they can be more specifically situated in both their Americanness, and also in the Hollywood habitus that developed. The first is corporate male sociopathy. I once again turn to Veblen for the origins and problematics of masculinist capitalism.²⁰⁹ In an exploration of male corporate sociopathy, his theory of excessive competition and domination is particularly useful. As Veblen had theorised on the topic of domination:

When the community passes... to a predatory phase of life, the conditions of emulation change. The opportunity and the incentive to emulation increase greatly in scope and urgency. The activity of the men more and more takes on the character of exploit.²¹⁰

Looking to how the pathologies of a managerial class are transmitted to a cultural production field is a type of deconstruction of creative industries that cultural labour theorists have attempted in recent years-- but interestingly, without a historical approach thus far. Saha has asked that we look to a "politics of production"²¹¹ as one in which the exact same initial impulses of the producer class are, in Ryan's estimation, then repackaged into modern

²⁰⁹ This is an excellent moment to both address the Hollywood question as concerns Veblen and point to yet another hole in interdisciplinary research that this project uniquely attempts to fill. It would be natural to wonder if, in all his writings on the sociopathology of American business and industries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Veblen ever actually commented on the Hollywood film industry itself. A quite related doctoral thesis to this project, James McMahon's excellently titled *What Makes Hollywood Run? Capitalist Power, Risk, and the Control of Social Creativity* (2015, York) does not uncover any instances of Veblen speaking specifically about Hollywood, even though McMahon (like myself) depends heavily upon Veblen for theorisation of Hollywood.

²¹⁰ Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, Chapter 1.

²¹¹ Saha, *Race and the Cultural Industries* 174.

business-speak with terms like “standardization” and “productivity”: “bureaucratization represents the corporate response to the unpredictability of the worker”.²¹²

What is shocking in such corporatist deconstruction is how perfectly aligned such conclusions are with the earlier-mentioned conclusions of a nineteenth century feminist thinker like Charlotte Perkins Gilman-- and how her conclusions on male capitalist social dysfunction still read as radical a century later. Business practices and business-speak are so thoroughly and completely saturated in masculinist discourse and false accepted commonplaces as to be both utterly entrenched and perpetually made invisible. They became more so, not less, throughout the twentieth century. In the case of the American corporate model, the mundane realities of the business world have been incessantly translated to war, sports, and animal metaphors: to go to battle, to beat an opponent, to win, to be a shark. Even back to the nineteenth century, Tammany Hall New York political boss Richard Croker put it bluntly as to this worldview:

Chess is war; business is war; the rivalry of students and athletes is war. Everything is war in which men strive for mastery and power as against other men, and this is one of the essential conditions of progress.²¹³

Following more than a century of this language, such a view of American business is completely and systemically entrenched. American corporate values are, to my knowledge, simply not addressed in terms of their sociopathy in mainstream business studies-- so much so that it is necessary to return to theorists of a century or more ago, like Veblen and Gilman, for such discussion.

These predatory systems, so well-defined by iconoclastic scholars like Veblen and Gilman, clearly include Hollywood. As the new industry’s success grew stratospherically, it was more and more clearly an industry by and for men. Take for example one of the founders, Carl Laemmle, as a counterexample to the sort of ascendant American business successes these theorists were describing. Laemmle never moved into the theatre expansion aspect of the film business that made the other first-generation men even more wealthy. As a result, he stayed in the second tier and declined early. Thomas Schatz’ characterisation of Laemmle in terms of the above premises of domination and exploitation is apt:

It’s been said that Laemmle was unique among the film industry pioneers in that he lacked the qualities most often associated with the movie mogul: the ruthless, competitive drive, the open greed, the instinct for the jugular.²¹⁴

²¹² Ibid. 130.

²¹³ Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America* 169.

²¹⁴ Schatz, *The Genius of the System* 28.

With humane (but still nepotistic) founders like Laemmle the exception, the archetypal Hollywood or American capitalist shark became the model in both fact and fiction. Fictionalised versions of these men who are useful here and in future chapters were based on tyrants mythologised into heroes: Mayer, Harry Cohn, Jack Warner, Mannix, and more. They include anyone from the aforementioned Sammy Glick as created by Budd Schulberg to the also-mentioned Stanley Hoff in *The Big Knife* (1949),²¹⁵ Clifford Odets' Mayer/Harry Cohn caricature. Jonathan Shields in *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952) is another archetypal character.²¹⁶ They also include later Hollywood and non-Hollywood monsters, from Oliver Stone's Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street* (1987) to Robert Altman's Griffin Mill in *The Player* (1992).²¹⁷ I would argue that this cultural archetype reached its apotheosis in fiction of the last several decades in the form of Patrick Bateman in Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (1991) and its 2000 film adaptation by Mary Harron.²¹⁸ In non-fiction and the MeToo landscape, one needs only look to hundreds of prominent men, most notably the real-life personages of Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, the late Jeffrey Epstein, and the most recent occupier of the American presidency.

What arose by the end of this early 1920s consolidation, then, was a highly patriarchal, rigid, and ruthless system. It successfully set up a system rife with opportunities for financial exploitation, personal and sexual abuse, and the ability for those in power to do as they pleased in terms of the buying, selling, bullying, and discarding of human beings. In the "In The Beginning" episode of Brownlow's *Hollywood* (1980), Cecil B. DeMille's daughter Agnes DeMille recalled what her father had told her: "[w]e were not artists, we didn't know what we were doing"; but that as with pre-Elizabethan theatre, they were making it possible for the next generation to become so.²¹⁹ While an interesting retrospective view, this statement romanticises and lends a creative gravitas to DeMille that most of the businessmen at the beginning of film, frankly, did not have. Instead, the Wurtzels and the Sennetts of the business won out. Beyond these first-generation men with their mediocrity and anti-intellectualism, the industry then moved seamlessly on to a system of even more entrenched and untouchable power and abusive

²¹⁵ *The Big Knife*. Dir. Robert Aldrich. Perf. Jack Palance, Ida Lupino, Wendell Corey. 1955.

²¹⁶ *The Bad and the Beautiful*. Dir. Vincente Minnelli. Perf. Lana Turner, Kirk Douglas, Walter Pigeon. 1952.

²¹⁷ *Wall Street*. Dir. Oliver Stone. Perf. Charlie Sheen, Michael Douglas, Tamara Tunie. 1987; *The Player*. Dir. Robert Altman. Perf. Tim Robbins, Greta Scacchi, Fred Ward. 1992.

²¹⁸ Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (London, Picador, 2015); *American Psycho*. Dir. Mary Harron. Perf. Christian Bale, Justin Theroux, Josh Lucas. 2000.

²¹⁹ *Hollywood*. 'In the Beginning- Episode 2.' Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

structures. By the 1930s, a feminist perspective reveals a truly dictatorial system that has been synchronously identified within Powdermaker's vision of a totalitarian Hollywood.

Chapter 2

Grand Illusion: Class Confusion and Women in Early Hollywood



Gloria Swanson, 1920s
@creativecommons

The economy that claims to include the feminine as the subordinate term in a binary opposition of masculine/feminine excludes the feminine... as that which must be excluded for that economy to operate.¹

-Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993).

Chapter One proposed a non-teleological and gender-focused understanding of Hollywood as a male-centred capitalist system, an interpretation of the work of previous film historians.² As this thesis project moves to the specifically American nature of Hollywood's gender-based exploitation, it moves to grounding in case studies of women in both the pre-studio and studio eras (1910-1930) and away from general discussion of the actress as class subject. Before addressing women's experiences in early Hollywood, I would like touch upon some of their lived realities in labour and performance in the US in precinematic contexts, from the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth. Such sociocultural practices provoke comparison with and often lead directly into revelations about the gendered birth of film, Hollywood, and the studio and star systems. This analysis holds a significant place in the larger argument of this thesis and cement its anti-teleological thrust: that industrialising performance in the U.S. via Hollywood's studio system, rather than demonstrating movement and modernity, in fact ensnared women into second-class status and precarious conditions in wholly new ways.

As in all modernising nations in the Industrial Revolution, the United States offered increasing opportunities for women to work and make money, but under worse conditions. With few labour laws, women who worked as dressmakers, seamstresses, laundresses, or washerwomen could work up to fourteen-hour shifts in cold or heat, with little food.³ As cultural and performance historians (such as Tracy Davis, James McMillan, Kirsten Pullen, and Barry King) have demonstrated, some working-class women did have one other alternative: to go on the stage or into other avenues of performance.⁴ These scholars have addressed the relative attractiveness of entertainment professions for working-class women, comparing acting with other working-class jobs available to them. Pullen reinforces that even though actresses and performing women did have to deal with "merciless attention"⁵ upon their bodies and personal lives, they nevertheless made far more money than other working-class women for work that was considered less grueling. Hilary Hallett specifies that by 1900 performing was one of

¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, Routledge, 1993) 36.

² *Hollywood*. Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London. Television; *Without Lying Down: Frances Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood*. Dir. Bridget Terry. 2000; Mark Garrett Cooper, *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood*. (Champaign, Illinois, 2010); Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (Champaign, Illinois, 2018).

³ James McMillan, *France and Women, 1789-1914: Gender, Society, and Politics* (New York, Routledge, 2002), 169.

⁴ Tracy Davis, *Actresses As Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London, Routledge, 1991); James McMillan, *France and Women, 1789-1914: Gender, Society, and Politics* (New York, Routledge, 2002); Kirsten Pullen, *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society* (Cambridge, 2005); Barry King, *Taking Fame to Market: On the Pre-history and Post-history of Hollywood Stardom* (New York, Springer, 2014).

⁵ Pullen, *Actresses and Whores* 42.

the largest professions for women, especially those coming from the working class who considered the stage their chance to avoid factories or being in service.⁶ Tracy Davis explains:

[t]he arts undoubtedly offered the most accessible and suitable professional fields for middle-class women who were schooled in drawing room accomplishments (and perhaps little else) as well as some of the most desirable lines of work for lower middle-class and working-class women for whom the social stigma of acting, singing, or posturing in public was less distasteful than the rigours of manufacturing, distributive, or domestic trades.⁷

Such a hierarchy of working-class jobs demonstrated why performance positions might have been considered attractive to women from the working classes. This was the case even when, as frequently happened, performance work was merely piecework. It might be cobbled together with other types of labour like factory or shift work. It also could often enmesh with various degrees of sexually connoted exploitation or sustenance sex work.⁸ There were no shortage of “double shift” actresses-- those who might work a typical working-class job in the day, and then perform in the evenings. The social subject of the double shift actress was a common one, and there was in fact no bright line at all between precarious industrial work and performance work. As this chapter will demonstrate, this reality effectively shatters the illusion of glamour that the overwhelmingly male-owned entertainment business was projecting. This was true not only for the thousands of aspiring women entertainers who lived their entire lives in obscurity and precarity, but also for the women who made successful careers on stage and in Hollywood.

The blurred lines between working-class women in performance and other professions existed far beyond the balancing of day jobs with part-time jobs. They have encompassed an entire continuum with the archetype that I identify as the showplace woman-- known in France as *la fille publique* and described by Kristine Butler in her studies of the French urban vamp--⁹ a no less workable concept in nineteenth century pre-cinematic times than in studio-era cinematic ones or, indeed, in 2020.¹⁰ In reality, in the pre-cinematic era stardom in the theatre was rare and lofty.

In *American Beauty* (1983), Lois Banner explained that in fact, the modern, twentieth century language of stardom grew out of the journalistic discourse around the “professional beauty” or the society belle common in the previous century.¹¹ This was a woman from the elite or the middle-class, exceedingly rarely the working-class, written about in newspapers for her beauty and all her beaux.

⁶ Hilary Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley, California, 2013) 39.

⁷ Davis, *Actresses as Working Women* 16.

⁸ Pullen, *Actresses and Whores*; Jeffrey Wiltse, “‘I Like to Get Around’: City Girls in Chicago Music Saloons, 1858–1906.” *Journal of Urban History* 39.6 (2013).

⁹ Kristine J. Butler, “Irma Vep, Vamp in the City: Mapping the Criminal Feminine in Early French Serials.” *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. Eds. Jennifer Bean and Diane Negra. (Durham, Duke, 2002) 212.

¹⁰ This categorization of performing and body-commodified labouring women includes not only theatrical or later film actresses, but dancers, clothing models, artists’ models, tableaux models, waitresses, saloon girls, prostitutes/sex workers, singers, burlesque dancers, taxi dancers, chorus girls, strippers, masseuses and more.

¹¹ Banner, *American Beauty* 105.

Evocative of the filmic Scarlett O'Hara, the society belle was rhapsodised about in the language that would sweep the world through cinematic culture: she was "brilliant", a "queen", a "star, part of a "constellation", with "subjects" and "attendants" in tow.¹² Such stardom would not typically have been the dream of the majority of young working-class women hoping to make some money, but instead that of a few middle class women, trained for acting and aspiring to a high-level career on stage.

Some examples of the working-class woman-cum-"quasi-performer" type in the urban nineteenth century U.S. include the subcultural "G'hal" of New York City, the "waiter girl" of the urban saloon, and the taxi dancer of the turn of the century. As historians in this field like Jeffrey Wiltse, Kirsten Pullen, and Gillian Rodger have excavated in recent years,¹³ these women blended working-class jobs with performance, bodily display, occasional nudity, and, at times, sex work. The social and professional ambiguity associated with these jobs makes them cultural antecedents of the showgirl; thus these women are indeed the progenitors of the first generation of Hollywood actresses.

The G'hals were an urban countercultural social group in New York and other large American cities who were primarily made up of Irish immigrants or first-generation Irish poor city-dwellers. These women worked low-wage drudge jobs during the day, but their real social identity was in nightlife—attending dance halls, saloons, "free and easys", wine rooms, oyster rooms, boxing matches, and vaudeville with their male social counterparts, the Bhoys. This was a rather fearless nightlife underworld unconcerned with respectability in the mainstream sense, where criminals, sex workers, and working people out for entertainment all mingled at once. Some of the G'hals also took evening shifts as "pretty waiter girls".¹⁴ A discourse developed in the press around girls who had run away from the family farm for the freedom and fun of the urban waiter girl lifestyle.¹⁵ Such writings, in fact, read quite similarly to the social panic around migration of young women to Hollywood in the 1920s.

Another pre-cinematic social archetype that blended working-class status with performing for wages was the urban saloon waitress/singer (not to be confused with the eponymous Old West "saloon girl", to be discussed later through the prism of western migration). In cities along the Eastern Seaboard and Chicago, the music saloon developed as part German beer hall, part ballroom. As historian Jeffery Wiltse has written of the culture of the saloons, they were notable for "women's ubiquitous presence... as waiters, performers, prostitutes, and patrons".¹⁶ Wiltse paints a picture of spaces where well-heeled proper ladies and sex workers mixed, and with numerous simultaneous levels of concurrent exchange-- women selling sex, waitresses flirting for tips, drinks, and gifts, people on dates, and unescorted women meeting men for romantic relationships.¹⁷ Women were also

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Wiltse, "I Like To Get Around"; Pullen, *Actresses and Whores*, Gillian Rodger, M. *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater in the Nineteenth Century* (Champaign, Illinois, 2010).

¹⁴ Wiltse, "I Like To Get Around".

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

commonly brought into saloon spaces as singers. Just as in the other types of clubs, saloons might likely offer grueling working conditions for both waitresses and performers, but also a semblance of safety-- *if* the performers were daughters or female relatives of the proprietor. If not, the women found themselves in a very unsupported world yet again, one in which favours or sex work were likely to be expected. In the nineteenth century, performing women unaccompanied by male family members were commonly considered sexual fair game. As Rodger explained, “[t]here was little to stop the men in the audience from molesting these women or treating them as prostitutes, who were not infrequent visitors to saloons”.¹⁸

Another prime example of sexualised, hierarchical working-class women’s performance work in the nineteenth century U.S. might be the American history of *tableaux vivants*. The term referred to shows of living models who would sit still while scantily dressed, with no singing, dancing, or performing aspect. *Tableaux* had become a minor social sensation beginning in the 1830s, when many of the “artists” were brought over from Europe.¹⁹ Yet by the 1850s it was considered seedy and storefront, a space of drunken male audiences and women in flesh-coloured body stockings.²⁰ In this respect the *tableaux vivants* club could be characterised as the nineteenth century progenitor of today’s strip club. Also as in the modern world and speaking again to the feminist materialist base of this thesis, *tableaux* and variety dancing became reliably seedier in years of economic recession and hardship. Just as in, to take the obvious example, Depression-era Hollywood, women who wanted to keep their dancing jobs had to be willing to “do more”²¹, with the old axiom that “there’s a hundred girls behind you to take your place” (*the* axiom that we will see ruled Hollywood supply and demand for decades) well in play. Dances like the cancan came into popularity coinciding with times of economic precarity; in other words, their incorporation into bills dreamed up by male theatrical impresarios played on the financial desperation of the performers. In a precursor to the studio system, the management and theatre circuit systems that formed in the nineteenth century were virtually universally male-owned.

Finally, the slightly seedy and underworld-associated profession and milieu of the taxi dancer arose firmly out of these working-class circumstances as well. Elisabeth Perry has written about the history of suspect “dancing academies”, which featured drinking, smoking, gambling, and alcoves and balconies interspersed throughout.²² In cities in which working-class men, many of them immigrants, were alone and lonely but could not afford respectable dancehall dances, cheaper dancehalls sprung up in which women were hired as “dance instructors”. The women, known as taxi dancers, often made five cents commission on a ten-cent dance.

¹⁸ Ibid. 17.

¹⁹ Ibid. 23.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. 55.

²² Elisabeth Perry, “Cleaning Up the Dance Halls.” *History Today*. Vol. 39, Issue 10 (1989): 20.

Two further cultural archetypes not only establish the American variety of the pre-cinematic actress as working-class, but also help to draw a historic line that leads directly into the new film archetype of the Hollywood starlet: the western saloon girl, and the eastern chorus girl. American eastern to western migration is present in both. Saloon singers in the urban east became saloon girls in the new frontier west. Actresses with peripheral involvement in the legitimate stage in New York morphed into Broadway chorus girls, who in turn became some of the first actresses to go west to Hollywood to dance and be extras.

Through social and performance history, Rodger has studied the blurring between the legitimate and illegitimate stage via “variety” entertainment, and thus the legitimate and illegitimate actress, in the nineteenth century U.S. Rodger has identified “two different strands of variety-sexualized and respectable... by the 1880s variety had fractured along these lines”.²³ Rodger’s class striation hypothesis identifies the same kind of class split in the nineteenth century that I identify in the twentieth; as with my Hollywood work, Rodgers see these nineteenth women as taking part in a “uniquely American” process of class value formation.²⁴ While glamorous leading lady actresses on the legitimate stage received the most publicity, a much larger parallel track existed of women subsisting on performance careers at the margins. A typical class-gender dynamic might have occurred when middle-class women took the more respectable, less dangerous performing jobs, while the lower performing jobs were then left to the more unschooled and unprotected young women.

As the United States moved westward in its rapid expansion and Manifest Destiny period, women performers (and the constant perception of their sexual availability) moved westward too. Entertainment spaces went by different names in the American West, and these evinced different levels of respectability or danger for women. The dangers for women performers in transient male spaces like mining camps in the West can be understood as extremely heightened. In California in the 1850s and 1860s, for example, the population was 90% male.

In many outpost towns, local leaders tried to brand new spaces of entertainment the town “opera house” in efforts towards culture and gentility. In some new towns, the opera house did take on such a role. Theatre historians like Rodger, Pullen, and Glenn Hughes have detailed how the local opera house frequently instead became a centre of drunkenness, crime, and sex work.²⁵ Wine rooms next to opera houses, in particular, functioned as the western equivalent to the *tableaux vivants*: a similar social space to the modern-day strip club. Singers and actresses plied men with liquor and were meant to make money for the establishment and themselves through the custom of “treating”.

²³ Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima* 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 8

²⁵ Glenn Hughes, *A History of the American Theatre: 1700-1950*. (New York, Samuel French, 1951); Pullen, *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society* (Cambridge, 2005); Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima*.

There were side rooms for sexual favours, and sex workers also worked these spaces.²⁶ Even more wild could be the honky-tonk, born in the Alaska and California Gold Rush towns. With dancehalls, girls, drinks, side-rooms, and female impersonators, the honky-tonk was beneath the burlesque space, and “the reputations of the entertainers were generally low”.²⁷ There were great chances for women to forge careers, but in a fraught and dangerous atmosphere. Decades before the movies, a situation was already arising in California in which women performers worked under industrially and sexually precarious positions, often making money for male-owned companies under said conditions. These American traditions of performers and performance spaces, in their hybridities, outsider status, and levels of comfort with vice and crime, should be properly recognised as much more of a true undergirding of Hollywood than anything promoted by a dream factory mythos.

As the west settled and became somewhat more respectable, more high-profile women arrived and became its first theatrical stars. In his overview of American theatre, Hughes singles out some of these personalities. One is the Irish-English courtesan-dancer Lola Montez, who left New York for California and became a massive success with the all-male audiences whom she cultivated.²⁸ Girls from traveling theatre families, like Marjorie Rambeau, were dressed up like boys to play and perform in the outposts of Alaska.²⁹ Charlotte Crabtree, performing from a young age in the California mining camps under the watchful eye of her mother, made it to San Francisco, adopted the stage name Lotta, and became another star.³⁰

Another commonality with early Hollywood lay in the ways critics saw these performing women as untrained and somewhat uncouth, yet full of electricity and fitting with the energy of new western cities and the young country. Truly foreshadowing the Roaring Twenties, some of Lotta’s press reads as nearly interchangeable with that of someone like the phenomenal Clara Bow of the 1920s. Lotta was described as a “rough diamond”, full of mischief and uncultured accents, but still exuding charm and vitality.³¹ She left a great deal to be desired as an actress, but was praised for dancing and singing “with great spirit”.³² Lotta was praised in the popular press for possessing “beyond all we ever saw.... brass”.³³ With commentary that verged on the proto-modernist, one reviewer concluded of Lotta’s popularity (despite her faults) that “all this is amusing, and whatever is amusing is popular”.³⁴ Another such performer was Clara Morris, whom critic John Rankin Towse described as follows:

²⁶ Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima*.

²⁷ Hughes, *A History of the American Theatre: 1700-1950* 309.

²⁸ In yet another rhyiming with later Hollywood stars, Montez’s constructed legend confused and finally overshadowed her actual biographical details. For example, her purported Spanish roots became a “real” part of her persona when in fact she was born to an Anglo family in colonial Ireland. Later filmic representations of Montez include the famous 1955 Max Ophüls film, which continued to blur these details.

²⁹ Hughes, *History of the American Theatre* 309.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.* 220

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.* 220.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 220.

She was, first and last, a natural born actress... She was often barely respectable as an elocutionist, she was habitually crude, and occasionally unrefined, in pose, gesture, and utterance; she had distressful mannerisms... but, nevertheless...³⁵

Pullen, like Rodger, has placed this time in American performance history as the one in which two tiers of classed actresses begin to emerge onstage. Just as there were gradations of women who deserved or didn't deserve safety or respect in saloon spaces, the legitimate theatre developed with two levels of actresses. This system bears a particular historical resonance with discussion in Chapter Four as to who was targeted by the Hollywood casting couch versus who was protected or left alone. One of the central points of Pullen's *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society* (2005) was to clarify how much lower-class actresses, coded as sexually available, continued to exist. Yet, as she also stresses, a new type of woman performer was emerging, one that seemed to give a nod to both Victorian values and American democracy. This type emerged from the middle-class, had education and training especially in singing or refinements, and often arrived with an origin story in tow about going on the stage to help her family in a time of financial reversals.³⁶ Some of these stage celebrities might have come from well-to-do family backgrounds. Others, like Charlotte Cushman of the 1840s, were described as noble because they were said to have unimpeachable morals.³⁷ Others, again, would be considered natural actresses and "geniuses" *in spite of* their lower-class ways, like in the aforementioned instance of Letta or Clara Morris. Already evident here, and again foreshadowing Hollywood publicity, is a class-based dynamic in which a particular woman might have been popular, but it was marked down to charisma rather than creative acumen or skill.

Distinct from both lower-class actress-sex workers and middle to upper-class *grande dames*, the chorus girl emerged. The chorus girl was young and pretty rather than womanly and stately. She may or may not have come from the working classes, but she was characterised in the news coverage of her day as something of a streetwise hustler. In *American Beauty*, Banner analysed the media discourse around the American chorus girl of the turn of the century. It generally had them out to land wealthy husbands or patrons, or, barring that, at least lifestyles of jewels and champagne.³⁸ Before there were aspirational movie fan magazines, there were newspapers that recounted the adventures of Ziegfeld Girls-- women like Billie Burke who made 1500 dollars a week and "lived in a whirl of furs, maids, and flowers".³⁹ Banner connected the pre-cinematic positionality of the chorus girl as the idol of young (working-class) women to American class consciousness. She explained:

The vanguard position of working-class women is evidenced by the fact that the most popular actress in the United States at the turn of the century was the chorus girl, a

³⁵ John Rankin Towse, *Sixty Years of the Theater; An Old Critic's Memories*. (New York, Funk and Wagnall, 1916) 150.

³⁶ Pullen, *Actresses and Whores*.

³⁷ Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!* 39.

³⁸ Banner, *American Beauty* 174.

³⁹ Daniel Blum, *A Pictorial History of the American Theatre, 1900-1950*. New York: Greenberg, 1950.

figure who personified the hopes of working-class women and whose free behavior both rectified and stimulated their own.⁴⁰

Banner has asserted that around 1900, the height of public celebrity in New York was the ensemble known as the Florodora Girls. Described as “goddesses, the first of their class”,⁴¹ these women couldn’t sing, dance, or act, but were merely chosen for beauty and squired around the stage by a male companion. There was extremely high turnover in the troupe as the young women were continuously picked off by proposals and marriage. Banner has identified the classed and aspirational American Dream for women that the turn-of-the-century showgirl represented-- one that inarguably kicked into hyperdrive with the Hollywood star: “[j]ust as there were supposedly few limits to the success a man could achieve through hard work, there were no obstacles to the heights a beautiful woman could attain”.⁴² As identified by Banner, the Florodora Girls can be seen as a precursor to the early Hollywood starlets in their aspirational positions in media consumed by working-class girls, as well as in their high visibility based on beauty and charisma.⁴³ Indeed, as theatre and vaudeville gave way to early film in primacy with the public, there was often a literal blurring of the chorus girl and the early Hollywood starlet. Some of the early stars, like Louise Brooks, Joan Crawford, and Myrna Loy started precisely as Broadway showgirls back East, migrating from east to west and beginning acting in the movies as extras or dancers.⁴⁴

The life of the pre-cinematic actress in the U.S., just as in any country or any historical period, was still not an easy one. There was drudgery or multiple job piecework, precarity, juggling of “respectability” with sexual availability, and danger. The woman performer as a working-class subject was a *de facto* trade object in the U.S. homosocial public sphere and male-controlled entertainment business. Yet, as Rodger, Hallett, Marcus, and other cultural historians have demonstrated, there was also more bodily freedom before industrialisation; more liberation, independence, and migration compared to what came next via the studio system.⁴⁵ In comparison with the out-of-control abuse of supply and demand in early Hollywood, things got worse. The Hollywood to come, characterised by indentured servitude-like contracts, forced and extreme bodily makeovers, and the open secret casting couch, did not yet exist. As delineated in Chapter One, white male corporate capitalism in

⁴⁰ Banner, *American Beauty* 175.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 182.

⁴² *Ibid.* 182.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 181.

⁴⁴ *Lulu in Berlin*, Richard Leacock (1984); Joan Crawford and Jane Kesner Ardmore, *A Portrait of Joan: The Autobiography of Joan Crawford* (Garden City, Doubleday, 1962); Grace Mack, "Myrna Loy Says It Pays to Be Homely." *Hollywood*, 1935.

⁴⁵ Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima* (2010); Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!* (2013); Sharon Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity* (2019).

Hollywood became continually more dominant, more specialised, and more Fordist by film's second decade.⁴⁶

Before the full implementation of the studio system closed doors to women's power in the 1920s, there was more of an archetypal chain leading from the freewheeling women performers of the later nineteenth century to the New Women characters and stars in earliest Hollywood. In some ways, for example, the cultural figure of the 1910s serial queen can be seen as something of a positive link between the more liberated aspects of the pre-cinematic actress and the early, open days of Hollywood. The positive change and utopian possibilities that Hollywood and California were representing for women in the 1910s were made manifest by the serial queens, known for their bravery and skillful stunts. Pearl White, for one, was known as "the queen of courage and daring".⁴⁷ As well explained by feminist film historians like Lauren Rabinovitz, Jackie Stacey, Shelley Stamp, Kathy Peiss, and Christina Burr, a culture of mimesis existed between the serial queen actresses and the young working-class women who identified with and emulated them.⁴⁸ Besides demonstrating athleticism and bravery, many of the serial actresses also showed creative acumen, working as co-writing or co-producing partners on teams for their own films. In extratextual fan magazine coverage, the actresses were just as likely to be remarked upon as businesswomen and entrepreneurs as they were to have their roles discussed.⁴⁹

Besides being early film celebrities, feminist role models, and economic successes, the serial queens may also be read with interest via both class and Americanness. Lois Banner and Hilary Hallett have both written in particular about the serial queen as the American face of the New Woman to the global public.⁵⁰ Shelley Stamp has brought attention to the cultural impact of the serial queens on the spectator in terms of American girlhood, while Liz Conor has explored the same American export qualities of the daring new women protagonists upon global audiences of the time.⁵¹ Feminist film historians like Stamp and Bean have already written comprehensive studies of the serial

⁴⁶ Cooper, *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood*; Gaines, *Pink-Slipped*, Terry, *Without Lying Down*.

⁴⁷ Bean, "Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body", 11.

⁴⁸ Lauren Rabinovitz, Lauren. *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-century Chicago* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 1988); Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London, Routledge, 1994); Shelley Stamp *Movie-struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, 2000); Kathy Peiss, "Silent Film and the Hidden Histories of Working-Class Women." *Women and the Silent Screen* conference. University of Pittsburgh. September 19, 2014. Keynote Address; Christina Burr, "Working Girls' Fan Culture and Gendered Modernity in the US in the Early Twentieth Century." *Women and the Silent Screen* conference. University of Pittsburgh. September 17, 2014. Presentation.

⁴⁹ Shelley Stamp *Movie-struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, 2000); Kathy Peiss, "Silent Film and the Hidden Histories of Working-Class Women." *Women and the Silent Screen* conference. University of Pittsburgh. 19 September, 2014. Keynote Address

⁵⁰ Banner, *American Beauty* (1983); Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!* (2013).

⁵¹ Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls* (2000); Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman* (2004).

queens,⁵² in my case, I am particularly interested in the serial queens for their circulation and export of a national femininity. As I have written of these women in “Hollywood Was A Matriarchy: The Forgotten Decade of Women’s Power and Independence In Film” for *The Independent* (2018):

Above all, they infused the global New Women with a front-and-center Americanism that reverberated around the globe... To international audiences, critics, and intellectuals alike, these women represented an American physicality and bravery. America appeared to be a kind of gender utopia on-screen, and Hollywood seemed to be one too.⁵³

Ironically, while American society was exporting a global model for young womanhood in modernity culture, in the U.S itself a highly gender-biased and exploitative film industry was about to emerge within just the course of a decade.

Alicia Malone, in her book *Backwards and In Heels: The Past, Present, and Future of Women Working In Films* (2017), offers that moments of feminist advancement in Hollywood have always provoked backlash and patriarchal reification.⁵⁴ For instance, while male serials stayed popular into the 1930s and even the 1940s on radio, women’s film serials were dead by the 1920s. Just after their heyday, they had already come to be seen as a sort of relic of the suffragette grandmothers’ age. In 1936 a *Los Angeles Times* reporter opined, “[t]here are no more serial queens... the serials now prefer to let their menfolk wear the pants”.⁵⁵ The end of the serial queen cultural moment can be concurrently configured as the reclassing of women performers to second-class status in a standardising Hollywood. The shift was not a mere coincidence of trends or taste. Rather, it can be directly politically understood as part of a broader trend in the business of return to traditional gender roles.

As Mark Garrett Cooper has put it, we need to contend with “the contingency that dogs any historical explanation: no matter how pellucid the unfolding of causes and consequences, events might have gone otherwise”.⁵⁶ Gender was not an ahistorical category in the Hollywood system. Paraphrasing both Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, gender has a history and a future; in Hollywood this has been no exception.⁵⁷ As Steven Ross notes, for example, “Hollywood did not just happen. It

⁵² Stamp, *Movie-struck Girls*; Jennifer M. Bean, *Flickers of Desire: Movie Stars of the 1910s*. New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2011).

⁵³ Kerry McElroy, “‘Hollywood Was a Matriarchy’: The Forgotten Decade of Women’s Power and Independence in Film.” *The Independent*. September 1, 2018.

⁵⁴ Alicia Malone, *Backwards and in Heels: The Past, Present and Future of Women Working in Films*. (Coral Gables: Mango, 2017); Amber Tamblyn, *Era of Ignition: Coming of Age in a Time of Rage and Revolution* (New York, Penguin Random House, 2019).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵⁶ Mark Garrett Cooper, *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood*. (Champaign, Illinois, 2010) xxi.

⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York, Pantheon, 1978); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, Routledge, 1990); Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body* (New York, Routledge, 1991); Susan Bordo, “The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault.” In *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of*

was shaped by a series of contentious skirmishes among an array of groups with a variety of political visions".⁵⁸ In *Working Class Hollywood*, Ross situates his arguments within many leftist political and class counterfactuals.⁵⁹ There is equal ability to do the same speculative work with gender in early Hollywood. There was no certainty as to how systemic guidelines or prescriptions around the roles of women would have developed. While numerous film scholars have famously written about this shift (Jane Gaines; Karen Mahar; Hilary Hallett; Mark Garrett Cooper; Jennifer Bean), they have focused on different reasons and methods.⁶⁰ Whatever the scholarly approach, however, it is indisputable that separate spheres and a return to gender norms had definitively returned by the beginning of the 1920s.

Jean-Louis Comolli reminded in *Cahiers du cinema* that film is far from merely an ideological artistic text: it is instead "a sociohistorical practice with an ideological function".⁶¹ This type of politically informed reading of film can be applied to the socioeconomic system of early Hollywood. It can be used to consider the mystery of women's disappearance in early Hollywood as directors and producers, as well as the waning of strong figures such as the Modern Woman or the serial queen. The shift to male finance capital and executive omnipotence marks, in Comolli's terms, the shift to new sociohistorical practices upholding different ideological functions. These practices, illustrated in throughout this chapter and beyond, had the ideological function of maintaining the re-establishing and upholding of a white masculinist-capitalist order. Specifically, they made Hollywood palatable to such an order, thus leading high finance into the American film industry. Both Los Angeles as a new metropolis and Hollywood as the site of this new film industry began to successfully mirror the same racist, misogynist, classist, and capitalist structures of broader American society. But at the same time, as I have argued:

It is now evident that the failure to create a new industry outside of America's more traditional capitalist patriarchy was intentional, not simply failure of imagination or creativity. In light of #metoo, we can see how it also led to specifically hazardous industrial conditions for women.⁶²

Being and Knowing. Eds. Alison M. Jaggar; Susan R. Bordo (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 1992); Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender, and the Self* (Boston, Northeastern, 1993).

⁵⁸ Steven Ross, *Working Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton, 1998) 10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (Champaign, Illinois, 2018); Karen Ward Mahar, *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 2008); Hilary A. Go West, *Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley, California, 2013); Mark Garrett Cooper, *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood* (Champaign, Illinois, 2010); Jennifer M. Bean, *Flickers of Desire: Movie Stars of the 1910s* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2011).

⁶¹ Qtd. in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London, Routledge, 2003) 89-90.

⁶² McElroy, "Hollywood Was a Matriarchy".

In fact this period of masculinist-capitalist corporate triumph amounts to another nodal moment in the history of women in Hollywood, of the kind that actress, poet, and MeToo/Time's Up founder Amber Tamblyn has described thusly: "power that has traditionally been denied to us... perversely, has been lent to us for a time, before we have to give it back to the rightful owners".⁶³

In "Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body" (2001), Jennifer Bean reminds that on the whole, there were relatively few female stars in the 1910s and indeed into most of the 1920s-- and yet film studies of the time seem to emphasise them heavily. Bean continues that "historians have tended to focus on actresses that were extremely successful, popular, and therefore exceptional", while "the bulk of unnotable women has been ignored".⁶⁴ Bean has asked why Hollywood history hasn't been more focused on, for example, the extra? Certainly, it would be in keeping with the broader historical turn to social histories of non-elites and working-class people. And further, the treatment of extras and women with no power is instructive as to the way the system truly functioned, glamour and dream factory mythos aside. This is an area that I will address more in later chapters, in exploration of the studio system in its full power.

Through the 1920s, there was in fact a surfeit of publicity, novels, and films detailing the experiences of "extra girls". Some of this material made their lives look glamorous and exciting, and enticed more young women into the migration cycle. Other texts presented as rather hysterical warnings. Some called the term a glorified euphemism for "sex worker" in a city and industry trying to hide its exploitation of women. And some sought to help these young women as either walking social problems or, simply, women in need of assistance. As usual, the truth was somewhere in the middle.

From the perspective of feminist labour studies, "extra girls" were generally young women eking out a precarious living on the margins of a film industry that was succeeding at pretending to be the epitome of glamour in its global press. Extra girls dealt with minimal wages and unsafe labour practices as in any working-class job. Some engaged in sex work, mistressing, or other piecework bodily performance jobs no different than the working-class young women highlighted in precinematic contexts in the introduction. A very few rose out of the day-to-day extra life to become stars, like Patsy Ruth Miller, Norma Shearer, or Jean Harlow. But really they were primarily working-class labourers: as a 1920 *Photoplay* article joked, "The reason why they are called 'extra' girls is because of the extra

⁶³ Amber Tamblyn, *Era of Ignition: Coming of Age in a Time of Rage and Revolution*. (New York, Penguin Random House, 2019) 47. Tamblyn is yet another first person witness-primary source turned essayist and chronicler of the abuses of Hollywood in both essay and fictionalised form who is a key source for this project. Born into a Hollywood family and with fame as a child and young adult star, Tamblyn walked away from the complex to write about feminist issues and what Hollywood does to women's bodies and psyches. She is now a founding member of Time's Up and a prominent MeToo feminist activist. Though she was born in 1984, her writings do similar work to those of Louise Brooks throughout this project-- as she straddles actress, historian, poet, and activist roles. Like Brooks, she has written on women in Hollywood across mediums. Besides essays and criticism, Tamblyn's writing includes intertextual metafiction and poetry on the morbid fascination with dead Hollywood actresses (2012's *Dark Sparkler*).

⁶⁴ Jennifer Bean, "Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body." *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 16.3 48 (2001), xiv.

amount of work that one had to do. The only thing that isn't extra is the pay".⁶⁵

An examination of gendered power in Hollywood's star system will generally focus on the relationship between stars and the management class, and there is much of this material in case studies to come. However, one of the impetuses of this project in examining women in Hollywood from the perspective of second-class citizenship, exacerbated by the events of 2017, has been to move away from traditional film history practices that focus on stars to a more intent gaze on bit players, extras, failures, and "has-beens". This shifted lens can be wielded as a more accurate way to see through the false glamour of an oppressive system, and is important work begun by film historians in recent decades. Pre-MeToo, Anthony Slide has done thorough work of illuminating the lives of the extras in his 2012 monograph *Hollywood Unknowns: A History of Extras, Bit Players, and Stand-Ins*.⁶⁶

In connecting with pre-cinematic history in much the way this chapter does, Slide explains that the theatrical tradition's antecedents to film extras were supernumeraries, or "supers". Like with many later film extras, "supers" were often on their way up or down in the profession. But film extras had started as early as Edison and Porter's films in the 1890s. The very first cohort of film extras had not had time to succeed or fail in the new industry. In reality, working conditions for the vast majority of small-time performers in Hollywood were poor and remained so. Slide explains that in this period, "the California Department of Industrial Relations was receiving a large number of complaints about Hollywood's violations of the state's labor laws".⁶⁷ It was found that extras and children were being required to work without pay for overtime hours. (In 1925, after the commission to question poor treatment of women and children extras was formed, eight-hour days as well as overtime and same day wages were mandated.) Primary sources reveal countless labour abuses and offer anecdote after anecdote as to what it was like to live and work in a system in which its workers were so unprotected. Silent actress Priscilla Bonner, interviewed for Tony Vilecco's 2001 oral history *Silent Stars Speak*, recounted that as there were no unions in her day, it was normative for cast and crew to work through the night to finish a picture before a new set went up in the morning. Most of the memoirs consulted for this project as primary sources contain first-person accounts of at least one near-death experience on-set, or recount the accidental or negligent death of a colleague from cast or crew.

In Hollywood's earliest years the pool of extras either playing at or making a living in the backgrounds of films began to change, becoming something uniquely American, western migratory, and class-conscious. Both historians who have examined extras and fiction writers contending with the social phenomena⁶⁸ described a milieu comprising all ages, levels of education, and acting

⁶⁵ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 17.

⁶⁶ Anthony Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns: A History of Extras, Bit Players, and Stand-Ins*. (Oxford, Mississippi: 2012).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶⁸ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns*; Horace McCoy, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (London, Profile, 2011); Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust* (New York, Time, 1965); F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Last Tycoon* (Richmond, UK, Alma, 2018; Theodore Dreiser, "Hollywood: Its Morals and Manners", in *The Best of*

training who began to show up in Hollywood in the 1910s: hungry chorus girls, debutantes, bored society women, pocket money-seeking housewives, families with a dozen children, retirees, ex-military, the homeless, academics, politicians, and clergy. Particularly interesting for this class-based study were the ruined millionaires or their daughters, who still had beautiful clothes and manners but required funds.⁶⁹ Strapped royalty and aristocracy were known to appear as film extras, particularly White Russians who had fled Europe with the Russian Revolution.⁷⁰ Situations might develop where a financially ruined but titled European aristocrat might play a footman, with an actual former footman working as an etiquette advisor behind the scenes. The class chaos occurring here was quite literally a new phenomenon in human society, all taking place in the strange, hybridised space of the new American West.

All extras learned tricks of the trade to try to keep working day to day and thus eating. Standing close to the stars in a scene was advantageous, as then a director would have no choice but to use one in the next days' scenes. Learning the job also took place under the reality that labour treatment of extras differed along gender lines. Extra-studio organisations also offered normalising and regulating advice. In 1928, the head of Central Casting declared that:

An extra must first learn, and constantly practice until she is proficient, the art of make-up. From the moment she enters her first set, she must learn to give explicit and unquestioning obedience to orders from the director and his assistants.⁷¹

The choice of "she" rather than "he" here seems both unconscious and telling in terms of bodily control and directorial obedience. There were more specific and not at all subtle rules for women with certain studios and executives. Producer Al Christie produced a list, whereby some of the highlights for women extras were as follows:

1. Must be between 5 feet and five feet eight in height... 2. Weigh not less than 100 or more than 130 pounds... 4. Must not alter color of hair or cut same without permission... 7. Must not smoke cigarettes in studio nor in public places... 8. Must not chew gum.⁷²

Remarkably, no parallel rules were given for male extras.

Both secondary sources and first-person primary accounts have highlighted the precarity and everyday struggles and tricks in the life of the extra girl. Because of theft, extras kept coats and any valuable possessions with them on set, and "carried only a minimal amount of money on their persons, just enough to pay for lunch and car fare home".⁷³ An ad of the period for Lux Laundry

Shadowland, ed. Anna Kate Sterling (London, Scarecrow 1987); Budd Schulberg, *What Makes Sammy Run?* (New York, Modern Library, 1952).

⁶⁹ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 19.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. 5.

⁷² Ibid. 19

⁷³ Ibid 46.

Flakes used an extra and her specific life quite cheerfully for a testimonial. In the ad, the young woman explained that as an extra girl, she needed to make every penny count, so every night she washed her clothes with Lux. Sometimes she might need to skip breakfast, but her clothes always looked good!⁷⁴

In the ubiquitous “extra girl *exposé*” article, writer and critic Ruth Waterbury went undercover as a new extra girl to write her 1926 piece “The Truth About Breaking into The Movies”. Slide interprets her piece as follows:

She learns the extra’s routine: Never purchase a round-trip ticket on the bus line, because you hope you can pick up a ride coming back. It’s risky, but it saves you twenty cents.⁷⁵

Waterbury’s conclusion to her article is bleak, as she describes dealing with sexual harassment and watching extras fight over mints.⁷⁶ The piece ends with her lamenting, “[y]ou know why girls stay there and starve... You sniff the gold dust and your sense of values is destroyed”.⁷⁷

Waterbury’s piece fits in with a slew of rather prurient pieces by male writers also fascinated with the presumed sexy and dangerous lives of extra girls. One example is Theodore Dreiser, who wrote a four-part series, *Shadowland* (1921-1922) at a time when he himself had become sexually involved with a bit player woman. With his lover supplying him true stories from sets, the stories in *Shadowland* notably eschew happy endings, focusing on tales of sexual abuse and withheld pay.⁷⁸ In the series, Dreiser queries, “[a]ren’t there high-salaried directors and stars and stockholders and bankers to be paid? And don’t they always come first? They do”.⁷⁹

Outside of literature, the fan magazines whose own fortunes were entirely intertwined with the success of Hollywood seemingly couldn’t make up their minds about the lives of extras. While novels and short stories tended to focus on the dark side of the extra experience, the fan magazine showed a confused split.⁸⁰ At times they highlighted the extras’ “tragedy of living”, contrasting between the “stars’ sugar-coated lives” and their “bitter” ones, as in a 1927 *Photoplay*.⁸¹ Articles warned that extras would encounter “poverty, pathos and perversity in this fabulous paradise of prosperity, plenty and prodigality”.⁸² Yet at other times, or even in opposite issues, the fan magazine press would highlight

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Lunden. “The Case of Lux Flakes: The Costume Designers as Fashion Experts and Endorsers During the Studio Era.” SCMS, Toronto. March 15, 2018. Conference Paper.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 85.

⁷⁶ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 86.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Theodore Dreiser. “Hollywood: Its Morals and Manners.” In *The Best of Shadowland*. Ed. Anna Kate Sterling (London, Scarecrow, 1987).

⁷⁹ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 88.

⁸⁰ Richard Abel, *Menus for Movieland: Newspapers and the Emergence of American Film Culture, 1913-1916* (Berkeley, California, 2015); Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns*; Martin Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* (Westminster, Arbor House, 1970).

⁸¹ Ibid. 5.

⁸² Ibid. 6.

an archetype that fascinated them-- the dilettante extra, already wealthy, who lived a life of yachts and mansions and appeared in films for fun. Still other articles were clearly trying to recreate the American class structure in movie hierarchy and make it palatable and interesting. The fan magazines heavily pushed the idea of the Hollywood extra "Four Hundred", the elite top tier of extras with names taken from East Coast high society. A 1925 *Photoplay* article on the "Four Hundred" described "extras who through breeding or 'prudent observation' had taught themselves to attain the manner of rank and elegance".⁸³

Young women wound up as extras from across social strata.⁸⁴ Some of their numbers were filled by another substrata of women arriving in Los Angeles to make it big in Hollywood at this same time: beauty pageant contestants. Well delineated as new social archetype by Liz Conor in *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (2004), the beauty pageant contestant was participating in a system that combined old patriarchal ideals with modern visibility and media. Beauty pageants had been attempted by P.T. Barnum in the U.S. since the 1850s, but at their onset no respectable woman would take part, even anonymously.⁸⁵ An 1858 editorial criticising any idea of a cult of beauty creating public celebrity is instructive: "[a] private woman is altogether too sacred an object to have her charms and graces discussed in the newspapers, like the points of a racehorse or the lines of a yacht".⁸⁶ In 1905, Reverend Thomas B. Gregory of Kansas City said of pageants at the St. Louis Exhibition:

Imagine a really refined and innocent young girl sitting upon a platform at a great exposition to be gazed as and ogled and discussed and commented upon by the great mixed multitude... No truly refined young girl would submit to such a thing. The mere thought of it would drive her mad.⁸⁷

According to Lois Banner, this problem of well-bred young women putting themselves up to be judged "would not be completely overcome until the Miss America promoters successfully combined the features of lower-class carnivals with upper-class festivals".⁸⁸ Making oneself visible and acquiescent to the judgement of male eyes had to be converted into a celebration of young American womanhood somehow. Such a level of public display shifted from highly shameful to something middle-class women did, in willingly putting their bodies and faces up to be judged by men. This shift coincided perfectly with the arc of theatre and performance moving from shameful and lower-class to

⁸³ Ibid. 46.

⁸⁴ Kerry Seagrave, *Extras of Early Hollywood: A History of the Crowd 1913-1945* (Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2013); Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns*; Patsy Ruth Miller, *My Hollywood, When Both of Us Were Young* (Albany, GA, BearManor, 2012).

⁸⁵ Banner, *American Beauty* 255.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 105.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 260.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

aspirational as well. Just as middle-class girls had moved towards the stage in the later nineteenth century, some just a generation later learned to stand on stages in bathing suits to be judged.

As Conor writes, the beauty contest and its perceived pipeline to a film career were precisely such new and modern cultural milieus, in which women expected to be visible and ranked in the public space.⁸⁹ While I would take issue from a particular feminist perspective on women's bodily autonomy with both Banner and Conor's assertions that "modern" necessarily equated to good or progressive for women, I do take the point that there was significance to this cultural connection. Banner situated 1921 as a major year in the discourse of beauty in American cultural history with the first Miss America pageant. It led to an entire industry, and was a wholesale success at commodification of beauty culture via advertising and fashion.⁹⁰

In this new cultural moment, it became commonplace for newspapers to hold beauty contests, encouraging the sending in of women's photographs for most perfect figure or beautiful face. Where in, say, the Gilded Age U.S., beauty might have been a commodity to get a woman *off* the stage and married to a wealthy man, now beauty was conversely becoming the ticket to total visibility-- celebrity. Modern beauty and modern celebrity both coursed through one overarching and pervasive archetype: the screen starlet. As Conor has written:

The Beauty Contestant's linkage to the Screen Star was reinforced by competitions for the most beautiful Screen Type and Screen Star double, and best figure competitions were run as publicity stunts by major picture palaces.⁹¹

To stop and think about such promotions is to realise that bodily commodification of women by men was being sold wholesale as not only harmless fun but completely aspirational; truly, a new feminine American Dream. The success in the zeitgeist of such methods was confirmed when arguably the most eponymous Hollywood star of the 1920s, Clara Bow, made it to Hollywood after winning a beauty contest. Thelma Todd, too, rose to stardom as a former Miss Massachusetts.⁹² A few success stories notwithstanding, however, the beauty contest was insidious in its patriarchal-misogynistic messages, and in its benefit to the masculinist bottom line of the film industry. In Brownlow's *Hollywood*, a fan magazine man in later-life interview showed himself to be quite more sensitive and even proto-feminist than his peers when he admitted, "I thought it was a very cruel kind of publicity".⁹³ The "cruelty" to which he referred was the fact that after so much public ogling and judging, a "winner" might move to Los Angeles, only to get nowhere and then be too ashamed and

⁸⁹ Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Bloomington, Indiana UP, 2004).

⁹⁰ Banner, *American Beauty* 20.

⁹¹ Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman* 137.

⁹² Kenneth Anger, *Hollywood Babylon* (New York, Penguin, 1985).

⁹³ *Hollywood*. "Single Beds and Double Standards- Episode 3." Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

stranded to go home. In other words, the beauty contest was often a sort of bait-and-switch that could ruin lives, and the studios and magazines used it heavily anyway all the same.

While beauty pageants were occasionally acting as pipelines to new forms of “stardom”, other class shifts were taking place in the move from stage to screen, and in the new filmic industry itself. In terms of class shift, film historians have often remarked upon the fact that stars did not at first want their names revealed because film acting was not respectable. As Barry King described in *Taking Fame to Market: On the Pre-History and Post-History of Hollywood Stardom* (2014), “[f]ilm ‘posing’ was a low-status activity, deserving only of routine levels of pay”.⁹⁴ So in the earliest days, resistance to the star system did not only come from capitalist corners but from the actors themselves. Viola Dana recalled that because American films were of such poor quality before 1910, actors were embarrassed to be in them. If they took film work over a summer out of the need to eat, they wouldn’t mention it back in the theatre in the fall.⁹⁵ On the cusp of the global ascendancy of film stardom, a fascinating class split in terms of performing women is now scrutable. Knowing all that Hollywood stardom became in sociological terms, the fact that film acting was shabby and shameful reads today as bizarre. The push in the early 1910s to shift perception of the film actress from someone low to the girl next door, to respectability, became a major aspect of this coalescing moment.

Mary Pickford, who became the biggest star of all in the first decades of Hollywood film and its global export, provides an excellent barometer of the shift in women’s film performance from seedy to aspirational with several anecdotes from her own life. Even Pickford’s well-documented start in life as Gladys Smith proves telling.⁹⁶ With a father named John Smith, the literal pseudonymous no-man, who had abandoned the family, an Ontario girl named Gladys Smith becoming the first and biggest star in the world seems eerily fitting as to how stardom plucked people from ordinary life and made of them new, world-famous constructions.⁹⁷ Pickford as a young girl was just one of the first of what became an incredibly common working-class star discourse archetype-- the actress who was orphaned or half-orphaned, gone into show business to help support the family.

Pickford was working as a successful theatre actress with the respected Belasco company, when the family fell upon hard times. Her mother asked her if it wouldn’t be too horrible for her to apply with some film companies, as they were broke and it could be the only way to keep the family together. Both mother and daughter agreed that it was shameful and below their standards, saying, “[i]t’s only to tide us over”.⁹⁸ Pickford’s memoir *Sunshine and Shadow*, written in her own later life in 1955, is an early example of the celebrity autobiography presented as candid and serious, rather than

⁹⁴ Barry King, *Taking Fame to Market: On the Pre-History and Post-History of Hollywood Stardom* (New York, Palgrave, 2014) 116.

⁹⁵ *Hollywood*. ‘In the Beginning- Episode 2.’ Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

⁹⁶ Pickford, *Sunshine and Shadow* (Garden City, Doubleday, 1955).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 64.

as ghostwritten celebrity puff piece.⁹⁹ In the memoir, Pickford admitted to resenting her mother for pushing her in such a degrading direction over family finances:

In my secret heart I was disappointed in Mother: permitting a Belasco actress, and her own daughter at that, to go into one of those despised, cheap, loathsome motion-picture studios... I remember praying that no one from the theater would see me going up the Biograph steps.¹⁰⁰

In her own writings, Pickford's class-conscious awareness of the *déclassé* status of the new film actress comes through repeatedly. Her younger brother, for instance, would blackmail her for spending money on the streetcar by threatening to shout out, "It's the Biograph Girl!" and embarrass her.¹⁰¹ Pickford summarised the economics of the still-disreputable business in the following exchange that she reported having had with D.W. Griffith in the early 1910s, when she asked him for a raise:

"Are you any better as an actress this week," he replied, "than you were last week?" I said, "No, sir, but two people recognized me in the subway today. And if I'm going to be embarrassed that way in public, I'll have to have more money".¹⁰²

Commenting on the end of another argument with Griffith over salary, in which he had again rejected her request, Pickford determined she would leave the sordid world of film and go back to the respectable theatre. As she wrote:

I was determined to shake the degrading dust of the studio from my feet and go back to the theater for good. I could do very well, I thought, without these uncouth and loud-mouthed motion picture people.¹⁰³

Griffith's response to Pickford, as she reported it in her memoir, was quite an abusive one, with overtones of the sexual economy of obsolescence in patriarchy. He laughed at her, jeering that she was now damaged goods as far as the theatre was concerned: "[d]o you suppose for one moment that any self-respecting theatrical producer will take you now after spending three years in motion pictures?"¹⁰⁴ These levels of managerial and personal abuse fit in well with interesting recent work done by Jennifer Voss that situates quite contiguously with the conclusions of this project, under the evocative title "'Catch 'Em Young, Treat 'Em Rough, Tell 'Em Nothing': A Study Into the Emotional Exploitation of Women in Silent Cinema".¹⁰⁵ Even by the silent era, emotional abuse and exploitation of young women by older men was a management prerogative and deliberate strategy for control

People who had known Pickford from the theatre world had indeed been disappointed, even

⁹⁹ Mary Pickford, *Sunshine and Shadow* (Garden City, Doubleday, 1955).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 65, 69.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 75.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 72.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 89.

¹⁰⁵ Jennifer Voss, "'Catch 'Em Young, Treat 'Em Rough, Tell 'Em Nothing': A Study Into the Emotional Exploitation of Women in Silent Cinema." *Women in Hollywood Symposium*. De Montfort University, Leicester. May 28th, 2018. Conference Paper.

horrified, by her choice to act in films. Mrs. Mary Gish, a theatre actress whose daughters famously later also became film stars, wrote of seeing Pickford in films, “Gladys Smith has fallen from grace. The poor girl must be very poor indeed to have so degraded herself”.¹⁰⁶ William DeMille, Cecil B.’s brother, wrote to David Belasco as to the absolute folly of Pickford’s getting involved with such a faddish business, which could only ruin one’s reputation: “she’s throwing her whole career in the ash-can and burying herself in a cheap form of amusement which hasn’t a single point that I can see to recommend it”.¹⁰⁷ Yet ultimately, everyone involved in these anecdotes eventually followed Pickford into film, either in front of or behind the camera.¹⁰⁸

Further to the point of class issues and the emergent construct of the star, the reason Pickford gained a reputation as such a hard-headed and savvy negotiator was that she remained constantly worried about her family, precarity, and poverty. Stardom was such a new phenomenon, and she had become so massively famous so quickly, that no one knew what to make of it-- from studios to publicity people to Pickford and her family themselves. As she wrote in *Sunshine and Shadow*, “I never once thought my popularity was anything but a temporary and freakish phenomenon”.¹⁰⁹ Pickford’s own account demonstrated that the Hollywood actress of the silent era existed within the world of economic instability and the possibility of slipping back into obscurity and the masses at any time.

As well-delineated in film history by Cooper, Hallett, Gaines, first-person memoir, and touched upon in Chapter One, there were more jobs open to women in the relatively egalitarian 1910s industry than in the corporate 1920s. Yet this also meant that, just as took place with cultural examples of the pre-cinematic actress, actresses did double duty in crew, holding multiple positions. It was a far cry from the later charges of elite and out-of-touch stars in limousines and furs. Florence Turner, the Vitagraph Girl, made more weekly salary when acting as wardrobe mistress to the company than the weeks in which she was lead actress. Her other duties were set work, serving lunch, and working as cashier for payroll.¹¹⁰

Lillian Gish’s accounts of this class-shifting period were also telling. She found the actress life degrading but, like Pickford, felt that she was undertaking it to support her family. She wrote to a friend who was married with a child, betraying both envy and shame but describing herself as determined that she would not be “soiled” by this business:

I was reading in my dressing room and I happened to glance up at a mirror and there I sat all false with paint and cosmetics covering my face... I would like to make money enough to give Dorothy a good education and build a house so we can have a home.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ *Sunshine and Shadow* 90.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 89.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 100.

¹¹⁰ Gaines, *Pink-Slipped* 137.

¹¹¹ Bean, *Flickers of Desire* 84-85.

While this industry indisputably grew into a global glamour behemoth, in fact its own shabby roots back to the 1900s and 1910s, though long obscured, are still discernible through primary sources. Gish's discomfort with her "false" painted face would have been a function of her attempting aesthetic labour upon her own physical construction in new industrial conditions, a mix of theatrical tradition and working with the new technology of film. Katherine Porter described the Essanay Studio of the 1910s as "just an awful-looking place", to which one had to bring their own supplies to earn their five dollars a day.¹¹² Actors were responsible for doing their own makeup, and learning to adapt theatre makeup to film was trial and error. Film historian Lea Stans' makeup blog has described a world of yellow powder, brown lipstick, and faces painted ghostly white.¹¹³ Cameraman Lothrop Worth described in interview actors who were, in the early days of greyscale, in makeup so white as to resemble that of clowns.¹¹⁴ Even as studios developed standardised makeup departments by the 1920s, extras and bit players continued to do their own makeup-- resulting in what Joan Crawford described as "many errors... judgements of style and taste".¹¹⁵ Aspiring actresses could be found all over Los Angeles, recognisable in drugstores and shops by their chalk-white faces and red lips even when not on sets.

One of the many ironies of Hollywood as business but also as cultural force, explored in terms of some of its corporate practices in Chapter Three, lay in its gendered relationship to deception. The fact was that it was a business built around accepted (male) corporate lying¹¹⁶-- and yet most of the social panic around lying and acting went back to the deep-seated patriarchal fears about the actress that have existed for centuries. Within these ancient misogynistic constructs, women are liars; therefore, actresses must be the biggest liars of all. Angela Dalle Vacche has connected deep-rooted fears of the lying feminine in modern contexts to class anxiety around the status of the new film actress. She has cited nineteenth-century criminologist (and misogynist) Cesare Lombroso's theories, popular in the years leading up to cinema:

Lombroso's double equivalence of acting as a form of prostitution and prostitution as a form of acting conveyed deeply rooted fears about an economic and social order that was changing too fast, especially in regard to the new professional roles available to women. Because she received money from the film industry, the actress was a sort of

¹¹² Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 24.

¹¹³ Michelle Tolini Finamore, *Hollywood before Glamour: Fashion in American Silent Film* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Lea Stans, "Silent Film Makeup: What Was It Really Like?" *Silent-ology* blog. February 22, 2016.

¹¹⁴ Paul Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered: An Oral History of its Golden Age* (Lanham, MD, Taylor, 2011) 68.

¹¹⁵ Crawford and Kesner Ardmore, *A Portrait of Joan*.

¹¹⁶ Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers* (Eastford, CT, Martino Fine Books, 2013); Ezra Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1961); Budd Schulberg, *Moving Pictures: Memories of a Hollywood Prince* (New York, Stein and Day, 1981).

prostitute who had no authentic emotions. By receiving money from anonymous clients, the prostitute was the lowest kind of actress: she, too, pretended to have sensations.¹¹⁷

In emerging Hollywood, these cultural currents enacted thusly: Studio men created a system of falsity and dissimulation, and women worked in that system. Yet women became the face of it and blamed for its excesses, while little attention was paid to the men behind the curtain.

This ancient fear of the lying feminine, and thus the doubled fear of the actress, found new expression in the early twentieth century with the emergence of film. In the *Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (2004), Liz Conor has noted the rise in discourse on the deceptive nature of the star, both in terms of her publicity and biography and her very face. Stars were called artists of visual deceit, with “beauty” actually spun out of thin air through makeup and camera trickery. “Screen makeup was reportedly the means by which ‘girls and women, who had little if any claim to beauty, were given screen faces of supreme loveliness’.”¹¹⁸ Even Pickford was secretly reported to be “‘homely without layers of thick yellow make-up’ which photographed white”.¹¹⁹ In fact, Pickford herself acknowledged the labour-intensive alchemy of glamour in her later-life memoir, when she explained:

Very few people realize the tremendous amount of preparation that goes into movie photography. Actresses are at the studio at six in the morning to be ready at nine. Their hair is shampooed daily, and coiffed by the finest hairdressers in the country. Tests are made for days and even weeks in advance for different colors of grease, paint, powder, and lipstick, to say nothing of different styles of hairdressing. Not one, but several, makeup specialists are needed to prepare them for the camera.¹²⁰

Standardisation of “modern” beauty products also led to dangerous bodily hazards for women, which, just as so often detailed in Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth* (1991), then permeated to the broader culture of non-performing women. Conor has detailed some of the 1920s beautification dangers for both Hollywood actresses and the general population of women; they included blood poisoning from paraffin injections, hair dyes, and acid exfoliators. Skin problems from hair chemicals were so pervasive that the term “flapper’s rash” was coined for inflammation on the back of the neck.¹²¹

Feminist aesthetics and beauty studies as disciplines have offered innovative ways to consider institutional beauty practices as patriarchal and oppressive.¹²² I now return to some of aspects of

¹¹⁷ Angela Dalle Vacche, *Diva: Defiance and Passion in Early Italian Cinema*. (Austin, Texas, 2008) 134; “Oldest Obsession.” *New York Times*, November 27, 1960.

¹¹⁸ Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman* 91.

¹¹⁹ Ibid; Patsy Ruth Miller, *My Hollywood, When Both of Us Were Young* (Albany, GA, BearManor, 2012).

¹²⁰ Pickford, *Sunshine and Shadow* 166.

¹²¹ Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman* 245.

¹²² Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York, Morrow, 1991); Susan Bordo. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. (Berkeley: California: 1993); Michelle Lazar, “The Right to Be Beautiful: Postfeminist Identity and Consumer Beauty Advertising,” in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, ed. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (London, Palgrave, 2011).

what life would have been like for extra girls in Los Angeles aside from body modification. Post-MeToo, another aspect to the understanding of women in 1920s Hollywood that now demands particular revisiting lies in the areas of migration, moral panic, and safety. A standard film history narrative in recent decades, both feminist and mainstream, has been to situate fear of the mass influx of “extra girls” into southern California as puritanical moralising, both anti-sex work and diminishing of the agency of the young women.¹²³ Also, these crusades were thought to have been informed by lurid and conservative press around Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle and other scandals. Finally, such fears have also often been considered, like white slave trade films, to have been informed by antisemitic tropes of unscrupulous foreign men corrupting innocent (Christian, white) American girls; a fear openly discussed by southern senators, Henry Ford, and the Ku Klux Klan alike.¹²⁴

I propose a new look at this previously well-established discussion of migration and moral panic, in light of closer examination of social and labour conditions, and in the post-MeToo climate. I would argue instead that the new industry, particularly through its publicity arm, did in reality contribute to a public health crisis of sorts, responsible for tens of thousands of young women with no work and subject to sexual exploitation arriving in a new city *en masse*. The men in charge of this system, in fact, were trafficking in women. Not in the lurid and cartoonish ways written about in dime store novels or antisemitic literature, but simply, in that they had set up a system where it was profitable, enjoyable, and consequence-free to control women both contractually and sexually. I would argue that we should revisit interpretation of initiatives like studio mothers and the Studio Club away from those of “pearl-clutching” moralisers. Instead, such groups might be better situated as advocates for women, and feminists attempting to create a culture of solidarity and public safety. There is a massive body of theoretical work to explore around the concepts of visibility in the city and freedom versus safety, as linked between actresses and women spectators and connected by class and social hierarchies. That nexus of feminist film history, too, now appears different through a historicised lens of the last several years.

Scholars, especially feminist film historians, have situated 1910s Hollywood as a western pastoral of possibilities where, for the first time in history, a new city, new technology, and new entertainment and performance form were born at the same time.¹²⁵ How then does the cultural imaginary arrive fully in the jaded, the cynical, and the fearful just a few short years later, to the degree that young women had become a social problem? From the carefree single girl making her

¹²³ Heidi Kenaga, "Making the 'Studio Girl': The Hollywood Studio Club and Industry Regulation of Female Labour." *Film History: An International Journal* 18, no. 2 (2006): 129-39; Hilary Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!* (2013)

¹²⁴ Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How The Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York, Crown, 1988), 277-278.

¹²⁵ Hilary A. Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley, California, 2013); Heidi Kenaga, "Making the 'Studio Girl': The Hollywood Studio Club and Industry Regulation of Female Labour." *Film History: An International Journal* 18, no. 2 (2006): 129-39.

way in the world as the archetypical new arrival, to the imprudent girl being bombarded with messaging that her slide into ruin was just around the corner?

The mass exodus of young women to western cities, especially to the new movie business, was undoubtedly a very real new social phenomenon. Throughout the previous decade, young women across the U.S. and in other countries had grown used to stories, novels, memoirs, and magazine articles touting the new Hollywood dream. These fictional and fan magazine pieces have been referred to as Horatio Alger stories for girls with pretty faces.¹²⁶ Articles like “Have You a Movie Camera Face?” and “How To Become a Movie Actress” abounded through the 1910s. The latter was a series by an as-yet-unknown Louella Parsons, who asked seductively, “[o]thers have become rich and famous. Why not you?”¹²⁷ She continued, purply:

Dreams- dreams most fascinating to young women all over America are coming true every day. Do you dream of becoming a motion picture actress and actually plan to be one?... not a day passes but some girl who shares your fondest fancies is made exquisitely happy.¹²⁸

Parsons reported helpfully that the most famous directors like Griffith, DeMille, and Ince have all declared that they want untrained young women, as they should be like mouldable clay.¹²⁹

Such guides suggested to women how they should make their own breaks, research the names of directors, and be well-studied as to what films are being made where. Novels like *The Close-Up* (1918), which told of a secretary from back East who went to Hollywood as an office manager only to become the industry’s biggest star, were popular. Publicity promoted the concept of the West for women as a democratic ideal. Actresses’ own interviews were proto-feminist. In a 1914 column, journalist Gertrude M. Price had advised her audience of midwestern girls, “[t]he ‘movie’ world is the great new woman’s field!”¹³⁰ No wonder so many young women were lured to Los Angeles by what they were seeing and reading in this period. Even when *Photoplay* began to realise that they would need to become “increasingly discouraging to the feminine youth of the land”, they still continued to publish contradictory pieces on new arrivals at the same time, with lines like, “[e]very one of them has the chance to be a Mary Pickford or a Norma Talmadge”.¹³¹

This type of mythmaking publicity had very palpable real-life effects. At points it was estimated that literally hundreds of young women were arriving in Los Angeles every single day. Thus, concern about what would become of these girls was not a mere panic rooted in sexual puritanism or classism - but legitimate social concern in dealing with an irresponsible and amoral industry. Even the normal boosterism that civic officials might do for a city’s most high-profile industry needed to be supplanted

¹²⁶ Hallett, *Go West, Young Women*; Conroy, *The Spectacular Modern Woman*.

¹²⁷ Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!* 73.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* 74.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 76.

¹³⁰ *Toledo News-Bee*, March 30, 1914. In Richard Abel, *Menus for Movieland* (California: Berkeley: 2015) 147.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 79.

by reality. The threat of hordes of destitute and homeless young people, and its accompanying public health concerns, were real. As the 1920s went on, mail leaving Hollywood was affixed with a ubiquitous sticker: “[t]ell your friends. Don’t try to break into the movies in Hollywood until you have obtained full, frank, and dependable information from the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce”.¹³²

An aspect of this public panic was explicitly sexualised—contending that many “extra girls” were just sex workers avoiding vagrancy charges by giving themselves euphemistic job titles. The converse fear was that wholesome young women would show up from the Midwest, still “nice girls”, but then fall into sex work in Los Angeles when they failed to crack the movie industry. In his typical unmistakable prose, Kenneth Anger in *Hollywood Babylon* (1965) wrote:

It is true that from the time it became the Motion Picture Capital of the World, shady characters descended on boom-town Hollywood like swarms of moths drawn to a searchlight... Thousands of green, dumb young screen-struck kids were lured by the hollow promises of phony talent schools- a Hollywood Fool’s Gold Rush that panned out nothing but bitter dross. Many pretty-faced patsies, deluded of dreams and empty of pocket, drifted into prostitution. These newly-recruited LA streetwalkers called themselves ‘movie extras’ to avoid the California vagrancy laws.¹³³

Sexualised fears of Hollywood as industry and culture came to a very public head with the infamous Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle scandal of 1921, precipitated by the death of bit player Virginia Rappe. The Arbuckle affair is and was an extremely well-known case even in popular culture, and has been written about extensively in film history over many decades. Standard masculinist film history has declared the Arbuckle case one in which an innocent man was railroaded and ruined by moralists and hypocrisy. Feminists have not particularly challenged that assertion, save Hallett’s interesting re-reading of the case in *Go West, Young Women!*. Yet with this project’s post-MeToo vantage point on Hollywood history, I propose a brief revisiting of it— not in light of the facts of the case, and not in light of Arbuckle’s guilt or innocence at all. Rather, by centring the woman who died as part of our more modern understanding of respect for victims, and concurrently, demonstrating how misogyny, patriarchy, and studio power all worked to fix a potentially industry-damaging scandal at the expense of the reputation of a dead human being.

Specifically, turning a contemporary eye on Hollywood sexual assault culture to the case, I want to draw attention to how wildly misogynistic the press coverage was by today’s standards, and how Hollywood’s own consensus and film history continued to be. But also, to how feminists did assert themselves as anti-rape activists in the moment, only to be forgotten. A central aspect of this revisionist analysis is that within it, the guilt/innocence/culpability of Arbuckle is not actually at hand. In other words, the traditional focus of the film history narrative around this scandal has been on

¹³² Margaret Talbot, “The Screen Test.” *The New Yorker*. October 21, 2012.

¹³³ Anger, *Hollywood Babylon* 134.

Arbuckle. With a lens of the current day, I wish to instead place it on Rappe; specifically, her posthumous treatment by the studios, the press, and Hollywood's powerful.

The standard narrative of the Arbuckle affair as narrativised in both popular culture and mainstream film history has been tinged with patriarchal assumptions and outright misogyny. This is evident in both primary sources, and in film history texts and analysis. Kevin Brownlow's 1980 *Hollywood* docuseries is just one example. In the episode "Single Beds and Double Standards", narrator James Mason explained that corrupt district attorney Matthew Brady forced witnesses to perjure themselves and suppressed a report on Rappe "that said she had not been attacked in any way".¹³⁴ This statement betrays a fundamental biological ignorance of the realities of sexual assault even in 1980, one that in fact shows little movement from the same ignorance in 1921.

This standard narrative, driven by male film historians, has been maintained quite vigorously over the years. It has explained that with the Arbuckle scandal, the public became caught up in an unjustified hysteria, with lynch mobs and vigilante justice fomenting against gang rapists. Brownlow's documentary asserted that "[w]omen's groups across the nation rose up in fury".¹³⁵ Such groups have typically been cast in with society clubwomen and moralists who advocated for Hollywood censorship. In fact, just as with the Studio Club, the feminist advocacy and activism of these women is now due for revision. One such group, the Women's Vigilant Committee, appears to have been remarkably ahead of its time, by the standards of today. The WVC were victims' advocates for sexual assault survivors, decades before that was an established position in legal systems. They sent a women's committee to trials to look for the intimidation of women witnesses. Instead of a group of enraged busybodies, as portrayed by masculinist film history, these women should more rightly be understood as feminists with an early understanding of rape as a crime of power rather than one based in the woman rape victim's "culpability". They were also incredibly modern in their understanding of victims' advocacy and the recognition that court systems have inherently been spaces of retraumatisation for victims of sexual assault.

Standard film history has portrayed district attorney Brady as corrupt and motivated by careerism and vendetta in laying charges against Arbuckle. An alternate reading would be that Brady was angered by attempted corruption and open pressure from the powers of the film industry. As Anthony Slide has recounted:

prominent movie colony figures called [District Attorney] Brady to suggest that Arbuckle shouldn't be crucified just because Virginia Rappe drank too much and died. The D.A. was enraged at these further interventions.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ *Hollywood*. "Single Beds and Double Standards- Episode 3." Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. *BBC*. London.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*.

¹³⁶ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 29.

At the trial, Arbuckle was indifferent about Rappe, showing no remorse, regret, or even sorrow for her death. His lawyers fully took on the strategy of painting the dead woman as a diseased, promiscuous whore. When a jury acquitted Arbuckle for a final time, Arbuckle gave a speech on the courthouse steps that made no mention of the deceased woman or her loss of life, only speaking about himself and rehabilitating his wholesome image. With shades of Bill Cosby and his Jello spokespersonship, Arbuckle proclaimed, “[m]y life has been devoted to the production of clean pictures for the happiness of children. I shall try to enlarge my field of usefulness so that my art shall have a wider service”.¹³⁷ But the studios had lost a million dollars on his films that they couldn’t release and had been forced to shelve. Arbuckle’s \$3 million-dollar contract was cancelled. He never worked again and died in 1933.

The scandal assuredly brought the “bad apples” of Hollywood forth to the public eye in a way that terrified the studio executive class.¹³⁸ I would argue that while Arbuckle lost personally, power and corruption actually consolidated around men in this moment. The cleverest and most subtle way the studio heads reasserted the power of the male capitalist management class, and also drew a very strong and false distinction between their own behaviours and those of their male employees, was by situating the entire Arbuckle incident as an *actor* problem. In this view, it was simply wild, hard-living actors who were in need of being controlled. Arbuckle’s debaucherous behaviours were merely an example of how the frivolous, new money actors of Hollywood didn’t know how to behave-- a failing blamed on their working-class roots. This was thus the moment when the studio heads very publicly inserted morals clauses into actor contracts, and brought in Will Hays as public face of the MPPDA.

The enforcement of actors’ “moral hygiene” did not go ungendered. The new morals clause of the Code affected women stars unfairly, as it did not demand a uniform standard of behavior from men and women. It merely demanded that the “social conventions of the time” were followed. This meant sexual double standards on divorce, infidelity, extramarital sex, and any number of additional things. Women were not even to be shown drinking alcohol in films, post-Arbuckle.¹³⁹ One year after the scandal, Jesse Lasky told Gloria Swanson it was impossible for her to file for a divorce-- even though as she later recounted, her husband (fellow star Wallace Beery) had raped her on their wedding night and also poisoned her with an abortifacient.¹⁴⁰

Hays and Hollywood also called for films in the post-Arbuckle moment that would show that anyone who believed in Hollywood as a dangerous place for women, or “the casting couch” as a

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ezra Goodman. *The Fifty-year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961); *Hollywood*. Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London. Television; Kenneth Anger, *Hollywood Babylon* (New York, Penguin, 1985); Vincent Brook, *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles* (New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers, 2013).

¹³⁹ *Hollywood*. “Single Beds and Double Standards- Episode 3.” Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

¹⁴⁰ Aubrey Malone, *Hollywood's Second Sex: The Treatment of Women in the Film Industry, 1900-1999*. (Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2015) 11.

reality, had it all wrong. For example, the novel *Souls for Sale* was written in 1921, and was written with the tone of lurid intrigue that already mentioned in novels of the extra girl genre. But notice the changes in the way the film was produced in 1923, after Arbuckle. In his 2017 text on historicising the social-industrial practice known as “the casting couch” in light of MeToo, Andrew Heisel explains the key scene in the 1923 film from the viewpoint of the aspiring ingenue:

She waits outside the director’s office and watches as a young vamp looks deep into the director’s eyes, puts her arms around him, and says, “I must have work. I know that I must pay “the price”. The man is repulsed, casting her out and insisting neither he, the producer, nor the director would dream of touching her. “It’s the public you’ve got to sell yourself to—not to us.”¹⁴¹

As Heisel concludes, “Thus the notion of the casting couch is dismissed. The heroine avoids making the same mistake and instead finds stardom the ‘honorable’ way”.¹⁴² Such moments were the opposite of mere entertainment, but were instead deliberate corporate strategy insertions in the midst of a public relations crisis.

As Hollywood enlisted Hays and wholesome publicity to try to do damage control in the aftermath of Arbuckle, the “bad apples” cliché was trotted out even more. A *Photoplay* article of the Arbuckle period plaintively asked why the entertainment business should be targeted for immoral conduct, when the odd man here or there was certainly predatory in other industries:

The governor of a great state is sued for seduction... a leading banker is accused by his wife of illicit love affairs... But does the world conclude that governors, or bankers, or ministers, or lawyers- as a *class*- are therefore rotten...?¹⁴³

Based on the parameters of this project, I would obviously take the position that for a long time, they did not, and this was part of the problem. Had the general public drawn such conclusions about men in power as a predatory *class*, the last century would not have been so retrograde in progress towards gender equality. In addition, situating the male power elite as a predatory class, à la Veblen, would have amounted to a much clearer understanding of the links between capitalism, power, misogyny, and sociopathy.

Finally, adding such a historicised approach to one of the most well-trod discursive moments of Hollywood history means that this section ends not on Arbuckle, but on Virginia Rappe. It looks to the extremely problematic discourse around Rappe’s life and death, and considers Rappe through the gender-as-class focal point of the project in a new way. Consider if this case had taken place today,

¹⁴¹ Andrew Heisel, “*Stage Door*: The 1937 Film That Reveals Why Hollywood’s Sexual Harassment Reckoning Took So Long To Arrive.” *Pictorial*. December 21, 2017.

¹⁴² *Ibid*.

¹⁴³ In Karen Sternheimer, *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream: Stardom and Social Mobility*. (New York, Routledge, 2011) 57.

leaving an aspiring actress dead, how patriarchy-upholding, wildly inappropriate, and misogynistic we would consider many of the following comments.

Hilary Hallett, in attempting to do one of the first feminist readings of the Arbuckle case in 2014, has made an astute point that speaks to my larger point of women as dehumanised second-class citizens in the Hollywood system. Hallett remarks that, in a century of film history work, no one paid much attention to Rappe in the Arbuckle scandal:

Both scholars and popular writers alike have long reduced her significance to one or the other of two-bit parts: an irrelevant, silly starlet, or a two-bit prostitute whose venereal disease caused her death.¹⁴⁴

There is an axiom in American entertainment and political culture that has always been played for laughs-- all things may be forgiven (for a powerful white man) except getting caught with a “dead girl or a live boy”. The violence, brutality, misogyny, and homophobia behind the white male American male power structure revealed in this “joke” has always been chilling. But in such a social milieu *and* cultural imaginary, Rappe became merely the first of a series of Hollywood “dead girls” down the decades who could pose a threat to a white man’s status. Readers will be well-situated to keep this “joke” hovering above their heads when re-examining cases that fall in Hollywood’s highly problematic “beautiful/glamorous/dead” discourse, anything from the Black Dahlia to the death of a Thelma Todd, a Lupe Velez, a Carole Landis, or a Marilyn Monroe. Hallett was correct in instead trying to resituate the personhood of Rappe in modern times. I would like to do so further now, post-2017.

Few would know that the press switched course rather dramatically in its coverage and characterisation of Rappe, both from life to death and then throughout the trials. In 1913, a Chicago newspaper had profiled Rappe as a perfect example of the successful Chicago single working girl and New Woman type, in an article that proclaimed “Chicago best city for girls”.¹⁴⁵ After her death, she was initially still portrayed in this vein, as a well-dressed woman of wealth and projects with a prestigious fiancé in New York. But soon enough, coverage shifted to turn her into a failed actress, a diseased good-time girl, and a pathetic fallen women victim to Hollywood. Her family past was explored and she was reported as the illegitimate daughter of a banker and a prostitute.

The barrage of dehumanised press coverage surely impacted the way silent era Hollywood workers recalled the case, Arbuckle, and Rappe-- as did what we now have in our lexicon as their internalised misogyny and “slut-shaming” worldview. The sequence in Brownlow’s film in which the celebrities interviewed discussed Rappe today comes across as shocking and brutal. Adela Rogers St. John blithely explained:

This girl. I won’t call her a tramp but, she was an extra girl who made her way the best she could. And she had a habit of taking off all her clothes. And prance around. See

¹⁴⁴ Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!* 24.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 181.

what trade she could drum up, I guess.¹⁴⁶

Between Brownlow's filmed interviews and Anthony Villecco's oral history written interviews, quite a startling community consensus emerges on Rappe's death. Several referred to Rappe's "medical condition", whereby she wasn't supposed to drink on doctor's orders and so made herself sick. Others situated Rappe as a girl in the outfit of a procuring madam who ran a shakedown scheme against producers or directors, charging attempted rape in order to obtain payouts. Still others took a political view. Colleen Moore remarked of the death of a peer and young woman, "the whole thing was really blown out of all proportion, I see that now, by the district attorney at the time, who was running again for office. And this was a great platform for him".¹⁴⁷ Veering to conspiracy, Viola Dana claimed the entire case had been drummed up by Hearst as a play to hurt Los Angeles and make San Francisco the centre of film production.¹⁴⁸

The slut-shaming and rewriting of a young woman's humanity out of history has not abated in film history, both in the less-enlightened 1980s and, distastefully, to the present. Brownlow's documentary had narrator James Mason pontificate that "[i]n prosecuting a star, district attorney Matthew Brady sought stardom for himself".¹⁴⁹ Mason goes on to speak the following lines:

Neither was she the virginal paragon the district attorney had portrayed. She had had several abortions and suffered from venereal disease. Which Arbuckle did not contract.¹⁵⁰

With yet another misunderstanding of basic biology, this is presented as evidence that a rape could not possibly have occurred. Anthony Slide, in 2012's *Hollywood Unknowns*, continued to slander Rappe nine decades later, listing that she was free with sexual favours, possibly a prostitute, recipient of "at least five abortions", and riddled with gonorrhoea.¹⁵¹ It is remarkable how not a single one of the purveyors or first-person accounts here-- from women stars to contemporary film historians-- understood that not one of these things precluded Arbuckle from having committed a crime, made Rappe responsible for a sexual assault or her own death, or made her death either deserving or valueless, even were they true.

In keeping with one ethos of this project to make space in both public and scholarly narratives for the narratives of abused and marginalised women, I would end this section on a quote not from Virginia Rappe herself, who could not speak as she was already dead, but from someone who presumably cared about her. This quote returns personhood and humanity to Rappe, making her the

¹⁴⁶ *Hollywood*. "Single Beds and Double Standards- Episode 3." Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁵¹ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 95.

centre of her own life and death-- as opposed to a discardable, diseased “tramp” who caused a lot of trouble to important men, or a *thing* that “happened” to the industry. It is also a fascinating quote in its connection to class in the Hollywood milieu. Rappe’s fiancé, Henry Lehrman, was not of the film industry or Los Angeles but a New York businessman. He granted an interview to a newspaper after her death in which he offered the following:

Virginia had the most remarkable determination. She would rise from the dead to defend her person from indignity. As for Arbuckle, this is what comes of taking vulgarians from the gutter and giving them enormous salaries and making idols of them. Some people don’t know how to get a kick out of life, except in a beastly way. They are the ones who participate in orgies that surpass the orgies of degenerate Rome.¹⁵²

A strong case can be made for Rappe’s death as one of the tipping points into the dark Hollywood mythos. As well, for the reputation of women who moved there from that of plucky and resourceful to promiscuous and diseased, almost overnight. In a well-functioning and sensible system, there should have been discussion of conditions of labour, pay, and overcrowding that put the onus for the safety of the mass of new arrivals on the studios. In the highly patriarchal 1920s, it was far more common to see the issues framed as those of “good women” and “bad women”.

To make sure that “nice girls” and not surreptitious sex workers were employed, post-Arbuckle, studios began to hire “studio mothers”. At Biograph, Lucille Brown was Griffith’s lead studio mother. She was interviewed as saying:

The moral character of the majority of my girls is very commendable, despite idle rumors to the contrary. Before encouraging any of the girls who show possibilities, a complete investigation is made of the girl’s character, her home and environment. Any number of my applicants are impossible types for picture work, and these we discourage immediately.¹⁵³

Anita King, the Paramount Girl and a star in her own right, went on to become a studio mother after retiring from performing. Universal even employed a woman police chief whose job was, in part, to ensure the morals and the suitability of women extras on the lot. As Mark Garrett Cooper detailed in *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood* (2010):

In 1915, Laura Oakley told the Chicago newspaperwoman Kitty Kelly that she had taken the job of police chief ‘in order to weed out the undesirable girls who had flocked in as extras. It was really social work and was conducted in that way.’¹⁵⁴

Some of the studios, by virtue of the odd extreme moralist in the executive class, developed severe policies that rejected women from certain industries and even cities as wholesale immoral. Casting director for Goldwyn Robert McIntyre, one such devout moralist, proclaimed:

¹⁵² Ibid. 30.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 27.

¹⁵⁴ Cooper, *Universal Women* 73.

The Goldwyn studio is the safest and sanest place in the world. Healthy morally, mentally and physically... A place every mother should be content to have her daughter be... There is no reason why a motion picture studio should not be the cleanest place under the sun.¹⁵⁵

Slide elaborated of McIntyre:

To this end, McIntyre favored the kind of extra who came from a good, wholesome home, “the kind of girl you’d like to know.” It was reported New Yorkers stood little chance of employment at Goldwyn... The same logic applied then as it did early in Goldwyn’s producing career... Goldwyn could find a better class of person if individuals were selected outside the system.¹⁵⁶

In reality, the family-sheltered, middle-class virgin entering the actress profession had never been the norm in the traditions of performance, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Rather, she represented the newer classed phenomenon of the last several decades before film, in which middle-class girls going into theatre had been shifting and was, for the first time, increasingly respectable. For many show people or working-class aspiring actresses in Hollywood-- those perhaps coded as “New Yorkers” by the likes of Robert McIntyre-- the casual, occasional sex work that dated back to the Victorian factory worker in between piecework jobs, or the work of the early twentieth century dancehall taxi dancer or burlesque queen, would not have been out of place. It was clear whom Hollywood wanted the press to *present* as working in the business. This public face was always separate from its realities. Clearly in practice, the men in the industry had no real interest in shutting down a pipeline to sex workers in Los Angeles, and neither did the police or politicians.

Outside of the way the city of Los Angeles was actually functioning, the nature of the public fears around young women going there and falling prey to endemic sexual exploitation were also ever present in the background of this discursive crisis. Such fears prefigured the rampant sexual abuse of the high studio era. Beginning in the 1910s, there was concern bordering on panic that pimping rings were operating to lure young women throughout the United States into sex trafficking. Shelley Stamp has written about how such fears hit the cultural imaginary of the nation with a rash of “white slavery” fiction in this decade, while Steven Ross notes that there were even campaigns to warn girls about pimping and trafficking outside of theatres.¹⁵⁷ The Mann Act, an American federal law prohibiting the transport of women across state and federal lines for the “the purpose of prostitution or debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose”,¹⁵⁸ was passed in 1910. Famed for its racist abuses around miscegenation charges, the law was in fact initially championed by both progressive suffragettes and radical feminist socialist-anarchists of the time like Emma Goldman.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 27.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 28.

¹⁵⁷ Shelley Stamp, *Movie-struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, 2000); Ross, *Working Class Hollywood* 28.

¹⁵⁸ Brian K. Landsberg, *Major Acts of Congress. Macmillan Reference USA*. London, Macmillan, 2004) 251.

Most of the advocacy and legislation around the Mann Act was enacted in large eastern cities. The Act years played out in a specifically different way in early Hollywood, as Los Angeles was not far from the U.S.' southern border. This meant panic around trafficked girls in Hollywood often centred around Latin America. There was particular concern that young women were being absconded with against their will and taken across the border to Mexico. Racist fears and language also abounded around this "white slave trade". In *What Chance Have I In Hollywood?: The Mystery of the Movies* (1924), writer Marilyn Connors claimed (dubiously) to have lived in Hollywood her whole life, and derided "the notorious Tia Juana trap".¹⁵⁹ Connors went on: "[m]ore than FIVE THOUSAND girls disappear annually through the mysterious gateway of missing persons in Hollywood. They are swallowed up in the border towns".¹⁶⁰ Calling these towns "the slums of Hollywood", Connors described pimps who abducted girls to Tijuana. She cited an extra from Wisconsin who had gone for performance work to a cabaret in Mexicali, been drugged and raped, and was now being kept in a brothel. In her fan magazine ad, Connors asked the reader to send her one dollar for her *exposé* book, which would answer of her "Hollywood hometown", "[d]o you want to know whether the life there is clean or evil?".¹⁶¹

Within just a few years, Hollywood seemed to have switched off its figurative welcome sign. Even Norman Rockwell got in on the discursive act, with a 1930 painting called *Hollywood Dreams* that centred upon a girl outside a casting office with a "closed" sign.¹⁶² A review of both fan magazine and newspaper primary sources, as well as fictional short stories, novels, and films, all reflects the same thing: a quite dramatic shift to a message of "stay home, we're full", tinged with fear, over the span of just a few years.

By 1922, the situation was beginning to turn to what could be called a worried backlash. A staggering 10,000 girls a year were now arriving to work in the business-- with thousands of them planning to become stars. Even global superstar Mary Pickford was called upon to reason with the young women:

On December 3, 1923, in an unprecedented action, Mary Pickford spoke to a crowd of twenty thousand gathered in Pershing Square in downtown Los Angeles. She explained that she did not want to keep young people away from Hollywood, because the "movies always need new blood," but she urged that they have sufficient funds to live on for at least five years, and that young women always be accompanied by their mothers.¹⁶³

It seems obvious the situation was more strained than later acknowledged. There was a social crisis, in that the young women who arrived in Los Angeles were not safe-- either economically or physically.

¹⁵⁹ In Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 88.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.* 82.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* 34.

With numbers of new arrivals at these levels, this did amount to a serious labour, housing, economic, and social situation. And women were in fact being abused or assaulted, and falling into precarity and poverty in vast numbers.

By the middle of the 1920s, the fan magazine began to show signs of strain and ambivalence in its messaging around these new social realities. In a fascinating interview, actress Ruth Stonehouse was interviewed by Louella Parsons. “Stonehouse confessed that she ‘felt like telling every girl to stay at home’, warning those she called ‘the movie mad’ that ‘the profession is crowded now... it will be survival of the fittest.’ Parsons: ‘Haven’t you something to say to the poor girls who you so cruelly condemn to stay at home?’ ‘unless they have ‘the goods to deliver’... stay at home’”.¹⁶⁴ Stonehouse had a highly unusual pedigree, having been a journalist who shot from extra to star and, eventually, to director. Obviously, the days when her own stratospheric career trajectory had been possible had likely passed. A Frank Condon 1923 short story in *Photoplay* entitled “Hollywood” included a father warning his daughter: “[t]he motion picture is a fiery dragon, sinking its ruthless claws into the innocent young womanhood of America”.¹⁶⁵ The working girl public lapped up exposés like Mae Murray’s “SINGED STARLET WARNS OF WINDING CELLULOID ROAD TO RUIN”.¹⁶⁶

Remarkably, one mainstream magazine even explicitly connected their plea to women to stay home with Fordism, economic structure, and the standardisation of women’s bodies. *Women’s Home Companion* warned that the “factorylike” studios were “‘busily engaging in manufacturing stars at low wages and had no need of more aspiring talent”.¹⁶⁷ *Photoplay* began to publish grimmer and grimmer figures, setting the chance for success at about 10,000 to 1. They also began to intimate (for those who could read between the lines) that broken dreams might not just mean going back home, but a path of procurement, pimping, or stag films. Conor explained the situation in terms of public health crisis:

The impressionability of Star-Struck Girls seemed to prime them for a kind of moral disorientation that made them vulnerable to seduction and misuse by ‘movie sharks’. ‘Everyones’ had run, since 1920, columns about the influx into Hollywood of ‘foolish’, ‘Movie-Mad Maids’, ‘taxing the ingenuity and resources’ of Los Angeles welfare workers; one hundred girls tried out for every film part, with many left destitute and stranded... young women with ‘movie fever’ were said to be surprised, once in Los Angeles, ‘to find that no one wants them, and that it is hard work and not moral laxity that will get them a place’. The editors reminded readers that they had already published warnings issued by Los Angeles authorities to dissuade young women with the ‘movie bug’, ‘no matter how beautiful or otherwise attractive they were’, from coming to seek ‘elusive screen notoriety’.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 84.

¹⁶⁶ Anger, *Hollywood Babylon* 133.

¹⁶⁷ Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls* 39.

¹⁶⁸ Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman* 94.

I would argue that breathless tones aside, actresses or fan magazines publishing cautionary tale-style articles telling young women to stay home frequently did provide statistics and practical information. Regardless of their angles or motives, they may have saved lives. To dismiss such concerns as patriarchal or clubwomen's paternalism as in some previous scholarship now seems misguided. Aside from the lack of jobs, housing, food, and resources, in a society like this such women, with no money and no protection, were in fact highly vulnerable to serious abuse.

A slew of films on the problems of the aspiring actress began to arrive on the scene. Patsy Ruth Miller wrote in her memoir of starring in 1926's *Broken Hearts of Hollywood*: "The newspapers applauded the film: 'It is a picture produced with purpose, the purpose being that youngsters must not expect to go to Hollywood and become screen stars overnight'".¹⁶⁹ In 1926, Miller and the new chorine ingenue Myrna Loy also starred in the aptly named *Why Girls Go Back Home*. Perhaps most germane to this discussion and the ominous turn is the 1927 film *The Port of Missing Girls*, a film in which six young women show up to Hollywood and fail, each in a different way. The poster's taglines were jarringly pessimistic. They seemed to equate Hollywood with the bleakest of social problems in terms of its prospects for young girls. The tone was one along similar lines to previous social problem films about sex trafficking or teen runaways. No lightness or dream factory mythology was to be found in poster lines that screamed:

"Thrilling and Sensational Portrayal of the Mysteries of Our Many Missing Girls"...
"WHY DO THEY LEAVE? WHERE DO THEY GO? WHO IS TO BLAME?" For the answer see- "The Port of Missing Girls".¹⁷⁰

Popular culture may have been flooded with prurient mail-order books and films on these "missing girls", it's true. But the sociocultural realities were quite different. Rather than too much concern for young migratory women, I would argue there really wasn't enough, in terms of actual women in actual danger. Articles on such topics served to scare the public, but maintained a Victorian sense that the women involved were "lost" or "fallen". Women could, and in fact must, be counseled not to go to Hollywood, because once they were "ruined", they were simply "gone". Behind the lurid pieces of journalism or entertainment was the social reality based in a fundamentally misogynist society. In a pre-internet world, women went missing and that was that. People moved around the continent and lost track of relatives, and no one could particularly be sure that someone was safe, or alive, if they weren't receiving letters from them. In *The Contradictions of Culture: Cities, Culture, Women* (2001), Elizabeth Wilson's inclusion of William Acton's famous study on women sex workers in the 1850s sounds quite modern and apropos to the modern migratory city here-- "[w]ho are these somebodies whom nobody knows?"¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. Introduction, Miller, *My Hollywood*.

¹⁷⁰ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 82.

¹⁷¹ Elizabeth Wilson. *The Contradictions of Culture: Cities, Culture, Women* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2001) 73.

Life was different, and in these differences, expectation of violence against women, or their ruin, was absolutely normative. In his early (1931) *History of the Movies*, Benjamin Hampton wrote rather shruggingly, “[n]o one will ever know how many girls journeyed there [Los Angeles] in the ten years beginning in 1919, nor what became of most of them”.¹⁷² Hallett cited a 1920s petition to the Los Angeles City that mentioned the “‘mysterious disappearance’ of ‘over six hundred young women’” over the previous year,¹⁷³ while Connors cited thousands. The discursive slippage is fascinating in itself. No one really knows the numbers, who went home safely, who got married, who was kidnapped, who died. How many were actually trafficked into illegal situations, or fell into lives of abuse, poverty, or addiction?

Thus there is a constant presence of misogynistic absence in Hollywood history. The phenomena of women who have slipped, fallen, or disappeared was becoming a trope-- whether they stopped getting parts and went home to the Midwest, stayed and worked anonymously in suburban shops and offices, fell into trafficking in Tijuana, or lived in brothels as call girls down the street from the studios. A culture had developed of not just “in” or “out”, but “here” or “gone”. This instability and dispensability of people, ungrieved and unremarked upon, becomes a cultural cornerstone of what Hortense Powdermaker would come to identify as a centrality of the dehumanised Hollywood system. It was also the prime contributor to one of the more macabre sides of the Hollywood mythos.

In this period, image-saving ventures arose that attempted to put a benevolent face on the studios. One prime example was Central Casting, established in 1919 as a centre whereby extras (60% of whom were women) could call in to a central switchboard for daily work. The move was billed as a humane one on the part of the studios, one that caused a trade paper to assert of Hollywood that:

[t]he motion picture industry has given the lie to the scoffers and cynics who claim that it is nothing but a money-grabbing institution. It produces concrete evidence that it possesses a heart and a soul.¹⁷⁴

In fact, though, Central Casting had actually been created because as early as 1919, shady casting directors, agents, agencies, and acting schools were already running rampant. This included a rash of random individual men simply calling themselves “agents”, who were in reality mere swindlers and sexual predators.¹⁷⁵ What seemed like “benevolence” at first glance was really more damage control for an industry that was already beginning to take a dark masculinist turn. The studios had effectively created a crisis by encouraging hundreds of thousands of girls to migrate to Los Angeles to follow

¹⁷² Ibid. 51.

¹⁷³ Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!* 152.

¹⁷⁴ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 65.

¹⁷⁵ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*; Miller, *My Hollywood, When Both of Us Were Young*; Anger, *Hollywood Babylon*; Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York, Crown, 1988).

their dreams with their ubiquitous “anyone can be a star” publicity. Central Casting and other initiatives of the like thus defensive strategies against blame in the face of alarming rising negative statistics around young women in the city. Certainly, the dream factory mythos of the studios themselves was belied by the fine print on the Central Casting contract. It stated that extra work was casual work and not to be thought of as a livelihood.¹⁷⁶

By the mid-1920s, both those trying to help women in need and those in positions of power took a harder line. Central Casting’s position became severe, with a policy of pushing women to leave over rather than doing anything to help that they perceived as coddling. Marian Mel was head of the women’s division, a bureaucrat who had previously been on the California Labor Commission:

To would-be extras, she would say, “Think over your life and recall the thing you do best. Then go home and do it. Hollywood doesn’t need or want you. Go home. If you stay here, you will only suffer and possibly starve.” When begged for help, she would respond, “I can’t, and for your own sake, I won’t.”¹⁷⁷

If the situation was bleak for extras and bit players, it was often equally dire for women a few rungs above on the ladder of Hollywood “success”. Mary Desjardins has written as to how dystopian discourses about the creation and exploitation of stars began to become commonplace in this moment as well.¹⁷⁸ The shift to darker material that both gothicised and romanticised the precarity of women’s Hollywood lives didn’t only reside in fiction, however. Coinciding with the increased cultural awareness of the dehumanisation in the system, there were a rash of economic suicides and dramatic gestures of protest.¹⁷⁹

No one in the 1920s more effectively made herself into high metaphor against all of these pathological forces than Australian actress come to Hollywood Lotus Thompson. After a career as a serious actress with success in her native country, Thompson was increasingly disillusioned that in Hollywood, she was only wanted for and constantly reduced to her beautiful legs. She was getting work as a leg extra and publicity in the newspapers for “leg art”, but not being asked for real auditions. In 1924, Thompson infamously poured acid over her legs so producers would stop trying to reduce her to her one “perfect” body part.¹⁸⁰ Thompson stands as a living embodiment that Judith Mayne’s assertion that “the cinematic apparatus is shaped by one broken history of the objectification of the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 69.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 24.

¹⁷⁸ Ehrhard Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism*. Berkeley: California, 2007; Miranda Banks. *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (London, Routledge, 2009).

¹⁷⁹ Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman*; Paul Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered: An Oral History of its Golden Age*. (Lanham, MD, Taylor, 2011);

¹⁸⁰ Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman* 1.

female body after another”¹⁸¹ has never been simply an academic question related to semiotics and film theory. It is rather a question of real women, labour, and trauma, and has been for a century.

In this climate of difficulties and abuses for both impoverished extras and aspiring starlets alike, an institution that worked to address the public health crisis of women migrating to Los Angeles in the 1920s was the Studio Club. A feminist revisionist look at the organisation allows for the argument that the work of actually keeping women safe and helping those in precarious states was often undertaken by other women. For example, it was for assistance to and protection of actresses that the Studio Club was formed as a chaperoned home for young women in Hollywood in 1916. While there was surely a great deal of patriarchal and misogynistic moralising on the part of some powerful, and likely hypocritical, people in the system, I propose a revisitation of the Studio Club now as separate from those forces. I would instead make the case for the Studio Club as a case of women in solidarity with other women, in an early feminist Hollywood venture.

The Studio Club has typically been written about by feminist film historians as a venture by an unusual coalition of upper-class WASP society Angelenos and the Jewish wives of the studio heads, both on guard for their city’s morals and their husbands’ reputations, respectively.¹⁸² I would argue that these women might have been induced to contribute money and support this initiative as philanthropy, but that the women actually running the residence were much more egalitarian and activist. In fact, Studio Club mothers had experience in social work, some with the famed Hull House back East. Evelyn Keyes fled there as a starlet during her abusive and mentally ill husband’s breakdown and eventual suicide; demonstrating that it also, in fact, functioned at times not dissimilarly to a modern women’s shelter.¹⁸³ While the Studio Club did promote a specific type of middle-class, genteel femininity and conformity, it undeniably helped a great deal of young women to forge careers, stay safe, and find community. It is of course true that the studios and film industry and the city’s elite women had a cynical interest in appearing to be full of concern and philanthropic spirit for young women. But the women on the ground in this organisation had different goals and accomplished different aims.

The Studio Club opened its doors with eighty paying members at its 1916 founding, situating itself as the third YWCA home in the world but the “only one in existence for motion picture girls”.¹⁸⁴ Mrs. Edward Townsend of the YWCA, remarking upon the housing shortage in Los Angeles, noted that for young women in the city, “dreams are a poor substitute for three meals a day and a place to

¹⁸¹ Judith Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women’s Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana, 1990) 160.

¹⁸² Heidi Kenaga, Heidi. "Making the 'Studio Girl': The Hollywood Studio Club and Industry Regulation of Female Labour." *Film History: An International Journal* 18, no. 2 (2006): 129-39; Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!*

¹⁸³ Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 129.

¹⁸⁴ Mary Mallory. “Hollywood Heights: Hollywood Studio Club Provides Home for Movie-Struck Girls.” *Daily Mirror* blog. August 26, 2013.

sleep”.¹⁸⁵ From the beginning, the Studio Club’s own self-identity was one of an egalitarian community-- promoting connections between women of all positions and levels of success or precarity within the industry. A 1917 *Photoplay* profile by Elizabeth McGaffey described “[t]he Hollywood Studio Club, where a new democracy among screenland’s feminine members has been formed”.¹⁸⁶ It went on to explain that, “[h]ere the ‘star’, the ‘extra girl’, and the girls of the studio who do not face the camera get together”.¹⁸⁷ Emphasising how the home helped women in need, the article explained, “[t]here are accommodations for regularly employed actresses as well as for girls who have found the going on ‘The Glory Road’ too difficult for a slender purse”.¹⁸⁸ Media coverage also stressed that a girl who wound up down on her luck could stay until things turned around for her, and that she could pay back her rent when she had it. The average stay was six months. Janet Gaynor, Zasu Pitts, and (much later) Marilyn Monroe were among young women who lived there before they became stars.

Heidi Kenaga, in her 2006 article “Making the ‘Studio Girl’: The Hollywood Studio Club and Industry Regulation of Female Labour”, has theorised the club in a broader context of upper-class Los Angeles trying to regulate the sexuality of working-class women. In this scenario, the Studio Club was a space of classed meddling.¹⁸⁹ Post-MeToo, I cannot agree with this premise. I think the Studio Club can instead be situated in a 1920s tradition of progressivism and feminist advocacy. It is undoubtable that a few elite women got involved for fear that the new influx of young girls would ruin Los Angeles. However I would argue that this was no clubwomen’s moralising crusade on the level of the Better Films Foundation, for example. The majority who truly believed in the club seemed genuinely motivated by concerns for young women’s safety and finances. As well established in this chapter, the city could absolutely be a dangerous place for young women alone as they ran out of money, had no work, no healthcare, and no way to get home. As Edna Harris explained, “[g]irls have come to Los Angeles with just enough money to make the trip... inevitably we must obtain positions for them in other lines or get them back to their homes”.¹⁹⁰

Reinterpreting the detailed history of the Club’s formation, it seems to me, sets a forgotten middle-class librarian named Eleanor Jones in a similar role that Tarana Burke has played in the current MeToo movement. Jones, like the contemporary Burke, was also a non-Hollywood, non-elite woman who got the ball rolling on correcting a massive problem for Hollywood women, doing them enormous good without taking the credit. The following resituating of the founding of the Studio Club towards cross-class solidarity, feminism, and activism, as recounted by writer Mary Mallory in 2013, is overdue:

¹⁸⁵ In Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 55.

¹⁸⁶ Elizabeth McGaffey, “The Studio Club.” *Photoplay*. December 1917. 83-86.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Heidi Kenaga, Heidi. "Making the 'Studio Girl': The Hollywood Studio Club and Industry Regulation of Female Labour." *Film History: An International Journal* 18, no. 2 (2006): 129-39.

¹⁹⁰ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 54.

As their money slowly dwindled, many hung around libraries and other respectable locations. Mrs. Eleanor Jones of the Hollywood Public Library began noticing many young women staying until closing time. Many had nowhere to go and no friends or family to spend time or live with. Jones began befriending them and trying to help them. A young girl whom Mrs. Jones regularly noticed sitting alone in the library disappeared one day, and then reappeared more than a month later. When Jones asked where she had been, she replied that she had spent a month in the hospital with no visitors. Soon after, as she realized that she had no prospects in Hollywood, she returned home.... Jones approached Mrs. W. Richmond, Mrs. William DeMille and Lois Weber...¹⁹¹

This was the real birth of the Studio Club. Original philanthropist women started the club as a social space for teas and dances, but “when a few of the young women mentioned that they had no place to live, they were invited in”.¹⁹² Actress memoirs praise the care and camaraderie they found at the Studio Club to these points. Keyes remarked:

Living at the Studio Club was nice. A respectable place- no men allowed, ten dollars per week for room and board. They were all newcomers there like me. Young actresses. I shared a room there. It was a place where you were protected, and it was reasonable. They weren't trying to make money. They were trying to make a haven for young girls.¹⁹³

Finally, film historians like Slide have offered evidence that the male studio heads had great antipathy towards the Studio Club. They were annoyed by the concerns of the clubwomen, and even more by the public attention the club drew (and the subtext it brought to mind). When *Variety* ran a thoughtful series on both the Club and women's groups giving lectures on how to protect young extra girls from pimping rings and being loaned out for “executive entertainment” under the guise of work, Loew and Schenck demanded the series removed. They felt--rightly so-- that it gave the studios and industry bad publicity.¹⁹⁴ In terms of historical analysis, such reactions suggest that the male capitalists of Hollywood were afraid for the public to see the way the system was really working for women. Acknowledging that there were in fact many young women who really needed assistance would have meant acknowledging the social problems they had created, and that the Hollywood Dream was largely a hazardous falsehood built on sexual exploitation.

Throughout this project, I have identified two parallel cudgels that emerged as disciplinary tools at this time, both most effective in terms of propping up the system: glamour and publicity. I am here employing primary source and first-person accounts that recentre actresses and utilise their own understandings to these points. Theoretical discussion in later chapters incorporates concepts of symbolic and real violence, in terms of how the system was able to function and protect itself. Political

¹⁹¹ Mary Mallory. “Hollywood Heights: Hollywood Studio Club Provides Home for Movie-Struck Girls.” *Daily Mirror* blog. August 26, 2013.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 129.

¹⁹⁴ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 189.

theorist Yanos Varoufakis has also made the rather obvious but compelling assertion that there is not enough social force to prop up any authoritarian system with violence alone. Soft power considered acceptable to most is what succeeds.¹⁹⁵ Starting from Powdermaker's premise that studio Hollywood was an authoritarian system, glamour and publicity would be, in Varoufakis' terms, the dual soft power reinforcements of such.

Publicity as such a tool will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, as it took even stronger hold in 1930s fan magazine discourse coinciding with the economics of the Depression. But here, briefly: when it suited them and if there was a disciplinary point to be made, the fan magazines of the 1910s were already becoming adept at a tactic that would become ubiquitous. They had no problem switching their presentation of actresses as humble but respectable working girls worthy of the audience's respect to that of spoiled aristocrats, when it suited them. This was particularly the case when called upon to admonish a star for her behaviour, especially if it in any way involved financial demands. Reporters like Stephen Bush at *Moving Picture World* would assist in the studios' disciplinary processes by dutifully writing about the "evil" of "gouging stars" who demanded "fabulous and ridiculous salaries".¹⁹⁶ Such effective strategies obviously kept any organising or even griping about economic equity to a minimum.

In terms of glamour as employed by the studios, it can be situated as not only disciplinary tool, but also as something of a narcotic-- to both stars and spectators. As Janet Staiger has asserted, Hollywood was above all "a cinema of concealed artifice".¹⁹⁷ Lois Banner has reminded that the word "glamour" itself, coined by Sir Walter Scott in the early nineteenth century, is "a word grounded in the ancient Scottish culture of magic, witches and spells and transmogrified into the modern meaning of elusive, sophisticated attraction".¹⁹⁸ Banner describes this slightly supernatural concept as one that would come to fully haunt the beauty culture of the modern age.¹⁹⁹

For perhaps *the* striking example of this use of glamour "on" the audience as both peak 1920s Hollywood and deliberate class strategy, one could take the case of Cecil B. DeMille. In the eponymous example of Miriam Bratu Hansen's vernacular modernism, the world DeMille created in his films had a massive social influence on American life— fashion, interior design, architecture, perfume, and cosmetics. Privately, however, DeMille bemoaned that he would have preferred to make more serious films but that the audience wanted opulent fantasy, and so he gave it to them: "the

¹⁹⁵ Under the Skin with Russell Brand. "#015 How To Construct a Global Revolution." Online audio podcast. June 21, 2017.

¹⁹⁶ Gaylyn Studlar. "Theda Bara: Orientalism, Sexual Anarchy, and the Jewish Star." In *Flickers of Desire: Movie Stars of the 1910s*. Ed. Jennifer Bean (New Brunswick, Rutgers UP, 2011) 115.

¹⁹⁷ Janet Staiger, "Standardization and differentiation: the reinforcement and dispersion of Hollywood's practices", in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. (London, Routledge, 2003) 112.

¹⁹⁸ Banner, *American Beauty* 24.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 11.

chambermaid's idea of glamour, he called it".²⁰¹ Leatrice Joy Gilbert Fountain, daughter of silent stars Leatrice Joy and John Gilbert turned film historian and biographer, demonstrated a perfect understanding of DeMille's artistic trade-off and its class politics in her oral history interview with Paul Zollo:

DeMille showed he was perfectly capable of making intelligent, sensitive, well-drawn films. But he wanted to make a lot of money, and he lost respect for the public. He was sure that if he made crappy movies, then everybody would love them. And he was *right!* [Laughs] He would tell Mother, 'I want you to be a lady in this, but I don't want you to be what a *real* lady is, I want you to be what a housemaid *thinks* a lady is. Do it for them.' He was always aiming *down* at his audiences.²⁰²

Glamour could also act as an opiate to the actors themselves. Chapter Four will go extensively into case studies of stars who were self-aware class actors, rebels, and troublemakers. But when the system worked as designed, it instead reshaped arriving aspirants into grateful, dutiful daughters of patriarchy. When the studio finishing and refinishing process worked as designed, the corporation now had a docile and obedient money-maker as employee. Such performers believed in themselves as the lucky and the chosen ones, rather than as mistreated workers in a corruptly weighted system who should be organising. How could that be the reality if they were universally envied as gods and goddesses, made up in beautiful clothes, makeup, and photography to become supra-human, ethereal beings? Most case studies in this project are of the dissenting activist type, in keeping with my themes of labour and class abuses. However, primary source research revealed many opposite instances of the socially conservative, grateful company employee type, as well. This was particularly the case of conservative-leaning, later-life interviews in texts like *Silent Stars Speak: Interviews with Twelve Cinema Pioneers* (2001) and *Movies Were Always Magical: Interviews with 19 Actors, Directors, and Producers from the Hollywood of the 1930s through the 1950s* (2003).²⁰³ Thus some actors and creatives saw through the illusion and were self-advocating or dissatisfied workers; many did not.

Consider how disappointing Eleanor Boardman found starring in one of the most acclaimed Hollywood movies of all time, King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928), because it was a masterpiece of a social study rather than a costume drama:

I didn't care about ordinary people. I thought when you went into movies that you wore curls and beautiful hats, and gorgeous clothes and, glamorous. Suddenly I was cast in this downtrodden, Mary Doe, meets John Doe, going through life. No money, no education, no knowledge of what they were doing. It was a job I had to do! I didn't like

²⁰¹ Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 219.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Tony Villecco, *Silent Stars Speak: Interviews with Twelve Cinema Pioneers* (Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2001); Leo Verswijver, *Movies Were Always Magical: Interviews with 19 Actors, Directors, and Producers from the Hollywood of the 1930s through the 1950s* (Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2003).

to be so drab. And unattractive. As I say, the hair was hanging down, no makeup on.²⁰⁴

Boardman articulates here that she had inadvertently found herself in an important classic of social realism, when what she had expected to be part of in Hollywood was what Jane Gaines called in “Dream/Factory” (2000) “the beautifying mirror”: the ruling class’ edification of the dreams and aspirations of the masses.²⁰⁵ Reflecting back to the masses their own problems instead, and doing so as an anomalous upper-class born, educated actress herself made Boardman unglamorous and, thus, uncomfortable.

This question-- where manufactured glamour and publicity met with the actual personage of a performer-- is central to an understanding of the class status of the woman in Hollywood. It begs questions of affect: what did it mean to feel like a star? To feel glamorous? Which version of the evolving, constructed self was the actress at this stage of life? Within these schemas, one often sees conflation between different strata of women, in terms of finance and class as discussed at other points in this project. The simple, anecdotal points raised here in terms of archetypal overlap have never been much considered in either mainstream or feminist film history to date.

Both statistically and anecdotally, first-person evidence repeatedly suggests that the actress whom the working girls were seeing on the screen, presented to them as supremely wealthy and glamorous, still internally identified herself as a member of the working class. She worried about money and security, having more often than not grown up poor, knowing that the studios would take what they could get from actresses and then throw them away. The star did not generally experience life as floating through a series of parties, wearing only ball gowns, and living for romance and luxury like the characters she might have played. She had agents and contracts and harassing studio executives and competition for roles, sexual exploitation and forced plastic surgery and worries about aging with which to contend. She might have had family members back home to whom she sent money to keep them afloat. She was competing with other women in this male-structured system, but also working with them and maintaining friendships despite the cruelty of the system.

There are many examples in primary sources that show this class continuum of women, complete with solidarity and mutual assistance. Colleen Moore shared an anecdote about her friend and fellow star Constance Talmadge in her memoir *Silent Star* (1968) that spoke incisively to these overlapping identities of class and camaraderie. Moore witnessed Talmadge give her entire wardrobe, including the finest designer clothes, to a cleaning woman at the studio. Her reason? “My sister is marrying a millionaire”.²⁰⁶ Talmadge was referring to her sister and fellow star Norma Talmadge, who

²⁰⁴ *Hollywood*. “The Man With the Megaphone- Episode 10.” Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

²⁰⁵ Jane Gaines, “Dream/Factory”. In *Reinventing Film Studies*. Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill (London: Arnold, 2000), 111.

²⁰⁶ Colleen Moore, *Silent Star* (New York, Doubleday, 1968) 31.

had just gotten engaged to powerful studio executive Joseph Schenck. In another anecdote, Moore recalled that actress and Hearst mistress Marion Davies once purchased new coats for all her actress friends visiting San Simeon one weekend and handed them out casually. This was Davies' scheme because one of the women was not getting work, had a hole-ridden coat, and was too proud to take help.²⁰⁷ In fact, Moore's entire memoir abounds with women helping other women within the early Hollywood system. She and her friends, other young stars, began a networking club:

What we ended up doing was to help each other get jobs. When anyone went to be interviewed for a part and didn't get it, she'd quick call up all the other girls in the club so one of them could.²⁰⁸

In another instance, Moore discussed how the wardrobe mistress at Goldwyn Studios would lend actresses beautiful gowns from costumes to wear on dates, risking her own job-- and that all of the girls were in on the secret. As Moore recalled, "[w]e didn't even let on to each other. If I was out dancing and saw a girl wearing a gown I was wearing in a picture, I'd pretend I'd never seen it before".²⁰⁹ Anecdotes such as these are revelatory as to rarely discussed cross-class and cross-success solidarity among women in Hollywood.

Numerous primary source writings and oral history recollections present in this project offer the recollections of stars who did not perceive themselves as goddess-like to any degree. Colleen Moore, to take just one example, thought of herself first and foremost as a sort of superfan. *Silent Star* (1968) was not only a history of her own stardom, but of her own fandom. It detailed how she had begun, as a girlhood fan, to plan her actress career. Like all of her girlfriends, Moore had a scrapbook of film stars-- but unlike them, Moore recalled, "I left a blank page in mine for my own picture after I became a movie star".²¹⁰

In any attempted assertion that "[t]he Screen Star and her emulator, the Screen-Struck Girl"²¹¹ were two distinct creatures, simple math and history get in the way. If a "screen struck girl" or "movie mad maid" was fifteen in 1915 watching the serial queens, might she not have grown up to be one of the adult star actresses of the following decade? Or, a teenage fan in the 1920s who grew up to become an adult star of the 1930s and 1940s? Contrary to all the illusions of glamour and studio publicity, stars did not descend from the heavens fully formed. As Moore had detailed, they were fans first, frequently from working-class families, who had themselves been raised on the first decades of cinema from childhood.

This exact point clearly situating actresses in the lower and middle classes, far from constructed glamour, comes up constantly in accounts *by the actresses themselves*. Turning to such

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 228.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. 113.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. 118.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 228.

²¹¹ Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman* 11.

accounts repeatedly bolsters the earlier assertion that these women remained completely on a class continuum with their working-class spectators, families, or even former selves. In fact, just as this project began as an adamant corrective to Mulvey's assertion that the actress is the "glamorous impersonating the ordinary", it takes on another rejoinder to a Mulveyian premise here in relation to actress and spectator. In theorisation about representation and relationship, Mulvey posited that the spectator was attempting to inhabit the actress' space, trapping herself in identification in trying to get closer to the star.²¹² Mary Ann Doane echoed the same point around the same period, that the female spectator was trying "'to approximate the bodily image of the star".²¹³ By my estimation, and this is key-- *they never stopped being in the same space in the first place*. They were largely women from the same social groups, who had become differentiated by their professions. One was just more high-profile than the world had ever seen to date, but underneath the façade of Hollywood, the women in both groups often faced similar labour hazards and challenges.

In her 1903 book *The Home*, the sometimes-called utopian feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman lived up to this description when she wrote, "[i]f women were there, everywhere, in the world which belongs to them as much as to men, then everywhere would be safe".²¹⁴ I label this utopian because as women know, this did not turn out to be the case-- not in 1920, and not in 2020. Calculating from the year that cinema was invented to the present, women's visibility has increased exponentially-- but their safety has surely not. Moreover, what is to be made of circumstances in which some women suffer or are abused in order to make other women freer and safer? This rather bleak conclusion necessitates a reckoning with how freedom, safety, and visibility have worked in modernity for various types of women. It also connects in interesting ways with the feminist scholarly interest in the archetype of the *flâneuse* that has very discursively present in recent decades. A contention with what the scholarly focus upon the *flâneuse* in cultural studies of the last decades has to do with the situating here of women as second-class citizens in Hollywood is due. The concept of the female *flâneur* may in practice be more complicated than one of urban liberation. The public female body is always on display. The male gaze and objectification dominate. Skepticism towards the idea that women were ever liberated into the modern city at all is warranted, in light of post-MeToo feminist histories.

In academic circles, a majority of the interest in the *flâneuse* grew out of Second Wave feminists pushing back on the prevailing understanding of women's victimisation, to instead assert spaces where they found liberation and emancipation in modernity. For the feminist film historian, the public modern woman became a spectator, sitting in a theatre, watching adventures on film to which

²¹² In Petro, "Feminism and Film History." *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 8, no.1, vol. 22 (1990).

²¹³ Patrice Petro, *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2002) 43.

²¹⁴ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (London, Forgotten Books, 2015) xlv.

women had never had access before in previous human history. Anke Gleber had made this argument quite clearly; as she has explained, previous to cinema the only way to see the world unthreatened as a woman was to disguise as a man. Gleber has dismissed Walter Benjamin's gender-neutral concept of "the masses" as naïve. Women could not idle alone, and so lived outside the city even within it. If women were the constant object of male voyeurs, they were stymied of the opportunity to themselves look.²¹⁵

Particularly with the advent of film, in Gleber's argument, every woman could become a *flâneuse* without worrying about safety or public scrutiny. She could go places and see things to which she had never before had access. As articulated by Gleber, we can think of female film spectatorship as *flânerie* for the mass of women and, in this respect, as liberating. Heide Schlüpmann has also seen the space of the cinema as one where women could be cultural and social outside the family.²¹⁶ Women were, in this estimation, free of the gaze in dark theatres, able to finally look for themselves. For Katharina von Ankum, too, the cinema was the singular place where a woman could both escape the constant anxiety of public judging and act as a secret *flâneuse*. Outside this uniquely dark space, the modern woman was always acting because she was always being seen and observed. Finally to these points, Liz Conor began to get very close to some of the central assertions of this thesis project, when she posited that the problem of a female flâneur is a problem of *class* status. Jumping off from Gleber, Schlüpmann, and Von Ankum, Conor has asserted that film, in effect, revolutionised women's class status due to its reconfiguring of public space.²¹⁷

It certainly all sounds promising for the *pro-flâneuse* argument. But the pessimistic argument rears its head again. Mightn't the early cinema theatre be situated as just another (new, more modern) space of unsafety? The chance to view the world as a spectator in the dark was indeed powerful. But getting to one's seat and sitting in it was not an unembodied or ungendered experience. Some feminist film historians of the silent era have contended with the negative aspects of the cinema theatre as cultural and sociological space, as I do here. Constance Balides has acknowledged of early filmic culture that nickelodeons and cinemas, along with penny arcades, soda fountains, and dance halls, were spaces in which girls were regularly recruited by pimps or trafficked.²¹⁸ Advertising for working-class cinemas might invite customers by promising outright, "[c]ome right in, we have the darkest cinema in the whole town",²¹⁹ suggesting a space for peace, freedom, and the right not to be observed. But wouldn't such a slogan also present a come-on to a molesting man, for example? How

²¹⁵ Anke Gleber, "Female Flânerie and the Symphony of the City." *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*. Ed. Katharina von Ankum (Berkeley, California, 1997).

²¹⁶ In *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*; Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman*.

²¹⁸ Constance Balides, "Making Ends Meet: 'Welfare Films' and the Politics of Consumption During the Progressive Era." *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. Eds. Jennifer Bean and Diane Negra. (Durham, Duke UP, 2002. 167-86).

²¹⁹ Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: The Story of Franz Biberkopf* (London, A&C Black, 2004) 28.

free is a woman in watching if she has to make her way through a crowd of sexually predatory men to get there? So were theatres spaces where women could feel safe from street harassment and escape to fantasy? Or were theatres the same kind of lower-class spaces unsafe for women, filled with harassment themselves?

Further, even the feminist cultural and film historians who do acknowledge the potential dangers of this historical cinema space are concerned with female *spectators*. They have not to date contended with the same factors for the woman performer on the screen at all. The freedom of the spectator to sit in the dark and experience not being a watched or preyed-upon woman in public is a questionable contention. But even if we do grant the cinema theatre as a safe space for a working-class woman, her feeling of *freedom* might have been purchased by the *danger* that the actress being watched was put through to make the scene. In a key question that echoes some raised in feminist critiques of mainstream, masculinist pornography: the spectator may be feeling free and safe, but how can she know the actress wasn't abused or exploited in the making of the "fantasy" that she is watching? This is an epistemological impossibility.²²⁰

I am suggesting that in fact, the spectator and actress were operating on parallel tracks of freedom, safety, and visibility-- and that frequently when one was up, the other was down. An actress had visibility and relative wealth, while the working-class woman watching stayed in her precarious position. But from my vantage point of situating women's class status in Hollywood and a historiographic application of MeToo, film might at times have seemed an escape from precarity or danger for the spectator, while in reality being emblematic of these realities for the female performer. Even if we assume that the spectator was safe to dream in the theatre-- then the spectator became free in the theatre, free from her working-class life, unfair labour conditions, street harassment, free to gaze, free to observe and "travel" unmolested, a virtual *flâneuse*. In the meantime, however, the irony is that the women she was watching were not free. They were playing at freedom but working under the threat of sexual coercion, exploitation, and unsafe labour conditions themselves. Perceived as living charmed lives, in reality they might have been dealing with the exact same conditions of predatory bosses and dangerous workspaces as the women in the audience. On top of these factors, actresses were certainly experiencing the coerced beauty standards and bodily control that became so central to the system in its peak Fordist years.

A simple, conventional reading, present for a century, might be that the working girl sacrificed her nickel to the studios, who kept the actress in furs and swimming pools. But in fact, the actress was sacrificial herself. She herself suffered in voyeurism and exploitation so that the female spectator could have an afternoon of fantasy. Previous scholarly focus on the spectator and the free woman in

²²⁰ The enormity of this topic and this particular aspect of it comes up again as a later nodal moment of women performing in film in terms of the porno chic phenomenon of the 1970s, Linda Lovelace, and the feminist porn wars of the 1970s and 1980s.

the city has neglected the inverse and parallel relationship of freedom, safety, and the lack thereof with the performing woman in the Hollywood system. I am contending that their social situations actually worked in tandem-- or, borrowing a phrase from Patrice Petro, "oscillated along a continuum between anxiety/privation and boredom/sateity" --²²¹ that there were layers of freedom versus danger for both. Miriam Bratu Hansen was one of the only film historians of her generation to even come close to this point. Hansen explained that no matter how modern a film may seem, when men control the image of women onscreen, ambivalence is already baked in and agency is disrupted for both spectator *and* female star.²²²

Not only were these women on the same continuum in terms of safety, freedom, and visibility: they were also situated as such in terms of their very class subjecthood. Barry King has placed the star-fan relationship in pre-cinematic contexts as one that would go on to define the same in the cinematic era: as one "where a new geometry of class relationships could be concretized".²²³ All of them, spectators or performers, were working women in a capitalist, male-dominant culture. Thus, all of these women lived the *trauma* of being gendered subjects in a gender-biased society.²²⁴

The spectator identified with the actress not only as a lofty star, but also as a fellow young woman, knowing from fan magazine discourse that she might have risen from working-class in just the past few years herself. The actress in the meantime was not above the spectator, in a one-way relationship of deity looking down at supplicant. The actress knew who the working girls who came to her films or stayed away were, because she had been one herself not long before. The fear that she might have ended up back in their ranks again would have remained ever-present for most. After several decades of Dyerian focus on stars as symbols and social gods and goddesses or modern mythological figures, alternative approaches that centre labour and class are both simple and needed. As Jane Gaines writes in *Pink-Slipped*, "[c]loser examination also reveals the two groups as physically proximate, the differences between them often blurry".²²⁵

Clearly, the shift to an understanding of the realities of precarity and obsolescence, and a continuum between working-class audience girls and migratory extra girls or bit players new to Hollywood and on its lowest rungs, is possible within feminist film history. This thesis contends that all actresses, including stars, were second-class citizens in the Hollywood system. Yet how can this claim be compatible with Hollywood's star system, including the image of opulence and decadence prominent in the 1920s? It would seem I have a luxury problem-- and a woman problem to boot? If

²²¹ Petro, *Aftershocks of the New* 85.

²²² Miriam Hansen, "Fallen Women, Rising Stars, New Horizons: Shanghai Silent Film As Vernacular Modernism." *Film Quarterly* 54.1 (2000): 10-22.

²²³ Barry King, *Taking Fame to Market: On the Pre-history and Post-history of Hollywood Stardom* (New York, Springer) 28.

²²⁴ Trauma, extensively explored in performance studies, will return in later discussion, particularly with regard to systematic abuse and the male executive/woman performer relationship.

²²⁵ Gaines *Pink-Slipped* 137.

even stars were working-class subjects, as I contend, how can I deal with the mansions, furs, and luxury automobiles, the most lavish lifestyles known to the U.S. of the era?

It is true that by the middle of the 1920s, as the rest of the U.S. was also in boom times and get-rich-quick mode, the discourse of the brave little working girl actress or the proto-feminist serial queen was out. Peeks behind the curtain at the lifestyles of the fabulously rich and famous were in. Karen Sternheimer has described how “[a] 1924 *Screenland* article describes the sorts of demands stars made of their cooks, maids, and chauffeurs- quite a shift from pictures of actresses scrubbing their own floors in the 1910s”.²²⁶ Fan magazines wrote breathlessly about the ascendance to “the limousine life” and stars’ expenses, including 10,000 dollars a year in clothes²²⁷-- at a time when average yearly income for a man supporting a family was half that.

Surely new social classes and hierarchies were forming. On the surface, it certainly seemed like, as the constant international press pumped out for a decade declared to the world, Hollywood stars could be situated as a new pantheon of gods and goddesses. Not only would these people never have a financial care in the world, it was reported, but they were a new kind of aristocracy the world had never seen before. Yet while the star system certainly contributed to the creation of wealth among actors, including women, Hollywood remained a corporate system, ruled by capitalist structures and gendered hierarchies. Women could only rise so far in such a system, and even this was dependent upon salaries deigned appropriate by the bosses rather than concrete power. The costs of maintaining stardom were exorbitant and a disciplinary tool in themselves, a point to be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. Parallel to this, the myth that anyone who had success in films was “set for life” was completely belied by case studies that arose in the 1930s and beyond. A return to precarity was far more likely-- even more particularly for women, who lived under a severely ageist regime.

This mythos of the Hollywood elite as a kind of new pantheon of gods, based in romanticised inaccuracy and sensationalism, has nonetheless successfully come down through the years in large part through the gossip and celebrity entertainment industries, repeatedly bolstered by scores of fan magazine and mass market writers over decades.²²⁸ From the perspective of scholarly revisiting, it is both an unserious way to understand workers in an industry, and one obscurant of actually looking at labour and industrial conditions. All the same, the massive success of such a fevered myth confused even presidents and monarchs in its contemporary moment; it is unsurprising that it has continued to confuse popular culture writers, “Golden Age Hollywood” fans, and even some film historians to the present too. Challenging this long-held myth requires both a concrete labour studies approach, as this

²²⁶ Sternheimer, *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream* 53.

²²⁷ Ibid. 39, 53.

²²⁸ Louella Parsons, *Tell It to Louella* (New York, Putnam, 1961); Ezra Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1961); . In Martin Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* (Westminster, Arbor House, 1970; Richard Abel, *Menus for Movieland* (California: Berkeley: 2015).

project attempts, as well actual readings of the priceless first-person recountings of women like Frederica Sagor Maas or Louise Brooks, who actually experienced and reported upon the system as class actors.²²⁹

It is true that Hollywood changed social customs and manners quite dramatically. Hollywoodisms became peak Americanisms-- from the constant wearing of jeans and t-shirts to the pervasive use of first names. But the perceived status of the “golden people” stars of Hollywood didn’t just affect a change in fashion or speech. In a fascinating Bordieusian moment of “class fracture”, the social position of the stars was something so globally new and ambiguous, so dazzling, that there are first-person accounts of confusion when actual royalty came to Hollywood. Those on both sides weren’t yet clear on who should bow to whom. There are many such fascinating anecdotes of either the stars earnestly trying to live up to their roles as a new aristocracy, or titled aristocrats expecting them to and instead being let down by meeting some working-class actors with money. Noel Coward lamented the loss of the good old days, when performers were treated as the hired help, brought to the side door but paid well. Now, Coward quipped, one was obligated to sit through dinner parties making small talk with boring aristocrats.²³⁰ Early twentieth century Los Angeles and its culture based on performance had very quickly come to mirror King’s conclusions on the theatrical world of early modern London:

In sociological terms, the antecedent and then surrounding ecology in which the progenitors of stardom emerged was one of status ambiguity, in which the various dimensions of social existence- an individual’s trade, family background, religious beliefs, and so on- did not smoothly cohere.²³¹

A prototypical example is that of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks’ status as “Hollywood royalty” par excellence. The couple-- born as the aforementioned Gladys Smith of Toronto and Douglas Ullmann of Denver-- built their fairy tale estate at Pickfair to live up to their fame. Interviewed in Vilecco’s oral history collection, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. explained that Pickfair was the ultimate invitation destination not only for stars but also for politicians, presidents, and royalty. In Kevin Brownlow’s documentary, it was remarked that “they really kept court there, like in London”, and that they received everyone from titled aristocrats on honeymoon to the King of Siam.²³² Joan Crawford, onetime Pickfair daughter-in law as the flapper bride of Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., described Pickford in her own memoir *A Portrait of Joan* (1962) as having “the manners and bearing of a little queen”.²³³ In one recollection in the memoir, the working-class Crawford recalled being so intimidated by Pickford

²²⁹ Louise Brooks, *Lulu in Hollywood* (New York, Knopf, 1982); Frederika Sagor Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim: A Writer in Early Hollywood* (Louisville, Kentucky, 2010).

²³⁰ E.W.R Many. “Noel Coward on Acting.” Online video clip. YouTube. 2014. Web. Accessed December 1, 2019.

²³¹ King, *Taking Fame to Market* 28.

²³² *Hollywood*. “In the Beginning- Episode 2.” Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

²³³ Crawford with Kesner Ardmore, *A Portrait of Joan* 67.

that she was too frightened to ask to be excused to go upstairs, and so dressed for formal dinners in the downstairs bathroom.²³⁴

Pickford and Fairbanks tinkered with high society precedent on dancing and seating etiquette as it suited them, and the most prestigious people in the world went along with it. Barry King has identified particular social significance in the class shift around the first generation of Hollywood stars and, in particular, the milieu of Pickfair. To King, Pickford, Fairbanks, and Cecil B. DeMille were of a type he deemed “passable WASPS” who could bridge the gap between high society in Los Angeles and Jewish Hollywood. He has contended that this first generation of stars was “preoccupied with forging an equation between film acting and WASP respectability”.²³⁵

In 1925, megastar Gloria Swanson broke yet another class barrier when she went to France to film a movie and returned home married to a marquis;²³⁶ a far cry from her middle-class Chicago origins and childhood as a military brat. This trend of American star actresses marrying men from European royalty would continue apace in the studio era, peaking in the 1950s. Citing Swanson’s marriage to the Marquis de la Falaise, King has asserted that “[t]he blurring of the line between early stars and lesser nobility was a function of a general social equation... a democratic form of aristocracy; a powerless elite, but an elite nonetheless”.²³⁷ In her memoir, *Goodness Had Nothing To Do With It* (1959), Mae West from working-class Brooklyn mused on her time as one of the most famous celebrities on the planet, when she was visited by all the world’s aristocrats and socialites-- international royalty like the Aga Khan, titled British aristocrats, Vanderbilts and Rockefellers.²³⁸ In her own memoir, Patsy Ruth Miller recalled joyriding through the streets of Culver City with the uncle of the king of Egypt and posing for pictures with the crown prince and princess of Sweden.²³⁹

The flavour in the air for the global hysteria around the stars of the 1920s as a new aristocracy has also been made evident in fiction and Hollywood film itself. Wilder’s *Sunset Boulevard* cheekily abounds with such meta-details. In one early scene, the butler of Swanson’s Norma Desmond, Max, chastises Joe Gillis for his lack of respect for the aging, forgotten star. Max (later revealed to have formerly been Norma’s former director and husband, meta-played himself by silent actor/director Erich von Stroheim) recounts Norma’s heyday with eerie, stylised awe:

She was the greatest of them all. You wouldn’t know her, you’re too young. In one week, she received 17,000 fan letters. Men bribed her hairdresser to get a lock of her hair. And there was a maharajah who came all the way from India to beg one of her silk stockings. Later he strangled himself with it.²⁴⁰

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ King, *Taking Fame to Market* 127.

²³⁶ Anne Helen Petersen, *Scandals of Classic Hollywood: Sex, Deviance, and Drama from the Golden Age of American Cinema* (New York, Penguin, 2014) 85.

²³⁷ King, *Taking Fame to Market* 127.

²³⁸ Mae West, *Goodness Had Nothing To Do With It* (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1959).

²³⁹ Miller, *My Hollywood* 60, 67.

²⁴⁰ *Sunset Boulevard*. Dir. Billy Wilder. Perf. William Holden, Gloria Swanson, Erich von Stroheim. 1950.

All this opulence and legend aside, the “Golden People” mythos, as defined by writers like Kenneth Anger, was in fact always already dogged by the biographical origins of the new star ascendancy. Throughout this project’s case studies, I am particularly devoted to parsing how actresses related to their birth identities versus their Hollywood publicity-given personas in relation to class. As already established, the solid fact was that most American movie actresses came from the working classes. As John Kobal wrote in his 1982 biography of Rita Hayworth and the building of legend in Beverly Hills:

Many of the street names seem to have been inspired by the stars: Young, Pickford, Fairbanks, Hayworth. But it’s more probable that movie stars took their new names from the streets than vice versa.²⁴¹

In phenomena that will also be discussed in Chapter Four, sometimes publicity remodeling of a woman into her star persona scrubbed her working-class background entirely and created for her an aristocratic bio. But at other times a working-class background and struggle to the top was played up. In some ways, there seemed to be no rhyme or reason to who got which treatment. Sometimes publicity was “honest” on class background, as when the fan magazines celebrated the Talmadge sisters’ working-class backgrounds and declared that it was what made them relatable stars. On rare occasions, it would class an actress *down*, rather inexplicably, as when Patsy Ruth Miller of an upper-middle-class St. Louis family read in her own publicity about her past as a maid.²⁴² But more often, it was the opposite: it attributed an upper-class, finishing school background to a working-class girl with a changed name.

To attempt this complex theorisation of silent era stars as working-class subjects, it is useful to return once again to Thorstein Veblen and his most famed concept in conspicuous consumption. In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen explained that the working rich can only emulate the leisure class by buying highly expensive and highly visible symbols of wealth. The studio founders themselves were engaging in such conspicuous consumption as a new parvenu aristocracy in Los Angeles, defined by minority status and to be discussed more in Chapter Three in terms of ethnicity. But the stars were the employees of this arriviste class-- making them a kind of doubled parvenu aristocracy, on far more precarious ground, living on and by the image of wealth as more important than the wealth itself. Lest we forget, Norma Desmond may have lived in a giant, crumbling mansion with oil well residuals, but she also went back to the studio to ask the still-omnipotent DeMille for work and he turned her down. In reality, the 1920s was the *most* illusory decade in a city, industry, and culture built on illusion.

²⁴¹ John Kobal, *Rita Hayworth: Portrait of a Love Goddess* (New York, Berkeley Books, 1982) 2.

²⁴² Miller, *My Hollywood* 91.

Adela Rogers St. Johns corroborated the strangeness of the new money-mad position of the young performers of 1920s Hollywood when she told Brownlow in old age, “[w]ell, we didn’t know what to do with anything. We’d never had anything, or had any money. And here we were”.²⁴³ In *The Dream Factory*, Powdermaker as anthropologist remarked upon the same, noting that “[f]or almost all the top successes in Hollywood, great wealth is a new experience”.²⁴⁴ The legitimate press of the time (as opposed to the Hollywood publicity machine) commented on this same social phenomenon as well. The *New York Journal* explained disapprovingly that:

When people spring from poverty to affluence within a few weeks, their mental equipment is not always equal to the strain. They have money, an unaccustomed toy, and they spend it in bizarre ways. They may indulge in ‘wild parties’ or they may indulge in other forms of relaxation and excitement... Many of them spend all they make.²⁴⁵

The piece went on to rather breathlessly warn that lack of full access to alcohol in Hollywood during Prohibition was leading to a rise in drug use and abuse and a dearth of new drug pushers.

Even the hallowed mythology of San Simeon and the fabulous parties of Hearst and Davies were a good deal more downmarket than glamorised histories would have us believe. Colleen Moore was struck by the contrast between the grandeur of the palace and some of the errors of taste she noticed there:

The glasses were beautiful blue Venetian ones, and the plates lovely china, but the napkins were paper, and down the center of the table were bottles and jars, with the labels still on them, of catsup, mustard, pickles, jellies, etc.²⁴⁶

Bette Davis had a similar classed recollection of San Simeon, remarking in her 1975 memoir in her characteristically arch style, “San Simeon might have been a palace but there was no soap in the bathroom when I dined there once”.²⁴⁷ Ezra Goodman, also a writer with the ever-present sharp eye for detail, quipped of the offices of one production company that they were decorated in “Beverly Hills Oriental... what is known as the L.B. Ming dynasty”.²⁴⁸ Continuing, he observed that:

The ash trays and antiques all had prices affixed to them... A massive antique breakfront was filled with authentic leather-bound sets of Sir Walter Scott and other classic authors. Almost all the books were upside down.²⁴⁹

²⁴³ *Hollywood*. ‘In the Beginning- Episode 2.’ Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

²⁴⁴ Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie- Makers* (Eastford, CT, Martino Fine Books, 2013) 261.

²⁴⁵ In Anger, *Hollywood Babylon* 60.

²⁴⁶ Moore, *Silent Star* 223.

²⁴⁷ Bette Davis, *The Lonely Life* (New York, Putnam’s, 1962) 172.

²⁴⁸ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 192.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 193.

As Neal Gabler concluded of the spending habits of the Hollywood *nouveaux*, “acquiring class never came cheap”.²⁵⁰

I would here return momentarily to the title of this thesis project in *Class Acts*. The fact is that this popular phrase of the day, with its multiple meanings, betrayed the perceptions of the upper-class from the lower classes. One glaring irony, of course, is that “class act” was a slang term about how to behave as upper-class by people who were not upper-class at all-- certainly not used by aristocrats. Rather it was the common parlance of those like the working-class immigrant studio founders turned millionaires, and the frequently poor or working-class girls whose origins and ethnicities they so successfully obscured and turned into stars.²⁵¹

One first-person, contemporaneous primary source offered, by contrast, insight into how the true American upper class saw and interacted with the new Hollywood movie “royalty”. American aristocrat turned writer and journalist Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr. occasionally wrote dispatches for *Photoplay* throughout the 1920s. In one such piece, “Why Fifth Avenue Laughs At Hollywood Society”, Vanderbilt wrote of the amusing new 1920s habit for the upper classes of both the Eastern U.S and Great Britain to go “slumming” in Hollywood once or twice a year. After such trips, the elite would mockingly report back on the manners and habits of its inhabitants. Vanderbilt, Jr. described his social strata as distinctly unimpressed with the new money Hollywood types, explaining that the Newport/Fifth Avenue set “for the most part... lifts a snooty eyebrow and emits a robust chuckle when anyone brings up the topic of movieland society”.²⁵² He also offhandedly mentions family and associates of his in high society who have been cut off socially by hostesses for dating movie stars.

Vanderbilt picked up on the culture of overcompensation in social markers that defined the arrivistes of Hollywood, in everything from interior decorating to speech. He speculated that “[n]o doubt in the depths of the modest little homes from which most of them emanated, they had for years been ‘just folks’... Hollywood and its hillbillies are a great deal grander” than they had been back East.²⁵³ Vanderbilt frankly decried how “[t]he cheapness, the flimsiness, the gaudiness, the racket of the Hollywood social game paramounds anything anywhere else in the land”.²⁵⁴ Vanderbilt ended his piece suggesting that if new Hollywood people had real social training in the East, they would stop overdoing everything from makeup and what they perceived as posh accents to alcohol consumption:

The heavy goo and over-made-up cheeks will be more normal... They’ll talk in less harsh accents... and neither will strain the Oxonian which some Hollywood linguist has

²⁵⁰ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 241.

²⁵¹ Budd Schulberg, *Moving Pictures: Memories of a Hollywood Prince* (New York: Stein and Day, 1981); Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 62.

²⁵² Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr. “Why Fifth Avenue Laughs at Hollywood Society”. *Photoplay*. In Martin Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* (Westminster, Arbor House, 1970), 120.

²⁵³ *Ibid.* 121.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 200.

told them is the way the Four Hundred speak... They'll be ashamed at their own knowledge of how to drink, and how much.²⁵⁵

Numerous actress memoirs corroborated Vanderbilt's view of vulgar arriviste culture in young Hollywood. In her memoir *A Life on Film* (1971), Mary Astor (who had been raised in the Midwest but with many high culture trappings) wrote that:

the aping of genteel society was comically incongruous... these people, whose lives were absorbed by artifice and performance, really didn't know how to socialise except by entertaining- literally.²⁵⁶

Eventually, it seemed Vanderbilt's advice was, partially, taken to heart. In Paul Zollo's oral history *Hollywood Remembered* (2011), producer Leland Hayward's daughter Brooke (also a Hollywood memoirist) recalled of her father:

...he was raised a gentleman on the East Coast, he was a dark-suit-and-tie kind of guy, and nobody else in the film industry was. Generally speaking, the film industry was run by people that were recent immigrants who had not had that kind of upbringing. Leland would go around to their offices in a suit and tie, and they decided that he had class. There was a certain emulation.²⁵⁷

Another way truly upper-class people would mock Hollywood's new elite would be for what they perceived as their poor manners and vulgarity, in blurring social affairs with moneymaking affairs. The constant mixing of business and pleasure occurred to nearly absurd degrees, a phenomenon Powdermaker remarked upon extensively from an anthropological perspective in *The Dream Factory*. Or it would perhaps be more accurate to say that the Hollywood milieu, not knowing how to have "fun", made "fun" itself into work. Joan Fontaine wrote in her memoir *No Bed of Roses* (1978) that all Hollywood parties were written off as business expenses. Therefore, "[a]s a guest entered a Beverly Hills house, he was obliged to sign in before having the first cocktail".²⁵⁸ Bette Davis has been specifically known in writing and in interview, especially later in life, for her caustic wit, but she should also be known for having an excellent eye for class issues and applying said wit thusly. In her 1962 memoir *The Lonely Life*, Davis quipped that:

Most of Hollywood who decorate their houses like Scottish shooting boxes and sent the ladies off to the powder room while the gentlemen stayed at the table sipping brandy didn't know a credenza from an arpeggio.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Mary Astor, *A Life on Film* (New York, Delacorte, 1971), 251.

²⁵⁷ Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 296.

²⁵⁸ Joan Fontaine *No Bed of Roses: An Autobiography* (New York: Morrow, 1978) 148.

²⁵⁹ Davis, *The Lonely Life* 156.

With a close reading of primary sources,²⁶⁰ however, it is unsurprising that Davis would have been one of the sharpest actresses on class. She was intelligent, well-educated, passionate, and with a very keen sense of herself and the various facets of her identity. Davis' self-aware class actor status will be gone into in more depth in Chapter Four, where she is also situated as one of the loudest dissidents on labour issues. Joan Fontaine, too, spoke of being an educated woman in the Hollywood social scene that "[i]f you'd read a book, traveled, could discuss anything other than movies, it was best to keep quiet".²⁶¹ Her perspective, along with Astor and Davis', all added colourful anecdotal bolstering to Veblen's theoretical concepts of conspicuous consumption and the parvenu.

The most ostentatious tool for the manufacture of glamour in the Hollywood milieu was clothing. Just as actresses were responsible for their own makeup until departments standardised, actresses were expected to provide their own clothes. This was the standard until the later 1920s, when wardrobe departments became the norm. Economically speaking, this wardrobe was a massive and gendered hardship, and different actresses tried to negotiate it in different ways. Joan Crawford explained in her memoir that as she was spending too much in other areas, she would try to make her own clothes-- and hope that in her "extreme" draping of chiffon or satin that she would be imitated.²⁶² Patsy Ruth Miller had to resort to renting beautiful and suitable clothes, which swallowed up her entire fifty dollar a week salary.²⁶³ Others took the dramatic but risky strategy of buying massively expensive wardrobes as the lifeline to their careers. Hedda Hopper took her entire salary of five thousand dollars for *Virtuous Wives* (1918) and spent it on society lady-level couture. She then upstaged the leading lady of the film, and was in continual demand for society matron parts thereafter.²⁶⁴ Gloria Swanson, too, deliberately moved away from the cupid's bow flapper look to an orientalist sensual aesthetic, complete with turbans and robes.²⁶⁵ Her star image was then increasingly constructed around her clothes and how she wore them.

Swanson is an excellent cultural figure to close on this point, and not only for her meta-status on these exact themes, as an aging silent star who played the most famous, mad, silent star of all. Kenneth Anger quoted Swanson (who, as an aside, became a bitter archenemy of his for the way he wrote about her in *Hollywood Babylon* and their subsequent mutual antipathy)²⁶⁶ as saying:

Oh, the parties we used to have!... In those days the public wanted us to live like kings and queens. So we did- and why not? We were in love with life. We were making more

²⁶⁰ Davis, *The Lonely Life*; Sunflower4morning. "Bette Davis on The Dick Cavett Show- Complete." Online video clip. YouTube. November 20, 2019. Accessed December 16, 2019; Whitney Stine with Bette Davis. *Mother Goddam: The Story of the Career of Bette Davis* (New York, Allen, 1975).

²⁶¹ Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses* 133.

²⁶² Crawford and Kesner Ardmore, *A Portrait of Joan* 33.

²⁶³ Miller, *My Hollywood* 39.

²⁶⁴ Jennifer Frost. *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood: Celebrity Gossip and American Conservatism*. (New York, New York UP, 2011) 11.

²⁶⁵ *Hollywood*. "Trick of the Light- Episode 11." Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

²⁶⁶ Anne Helen Petersen, "What To Do With A Coffin Full of Sugar: Gloria Swanson, Kenneth Anger, and Self-Authorship in the Star Collection." *The Moving Image* 13, no. 2 (2013): 81-98.

money than we ever dreamed existed and there was no reason to believe it would ever stop.²⁶⁷

A useful way to think about the Hollywood women of the 1920s and to resolve the “luxury problem” at hand can be borrowed from some unexpected social satirists, one dead, one living. New York luminary turned 1930s Hollywood screenwriter Dorothy Parker declared of life as a creative in Los Angeles, “Hollywood money isn’t money. It’s congealed snow, it melts in your hand, and there you are”.²⁶⁸ In 2004, comedian and social satirist Chris Rock performed a famous stand-up special in which he delineated the difference between being rich and being wealthy in American culture. Making his points along racial lines that I would assert work equally well intersectionally in terms of gender, Rock brilliantly riffed of the NBA, with obvious parallels to Hollywood:

I’m not talking about rich, I’m talking about wealth.... Well, what’s the difference? Shaq [NBA basketball star Shaquille O’Neal] is rich. The white man that signs his check is wealthy... Wealth is passed down from generation to generation. You can’t get rid of wealth.²⁶⁹

No doubt Rock didn’t have the stars of silent Hollywood in mind when writing this stand-up act-- but he could have.

Passing through the 1920s, we must contend with the gendered casualties of the system, in the form of mistreated women extras and overburdened women stars. Yet there is also space to briefly consider some of the converse labour successes, women stars who did battle for autonomy and voice within the system. In this chapter, we have bounced from Mary Pickford as young, degraded theatre actress in films to Pickford the womanly, class-shifting aristocrat. But what about Pickford as both global superpower and businesswoman extraordinaire? As her popularity soared with the public and demand reached beyond all previous expectations, her salary jumped to as high as 10,000 dollars a week. Zukor charged distributors more and more for her films. They paid it, and began to build the movie palaces. Zukor and the executives had to carefully try to manipulate publicity to maintain Pickford’s image as “America’s Sweetheart” while the economic realities of what stardom was becoming were so shocking. As one 1916 *Motion Picture Weekly* article declared, “[w]hen a girl is only twenty-three... yet receiving a weekly salary that is the equivalent of two and hundred and fifty working girls’ wages, there is need of an explanation”.²⁷⁰ The previous quote sounds like a recipe for a despised public figure. And yet the publicity gambits worked. For fifteen of the first twenty years of *Photoplay*, Pickford was voted the number one most beloved star by the public. Really, Pickford pulled off an impossible task-- seen as America’s Sweetheart, a brilliant businesswoman, and a supporter of

²⁶⁷ Anger, *Hollywood Babylon* 71.

²⁶⁸ Marion Capron. “An Interview With Dorothy Parker.” In *The Critical Waltz: Essays on the Work of Dorothy Parker*. Ed. Rhonda S. Pettit. Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson, 2005. Print.

²⁶⁹ *Chris Rock: Never Scared*. Director Joel Gallen. 2004. HBO.

²⁷⁰ Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI Pub., 1998) 48.

women's rights, without being lambasted for the perceived discrepancies between the three roles.

When the idea of a star system emerged, it had been opposed by the businessmen forming the industry, for numerous reasons.²⁷¹ Both Edison and the new Independents resisted billing for actors in the early days. The star system was the opposite of a good Fordist business practice. As Mark Garrett Cooper has explained of Universal's driving concept, everything should be modeled on business efficiency. Directors were chosen from daily or hourly call sheets as to who was available, not style, genre, or expertise. In terms of actors, Universal's philosophy was the same: a role should be filled by whomever was available, as the central (or only) consideration. To the studio apparatus, it should make no difference if an actress played a lead role in one film and a maid in the next.²⁷²

In Gene Gauntier's 1929 "Blazing the Trail", a retrospective article of her star days in the 1910s, she described her time with the Kalem Company. Even though she and her company had made the businessmen at the top of the corporate structure millionaires:

[n]ow we learned among other disconcerting facts that *From the Manger to the Cross* was to be distributed without our names. The Kalem Company alone would profit by our work. No credit to the players would be given on film or in publicity.²⁷³

The only thing that saved the early performers of this era from not receiving any recognition at all or making minimum wages was the public. Charisma was something ephemeral, something that resisted capitalism and the wishes of management. Even in the years of Edison's Trust, it was unavoidable to accept that some names brought in more people than others. Little by little, both the Trust and the Independents stopped resisting star billing- to a limited degree.²⁷⁴

One could say that Adolph Zukor broke the stalemate and turned the tide towards stardom for good in his relationship with Mary Pickford. Zukor was an outlier as a studio boss-- he was gentlemanly and cultured, and kept New York facilities much longer than the other studios. For him, New York would remain the centre of arts, culture, and theatre, and he enjoyed collaborating with writers and theatrical people on films. As Neal Gabler explained, "[t]o Zukor, with his acute sensitivity to caste, California would always be somewhat abject, a 'factory'".²⁷⁵ Zukor also famously treated Pickford with respect, such that they had an excellent, almost familial relationship. Not only did Zukor not resist the star system out of greed or rigidity like some of the other producers, he actually welcomed it, and for class reasons. Zukor thought that the star system would be the defining factor in reaching his goal of getting the "slum tradition" out of films.²⁷⁶ Zukor had recruited Pickford and her

²⁷¹ Pickford, *Sunshine and Shadow*; de Cordova, *Picture Personalities*; Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*; Cooper, *Universal Women*.

²⁷² Mark Garrett Cooper, *Universal Women*.

²⁷³ Gene Gauntier, "Blazing the Trail." *Women's Home Companion* 9 Oct. 1929.

²⁷⁴ John Ellis. "Stars as Cinematic Phenomenon." *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*. Ed. Jeremy G. Butler. (Detroit, Wayne State UP, 1991) 303.

²⁷⁵ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 202.

²⁷⁶ Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!*

mother by predicting that the star system of film would surpass that of theatre, where Pickford was then a working actress.

Carl Laemmle had been the first to demonstrate that immigrant founders' conceptions of what the new film industry should and could be would, in turn, be informed by the working-class immigrant's understanding of class. The nickelodeons, in which almost every future studio founder had started out in ownership, had a simply seedy reputation. They were associated with the poor health of the slums, supposedly filled with bad air, fire hazards, and immigrant children truant from school. As David Thomson has remarked, "[t]he old terms of abuse- 'the bug hutch', 'the fleapit'- denoted how much of a class war hung over movies".²⁷⁷ Wanting to get away from both Edison's technological novelties and the low reputation of the nickelodeon, as well as to bring in prestige audiences for the first time, Laemmle in 1909 produced *Hiawatha*, based on a Longfellow poem and in an attempt at highbrow fare. Laemmle explained, "[y]ou can bet it's classy, or I wouldn't make it my first release".²⁷⁸ A Paramount ad from December 10, 1915 printed in the *Denver Post* asserted to the public that "Paramount Pictures are shown by the better class theatres throughout the country".²⁷⁹

Zukor had continued on in this "classing up" tradition, as Paramount began filming Shakespeare and Bible stories for "the public good". The idea was cemented in both the contemporary day and in film history that Hollywood movies gave civics lessons, that they "taught audiences, especially newly arrived immigrants, what it meant to dress, to think, and to act like a member of a particular class".²⁸⁰ This was all part of what Miriam Bratu Hansen has called Hollywood's democratising mythologising of itself as putting Americanness on screen.²⁸¹ This strategy and relationship would definitely be part of the time and activities Barry King had in mind when he wrote in *Taking Fame to Market* (2014) that "[i]n the period from 1910 to the early 1920s, the film business underwent a process of embourgeoisement, adding an aura of 'class'".²⁸²

Zukor may have been acutely sensitive to class issues in comparison with his filmic peers, but the hard-nosed realities of finances and exploitation were at the true centre of the industry. Early in the film days, Pickford's mother overheard two executives on the lot having a conversation about block booking: that "as long as we have Mary on the program, we can wrap everything around her neck".²⁸³ That was when she realised her daughter's power and told her to be tougher in negotiating-- that in fact the whole new system was resting upon her.²⁸⁴ As a result, in 1916 Pickford's negotiated contract included not only a 10,000 dollar a week salary, but 300,000 dollar signing bonus, a

²⁷⁷ Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 124.

²⁷⁸ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 62.

²⁷⁹ Abel, *Menus for Movieland* 57.

²⁸⁰ Ross, *Working Class Hollywood* xiii.

²⁸¹ Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1991).

²⁸² King, *Taking Fame to Market* 105.

²⁸³ Tino Balio, *The American Film Industry* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1976) 158.

²⁸⁴ Pickford, *Sunshine and Shadow* 31.

staggering 50% of the profits of her films, and the creation of her own production company.²⁸⁵ By age 24, she was making a million dollars a year. I would argue that the primary reasons for Pickford's unprecedented financial success, as well as her eventual revolutionary role as producer and executive as a founder of United Artists, was her playing hardball with the male Hollywood establishment and absolute insistence on being paid commensurate to success and profits.

At the same time founders were trying to add the façade of upper-class life to filmic culture to sell tickets, some of the performers were dealing in real class and labour issues. Pickford, for one, demonstrated numerous examples of solidarity with the working class and even with progressive, leftist labour politics. She spearheaded the founding of the Motion Picture Home for actors in need with money that had been raised for the war effort and became surplus. After her initiative, 200,000 dollars more were raised amongst others in Hollywood, and eventually a campaign was enacted for employees to donate one half of one percent of their salary to the Home.²⁸⁶ This was both a major initiative and quite a massive success for a single star actress-- especially considering that the Home still exists today.

Even more radically, Pickford and her husband and friends (Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, and Edwin S. Porter) founded United Artists in 1919. The four superstars took a decidedly capitalist-critical view towards Hollywood's ongoing formation. With UA, the creative producers were able to do an end run around the power of the capitalist financiers. Pickford and Chaplin were both from equally poor show people backgrounds and desperate to hold on to their money. Tino Balio has in fact called them "the first among their ranks to perceive the economic implications of stardom".²⁸⁷ As the businessmen were standardising the business, performers like Pickford and Chaplin viewed such capitalist ascendance as a plot against the artists. They subsequently felt that they had no choice but to act to protect their interests. The danger they posed to the Fordist masculinist-capitalist system was encapsulated in the famous 1919 quote by panicked studio executives upon the official opening of their company: "[t]he asylum is now in the hands of the maniacs".²⁸⁸ While the founders of UA weren't able to change Hollywood's direction back to its bohemian experimental days, it was a watershed moment that can be instructive in directing a post-Time's Up politique of the present. We can read the founding of United Artists as a rare win for a leftist collective of its day, controlled by employees and with roots in working-class and feminist advocacy.

Other women stars of the 1920s then followed Pickford's path of exploitation-defying financial autonomy and self-directed production companies. Patsy Ruth Miller recalled watching her mentor Nazimova up close in the business in the 1920s, as one of the first stars to put her own money into

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Moore, *Silent Star* 166.

²⁸⁷ Balio, *The American Film Industry* 154.

²⁸⁸ Pickford, *Sunshine and Shadow* 115.

production.²⁸⁹ Gloria Swanson, too, was a businesswoman. She bought screenplays and ultimately opted out of a million-dollar contract with Paramount in favour of more freedom with UA. Swanson described a battle with the MPPDA over the adaptation of *Rain*, of which she was not only to be star but producer, in decidedly feminist terms. When the MPDDA insisted on communicating with her male co-producers, an angry Swanson declared:

“I’m going to reply to them,” I said, “even if they didn’t have the courtesy to address their protest to me.” The two of them [Schenck and Walsh] sat mute because they could tell from the tone of my voice that I was furious. “I’m producing this picture,” I continued. “I talked Will Hays into saying it was all right. I paid sixty thousand dollars for the rights. So why are they sending their telegrams and letters to you, Mr. Schenck? I’ll tell you why. Because I’m a woman. They refuse to recognize me as a producer. They expect you to handle me like a silly, temperamental star. Well, I’m not going to let them get away with it!”²⁹⁰

What we see from this anecdote is a system that inherently could not relate to women as either equals or even lesser peers in its business practices, no matter how wealthy, well-known, or successful they were.

Colleen Moore was another star of the era who managed to take control of her own finances, and also to write some remarkably astute things about the gendered nature of capitalism to boot. Part of Moore’s reputation as star was for her wealth and her dexterity with its management. She played up both in her memoir *Silent Star* (1968) and her financial self-help book *How Women Can Make Money in the Stock Market* (1969). Over the course of forty years, Moore had two husbands who were stockbrokers. She began to learn about finances when one husband scolded her for not being able to invest her own money, and gave her a personal finance course. In the book, Moore explicitly explained that her impetus in writing the latter book was that she wanted to guide women into this world of men. Its tone was a direct address to women readers: I am ordinary like you, I could learn about finances and so can you.

In her stock market advice book, Moore made a point that would square well with feminist materialists today. She argued that men of means, who have always had their affairs managed by female secretaries, have perpetually told women that they don’t understand business-- yet somehow it has been women who have been managing the home for centuries.²⁹¹ Moore’s point anticipated many of the arguments made by feminist economists and philosophers of economy like Silvia Federici in the 1990s and 2000s.²⁹² In her self-help book, Moore used metaphor and examples from “women’s spaces” like the supermarket.²⁹³ In both books she employed anecdote and humour, including long

²⁸⁹ Miller, *My Hollywood* 35.

²⁹⁰ In Petersen, *Scandals of Classic Hollywood* 86.

²⁹¹ Colleen Moore, *How Women Can Make Money in the Stock Market* (New York, Doubleday, 1969) 127.

²⁹² Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard. “A Materialist Feminism Is Possible.” *Feminist Review*. 4.1 (1980): 79-105; Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York, Autonomedia, 2004).

²⁹³ Moore, *How Women Can Make Money In the Stock Market* 129.

examples and digressions about life and work in the film industry. From the positions of both personal reflection and of economics, she alluded to how women had always been very much a part of the filmic economy. Connecting her understanding of the place of women in the Hollywood economy with the potential for all women to learn about finance, Moore also revealed a savvy understanding of herself as an economic entity. Pickford, Moore, and Swanson might be among the 1920s stars who could be grouped as actualised class actors. All three were notable for taking control of their finances and avoiding exploitation.

Perhaps no actress from the 1920s was more self-conscious regarding these issues than Louise Brooks. Her career trajectory moved from that of an actress under control of the Hollywood capitalist system, to that of an intelligent and independent woman who rebelled against and denounced that system. In these hybrid roles, Brooks can be well described (alongside other important primary source actresses in this project) with Michel-Rolph Trouillot's concept of the "doubly historical" person. Referring to the person who both lives a historical moment, and then goes on to write about and narrate it, Trouillot's concept has been specifically taken up by Jane Gaines to the same purposes as mine here-- to describe "that strange discursive position" in which the "actor becomes his or her own historian, so to speak".²⁹⁴ Brooks lived and died most of her post-Hollywood life in poverty, but she was nevertheless an extremely powerful example of a post-Hollywood class-conscious actor.

Brooks was also a consistent and fascinating documenter of the moments of class shift and cultural milieu of early Hollywood, especially along the lines of Veblen's parvenu aristocracy. She is a perfect figure of East Coast to West Coast migration and the showgirl to Hollywood archetype, all the while uniquely and completely aware of the education and class hierarchies at play. Going back to the western informality in manners and dress mentioned earlier in other first-person accounts, Brooks explained in her iconic 1982 memoir *Lulu in Hollywood*, "[w]hen I went to Hollywood in 1927, the girls were wearing lumpy sweaters and skirts. I was wearing sleek suits and half naked beaded gowns and piles and piles of furs".²⁹⁵

Brooks quickly found southern California *déclassé* and not just in terms of sartorial style, but for its lack of culture and education. As she explained to Jan Wahl as published in *Dear Stinkpot: Letters from Louise Brooks Or, My Education with Lulu* (2010), "you know then in 1925 when I went into pictures, I took it for granted that everybody read Proust and heard 'The Ring'".²⁹⁶ Again elsewhere she recalled that upon arrival in Hollywood, "I found myself looked upon as a literary wonder because I read books".²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Gaines, *Pink-Slipped* 66.

²⁹⁵ Louise Brooks, *Lulu in Hollywood* (New York, Knopf, 1982).

²⁹⁶ Jan Wahl and Louise Brooks. *Dear Stinkpot: Letters from Louise Brooks Or, My Education with Lulu*. (Albany, GA, BearManor Media, 2010) 161.

²⁹⁷ Brooks, *Lulu in Hollywood*.

Finding Hollywood to be a dreadfully stupid and anti-intellectual place, Brooks took on a deliberate strategy not just of subversive and wild rebellion in behaviour, but something quieter, wiser, and foreshadowing of her later life. Essentialist critics have tended to focus on her beauty, mystique, and rebelliousness, as a greater part of obsession with the sexiness of the *Lulu* persona. In real time in her own life, however, Brooks began to redirect in terms of Hollywood from being looked at to doing the looking, by way of observing and writing. This meant she became an ideal primary source to write on not only the destructive nature of Hollywood for women as she experienced it, but in observing some of her peers like Bow. As Amelie Hastie put it in her important chapter on Brooks (“Louise Brooks: Expert Witness”) in *Cupboards of Curiosity* (2007):

More important, while Brooks was fascinated by the demise of various actors of her era, especially of the culpability of Hollywood culture in this demise, she was also quite interested in how star images and personas were produced in the first place.²⁹⁸

For example, Brooks observed that “[i]t was Lillian Gish who most painfully imposed her picture knowledge and business acumen upon the producers”, saying that it left Gish “marked for destruction”.²⁹⁹

Other women presented in this thesis as first-person reporters recalled similar treatment as Brooks, Fontaine, or other educated actresses had. Anyone in Hollywood who acquired any reputation for being “intellectual” was considered eccentric at best and suspect at worst; in women, intellectualism was even more suspiciously regarded. Many of the women in their later-life accounts remarked upon the strain of being thinkers while working for men who hated reading and culture. Frederica Sagor Maas recalled Schulberg, with whom she had initially bonded as a fellow misplaced university graduate in Hollywood, asking her, “why did you ever come here to this godless, bookless place?”³⁰⁰ Patsy Ruth Miller recalled being brought to the Algonquin Round Table in New York on a trip East by the playwright Marc Connelly and listening silently. “I think Marc enjoyed presenting me as an oddity: a movie actress who not only could read, but had read”.³⁰¹ This was not a brief phenomenon of the 1920s, but a lasting feature.

In terms of viewing silent era actresses through the dual lenses of working-class status and the traumatised position, no 1920s actress is more relevant than Clara Bow.³⁰² Pickford may have been

²⁹⁸ Amelie Hastie, *Cupboards of Curiosity: Women, Recollection, and Film History* (Durham, Duke, 2007) 106.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 116.

³⁰⁰ Frederica Sagor Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim: A Writer in Early Hollywood* (Louisville, Kentucky, 2010) 27.

³⁰¹ Miller, *My Hollywood* 77.

³⁰² *Hollywood*. “End of an Era- Episode 13.” Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. *BBC*. London; David Stenn, *Clara Bow: Runnin' Wild* (New York, Doubleday, 1988); Kelly Kirshner, “The Trouble With Clara Bow: Electric Forces at Odds on Hollywood’s Early Sound Stages” *SCMS Toronto*. March 14, 2018. Conference paper.

the refined self-made millionaire and feminist of the 1910s into the early 1920s, but her appeal and fan base lasted over decades. The *ur*-star at the heart of the Roaring Twenties was Bow-- uneducated, extremely working-class, even lower-class in mannerism and affect, but possessing of a style and aesthetic that resonated with the moment. Bow was the first sex kitten, made by and for the studio men, always destined to be discarded when they deemed styles to have changed. As Maas viewed her, “[s]he was such a child- love-starved and over-sexed. Everybody took advantage of her as she climbed to stardom”.³⁰³ Brooks in her later-life writer incarnation wrote sympathetically about Bow in terms of her tenuous star status and its relationship to her lifelong mental health struggles:

...as soon as Schulberg lost interest in her, that of course was when she began to slip inside her own head. Because Clara really didn't exist. She didn't exist off the screen. She manufactured this whole person.³⁰⁴

In *American Beauty*, Lois Banner detailed that in feminine style archetypes, the Jazz Baby flapper of the 1920s was the polar opposite of the turn-of-the-century Gibson Girl, who was “tall, athletic, patrician”.³⁰⁵ Bow was the international face of this modern and new American type. The most notable thing about this class shift was that Bow was truly *of* the fan magazine reading class of girls, almost like one who rose up to become their queen. She had, after all, arrived in Hollywood, with no education, after winning a beauty pageant. She had also emerged from a very troubled family dynamic. As Brownlow's documentary explained, “Clara Bow came from the same background as most of her fans, and they could easily identify with her, and the way she behaved”.³⁰⁶ Bow indeed came from extreme poverty, indeed slum life, in Brooklyn, with mental illness, neglect, and abuse in her immediate family. There was no creating of a publicity package that pretended at a secret aristocratic lineage for this particular actress. Yet the more real she seemed, the more the public adored her-- for a time. When one returns as a modern viewer to a performance by Bow such as the one in *The Saturday Night Kid* (1929), in which she speaks lines in street vernacular like “All my life I never had nothin’”,³⁰⁷ there is an experience of them ringing true, a combination of poignancy, pathos, and conflation/slippage.

Moreover, Bow was an extreme marker of class tensions within the Hollywood community itself. In the tenuous community of parvenu aristocrat capitalists and doubled parvenu aristocrat stars, no one wanted to be around her. Brooks wrote in her later-life analysis of Bow that Bow wasn't socially acceptable, and she knew it.³⁰⁸ One can speculate that in her accent and manners, she reminded many in Hollywood too much of the Brooklyn from whence many of them had also escaped. These producers and “geniuses”, men, had started over as a cadre of super rich on a new coast,

³⁰³ Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* 75.

³⁰⁴ In Hastie, *Cupboards of Curiosity* 106.

³⁰⁵ Banner, *American Beauty* 5.

³⁰⁶ *Hollywood*. ‘In the Beginning- Episode 2.’ Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

³⁰⁷ *The Saturday Night Kid*. Dir. Edward Sutherland. Perf. Clara Bow, Jean Arthur, James Hall. 1929.

³⁰⁸ Louise Brooks, “Gish and Garbo.” *Sight and Sound* 28.1 (1958): n. pag.

whereas Bow was a particular reminder of their miserable, East Coast upbringings. Arriviste Hollywood spread rumours of her having orgies with the USC football team, of her possible diseases, and of her spending all her time gambling with her servants. Bow's fractured position within Hollywood was even incorporated into her image in the fan magazines, as in the 1929 *Photoplay* article "Empty-Hearted":

They yell at me to be dignified. But what are the dignified people like? The people who are held up as examples for me? They are snobs. Frightful snobs ... I'm a curiosity in Hollywood. I'm a big freak, because I'm myself!"³⁰⁹

Frederica Sagor Maas, who usually wrote quite sensitively, did not have kind words for Bow-- and she had been the screenwriter who helped make her a star with *The Plastic Age* (1925). The Ivy League-educated Maas gave her impression of Bow in some words quite revelatory of the class tensions surrounding the actress:

I was not terribly impressed with Clara Bow. She was just a stupid little girl who was fortunate enough to be picked out... She was brought up on doing anything she needed to do to get ahead, and that was her excitement, I guess... She was no actress.³¹⁰

Another actress who went on to be a decades-long icon and is generally more associated with the 1930s and 1940s fits here as a fascinating classed subject of the 1920s all the same-- Joan Crawford. Crawford's backstory, like Bow's, was one of lower-class trauma. She ended up in Hollywood from the chorus in New York like Brooks and Myrna Loy, but had begun life poor in Texas as Lucille LeSueur.

Crawford was honest about her lower-class roots and ignorance of good manners and clothing as a newcomer to the industry in her later-life memoir, *A Portrait of Joan* (1962). Crawford remembered the first time she reported to a theatrical agency:

The outer office was filled with pretty girls, all slim, chic, the most beautiful and attractively dressed girls I'd ever seen. And here I was in a cheap blue suit too tight at the seams, service-weight hose, a hole in my glove.³¹¹

Crawford told the anecdote of bursting into the theatrical agent's office and beginning to cry, confessing that she had less than two dollars, and swearing she couldn't possibly go home. The agents asked her when she had eaten last. Crawford recreated that real-life experience in 1933's *Dancing Lady* (whereupon one critic said it was overdone and rang false).³¹² Through these years, Crawford was a glorified bit player desperate to move up the ranks. She danced on a broken ankle in

³⁰⁹ Lois Shirley, "Empty-hearted." *Photoplay*, October 1929.

³¹⁰ In Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 57.

³¹¹ Crawford and Kesner Ardmore, *Portrait of Joan* 50.

³¹² *Ibid.* 51.

one scene so as not to be fired, and she contracted tonsillitis from “so much time posing in bathing suits on the windy back lot.”³¹³

In fact Crawford remains one of the earliest and most famous of the working-class superstars. She came from a troubled family background that had moved all around the American Southwest. Her childhood was marked by living in back rooms and already going to work. Eventually she began serving as a work-study student at a boarding school, which made her an outcast. As Crawford remembered in her autobiography *A Portrait of Joan* (1962), “[c]hildren can be cruel. They are certainly aware of class distinctions. The minute I started serving them at table it was a step down into the menial class”.³¹⁴ At some of her schools, she was so busy keeping house like a teenage indentured servant that she barely had time to actually attend classes with her peers. By the time Crawford got to college and was still a work-study student, such snobberies continued. She had a classmate who suggested she rush her sorority: “but her sorority sisters, like most girls, wouldn’t accept a ‘waitress’”.³¹⁵

First-person accounts remembering meeting Crawford in this period are honest to the point of scathing on the subject of class. Maas, as usual, was vivid and revealing as a writer (and not at all concerned with being diplomatic in writing her memoir at 101). More to the point, the anecdote she shared about the early Crawford doesn’t just paint a picture of what she perceived the young actress to be: according to Maas, “a gum-chewing tart from New York”.³¹⁶ It is one that is immensely revealing about the highly classed construction of the star as an entirely new person, the illusion of glamour and lies that it entailed, and what a woman had to do to even get a little bit ahead in Hollywood. Maas described a woman she did not like or admire at all, but who finally earned her rather awed respect in becoming a star through sheer herculean effort-- changing every single thing about her speech, body, dress, and manners.

Maas first met Crawford when she was asked to go along to the train station in a group of studio folk to greet the new starlet. She continued:

This one had been discovered and signed by Harry Rapf, who had picked her out of the chorus at the Winter Garden in New York... When the train pulled in, I couldn’t believe what I saw. My first thought was that the name LeSueur (pronounced ‘sewer’) was certainly applicable. She was a gum-chewing dame, heavily made up, skirts up to her belly button, wildly frizzed hair. An obvious strumpet. I was introduced. “You a writer, huh?” She looked me over, grey eyes cold and calculating.³¹⁷

In Maas’ description, one can almost start to see the transformative process happening on the part of the old Lucille determined to become the new Joan— the differentiation of two separate entities. (The

³¹³ Ibid. 26.

³¹⁴ Ibid. 44.

³¹⁵ Ibid. 46.

³¹⁶ Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* 61.

³¹⁷ Ibid. 71.

psychological doubling of the star as both affective mechanism and function of trauma is one that comes up commonly in primary sources of actresses, and will be revisited again in later chapters.) Maas continued on Crawford's transformation:

A week later, she looked me up. "They've given me a new name," she told me. "From now on, I'm gonna be Joan Crawford, see? Lucille LeSueur, I'm burying her. For good. I was thinkin' I oughta change-like and kinda live up to being Joan Crawford. Because Joan Crawford is gonna be a Hollywood star- that's why she came out here.... You're a writer, right?... I like the way you dress. You dress like a lady. I need that. I want to be dressed right. Smart. I figured you could help."³¹⁸

The anecdote ends with Maas agreeing to take Crawford shopping, and then describing the change in Crawford class and persona-wise forevermore. In Maas' perception, she watched LeSueur *become* the Joan Crawford construction:

Trying on the new clothes in the stores, the image in the mirror bespoke a new personality... Her head was high, her carriage straight and tall. She had class, even if it showed only in her wardrobe. She worked on the rest to suit her new clothes. She studied French. She studied diction. She went to dancing school. She read good books and used a dictionary. And she married men like Franchot Tone and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., who were educated and sophisticated and helped with the final polish. By the time she had become a real star, Joan Crawford had almost become a genuine lady, but not quite; her earlier leanings somehow always showed through.³¹⁹

Interestingly, the fan magazine publicity construction of Crawford did not obscure her lower-class origins, but rather remained obsessed with them and her quest to "better" herself. Crawford's publicity package included "[t]he story of how Joan worked as a slavey in a boarding school" as "well-known", for example.³²⁰ Crawford became something of a class cipher; mocked for social climbing among some of the better-educated and the Hollywood "elites", beloved by the fan girls who saw her as one of them, moving up in the world through self-improvement (just like the characters she portrayed). This "queen of the working girls" persona was dominant in the 1930s, and thus will be revisited in Chapter Four.

After her (*déclassé*) arrival in Hollywood, Crawford was in a new life in a new region of the country; yet many of the same class issues persisted for her. Whereas in other actress case studies throughout this project, I theorise the "fifty bucks a week" contract starlets as cheated and heavily exploited, Crawford described her first Hollywood salary at seventy-five dollars a week "a veritable fortune" for herself and her family. This was true, if "[c]ompared with the twelve dollars a week I'd earned behind the notions counter at Kline's Department Store in Kansas City, compared with the thirty-five a week dancing in a Schubert chorus line and doubling in a nightclub".³²¹ The sense of being

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ "Four Rules of Married Love- Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. to Dora Albert." In Martin Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* (Westminster, MD, Arbor House, 1970) 188.

³²¹ Ibid. 8.

an outsider and not fitting in in Hollywood, just as she had not in schools, comes through in Crawford's memoir, even written as it was when she was in her fifties. She wrote of her perception that all the other young starlets had either rich boyfriends or good mothers and good educations, while she was all alone. She described this state affairs as a huge part of her drive to succeed; unlike the rest of them, she wrote, "I had nothing to go back to".³²²

As David Thomson asserted, "in the class system that obtained at the studio... Joan Crawford... [was] from the wrong side of the tracks".³²³ The fan magazines loved to suggest that Mary Pickford and Fairbanks, Sr. disapproved of Crawford's marriage to Hollywood's "crown prince" Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., making the public love the very classed Hollywood Cinderella story of the Charleston Queen all the more. Unusually for some stars, Crawford's publicity addressed all this head-on, often in her own voice, as she continued to do in her memoirs:

... there were those who said I had married Douglas because I was trying to make it from chorus girl to lady... What did the hotcha girl think, some writers asked, that she was cultured?... In my Charleston days I'd been called the hey-hey girl. Now that I read serious literature I was called high-hat. When I fraternized with electricians on the set, they said I was posing, when I cultivated celebrities, a snob...

In my scheme of things, being a lady has never seemed as important as being a woman. What I mean by lady has nothing to do with which rung she stands on the social ladder. Lady indicates a woman of innate breeding. She's read and absorbed what she's read, she's cognizant of other people, she's kind to people regardless of situations or circumstances...³²⁴

Finally, at the end of the decade, a confluence of technological and sociocultural change shook up the system in a way that is well-known to not only film historians but to the general public: the arrival of sound and the end of the silent era. I would here briefly like to rehash that well-worn tale from a new perspective— from that of labour and class, but also, specifically as to what the silent to sound cataclysm did to women and their careers. In other words, how was the emergence of sound circa 1929 both classed and gendered?

It is a commonplace of film history that many people from the silent era, including its most well-known stars and "genius" directors, have rhapsodised about the pre-sound era as a moment of universal language: the perfect filmic art. Not only did they not see sound as a superior technology, they actually characterised it as an inferior one that shunted film into national categories and disrupted true feeling with banal dialogue. But from a perspective of class and social theory, the shift to sound was a death of a heterotopia of a sort, too. Voices and accents reclassified film to a major degree. Without voices and accents, who could tell who Clara Bow or Valentino really were? Who could tell

³²² Ibid. 17.

³²³ Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 226.

³²⁴ Crawford and Kesner Ardmore, *A Portrait of Joan* 73.

that Theda Bara was not a Middle Eastern femme fatale for the ages, but a middle-class Jewish girl from Cleveland, the daughter of a tailor?

Now with sound, everything in depended upon the retraining of a class-marked or accented voice to one of higher-class status. Without this, becoming a star was a non-starter. Women's voices in particular needed to be reshaped, regulated, and classed. Studies have shown that in misogynistic cultures, women's voices are often perceived as loud or grating.³²⁵ Thus a filmic moment of a beautiful woman being "unmasked" to have an ugly, lowbrow voice has been repeatedly played for comedy in Hollywood, but also for class anxiety in the genre of Hollywood's deconstruction of itself-- from the famous Lina Lamont as played by Jean Hagen in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) up to the more recent Scarlett Johansson as DeeAnna Moran in *Hail, Caesar!* (2016).³²⁶ One could even go so far as to say that sound was one of the facilitators of class in Hollywood. At times it was even also used as a tool of male corporate control, as when the studio heads and executives used the moment of sound to get rid of those they perceived as troublemakers.

Bow is a particularly strong example of the meeting of class and sound as the silent era was forced to a close. Her exuberance in silent film had overshadowed her lower-class status, but around 1929 it was clear that her Brooklyn accent would become a major liability. Bow confided to Louise Brooks how badly she felt Schulberg was treating her in making her feel horrible about her accent. On one occasion he sent Broadway turned Hollywood star Ruth Chatterton to Bow's house to teach her how to speak properly; Bow was so embarrassed that she ran out the back door.³²⁷ This fit in with a cultural moment in which Broadway and Shakespearean actors showed up to Los Angeles *en masse* to open up voice schools and teach the "poor little actors",³²⁸ in the words of Colleen Moore, how to talk.

Fan magazine discourse was open about the problems in Hollywood at the time, turning the techno-cultural shift into a moment of suspense. They described "mike panic"- the fear running through the Hollywood acting profession that one wouldn't make the cut and would lose their career in the new sound period. In *Photoplay*, Harry Lang characterised "Terrible Mike" as a malevolent genie causing "hell in movieland".³²⁹ In Brownlow's *Hollywood*, the *Variety* cover that simply read "Panic" and another cover that read "The Microphone- The Terror of the Studios" flash across the screen.³³⁰

³²⁵ Kelly Kirshner, "The Trouble With Clara Bow: Electric Forces at Odds on Hollywood's Early Sound Stages." SCMS Toronto. March 14, 2018. Conference paper.

³²⁶ *Singin' In the Rain*. Dirs. Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly. Perf. Gene Kelly, Donald O'Connor, Debbie Reynolds. 1952; *Hail, Caesar!* Dir. Ethan Coen and Joel Coen. Perf. Josh Brolin, George Clooney, Alden Ehrenreich, 2016.

³²⁷ *Hollywood*. "Star Treatment- Episode 12." Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

³²⁸ *Hollywood*. "End of an Era- Episode 13." Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

³²⁹ Kelly Kirshner, "The Trouble With Clara Bow: Electric Forces at Odds on Hollywood's Early Sound Stages." SCMS Toronto. March 14, 2018. Conference paper.

³³⁰ *Hollywood*. "End of An Era- Episode 13." Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

Mike was coded as a man in these pieces, and the battle to keep one's career a personal struggle-- would Terrible Mike, masculine critic and star-maker, like the actress' voice? Or not?³³¹

Bow was one performer who in particular was singled out for "mic fright", as Kelly Kirshner has written, because she was already considered unstable and unreliable.³³² But in a new interpretation and in the labour studies vein of this project-- perhaps the performers were scared because the new technology created more dangerous working conditions, and also more difficult ones? There was possibility of electric shock. The lights were now hotter, and actors' clothes needed to be changed every hour. Camerawork was by necessity clumsier. Sets had to be absolutely silent, so there could be no encouragement from the director in emoting, as had previously been standard. Numerous first-person accounts of actors from the silent era discussed missing the beautiful mood music of the chamber orchestra in the silent days that had helped them to perform.³³³ Everything in these changes was geared towards the technology, away from either optimal performance or even basic bodily safety of the actors.

But beyond just another change in technology in a technology-anchored industry, the move to sound became indicative of many of the worst of the values and business practices of the men running the system-- from monopoly capitalism and double-crossing to vulgarity and putative punishment. Brownlow noted that "[t]he leading producers agreed that for one year, none would adopt sound unless all did".³³⁴ All abided by this except for William Fox, who didn't care about any agreements and began equipping his theatres. The move to sound also reflected the overall lack of culture or tradition in the business and the inherent comfort with obsolescence of all kinds as capitalist money-making tool. As Robert Farmer wrote in a 2010 article about Louise Brooks:

From the moment sound arrived, it was commercially useful to dispel the magic of the silent film; they were derided in print and on the screen as ludicrous, technically inept and badly acted. Something merely to be laughed at.³³⁵

This is how the silent era became stupid, backward, and simian in popular imagination and in some film histories for decades, until it was revisited with proper scholarship and spectatorship as its own art.

Brooks echoed this connection between sound, vulgarity, power, and capitalism in her later-life writings in one of her most scathing critiques of the studio founders. In fact, Brooks felt that the producers, directors, and writers were the ones who couldn't handle the transition to sound, panicked and blamed the actors, and solidified a new narrative of Hollywood history in which they were,

³³¹ Kelly Kirshner, "The Trouble With Clara Bow: Electric Forces at Odds on Hollywood's Early Sound Stages."

³³² Ibid.

³³³ *Hollywood*. "End of An Era- Episode 13." Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Robert Farmer, "Lulu in Rochester: Louise Brooks and the Cinema Screen as Tabula Rasa." *Senses of Cinema* 55 (2010).

naturally, correct.³³⁶ She identified a system capitalist, dehumanised, and misogynistic to the core, in which people (but most especially women) were thrown away as disposable, and there were constant attempts to cut actors' salaries for no real reason other than greed. Without ever mentioning the work of Powdermaker, Brooks had precisely outlined her totalitarian system.

To conclude, in terms of the set-up of this system and how it created gendered class striations, a final, particular economic force frequently worked hand in hand with masculinist abuses from the financial to the sexual: supply and demand. In the case of this supply chain the product was not inanimate but, rather, women. In short, the men of early Hollywood managed to create an ingeniously diabolical capitalist structure of precarity and obsolescence; one that functioned to successfully stymie almost all attempts at either gender or labour solidarity. As with the pre-cinematic case study examples at the beginning of this chapter but put into hyperdrive with modernity, its unofficial slogan might have been, "if you won't do it, there's a hundred behind you who will"—whatever "it" was. Men had been making money off of women working in performance through the manipulation of supply and demand long before the Hollywood system. As Tracy Davis wrote in *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (1991):

In the 1860s, Clara Morris noted that advertisements for the ballet generated three applications whenever twenty were required, yet at the end of the century such advertisements inspired more responses than could be processed, and up to 200 actresses would apply for one minor part in a new drama. By the end of the century, actresses were chronically over supplied.³³⁷

This phenomenon exacerbated exponentially in the new film industry. As Steven Ross has posited on young Hollywood (in an ungendered context), "[s]trike action was doomed to failure simply because for every extra refusing to work, there were many more happy for the chance of employment".³³⁸ Adding sex, body work, and personal boundaries of women into this mix made it something else again, and far more insidious.

It seems this gendered and embodied application of the concept of supply and demand can be applied as one of the central fulcrums of the abuses of the whole system. I would offer an anecdote by Mary Pickford in *Sunshine and Shadow* as what might be considered *the* industrial abuse origin story for women in Hollywood. The fact that she chose to share it is also telling as to the shifts of the business even at such an early stage. As early as 1912, the actresses of the Biograph company staged a de facto strike in solidarity with one another that they would not take parts where Griffith forced them to display bare legs and feet. Griffith produced yet such another demand, and the actresses kept to their principles. In retaliation, he gave the part in question, and another great one, to a "newcomer" (read: a shopgirl), Mae Marsh- who *was* willing to do what the others weren't. Pickford

³³⁶ Louise Brooks, "Gish and Garbo", *Sight and Sound* 28.1 (1958) 86.

³³⁷ Davis, *Actresses as Working Women* 12.

³³⁸ Ross, *Working Class Hollywood* 25.

continued:

Everybody was thunderstruck. Only a short while before Miss Marsh had given up a job at the lining counter of Bullock's Department Store and had come without any previous training in the theater to Biograph.³³⁹

This is a striking example of female solidarity broken by the male in power's sexual exploitation and manipulation. And this is how men defeated women in the Hollywood system for a century, full stop. If one-- or many-- would not sexualise themselves, the men in charge would simply find a woman who would. And what's more, that woman would do what the actresses wouldn't because she would likely be not just younger, more untrained, and amateur, but more working-class and thus more precarious or desperate than those already working in performance.

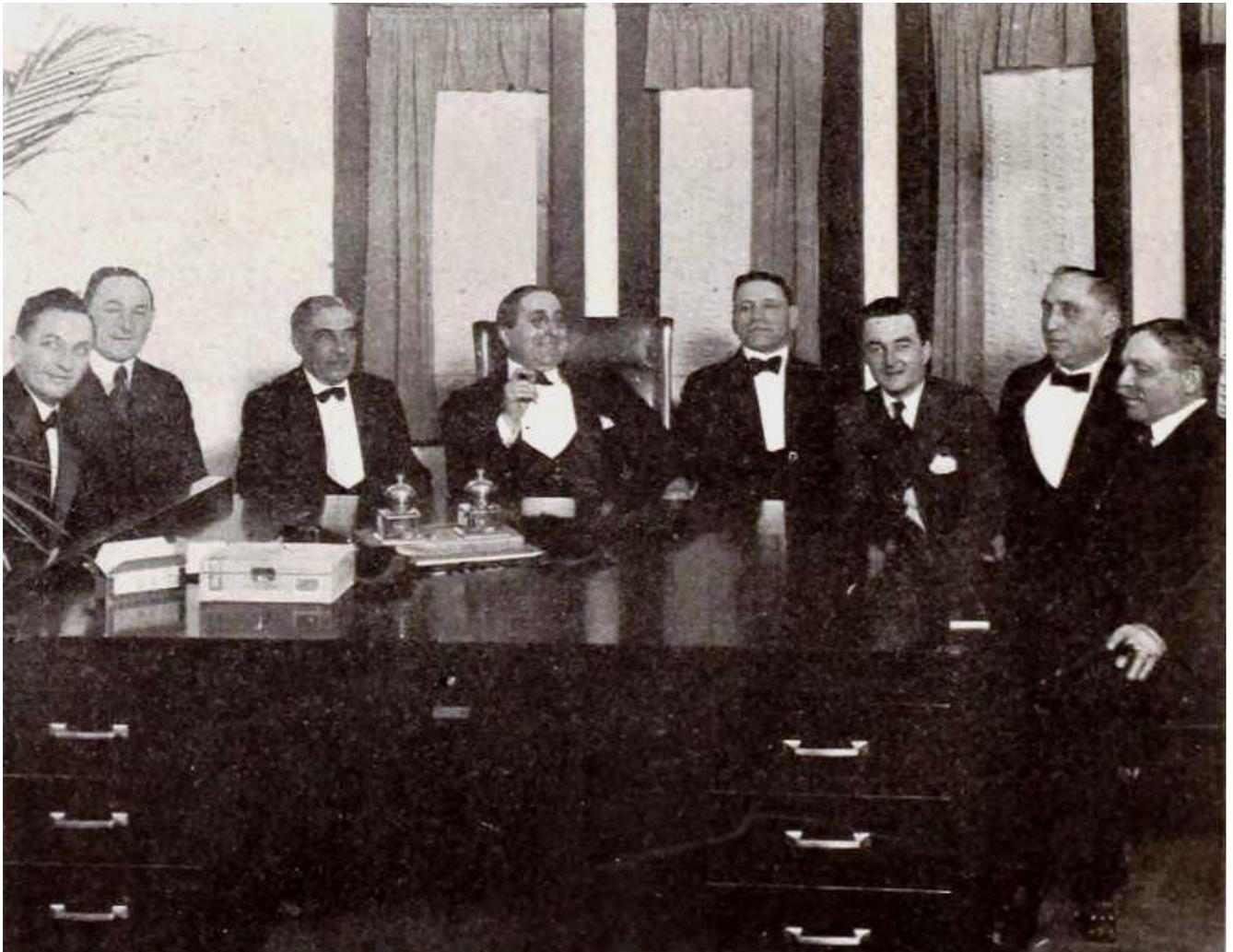
Pickford's reaction to these events demonstrated a familiar ambivalence about choosing to stay or go in terms of a Hollywood career. The same ambivalence-- uncertainty as to how to negotiate, combat, or acquiesce, and when-- can be found in first-person accounts of Hollywood women for decades and up to the present. The anecdote also revealed another dilemma: whether women in Hollywood would choose to help one another or to see one another as enemies. After all, Marsh, in terms of the female body economy of early film, can be read as something of a scab in this scenario. Her choice to break the solidarity of the women's group destroyed their collective bargaining power. But Pickford also conceded that in the end, Marsh gave a beautiful performance, and all the women congratulated her. Pickford recalled in her memoir that she had declared at the time that if a clerk or a trained actress could do the same thing as a trained theatre star in films and it made no difference, she wished to return to the theatre.³⁴⁰ Yet she never did. She stayed in Hollywood film and became the biggest star in the history of cinema, indeed the highest-paid woman ever when adjusted for inflation. So there was no satisfactory conclusion to this story; only the eerie sense that this, in the 1910s, already got very close to the heart of the whole matter. The next chapter of this project will move away from the women workers of the system to a psychosocial look at the men who created it. It will connect their values and personas to their business practices, to help determine how some of the pernicious Hollywood abuses cemented in the high studio era and are still extant, needing to finally be toppled, even today and post-MeToo.

³³⁹ Pickford, *Sunshine and Shadow* 88.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Chapter 3:

The Power and the Glory: The Consolidation of Masculinist Capitalism in the Hollywood Studio System



Louis B. Mayer and guests in office, April 1920

@ Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain, Creator Michael Dean.

Women today might be able to support themselves, and to earn big salaries and hold high positions. But they are paid by men, and given positions by men, and it is to men that they have to look for

everything just as it has always been men who owned and run the world! It's said that this is a "woman's town" but it isn't! Men own the picture business, men produce the pictures, give our contracts [sic]. It is a man who hires the biggest woman star and a man who directs her work.

-Star Miriam Hopkins, *Motion Picture* magazine interview, 1937¹

This thesis is large-scale attempt to set up a theory of the actress in the history of Hollywood in relation to class. To this effect, Chapter One explored the paradox of class in American history and culture overall, revealing how the U.S.' unique proclivities in migratory and corporate cultures set up the conditions that allowed the Hollywood system to develop as it did. Chapter Two focused on the socioeconomic dimension of the early filmic milieu, demonstrating the rise of class-related confusions, conflicts, and contradictions of new Hollywood in the 1920s. These realities were complicated by their connection to the parallel rise of gender-based discrimination in the young studio system. This chapter will consider Hollywood's male power elite class at the height of their powers in the 1930s: who there were as individuals, how they were able to create the system they did, and what were its markers.

This chapter explores the continuation and solidification of the studio system in the 1930s, stressing its male-centred abusive structure and management. The chapter illustrates how this system was rooted in men's class structures, rules, and values, as informed by some broader cultural models and some specific to Hollywood. A central, though not exclusive, source for my analysis in this chapter is Hortense Powdermaker's anthropological study *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* (1950). Powdermaker undertook her study through ethnographic observation during a residency in Los Angeles from 1946-1947, during which she interviewed a wide representative sample of figures from the Hollywood community. Her interview subjects included people at all levels of the system, from studio heads, executives, and stars to working technicians and crew members.² Three chapters of the work are dedicated to actors and acting. Powdermaker considers stars, contract players sociologically in the hierarchy of the system, as yet another group that helps her to draw her ultimate conclusions about the values and problematics of such a highly unique milieu.³ One of her primary findings is that Hollywood is a system filled with economic and power disparity, that allowed for rampant exploitation and abuse.

Drawing on primary and secondary sources, this chapter will illustrate the ways in which the studio system solidified into a male-hierarchical structure, ensuring the prerogatives and impunity of top-level, male corporate executives. High finance capital, hierarchization of labour, and verticalisation of industrial practices cemented power structures that made exploitation— especially by gender--normative. In effect, these industrial practices amounted to an apparatus that enabled studio

¹ Martin Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* (Westminster, MD, Arbor House, 1970) 65.

² Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers* (Eastford, CT, Martino Fine Books, 2013).

³ Ibid.

executive men to live consequence-free, in relation to their treatment of workers— and especially, to their sexually abusive treatment of women workers. Male executives were offered repeated opportunities to succeed or even to fail upward, while women were often banished for the slightest infraction— talking back, asking for more money, refusing a role, not agreeing to sex with an executive, aging past their later twenties. Indeed as I will contend specifically with regard to actresses, gender abuses operated so as to set women up for permanent failure, both financially and personally, and ultimately to “disappear” (to give up and leave) or to “be disappeared” (to be cast out of the system).

As many scholars discussed in Chapter Two have already analysed, the success trajectories of Hollywood’s male capitalist class actually marked the end of women’s participation in key administrative and creative positions. The 1920s was indeed a key decade to examine in the history of Hollywood in terms of a system that seemed to begin with a chance at wild prosperity for all. “Overnight” Hollywood fortunes seemed to prove that new money was to be had for the taking, and that Hollywood’s “elites”— even women-- were destined for the good life. Yet as upcoming sections will demonstrate, flashy luxury items could be and often were fleeting; they are not where the real centres of power within the system are to be found at all.

Instead, an American film industry based on male-run management and financing realities of power and success clearly demonstrated the closing of Hollywood’s gender-egalitarian moment of the 1910s in favour of masculinist corporatism.⁴ The revisionist history of Hollywood of this period helps also suggests that any assumption of women’s stardom as equivalent to women’s success or power would be false. Women directors were grounded, women’s fortunes were spent and squandered on the required accoutrements of stardom, and all of this inequality was obscured behind the dual cudgels of glamour and publicity.

More specifically and as Chapter One demonstrated, corporate mechanisms of economic organisation based in Fordism, managerialism, and nepotism were formed in Hollywood towards the end of the 1910s and solidified into the 1920s into a status quo.⁵ With the Great Depression, the

⁴ Tino Balio, *The American Film Industry* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1976); Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (New York, Scribner, 1993); Janet Staiger, “The Labor-Force, Financing, and the Mode of Production”, in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. (London, Routledge, 2003) Karen Ward Mahar, *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2008); Mark Garrett Cooper, *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood* (Champaign, Illinois, 2010); Jennifer M. Bean, *Flickers of Desire: Movie Stars of the 1910s* (New Brunswick, Rutgers); Hilary A. Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood*. (Berkeley, California, 2013); Alicia Malone, *Backwards and in Heels: The Past, Present and Future of Women Working in Films* (Coral Gables, Mango, 2017); Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (Champaign, Illinois, 2018); Amber Tamblyn, *Era of Ignition: Coming of Age in a Time of Rage and Revolution* (New York, Penguin Random House, 2019).

⁵ Steven Ross, *Working Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America*. (Princeton, 1998); Anthony Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns: A History of Extras, Bit Players, and Stand-Ins*. (Oxford, Mississippi,

Hollywood system was tested by real global and national crisis for the first time. It quickly became clear that within Hollywood's authoritarian tendencies, those that Powdermaker defined as totalitarian-- despotism power structures, unfair practices and precarious labour conditions-- dominated. In this context, the fear of the many of being banished at any time was juxtaposed with the power of the few to erase people. It would be these practices, along with outright criminality, that would move to the forefront in the face of the Depression's potential for industrial, national, or global collapse. Historians like Steven Ross, Anthony Slide, and Vincent Brook have done comprehensive studies using qualitative data about Hollywood in the Depression.⁶ Anecdotally in *Hollywood Babylon*, Kenneth Anger waxed poetic that the Depression "brought out the worst in the Bitch Goddess: stars struck out at stars, directors inveighed against directors, front-office men trashed everyone in sight".⁷ Primary source accounts explicate how many stars and executives, like millions of others around the US, were completely wiped out in the stock market and left with nothing.⁸ A business built on capricious ups and downs, "the breaks", palace intrigues, and power jockeying became that much more precarious.

A great deal of film and cultural historians have traditionally dealt with Hollywood of the 1930s in terms of its output: distribution, exhibition, and cultural product. This could include anything from its relationship to exported American cultural values to spectators and escapism in economic crisis.⁹ I instead wish to focus on 1930s Hollywood as to how its labour relations and culture were reinforced or impacted by the events of the Depression, reinforcing the studio system as a culture built on cruelty and the utilisation of banishment for actors and, particularly, for actresses.¹⁰ Such a vantage point also allows a multilayered look at the class politics of Depression-era Hollywood, gendering them in new ways.

Once the Depression fully engulfed the U.S., a full three-quarters of the American population was in poverty.¹¹ The crisis raised alarming questions as to the stability of the entire American system, and gave the lie to numerous facets of American self-conceived identity-- from the Horatio Alger story to the myth of American exceptionalism. As writer John Corbin queried contemporaneously in 1933,

2012); Vincent Brook, *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles* (New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers, 2013).

⁶ Kieron Connolly, *Dark History of Hollywood: A Century of Greed, Corruption, and Scandal Behind the Movies* (London, Amber, 2014).

⁷ Kenneth Anger, *Hollywood Babylon* (New York, Penguin, 1985) 171.

⁸ Hedda Hopper and James Brough. *The Whole Truth and Nothing But* (Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1963).

⁹ Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (New York, Scribner, 1993); Lucy Fischer, *Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco, and the Female Form* (New York, Columbia, 2003); David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London, Routledge, 2003); Lucy Fischer, "City of Women: Busby Berkeley, Architecture, and Urban Space." *Cinema Journal* 49.4 (2010): 111-30.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Taylor, *Elizabeth Taylor; an Informal Memoir* (New York, Harper & Row, 1965); Gene Tierney and Mickey Herskowitz. *Self-Portrait* (New York, Wyden Books, 1979).

¹¹ Karen Sternheimer, *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream: Stardom and Social Mobility* (New York, Routledge, 2011) 72.

“[c]an a nation call itself free if it finds itself periodically on the verge of bankruptcy and starvation in the face of the fact that it possesses all the materials of the good life?”¹²

As disposable income evaporated, theatre and performance were, naturally, some of the hardest-hit sectors of the economy. In *Goodness Had Nothing to Do With It* (1959), Mae West recalled the situation in New York, before she left for Hollywood-- hotels and theatres 70% empty, millions owed in back rent, with no one having any money.¹³ Tino Balio has explained that the Depression really meant a wholesale collapse of many creative industries like the theatre.¹⁴ From highbrow Broadway to vaudeville road tours and humble tent shows, any type of performance company was likely reduced to poverty or closure. With capitalism on the verge of imminent collapse, some theatres even took IOUs or groceries as barter from patrons in lieu of cash.¹⁵

For a good deal of time, Hollywood and Los Angeles fared relatively better than the rest of the U.S. as the country sunk into ever more dire straits. With more than a little cynicism, the studios deliberately rebranded themselves as an “essential industry” on the level of manufacture or munitions, as well as one of the highest cultural import, in argument against paying higher taxes.¹⁶ At first, they continued on with record-breaking profits. In fact, Thomas Schatz has noted in *The Genius of the System* (1988) that the studio heads boasted of themselves as a-- if not the-- Depression-proof business, finding 1930 their most profitable year to date.¹⁷ Diana Serra Cary (Baby Peggy) spoke of her father losing the entire family fortune, as well as the ranch he had constructed in Wyoming, both built upon her childhood stardom. The family saw no choice but for Baby Peggy, a child, to return to work in Los Angeles to support them. As Serra Cary recalled, “[t]he only place we could go back to was Hollywood. It was the only place that was still functioning”.¹⁸

However, Hollywood proved not to be untouchable by the economic crisis after all, when the 55 million in profits generated in 1930 dried up to a shocking 6.5 million just one year later.¹⁹ The stock value of the entire American film industry plummeted from one billion dollars in 1920s money to under 200 million in just three years.²⁰ Those who were still prospering and not starving like the masses-- from old money families to new money elites-- lived in constant fear of populist revolt and violence. There was real danger of social collapse and mass uprising, and those select few Americans who remained wealthy were well aware of this fact. This included the new studio executives, who tried

¹² Ibid. 216.

¹³ Mae West, *Goodness Had Nothing To Do With It* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1959).

¹⁴ Balio, *Grand Design* 14.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995).

¹⁷ Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988) 61.

¹⁸ Chris Gardner, “The Last Living Silent Star: Child Actress Baby Peggy Made the Equivalent of \$14 Million a Movie and Lost It All”. *The Hollywood Reporter*. March 4, 2016.

¹⁹ Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System* 61.

²⁰ Ibid. 159.

to draw as little attention to their vast wealth, ethnicity, and outsider status as possible. The executives also promoted patriotism and boosterism extensively in their popular culture product of the period. As Karen Sternheimer explained in *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream* (2011), “[i]t is probably not an accident that the term ‘American Dream’ was coined in 1931 by historian James Truslow Adams just as the Great Depression might have caused many to doubt whether it was really possible to make it in America”.²¹

It was in this climate that both institutional media and the Hollywood machine began to appeal to ideals of community, civic responsibility, and common shared sacrifice. When first the East Coast theatre and then the studios on the West Coast began to deal with the stark realities of the Depression, they generally strategised to appeal to senses of patriotism and community. Much excellent research has been done on the cultural output of both Broadway and Hollywood in this period meant to forge national solidarity in the Depression. One might be reminded of the famous “Remember My Forgotten Man” sequence in *Gold Diggers of 1933* as an example of Hollywood’s Depression-era populism.²² Lucy Fischer’s analysis of these vectors of dance, women’s bodies, and national crisis is particularly incisive as to this aspect of the period.²³

While the studio heads tried to keep public attention off themselves as wealthy capitalists in bad times, the Hays Office also assisted with similar smoothing of class tensions with what they allowed to be seen on screen. Privately, moralist Catholic censors like Joseph Breen referred to the studio executive class as “simply a rotten bunch of vile people with no respect for anything beyond the making of money”.²⁴ But Breen also saw his mission as upholding morality-- which in his mind also integrally meant upholding American capitalism. This led to a contradictory response in which the censors disliked the executive class (for whom they essentially worked), but yet did not allow films that would denigrate them (or indeed, any captains of industry) in anti-capitalist terms. For example, Breen rejected any negative portrayals of “capitalists” or criticism of “the profit system”; in cases where the word might be used by a screenwriter as a pejorative, he would write back suggesting an apolitical word like “lunatic” be employed instead.²⁵ Breen and his cohort went so far as to openly reject stories featuring corrupt police or politicians, or even plots “in which lawyers, or doctors, or bankers, are indicated as a class”.²⁶ In fact, the Production Code expressly forbade any specific business to be criticised.²⁷

²¹ Ibid. 19.

²² *Gold Diggers of 1933*. Dir. Mervyn LeRoy. Perf. Warren William, Joan Blondell, Aline MacMahon. 1933.

²³ Lucy Fischer, "City of Women: Busby Berkeley, Architecture, and Urban Space." *Cinema Journal* 49.4 (2010): 111-30.

²⁴ Balio, *Grand Design* 53.

²⁵ Ibid. 37; 65.

²⁶ Ibid. 68.

²⁷ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 421.

It bears noting that such “good will” psychological ops, combined with earnest and constant propaganda through the mouthpiece of the fan magazines and publicity apparatus, succeeded. Martin Levin, author of *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* (1970) and child of Depression-era Los Angeles, wrote in the forward to his compilation that looking back as an adult, he didn’t understand why they hadn’t all gone down to the mansions of the stars and revolted or looted. After all, he and his fellow Angelenos were starving. Levin’s conclusion was that the American Dream mythologies surrounding the stars were so strong that they staved off chaos or any kind of revolutionary violence. He identified the fan magazines of the day as the highly effective, defensive mouthpiece of the industry.²⁸

This was all the more impressive a feat for the humble fan magazines when one considers their herculean task. As Richard de Cordova reminded in *Picture Personalities* (1990): paradoxically, the stars had to be sold as “normal folks”, even in spite of their huge, excessive houses during a period of such collective misery.²⁹ At the same time, the glamour apparatus and the 1920s idealisation of the fur coat and swimming pool star lifestyle somehow still required celebrating, because it was the engine that drove the studios’ profits. In order to manage this balancing act (and cynically, to protect themselves), the studios and their publicity apparatus began to push hard on the concept of patriotic consumerism.³⁰ In a remarkable twist of propaganda, the stars weren’t class traitors, living in obscene wealth while the country suffered. In fact and in keeping with the Depression billboard, “Spend Now and Keep Business Alive!”, they were heroes for keeping the economy going. In this tack, stars’ original working-class backgrounds were prominently featured. Common backgrounds made their wealth “democratic”, and the spectacle of consumption and leisure something worthy and aspirational. One such representative article was entitled “How Stars Spend Their Fortunes”. In it author Jan Vantol explained that stars were in fact circulating dollars back into the economy with their homes and servants, paying high levels of taxes, and donating extensively to charity.³¹ The more references in a fan magazine article to a star’s humble beginnings, or to how much they used their money to help others, the more recognizable the text is as one employed to play defense for the industry.

Another part of the studio publicity strategy was to ignore labour issues, instead centring the American film industry’s moral leadership and patriotism. To this end, William Fox was quoted ennobling Hollywood as “a distinctly American institution” because “movies breathe the spirit in which the country was founded, freedom and equality”.³² Within this schema, studio system workers, like stars, were charismatic, civic-minded, and doing their part for the community. It was emphatically

²⁸ Martin Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* (Westminster, MD, Arbor House, 1970).

²⁹ Richard de Cordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana, Illinois, 1990).

³⁰ Richard de Cordova, *Picture Personalities* (Urbana, Illinois, 1990).

³¹ Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines*.

³² Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* 120.

denied that stars or other Hollywood workers had any suspect anti-business, pro-labour activist views associated with activists or “reds”. Thus under patriotic consumerist ideologies sold to the public, the Depression was not a situation marked by systemic inequality and failure, but a series of personal and individual problems. Amazingly, ads in fan magazines thrived on this “personal problem” approach. More amazingly, the celebrity culture of glamour and luxury actually ramped *up* in this period as a result.³³

In fact and again, such approaches to deifying stars and luxury had everything to do with self-preservation-- and not on the part of the stars themselves, who as we know from their own first-person reportage in numerous primary sources had virtually no say in what the fan magazines attributed to them. Rather, these strategies were formulated out of the offices of the corporate, studio executive class, who had reason to fear many things-- the vengeful anger of the mob as the country suffered, or antisemitic violence, but also redistribution of wealth, unionising, and even their own employees. As right-wing Republicans nearly to a man, their championing of the American Dream and their putting forth of their star employees as its manifestation were based in business calculations.³⁴

To this point, the rightward tilt of corporate, executive-level Hollywood really cannot be understated, especially in understanding the relationship between management and workers throughout the Depression. This paradox, in which Hollywood is perennially perceived as a leftist and radically futurist “Hollyweird” because it employs creative workers, while its right-wing corporate class and their actual aims are ignored, was explored in Chapter One. Such a disparity-- and triumph of the obscuring of power ideologies-- became even more pronounced through the politics of the Depression. Viewed through this realistic lens, Hollywood was a Republican town. Many of the workers of the system might have voted Democratic, but those at the top with the money, and those clamoring to be in their good graces, voted Republican. Louis B. Mayer was the chair of the California Republican Party for a time, while gossip columnists like Hedda Hopper campaigned for Herbert Hoover and viciously attacked and red-baited those with whom they disagreed politically.³⁵ The Warner brothers were the most progressive of the studio heads in that they had supported FDR for a time, but they too eventually returned to right-wing Republican politics.³⁶ As Neal Gabler explained in *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (1986) of the Hollywood founder class in comparison with the majority of American Jews who had begun to move to the Democratic Party in the 1920s, they “never realigned, and most felt little real affinity with the forgotten men of the

³³ Sternheimer, *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream*; Kathryn Olmstead, *Right Out of California: The 1930s and the Big Business Roots of Modern Conservatism* (New York, The New Press, 2015).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Jennifer Frost, *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood: Celebrity Gossip and American Conservatism* (New York, 2011), 15.

³⁶ Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own. An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York, Crown, 1988).

Depression”.³⁷ Gabler felt that, psychologically, they instead saw themselves more as compatriots to the Hearsts and Morgans of the country.

In later discussion of Louis B. Mayer as a kind of totalitarian leader of the sort envisioned by Powdermaker, his lifelong obsession with MGM as a “family” becomes relevant. In reality, according to Richard Maltby, the studios were marked by “notoriously poor” labour relations.³⁸ Few workers would have felt part of any family. In a Marxist reading either at the time or in the present day, studios had accumulated all the wealth, while the workers had been shut out from the profits. Primary sources reveal numerous instances of employer abuse of the employee class at the studios on the financial level. In just one such example, screenwriter Frederika Sagor Maas recounted that she and her husband realised they had lost 10,000 dollars in the October 1929 crash after William Fox had “offered” (mandated) employees to invest at least twenty percent of their yearly salaries into Fox stocks.³⁹ In another instance, journalist and industry chronicler Ezra Goodman shared a telling anecdote about Jack Warner and Warner Brothers, in terms of the upper level of the studios versus its working class, in *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (1961):

...he was addressing a large gathering of studio workers, including laborers, grips, and technicians, on one of the sound stages, exhorting them to greater efforts on behalf of a Red Cross drive. Since most of the studio help had already made contributions and taken salary cuts, Warner did not have any ready answer as to how they should go about making further donations. Suddenly his face lit up. “You’ve just gotta do something,” he told the assembled studio workers. “Tighten your belts even more than you have. And, when you leave here, call your business managers immediately. They’ll help you find a way.”⁴⁰

Far from talk of studios as families and puff pieces pushing patriotic consumerism, the longstanding California reality (and one to which the studio heads had smoothly adapted) was a right-wing anti-unionism steeped in intimidation and violence. As mentioned in Chapter One and well-delineated by Vincent Brook, Steven Ross, and other historians, the American film industry and its anti-union outlook had cleverly situated itself from the East in a city and region already well-established in reactionary union suppression.⁴¹ As Gabler wrote of the culture of Southern California in the early twentieth century, “[u]nion-busting was a way of life there”.⁴² As consensus had formed in the 1920s as to what the new studio system might look like, Irving Thalberg at MGM had quipped,

³⁷ Ibid. 315.

³⁸ Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995) 125.

³⁹ Frederika Sagor Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim: A Writer in Early Hollywood* (Louisville, Kentucky, 2010) 180.

⁴⁰ Ezra Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1961) 180.

⁴¹ Vincent Brook, *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles* (New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers, 2013); Steven Ross, *Working Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America*. (Princeton, 1998).

⁴² Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 320.

“[p]lumbers may need unions... but not artists”.⁴³ Before unions took any sort of foothold or gained any power, Mayer was famous for forcing people to work on Sundays. It wasn’t illegal to do so at that point, and so he did.

In their anti-worker and anti-union crusades, the studio founder class acted less like East Coast outsiders in California and more like hardliners who fit in comfortably with the right-wing local culture. Writer Carey McWilliams documented labour clashes of the period in Los Angeles-adjacent Imperial County, ruled by wealthy, old-style ranchers, and the ominous climate found therein; upon visiting, he remarked that “violence is what one somehow expects from the place”.⁴⁴ In 1936, John Steinbeck, native Californian, prepared to write *The Grapes of Wrath* and commented that “[f]ascistic methods are more numerous, more powerfully applied, and more openly practiced in California than any other place in the United States”.⁴⁵

As the Depression worsened over a period of years, the studio bosses dug in on their conservative positions. Rather than banding together to bolster the working-class and poor of the state in the crisis of the Depression, the prevailing right-wing studio philosophy of the entire 1930s was simply re-entrenchment of already-calcified positions of greed combined with fear. In 1933, the studios enacted a 50% pay cut upon most of their employees. Historians have posited that their obduracy in refusing to meet their employees in the middle in such difficult times permanently damaged industrial relations in Hollywood. As Gabler explained, “the measures ultimately and irrevocably destroyed solidarity in Hollywood by demonstrating to the workers that they really had no choice in the matter”.⁴⁶

In taking such hardline positions, the studio heads had in fact brought about a backlash that led to the founding of real unions, the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and the Screenwriters Guild (SWG). It was the studios’ own overreach that led workers to view the 1920s AMPAS union as little more than an arm of the bosses themselves, and to seriously organise. In *Grand Design*, Tino Balio recounted a 1933 meeting famous in Hollywood labour history, in which Eddie Cantor as new president of SAG derided the Academy (MPPDA) as fraudulent, sham representation, and the studios’ behaviours as unconstitutional. 500 of the 800 actors there were said to have stood up and cheered his remarks, and the majority (including stars like James Cagney, Miriam Hopkins, Frederic March, Jeanette McDonald, and Paul Muni) signed on to his position.⁴⁷

Within this period and against the precarious backdrop of the Depression, a medium-warm war began between the executive studio class and the system’s workers. Will Hays ran a campaign in public that extolled labour relations in Hollywood as the best of any industry in the country. Behind the

⁴³ Ross, *Working Class Hollywood* 247.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 112.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁴⁶ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 321.

⁴⁷ Balio, *Grand Design* 153.

scenes, he and his army of spies were monitoring and retaliating against any actors with organising tendencies. This behind-the-scenes war turned hot when the nascent SAG began to air the industry's dirty laundry in public, both in the press and in taking complaints all the way to the Roosevelt cabinet and the National Recovery Administration. SAG filed a brief with the NRA that scathingly asserted that "Hollywood's code of ethics is the 'lowest of all industries'; and that 'every dishonest practice known to an industry... has been resorted to by the producers against the actors'".⁴⁸ A January 1935 *Variety* piece showed the union taking even more of a scorched earth approach in their report to the NRA, both reporting the salaries of the executives presently crying too poor to pay their employees, and issuing the following absolutely excoriating remarks on why they had chosen to do so:

...not to show how much money executives make, but to give some idea of how ill it becomes these gentlemen to protest that the industry cannot afford fair working conditions for actors. It is even worse when we remember that most of the men who now run the business and assert that actors' working conditions cannot be bettered, dragged the industry to the verge of bankruptcy, took their employees' money for the purchase of stock as excessive figures, and made a record of financial ruin that has seldom been equalled in the annals of American business.⁴⁹

Hays, Mayer, and all the rest once again had another weapon in their arsenal, however, the most powerful one in terms of success or failure in the movies: their own publicity branch and its highly successful manipulations of public opinion. Anne-Helen Petersen, particularly, has written extensively on the ideological apparatus of the Hollywood publicity system as moral regulating force for women in patriarchy; Adrienne McLean has also written on the disciplinary nature of the fan magazine for actresses.⁵⁰ While Petersen and others have done this work referring primarily to the regulation of the audience, I am more interested in the use of the publicity machine to cow and control the actresses themselves.

This control functioned in a very specific and highly effective way. Any worker in the system knew that if the studios turned on a star, they could create such a barrage of bad publicity that the public would likely do the same. In Depression-era politics, this meant the kiss of death for a misbehaving star was to be branded as "greedy", "selfish", or "ungrateful". To be portrayed as any of these in a time of national economic crisis was unforgivable, and worked excellently as career-ending gambit.

One of the clearest examples of such a negative public relations campaign could be found in the media coverage of the contract disputes of star Ann Dvorak in the 1930s. As her biographer

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 154.

⁵⁰ Anne Helen Petersen, *Scandals of Classic Hollywood: Sex, Deviance, and Drama from the Golden Age of American Cinema* (New York, Penguin, 2014); "The Cinderella Princess and the Instrument of Evil: Surveying the Limits of Female Transgression in Two Postwar Hollywood Scandals." *Cinema Journal* 34, no. 3 (1995): 36; Adrienne McLean and David Cook. *Headline Hollywood: A Century of Film Scandal* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2001).

Christina Rice has delineated, Dvorak is largely forgotten as a star today, something that has precisely a great deal to do with her contract disputes with Warner Brothers and unheard-of open critiques of the system. Dvorak spoke publicly about the studio heads as “slave drivers” who were driving her to exhaustion and physical collapse, publicly feuded with Warner, and walked out on films and contracts numerous times.⁵¹ All of this simply wasn’t done in the ironclad studio peak days of the 1930s, and even less so by actresses in comparison with male actors. Rice has situated Dvorak as someone who paved the way for the rebellions of later, bigger stars like Bette Davis and Olivia de Havilland just a few years later, but as someone who lost her career by being a few years ahead of her time.⁵² This seems like a supportable hypothesis, based on how brutally and deftly the fan magazine press was able to villainise Dvorak in the eyes of a hungry Depression-era public. It was easy to present a dissenting star like Dvorak as sulky and privileged, and to remind them in print that they should “remember their place”, when millions of impoverished Americans would love to have their job. Delight Evans of *Screenland* magazine was blunt in a two-page anti-Dvorak editorial entitled “Warning to Hollywood Girls!”: “[t]wo years ago or so you were just one of the hundreds of Hollywood strugglers... Ann Dvorak, you have not yet ‘arrived’”.⁵³ The editor of *Screen Book* was even more explicitly gatekeeping for the Hollywood superstructure in his editorial, “Watch Your Step, Ann Dvorak!”, when he wrote:

You, Ann Dvorak, are not yet important enough to get away with it. And when you are important enough, you won’t want to. The motion picture industry is bigger than you are. It can get along without you, but you can’t, excuse me, get along without it. Because no other profession in the world can give you so much.⁵⁴

The studio executives also took to the practice of prominently displaying the NRA “We Do Our Part” insignia on their films and materials, while painting stars as the greedy and unpatriotic parties in fan magazines pieces. These corporate efforts even saw studios plant phony “fan” letters in the magazines, in which a “fan” would tell a star who got involved in any kind of labour organising how disappointed they were in them for complaining about their salary in such hard times.⁵⁵

The 1932 California gubernatorial election was a watershed moment in the politics and labour positions of the studios, as well as for their confluence with right wing California. Novelist (and occasional screenwriter) Upton Sinclair ran a progressive populist campaign with the EPIC (End Poverty In California) movement. The organised backlash to Sinclair’s campaign was a startling blending of the old, violent impulses of the state’s Wild West culture with the new money, power, and commensurate antipathy to labour espoused by the studio executives. In *Right Out of California: The*

⁵¹ Christina Rice, *Ann Dvorak: Hollywood’s Forgotten Rebel* (Lexington, Kentucky, 2013).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* 126.

⁵⁴ Rice, *Ann Dvorak* 74.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

1930s and the Big Business Roots of Modern Conservatism (2015), Kathryn Olmsted has written incisively about the importance of this cultural moment in terms of both American and Hollywood history. Olmsted situated extreme agitation against the New Deal and labour as both born in California in these decades, and the progenitors of the Nixon-Reagan Republican Party that remains directly linked through to politics of the present day.⁵⁶

Sinclair was a writer, journalist, and adopted Californian known to the studios for submitting good work that they couldn't use due to its anti-capitalist messaging.⁵⁷ He had run for governor several times to oppose the mendacity and corruption of the closed cadre of wealthy white men maintaining absolute power over California state politics. In 1934 and in the midst of the Depression, however, Lewis' campaign became an electrified radical movement, and he had a real chance of winning and upending the entire system. As Olmsted has detailed, the politics of the state were extremely volatile in this moment, because of the same migratory realities detailed in Chapter One: "[a]s many as one-tenth to one-third of the voters in each election were new to the state".⁵⁸

Even though Lewis was not in fact a communist, corporations (from Sunkist to the studios) spun a massive public relations campaign into existence that he was a dangerous demagogue trying to turn California red.⁵⁹ The campaign threatened to move the film industry to Florida if Lewis won, and falsely claimed that part of his platform was the inviting of both Russian Bolsheviks *and* the nation's hobo population to settle in California for a life of ease.⁶⁰

Many might be surprised to learn that Time's Up-esque labour solidarity campaigns did exist in a radicalised 1930s Los Angeles, but have been largely forgotten as the big business capitalists and studio owners won the day. Olmsted has written of the Hollywood left's support for striking farmworkers of the time:

Many artists, writers, and Hollywood stars tried to assist the farmworkers and support their radical organizers. The poverty of the farm laborers contrasted so sharply with the artists' idealized vision of California- a land that should have been filled with sunshine and happiness- that they felt compelled to point out the contradiction.⁶¹

Business in California, filmic and non-, responded to its critics with tactics favoured by fascists to the present day: counter-assertions of victimisation, media manipulation, blacklists, vigilante mobs, lawyers, court cases, and injunctions. With so much power behind them, and the power of propaganda and smears, the capitalist class of California, alongside the fascists and the institutional media, did manage to defeat Lewis and EPIC and maintain their power. Within a decade, Richard

⁵⁶ Olmsted, *Right Out of California* 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 313.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 172.

⁶⁰ Gabler, *An Empire Of Their Own* 314.

⁶¹ Olmsted, *Right Out of California* 6.

Nixon would run his first campaign using many of the tactics successfully employed against Lewis, from redbaiting smears to consolidating big right-wing money, and win.⁶² In retrospect, this turn of events in California from the 1930s onward looks like a key moment in which the antisocial forces of right-wing power and male capital triumphed. It has had consequences for the structure of the Hollywood system, as well as local and national politics, to the present.

In *Aftershocks of the New* (2002), film historian Patrice Petro made note of the fact that scholars who have historiographically been interested in the fascism of the everyday have not written much about American film.⁶³ With a class approach to the workers in the American filmic system and a resurgence of the application of Powdermaker's findings, this need not remain the case. This project does both seek the totalitarian roots of Hollywood as originally identified by Powdermaker, and post-MeToo, to make space for a reckoning with the superstructure of violence and, indeed, fascism of the system.

This history in fact begins to set up a pattern of the studio system as not only masculinist-capitalist but as a system of oligopoly, one that had already learned to work well in concert with corrupt local officials. The 1930s as the decade of oligopoly in the Hollywood system (and the 1930s and 1940s as "mature oligopoly") has been well-theorised by a number of film scholars and critics for some time.⁶⁴ Such characterisation calls for a final return to the work of Thorstein Veblen here, and not only to reiterate how his findings on capitalism and the predatory habit apply so well to early studio Hollywood as industry. It is also worth looking in this chapter at Veblen's writings that spoke to the predatory habits of *men*; specifically, of predatory capitalism as part of dysfunctional *masculinity* that he theorised as dating back centuries.

It bears repeating that Veblen was composing his analyses as to the deep faults of masculinist capitalism and, specifically, American industry at the exact time the studio system was coalescing. While the nascent film industry was not specifically mentioned in his writings about various American business concerns, its new technologies and business practices were certainly firmly at the centre of the modern moment. Applying Veblen's theorisations to the Hollywood film industry retroactively, from our own vantage point in history, allows for much insight.

For example, in *The Instinct of Workmanship* (1914), Veblen wrote about lower, "savage" states of business and industry in which leaders and workers depend upon "magic"-- ritual, secret organisation, ceremony, and luck, among other things.⁶⁵ This jibes quite perfectly with Powdermaker's later analysis of Hollywood from the perspective of anthropologist, in which she was struck by an

⁶² Ibid., 232.

⁶³ Patrice Petro, *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2002).

⁶⁴ Cathy Klaprat, "The Star As Market Strategy: Bette Davis In Another Light", In *The American Film Industry*, Ed. Tino Balio, 351; Aubrey Malone, *Hollywood's Second Sex: The Treatment of Women in the Film Industry, 1900-1999* (Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2015) 45; Tino Balio, *The American Film Industry* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1976) 35; John Allen Scott, *On Hollywood: The Place, The Industry* (Princeton, 2005) 117.

⁶⁵ Thorstein Veblen, "The Savage State of the Industrial Arts", in *The Instinct of Workmanship* (1914).

industrial culture so particularly imbued with superstition and the totemic, animistic power of good luck, bad luck, and “the breaks”.⁶⁶ As Sholem Aleichem wrote of his fictional Jewish-American, turn of the century immigrants in his Yiddish theatre novel *Wandering Stars* (1911), with a mindset clearly recognisable in the next generation movie founder class:

America is a blessed land where anything can happen. A person can be raised on high and ensconced in heaven, or he can be sent right down into the underworld. A midpoint, a golden mean, did not exist.⁶⁷

In *Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America From the 1930s to the Present* (1983), cultural historian Anthony Heilbut explained how far more highbrow European intellectuals who landed in Los Angeles recognised these habits of thought and culture built around Americanism, and pitied their believers. They noted their self-help books and their clichés of the lucky break, the bad break, the comeback, the fresh start-- pervasive clichés in every conversation and every magazine story arc-- and felt that the American psyche was an earnest but dull one that lacked for a stable sense of self.⁶⁸

Veblen was particularly explicit throughout his life’s work as to his view of the inherently amoral nature of capitalism in its quest for dominance and power. His writings on the subject are thus uniquely valuable in the application of such a view to the study of nascent Hollywood. Writing in 1914, Veblen found American society to be in the commercial phase of the pecuniary culture that had built Western society. He described how force, conflict, and exercise of power” had embedded into every social structure therein,⁶⁹ and that “the men” in leadership roles, as part of succeeding in this system, “must be habituated to the infliction of injury by force and stratagem”.⁷⁰ Veblen detailed the cultural imperatives and group psychology that had already allowed the cult of American manhood to take hold and flourish. The norm of early twentieth century American upwardly mobile cultural life was to revel in orgiastic capitalism. Veblen by contrast, notable apostate among American economists, was critical of American capitalist modernity’s “sign[s] of masculine success... linked to obsession with ‘ownership’ and competition to gain things whether they are necessary or not”.⁷¹

With this, Veblen may be the most useful scholar of his times in contextualising the studio system via a post-MeToo reckoning: specifically, as to how it was able to develop into such a malevolent system for women and other disenfranchised workers in its employ. In his chapter “The

⁶⁶ Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers* (Eastford, CT, Martino Fine Books, 2013) 281-282.

⁶⁷ Sholem Aleichem, *Wandering Stars* (New York, Viking, 2009) 197.

⁶⁸ Anthony Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America From the 1930s to the Present* (Berkeley, California, 1983).

⁶⁹ Thorstein Veblen, “The Savage State of the Industrial Arts”, in *The Instinct of Workmanship* (1914).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 12.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, xvi.

Technology of the Predatory Culture” in *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts* (1914), Veblen wrote:

Freedom from scruple, from sympathy, honesty, and regard for life, may, within fairly wide limits, be said to further the success of the individual in the pecuniary culture. The highly successful men of all times have commonly been of this type; except those whose success has not been scored in terms of either wealth or power. It is only within narrow limits, and then only in the Pickwickian sense, that honesty is the best policy.⁷²

In other words, Veblen could not be further from taking a “few bad apples” position. Rather, he was a radical anti-capitalist for his own day and would be so even today, in his assertion that masculinist bad behaviour is inherently *required* to succeed in corporate business in the first place. As he wrote further in the text:

The traits which characterise the predatory and subsequent stages of culture, and which indicate the type of man best fitted to survive under the regime of status, are (in their primary expression) ferocity, self-seeking, clannishness, and disingenuousness- a free resort to force and fraud.⁷³

Veblen had no compunction about liberally peppering his analysis of capitalism with the word “predatory” as a matter of course or, going further, in openly discussing the inherently criminal characteristics of the “captain of industry”. In fact, he explained the point quite clearly: “[t]he large owners as a class are characterised by the successful businessman- ‘astute, prehensile, unscrupulous’”.⁷⁴

Veblen also sought the intrinsic pathological roots of such social structures back to the beginning of human civilisations. From rape, kidnapping, pillage, and plunder to modern practices of acquisition and fraud, Veblen surveyed all as one continuous (and impossibly to ignore, gendered) line. His chapter “The Barbarian Status of Women” is particularly applicable to the arguments and industry at hand. Using Veblen, the Hollywood film industry can be conceived as one built on not only criminal business practices of men against other men, but on the tradeable nature of women within it and thus their second-class status. Describing the ways in which patriarchy and capitalism work hand in glove, Veblen wrote:

The discipline of predatory life makes for an attitude of mastery on the part of the able-bodied men in all their relations with the weaker members of the group, and especially in their relations with the women. Men who are trained in predatory ways of life and modes of thinking come by habituation to apprehend this form of the relation between the sexes as good and beautiful.⁷⁵

⁷² Veblen, “The Technology of the Predatory Culture”, *Ibid.* 137.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 149.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 366.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, “The Barbarian Nature of Women”, 113.

Writing of the inherently predatory nature of the modern industrial executive, the following quote by Veblen is certainly evocative (especially in a post-MeToo analysis) of the nature of practices that would fall under the auspices of “the casting couch”, specifically, in entertainment industries:

The mature captain of industry is in the position of a toad ‘who has found his appointed place along some frequented run where many flies and spiders pass and re-pass on their way’.⁷⁶

Veblen saw the pathological nature of capitalism not just in its gendered predatory nature, but in such a nature resting, specifically, on class. He asserted that a predatory web can only succeed in a system built on status hierarchies, and that hierarchies naturally foster a system in which the elite class is predatory, the middle businesslike, and the labouring class exploited.⁷⁷ Further, Veblen’s points reinforce my central one: that even women in the Hollywood system who seem to be of higher status, like stars, have far more in common with women of lower status in the system-- makeup artists or cleaning women, for example-- than they do with the male executive class. As Veblen explained, “[a]ll the women in the group will share in the class repression and depression that belongs to them as women”.⁷⁸

Veblen identified and clearly drew out a system predicated on “force, conflict, and power, in which the main players are ruthless predators, not admirable citizens”.⁷⁹ Thus he provides an excellent model for how we today can view the American industries of his time as masculinist-capitalist-nationalist ones. Veblen is not only useful in reading through early Hollywood as a miasma of sociopathic American machismo capitalism. To apply his work to a new billion-dollar industry specifically grounded upon the buying, selling, and rehabbing of women’s bodies-- there, he works even better. He was extremely cognizant of how the caveman relations of business were not only based in male corporate battle and besting amongst each other, but in the concurrent dominance of women. As cultural theorist and Veblen chronicler Martha Banta wrote in a modern forward to *The Instinct of Workmanship*:

One of the more startling aspects of Veblen’s assessment is the stress he places on the male’s ‘ownership’ of women achieved through the retention of entrenched customs. No matter what refinements have been added to contemporary modes of seizure, men continue to appropriate women to affirm their sex’s prerogatives.⁸⁰

What Veblen offers to an alternative systemic analysis of early Hollywood is a fundamental linkage of predatory business practices with predatory gender exploitations.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 472.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 184.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., xv.

⁸⁰ Ibid., xix.

Setting aside gender for a moment, it has already been established in film historical literature that there has never been a shortage of said predatory business practices in the foundational aspects of Hollywood as industry. In *The Whole Equation* (2005) David Thomson asserted that “[t]he history of the medium has been founded on illegal practices and extortion”.⁸¹ In his one studio study, *Twentieth Century-Fox: A Corporate and Financial History* (1988), Aubrey Solomon did painstaking research that uncovered a closed system dependent upon secrecy and hushed-up bookkeepers to cover up skimming. Under such a system, no one truly knew what the profits were or where a good deal of the money went.⁸² Solomon’s picture of the chaotic and unethical structure of a given studio portrays it as more akin to a business run under the same lines and with the same issues as a casino, rather than one in a legitimate industry. Speaking of padded production costs in particular, no less than David O. Selznick admitted outright that “[t]he whole industry, as a matter of fact, is built on phony accounting”.⁸³ Powdermaker, too, did not mince words to these points in drawing one of her major overall conclusions from the anthropological point of view:

It is [the] quality of trust which is lacking in Hollywood. Almost no one trusts anyone else, and the executives, particularly, trust no one, not even themselves. Trust is impossible to men whose major drive is to exploit and manipulate other human beings.⁸⁴

From a sociological-psychological perspective, the creation of an industry under such maladjusted lines hurt not only those devalued by it, but those in power within it themselves. Such antisocial business practices led to a cultural-industrial milieu that was the polar opposite of the idyllic one portrayed in the fan magazines, for everyone from the ordinary workers to the stars to the megapowerful executives. As Joan Didion, California native, wrote in *The White Album* (1979), “[t]he apparent ease of California life is an illusion, and those who believe the illusion real live here in only the most temporary way”.⁸⁵

In fact the reality in Hollywood was a world ruled by anxieties and clichés, insecurities and the magical thinking already pinpointed by Veblen. Executive Maurice Bergman described himself and his colleagues to Powdermaker as constantly worried hypochondriacs, prone to panic attacks and ulcers.⁸⁶ Powdermaker delved deeper into the physical response to working in such a peculiar business, in which anyone could be fired at any time by an executive in a bad mood:

⁸¹ David Thomson, *The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood* (New York, Knopf, 2005) 274.

⁸² Aubrey Solomon, *Twentieth Century-Fox: A Corporate and Financial History* (Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield, 1988).

⁸³ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 89.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 303.

⁸⁵ Joan Didion, *The White Album* (New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979) 64.

⁸⁶ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 32.

Fear clutches the abdomen at every ring of the phone... is the caller a bill collector, an income tax examiner, a producer with a script, an agent with a contract offer, an invitation to a premiere... or a friend, also 'between assignments', asking for a loan?⁸⁷

The industry was experienced like the playing of a compulsively frantic game, with no time to stop or show scruples without a competitor getting ahead. Several writers and scholars also connected this climate with the primary vice of the founder class being not alcohol or drugs, but gambling.⁸⁸ Veblen, in his chapter "The Belief in Luck" in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, had already explicitly situated gambling as part of said belief in luck, classifying it as a predation-related archaic trait.⁸⁹

Such a climate also contributed to the widespread use of every trick or dishonest business practice possible. Standard film histories to date have raised the spectre of just this sort of sociopathic capitalism through focus on another of the many business practices absolutely central to Hollywood's success and dominance: block booking via monopoly of theatres by the studios. In a business that publicly heralded its own excellence, one of its dirty little secrets was private: it actually made virtually no difference what films were produced, or their level of quality. Distributors and exhibitors under the monopoly system were compelled to take films regardless of content or quality-- with the studios making the money on both the production and exhibition ends. From the perspective of moneymaking for the studio capitalist, films moved in ticket units no different than popcorn units or soda units. In 1938 and referencing these methods of monopoly distribution and exhibition, the studios were ruled against in an anti-trust case known as the Paramount Decision. They continued to fight the decision in the courts for another ten years, resisting enforcement or making any changes throughout.⁹⁰ Finally in 1948, the Supreme Court ruled that the Hollywood film industry was in fact a monopoly. Studios and theatres were required to be split.

Numerous film historians have written in detail about the monumental shift that the 1948 anti-trust decision produced and its weakening of the studio system's power. John Allen Scott has in *On Hollywood: The Place, The Industry* (2005) described this moment as the shift from vertical integration to vertical disintegration.⁹¹ As Thomson wrote in terms of all the illegal money made in those years of stalling:

[t]hink of the plunder in those intervening years, and open an accounting book on all the situations which, with skill or something else, Hollywood has broken the laws of America.⁹²

⁸⁷ Ibid. 132.

⁸⁸ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 260; Balio, *Grand Design*; Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*.

⁸⁹ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* 185.

⁹⁰ Malone, *Hollywood's Second Sex* 69.

⁹¹ Scott, *On Hollywood* 29.

⁹² Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 270.

Thomson saw the decision as one in which the industry's power class was finally "compelled to admit and remedy a criminal strategy essential to its business, in an issue over which it had prevaricated, bluffed, bullied, bribed, and avoided for fifteen years".⁹³ Further, returning to the gender focus of this project, Aubrey Malone's conclusion on the 1948 decision in *Hollywood's Second Sex: The Treatment of Women in the Film Industry, 1900-1999* (2015) might be added: it "led to the crumbling of the big studios, but it didn't open any new doors for women to return to Hollywood".⁹⁴

Even earlier historians and philosophers on the nature of capitalism can be well-situated in reflecting upon these aspects of the nature of Hollywood. Nineteenth century French economist Frederic Bastiat noted, with great alacrity, that the moral and legal codes of capitalism are always already inherently compromised and corrupted, as are the *men* who profit so heavily from them:

When plunder becomes a way of life for a group of men in a society, over the course of time they create for themselves a legal system that authorizes it and a moral code that glorifies it.⁹⁵

In contemporary times, Marxist feminist historian and philosopher Silvia Federici has been even more blunt in writing (in her 2004 modern classic *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*) that "the escalation of crime [is a] structural element of capitalist accumulation".⁹⁶

It's worth noting here that the entire business, from the 1910s on through its decades of ever more visible success, cemented an image of the studio heads as fantastic businessmen in the public mind. In fact, even with every advantage of monopoly and criminality, nearly all of the studios ended up in bankruptcy or receivership at some point in the 1930s. Balio pointed out in his chapter "Production in an Era of Oligopoly" in *The American Film Industry* (1976) that the myth of Hollywood's great businessmen was just that.⁹⁷ We might think more accurately of the system as one grand, rigged game of Monopoly. As Balio has noted of what he rightly defined as "collusion", when one studio had a big hit, all profited, because of exhibition and the theatre conglomerates.⁹⁸ While extras were expected to live off \$1.25 a day, the studios were often in debt by many millions of dollars—and yet somehow their heads remained rich men.⁹⁹ These men were competitors and enemies, but also simultaneously high stakes poker partners or relatives by marriage. They would undercut or double-cross one another at one turn, then bail each other out at another— whether for an enormous studio default or a gambling debt.

⁹³ Ibid. 273.

⁹⁴ Malone, *Hollywood's Second Sex* 69.

⁹⁵ In *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison: Ideology, Class, and Criminal Justice*, eds. Jeffrey Reiman and Paul Leighton (London, Routledge, 2016) 20.

⁹⁶ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York, Autonomedia, 2004) 82.

⁹⁷ Balio, *The American Film Industry*, 30.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 17.

Such a fundamental comfort with criminality at times overlapped with an ease of relations with outright gangsters, and the use of gangsterism within the system itself. Gerald Horne has astutely addressed these classed concentric relationships in *Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950: Moguls, Mobsters, Stars, Reds, and Trade Unionists* (2001).¹⁰⁰ This relation to organized crime was discussed in Chapter One, in terms of the westward migration of such as it made its way to Los Angeles with the growing film industry of the 1920s. In this chapter, focused on the 1930s, the gangster as fully entrenched as a Hollywood and Los Angeles cultural archetype is evident-- not merely in the films that glorified him, but in reality.

Such companionability, and outright use of gangster muscle on the part of studio executives, was often particularly evident in union-busting activities. In *Working Class Hollywood* (1998), Steven Ross extensively detailed the mafia infiltration of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) in the 1930s, which culminated in the effective takeover of the union by gangsters posing as labour leaders George Brown and Willie Bioff.¹⁰¹ In *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*, Goodman wrote of "Bioff's hold on Hollywood unionism- a hold maintained with the submissive co-operation of the major movie studios".¹⁰² Eventually, the relationship soured: the studio heads came to consider the "protection" they paid to the gangsters to "keep labour peace" extortion, and both Brown and Bioff were eventually put on trial.¹⁰³ This was the same scandal that brought down producer Joseph Schenck and his brother, once again showing the overlap between the two groups. In other cases, the gangsters simply took control of various branches of the business outright, wanting their own piece of the Hollywood action.

In the 1930s, studio executives began to invite tough East Coast racketeers out to Los Angeles so that they would open high-end, secret illegal gambling clubs off the Sunset Strip. As Gabler detailed in *An Empire of Their Own*, establishments like the Clover Club functioned rather dramatically, complete with red décor, mirrors, secret doors, and paid-off police.¹⁰⁴ The welcoming of gangsters to Los Angeles to bring gambling and illegal fun is unsurprising, as far as the behaviour of the studio heads was concerned. What was surprising was how some of these gangsters ended up given executive jobs at the studios themselves.

There is also an entire history, to be raised again in some detail in Chapter Four, of the subset of Hollywood successful men and power brokers who had not only palled around with gangsters in their previous New York lives, but been actual gangsters themselves. "Sociopathic capitalism" did not always simply mean executives who thought they had the right to undertake crooked business with

¹⁰⁰ Gerald Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950: Moguls, Mobsters, Stars, Reds, and Trade Unionists* (Austin, Texas, 2001).

¹⁰¹ Ross, *Working Class Hollywood* 248.

¹⁰² Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 59.

¹⁰³ Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 277.

¹⁰⁴ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*.

impunity. It meant that some high-level people in Hollywood studios were, quite literally, highly violent criminals. And that these behaviours, far from falling aside when such men arrived in Los Angeles, continued apace as they became all-powerful within the system and the city. There was nothing stopping them doing so.

The most notorious example, to be discussed again in detail in this thesis' final sections in relation to the 1937 Patricia Douglas case, was of Mayer right hand man and MGM general manager Eddie Mannix. Douglas chronicler David Stenn, in his key pre-MeToo article "It Happened One Night... At MGM" (2003), described Mannix as follows:

cigar-chomping, bulldog-faced MGM general manager Eddie Mannix, known and feared as a 'fucking gangster'- during one tantrum he broke his wife's back, and an ex-mistress, actress Mary Nolan, endured 15 abdominal surgeries after his beatings.¹⁰⁵

Within the primary source research of this project, Mannix's name comes up with similar descriptions of his behaviour and character from numerous sources.¹⁰⁶¹⁰⁷

Besides the "business gangsters" working within the studio apparatus directly, including those who outright took over powerful positions, the "hood" type of gangster so commonly seen in 1930s Hollywood films themselves was well-established in Los Angeles by this time as well. This type of underworld figure gone California also began to appear in the culture imaginary via literature. One of the most interesting *noir* detective novels of the period set in Hollywood, one that both highly critiques it and brilliantly satirises it, was Raymond Chandler's *The Little Sister* (1949). Chandler famously worked in Hollywood as a screenwriter of his own novels' adaptations and on projects throughout the 1940s: he was quite familiar with the milieu of which he wrote.

The Little Sister is one of the hard-boiled detective novels for which Chandler became famous, but a lesser-known one overall in the Philip Marlowe canon. It is unique as well for its Hollywood backdrop. In a classic shaggy dog story, Marlowe travels around attempting to catch an "ice pick killer"; as in all his stories, he meets a panoply of untrustworthy people and criminals on his quest. But in this particular novel, the disreputable cast of characters are star actresses and aspiring starlets, studio executives, Dr. Feelgood mob doctors, and gangsters. The milieu is based on Hollywood and greater Los Angeles as Chandler experienced them, as the plot focuses on unsavory East Coast mobsters turned owners of trendy Hollywood nightclubs, and star actresses mixed up with them to the

¹⁰⁵ David Stenn, "It Happened One Night... at MGM." *Vanity Fair*. April 2003.

¹⁰⁶ Salka Viertel. *The Kindness of Strangers* (New York, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969); Paul Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered: An Oral History of its Golden Age* (Lanham, MD, Taylor, 2011).

¹⁰⁷ As an aside, the fact that the Coen Brothers chose to make Mannix not a supporting character in their 2016 Golden Age satire *Hail Caesar*, but rather their comically troubled hero, is hopefully merely a failure of doing proper film historical research upon such a brutal abuser of women. Regardless of the filmmakers' knowledge of the real historical figure of Mannix, however, the portrayal is still problematic-- as the Mannix character is shown to physically assault women throughout the film, often played for comedy, and yet is still centered as the sympathetic protagonist.

detriment of their reputations and careers. Chandler's keen eye for the classed social reality that everyone in Los Angeles was really from somewhere else, hiding their true identity, is underlying and foundational to the plot. To take one example of the manufactured statuses and hidden backgrounds of just about every character in the novel, Marlowe meets a gangster from back East called Weepy Moyer. Moyer has reinvented himself as a posh restaurateur, concurrently adopting the very WASPy name of Steelgrave. Another character is the well-mannered and well-educated European, Dr. Lagardie, entrapped by his own drug addiction and shamefacedly working as a mob doctor. Lagardie laments to Marlowe the California habit of address by first names as indicative of the manners and class of people one meets "out here", particularly holding a disgust for "old actors".¹⁰⁸ Ultimately the novel's entire plot hinges on the obscured identity of star Mavis Weld, and the studios' attempts to cover up photos of her consorting with gangsters.

The dialogue and observational points about Hollywood are telling. Chandler is most invested in envisioning Hollywood as a land of the phony American Dream, a place of false prosperity and no morals peopled by gangsters, grifters, and conmen. Marlowe describes his fictional Bay City, representative of the real Santa Monica, as "a cheap and nasty little town".¹⁰⁹ Speaking to his client and reinforcing earlier points on the blurred lines between gangster extras and actual criminals, Marlowe quips to one of his untrustworthy love interests, "Don't be silly, Orfamay. They don't have gangsters in Bay City. They're all working in pictures".¹¹⁰

In one scene (and one particularly telling an author who actually worked in Hollywood and knew the business from the inside), P.I. Marlowe is granted an audience with studio head Jules Oppenheimer. In it, the studio head confides the secret of the whole business to the detective. A secret based in reality and rather arcane for non-industry people, it is thus interesting in its specificity in terms of content for a humble hardboiled paperback of the day. Published in 1949 but obviously written a few years before the infamous 1948 Supreme Court anti-monopoly decision against Paramount, Chandler's novel sees Oppenheimer explain that the way studios pay people exorbitant amounts to produce new material is mere habit. What they produce, the writers and directors, actually makes no difference. The studios also own the theatres. The content and quality of the films is meaningless, as they will be placed regardless.¹¹¹ Chandler truly did have a finger on the power structure of the industry and its inherent nature as both cynical and illegal: what should perhaps actually come to mind when one hears the phrase "the whole equation".

¹⁰⁸ Raymond Chandler, *The Little Sister* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 2016) 325.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 325.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 316.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 306.

As this project attempts to be an advanced interdisciplinary study of class, labour, and gender in American culture, the title itself is far from accidental. In its double meaning, it is meant to be evocative of the concept of “class” in the colloquial American sense—one extremely popular in the decades of studio Hollywood, constantly referred to in studio conversation and correspondence, first-person accounts, fan magazines, and filmic dialogue. Thus, what Budd Schulberg called the “tinpot falsity” at base of Hollywood had everything to do with class-- and everything to do with the class and ethnic origins of the workers in the system, from the stars to the studio founders.¹¹² In fact, primary source documents reveal just how the uneducated, ethnic immigrant studio founder cohort had a veritable obsession with class and “classiness”.

Classy pictures, classy operations, and class acts were all the order of the day, and a common *lingua franca* of the whole industry in everything from pitches to publicity materials. One *Variety* article of the period described MGM’s commitment to even its lower (B) pictures by explaining that “[w]hen Metro goes out to make a Class B picture, they give it plenty of production, steady direction and a certain amount of class”.¹¹³ Sets might be cardboard, plots might be recycled a dozen times, but a thousandth film about a society heiress and her love life demonstrated, to the working-class men running the studios, the elusive and all-important “class”.

Walter Wanger, producer and power broker, gained influence as an independent producer freelancing from studio to studio far before this was the norm. Part of his self-fashioned image was built on his own building of class status, differentiated from the level of the men in the founders’ generation. Wanger had an Ivy League degree from Dartmouth and fashioned himself into a sort of intellectual of film to the other executives. Such emphasis was even reflected in his contracts. As Thomas Schatz explain, “[h]is productions were described in his contracts as ‘strictly first-class in artistic, pictorial, and dramatic quality’ and suitable for ‘the highest-class motion picture theatres in the US and elsewhere’”.¹¹⁴

It was not only the studio heads who exhibited this obsession with class, but also the censors. Will Hays and his office, as part of the broader “clean screens” initiative of the 1930s, continually pushed for more prestige pictures-- adaptations of famous classic novels, biographies of “great men”, and epics based on historical episodes .¹¹⁵ This push towards anything from Shakespeare to the romantic classics was pushed as one solution to the eternal problem American producers had grappled with since the early 1900s-- that “[e]ducated middle-class people were not habitual moviegoers”, and how to make them so.¹¹⁶ Yet the studios were frustrated by these dictums from the Hays Office, with a divide on the effectiveness of such a strategy. In fact, New York and the money

¹¹² In Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 316.

¹¹³ In Balio, *The American Film Industry* 103.

¹¹⁴ Schatz, *The Genius of the System* 349.

¹¹⁵ Balio, *The American Film Industry* 189.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 190.

interests hated costume drama and prestige adaptations of Brontë, Dickens, and the like, feeling them too highbrow and thus too risky. Only when producers like Selznick began to craft highbrow formulas that actually produced money-makers did they soften on this position.¹¹⁷

Where the studios were nervous about nineteenth century literary adaptations, they preferred “old reliables” like Park Avenue comedies of manners and escapist romances. The most acceptable films humanized and softened the rich by making their escapades light-hearted. This was a deliberate strategy to smooth over tensions during the Depression, at a time when the aforementioned fears of those with money of revolution or social collapse remained ever-present. As critic James Harvey has explained, “the ‘classy’ film is essentially an upper-class kind of film: a celebration of the elite and privileged”.¹¹⁸

This meant that in a decade of bread lines and social unrest, the most popular films and most recycled plotlines somehow tended towards slumming heiresses and cross-class romances. Maria DiBattista has written in *Fast Talking Dames* (2001) about the pervasiveness of the spoiled society girl as character, and the oddity of this archetype being one audiences liked and identified with through the thick of the Depression.¹¹⁹ Speaking to one of the most famous hits of the decade and its position in precisely this genre, *My Man Godfrey* (1936), Thomas Schatz has described a “fantasy of enlightened capitalism, reconciled class conflict”.¹²⁰ Another, even more politically explicit example of such a film would be *Fifth Avenue Girl* (1939), the storyline of which depicts a society debutante and her Marxist chauffeur falling in love.¹²¹

Such reconciled class conflict also included scores of cross-class romances that showed mingling, conflict, and resolution between the upper classes and the gangster criminal class. Films like *Night After Night* (1933) with Mae West and the real-life gangland-connected star George Raft, dealt with a myriad of romantic dynamics between the ever-present society girl, the gold digger, and the speakeasy owner. In fact there were hundreds of such films. The studios’ choice to remake this film over and over as a love and conflict saga spoke to the attempt to elevate personal relations and devalue economic conditions: a deliberate capitalist strategy for the status quo.

A counter to so many cross-class, happy ending, Pollyanna-esque Depression films might have been those considered to fall under “social realism” in genre. Yet these were rare at best. Social realism, especially as pertained to the touchiest of subjects in the deep crisis of the Depression-- capitalism, inequality, injustice, violence, racism-- was particularly frowned upon by the censors. Most of the studios were as suspicious of social problem films as they were of the highbrow and the

¹¹⁷ Schatz, *The Genius of the System* 168.

¹¹⁸ In Balio, *Grand Design* 262.

¹¹⁹ Maria DiBattista, *Fast-Talking Dames* (New Haven, Yale UP, 2001).

¹²⁰ Schatz, *The Genius of the System* 236.

¹²¹ *Fifth Avenue Girl*. Dir. Gregory La Cava. Perf. Ginger Rogers, Walter Connolly, Verree Teasdale. 1939.

intellectual— perhaps even more so. A candid accounting of haves and have nots in 1930s American contexts was seen as a dangerous way to attract attention and make targets of themselves.

Occasionally the rare dissenting studio executive did take an interest in a socially realist project, and would greenlight the film-- sometimes to award-winning acclaim. Spyros Skouras, for example, said of the social problem film that it could serve to give the audience “controversy with class”.¹²² However, many primary source recollections of the pitch-writing-production process in its extreme Hollywood distillation presented a more common trajectory for a socially realist idea. A script might be written, often a by a leftist writer wishing to showcase a particular societal issue. As the script made its way through rewrites, the social problem backdrop was often pronounced too problematic and removed altogether, leaving nothing more than another hackneyed, predictable love story unmoored from any social context. A good example of such would be the production of *Dust Be My Destiny* (1939). Based on a novel about young vagrants in the Depression, it was reworked and reworked at script level at the behest of executive Hal Wallis. Wallis exhorted that the plot centre around its two main characters; their problems should be personal, not societal. This whitewashing culminated with the removal of all “sociological references”.¹²³ This gradual process of creating the apolitical would be a most common trajectory for novels and scripts that circulated around 1930s Hollywood. A gloomy masterpiece like *The Grapes Of Wrath* (1940), relatively faithful to Steinbeck’s 1939 novel and highly political populist message, was certainly an outlier.

Instead the average film was written, packaged, and marketed to the studio’s idea of desirable fare for working-class women.¹²⁴ The idea of film as “the chambermaid’s delight”, also used mockingly in George Cukor’s *The Women* (1939) to deride a low-rent, cowboy-style radio star, brings into sharp focus the perceptions studios had of audiences, especially women audiences, and class in the decade. The order of the day was maximized profits through people-pleasing; to this end, formulas and typecasting were good, while individual careers or their detritus could be mere industrial by-products. B-picture producer Brynie Foy openly admitted his “secret” to Ezra Goodman in later-life interview: “I don’t want to do a script better... I want to do it like it was... I made one picture eleven times”.¹²⁵ Foy went on to explain how the original story in question was a deep-sea fishing adventure film called *Tiger Shark* in which the protagonist lost his arm, which then became *Lumberjack*, which then became *Bengal Tiger*, in which the protagonist lost his leg.¹²⁶ And so on.

¹²² Balio, *Grand Design* 292.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 294.

¹²⁴ My master’s thesis at Columbia dealt with the misogynistic, classed response of male modernist writers to Hollywood film (*A Defensive Modernism: Popular Culture, Early Cinema, and the Absence of a British Avant-Garde*, Master’s thesis, 2008).

¹²⁵ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 182.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Intellectuals saw through these “chambermaid’s delight” tactics of the studio executives as the vulgar and puerile attempt to “class up” American film without artistic substance or depth. Critic Wolcott Gibbs stated that:

ninety percent of the moving pictures exhibited in America are so vulgar, witless and dull that it is preposterous to write about them in any publication not intended to be read while chewing gum.”¹²⁷

In 1945, Gibbs explained quitting writing as a film critic in an article for the *Saturday Review of Literature* entitled “The Kingdom of the Blind- An Ex-Moving Picture Reviewer Considers His Ex-Job”. In the article Gibbs describes his epiphany occurring when he could finally see “the whole absurdity of what I was trying to do- to write, that is, for the information of my friends about something that was plainly designed for the entertainment of their cooks”.¹²⁸ Goodman, in *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*, called Gibb’s confession snobbish but also with undeniable truth to it. Escapism was the name of the game and films were “aimed at the twelve year-old mentality”.¹²⁹

Nonetheless no one was listening to intellectual dissenters on Hollywood film anyway, neither insiders nor outsiders to the system, as the millions rolled in unceasingly. The philosophy of a Sol Wurtzel or a Brynie Foy prohibiting “highbrow crap” was working just fine, as was the already-enshrined producer class witticism, “if you want to send a message, try Western Union”. Writing contemporaneously for the fan magazines of his time and clearly espousing the studio party line, one Potter Brayton declared that “Hollywood has come to associate art with long hair, temperamental demonstrations, and an excessive amount of ‘boloney’ handed out around the studios by ‘arty’ stars”.¹³⁰ Through her extensive sociological fieldwork, Powdermaker well understood this same central principle under which the men in power and their fan magazine mouthpieces were operating. She wrote, “[t]he goal is profits, large and quick ones. They call themselves ‘showmen’, and any talk about movies as art for them is the height of absurdity and unreality”.¹³¹ As Powdermaker went on to explain:

The domination of the business executive over the artist in Hollywood is not surprising either in view of the history of the movies or in terms of American culture. Movies began as small business, an extension of the Coney Island type of entertainment. The men who started them- some still in control- were usually small entrepreneurs, some from the field of cheap entertainment, some from other small businesses. The artist was not even present. Later, when he arrived on the scene, he came as the employee of those men, who by this time were big business and who still remain firmly in control.¹³²

¹²⁷ Ibid. 122.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 158.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ “Danger Signals”, Potter Brayton. In *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines*, ed. Martin Levin 103.

¹³¹ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 25.

¹³² Ibid. 28.

While the overall Hollywood industry coalesced around a definition of class as the veneer of luxury and glamour, rather than as gentility or true elegance, there were in fact variations among studios. These classed philosophical differences arose in large part from the politics and psyches of each individual founder. Their manifestations included both the treatment of the labourers in their employ, and the creative output of their films. In his cultural historian's analysis of the founders, Neal Gabler devoted careful attention to this aspect of the character and aesthetic of each individual studio. Gabler concluded that the studios were the actualisers of the individual dreams of the men at the top, and that this translated to everything from the looks of the stars to the colour of the telephones and the rules on using the bathroom. The upcoming section examines how such cultures developed, and how they translated to treatment of women in the studios as both workers and a gendered and classed group, respectively.

As Gabler explained and to take one example, the culture of hardscrabble cheapness and paranoia at Warner Brothers led to a culture of less beautified stars, from Davis among the women to Cagney, Bogart, and Edward G. Robinson among the men. As Thomas Schatz has explained:

Harry Warner saw himself in the early 1930s as the Henry Ford of the movie industry, and the studio as a factory that produced consistent, reasonably priced products for a homogenous mass of consumers.¹³³

In this, Warner Brothers of the 1930s is an excellent case study as to how industrial economic concerns and cultures shaped genre and Hollywood history overall. What looked like modernity, foresight, or risk-taking in making many male-driven, single-star gangster movies with dark worldviews hardly developed as a deliberate strategy of creative innovation. Rather, women-driven love stories required lavish costuming and were expensive, musicals even more so. Simple logistical factors like penny-pinching helped to develop Warner Brothers' cinematic imprimatur as edgy and fast; in reality it could be attributed to cut corners in cinematography and editing.¹³⁴ A far simpler and more banal explanation, but a more accurate one.

Such a worldview driven by particular cultural and business values also led to a marker of laziness and tackiness in the films itself, for those who were paying attention. In her 2013 Ann Dvorak biography, Christina Rice explained of 1937's *Midnight Court* that "the title card and half sheet featured recycled art from the Bette Davis vehicle *The Girl From 10th Avenue* with Ann's likeness slapped on over Bette's".¹³⁵ In her 1970s cowritten memoir, Bette Davis herself commented sardonically on the same topic. Davis recalled that observant fans would make a game of spotting the same interiors and furniture across Warner Brothers' films, demonstrating that the reputation for cheapness was not only extant within the industry but even with some of the public.¹³⁶

¹³³ Schatz, *The Genius of the System* 136.

¹³⁴ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 190.

¹³⁵ Rice, *Ann Dvorak* 177.

¹³⁶ Davis and Stine, *Mother Goddam*.

Such microcultures did not only translate to filmic output, as mentioned above, but were manifest in the business and personal behaviours of executives at each studio, as well as in the studio's respective labour conditions. Gabler explained that:

[e]ven in Hollywood, where the genteel was often vulgarized, the Warners were regarded as anti-intellectuals- who not only didn't remotely read literature, but wouldn't even read film treatments.¹³⁷

Warner's own son Jack, Jr. recalled him scolding him any time he perceived him "giving [him] that college talk".¹³⁸

Besides an inherent anti-intellectualism, Jack Warner's personal proclivities and ethos as power broker had specific consequences for his workers. Warner was known to exhibit the contradictions of many powerful businessmen-- dictatorial and conniving, while simultaneously petty, weak, and self-promoting. He frequently liked to make a show of magnanimity by "tearing up an actor's contract" to gift them a new and better deal. Yet common sense dictates that if an employer is of a type to tear up a contract in good times, they are also one who doesn't really respect it in contentious times either. More anecdotal evidence would certainly bear out this conclusion. Warner longed for respectability, and yet was known to renege on "gentleman's agreements" by simply retorting, "I'm no gentleman".¹³⁹

Such willingness to toss out both quotidian business practices and verbal agreements on a whim meant that the "standardised practices" that developed in Hollywood were themselves often unethical and anti-labour on their face. This will be discussed in more detail later, especially vis à vis Powdermaker's identification of the practice of loan-outs as one of the central markers of dehumanised totalitarianism in Hollywood. But for this section, I would briefly turn attention to the fundamental nature of the Hollywood contracts Jack Warner loved to rip up and rewrite, to take just one example. The studio-actor legal arrangement was a very formal one, on the surface. Yet, with closer examination of the rules of the contract as well as reams of anecdotal primary source material, it was anything but fair. Studios could fire with or without cause, while actors could never break the contract. Danae Clark has written interesting and extensive Marxist interpretation of business practices like the seven-year contract, which she described as "an imaginary relation of fair exchange between legal subjects".¹⁴⁰ From the perspective of critique of capitalism, a contract where the studio can fire at will but an actor can never "escape" is not a legitimate contract. In fact, it is nearly as telling as practices like loan-outs as to how the men who designed the system did so to ensure that they always held every card.

¹³⁷ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 150.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 293

¹⁴⁰ Danae Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors' Labor* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1995), 25.

Actors were well aware that their bosses were underhanded in their dealings with them and not to be trusted as equitable business partners, a point that comes up in both Powdermaker's findings and numerous memoirs. But here, in relation to the character and behaviours of Jack Warner, specifically, a picture emerges of a studio head who was quite particularly hated by many employees. Tommy Farrell, son of actress Glenda Farrell, shared the following candid recollections in Paul Zollo's *Hollywood Remembered: An Oral History of Its Golden Age* (2013):

I must have been fifteen before I realized that 'That-sonofabitch-Jack-Warner' was not one word. [laughs] He was never liked. Nobody that was under contract to the studio really liked him. Just when you were about to get a raise, he'd fire you. Unless you were making a lot of money for the studio, and then he'd give you half of what you should get. Or if somebody was ready to retire [laughs], he'd let them go so that he wouldn't have to pay retirement.¹⁴¹

Farrell also recalled his mother being overworked to exhaustion on two and three simultaneous pictures at a given time-- the same complaint that led Ann Dvorak to breach her contract citing health problems and end up in court against Warner's. The culture that Warner created also frequently came back to bite him in this respect, as most of his major stars balked or went to court with him at one point or another (namely James Cagney, Bette Davis, Olivia De Havilland, and Errol Flynn).¹⁴²

While Jack Warner was a fairly typical unethical businessman for his day in terms of power and practices, he actually exhibited comparatively moderate politics. In contrast, a far more fascinating matrix opens in examining the studio founders who had flirtations with not only right-wing, white male politics of the American West variety, but actual fascism. Well within the realm of Powdermaker's startling conclusion as to the nature of the Hollywood milieu, some of these power brokers could be read as operating as fascists themselves within the Hollywood system. Like Gabler in the 1980s, Powdermaker had decades before recognised that cultural and psychological analysis of the studio heads, their backgrounds and personalities, was key to understanding the sociocultural and industrial milieus they created. Powdermaker was not subtle in her chapter on the executive class in *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*; she titled it "Men Who Play God". In it, she explained in clear social scientist's terms a central premise that creative labour scholars are often only just rearticulating today:

The personalities of the men who sit in the front office are of interest as much as their customs, because their own natures influence the content of the movies and mold the human relations in the whole system of movie production.¹⁴³

Later citing Hitler, Powdermaker explained that "a knowledge of the personalities of any men

¹⁴¹ Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 197.

¹⁴² Rice, *Ann Dvorak*.

¹⁴³ Powdermaker, *Hollywood, The Dream Factory* 100.

who wield power is always important”.¹⁴⁴ This is just one of many instances where Powdermaker’s work has taken on a new relevance for revisiting in light of reckoning with longstanding Hollywood practices post-MeToo.

Powdermaker went on in her chapter on the executives to psychoanalyse specific Hollywood bosses, either those whom she had managed to interview or those whose employees she had interviewed. She concluded that there were of course individual differences between studio heads. Some really had no interest in movies at all, seeing them as just another business for profit. Each had their own “real” passions or vices, such as “horse racing, aviation, yachting, or women”.¹⁴⁵ One commonality Powdermaker found across the sample was a conclusion that could have come straight from the work of Veblen: she described them, on the whole, as “men whose drive is for domination rather than creativity.”¹⁴⁶

Louis B. Mayer was a far-right archconservative who famously organised MGM like a fiefdom. Not only did he refer to his employees as his “children”, he held court at hours-long speeches in which assistants were expected to kneel on either side of his chair.¹⁴⁷ Yet such magnanimity and lordship were at the same time covers for typical or even advanced capitalist ruthlessness; Herman Mankiewicz had once quipped, “Mayer’s diet is his fellow man”.¹⁴⁸ One of Powdermaker’s methodologies in *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* was to refer to her subjects by pseudonymous nickname. We cannot be certain if her “Mr. Big Shot” was Mayer, but there are certainly similarities. Powdermaker sketched a studio head with a God complex, one who employees reported at times seemed to demand miniscule changes that weren’t even good or necessary, merely to impose his will. In Powdermaker’s analysis of her anonymous studio head, she explained that “Mr. Big Shot’s desire for domination is so strong that he keeps people in a position of subservience even if it means a loss to the studio”.¹⁴⁹

While some of the other studio founders’ generation made no attempt to hide their humble roots (like the Warners) or reveled in their vulgarity (like Harry Cohn), Mayer was anxiously class-conscious. The fear of being thought uncultured was a lifetime cause of distress to him. His first studio had been shabby and decentralised. Frederica Sagor Maas recalled early MGM as having barely shaken Mayer’s Poverty Row roots at all and very far away from the glamour capital it would become. She described the writers’ bungalow as shoddily constructed, leaking, lacking paint and plaster, and always boiling or freezing.¹⁵⁰ Patsy Ruth Miller echoed this image, recalling:

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 105.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 110.

¹⁴⁷ Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 174.

¹⁴⁸ Malone, *Hollywood’s Second Sex* 57.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 103.

¹⁵⁰ Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* 62.

L.B. Mayer Studio, before L.B. became a part of Metro-Goldwyn Mayer... To call it a Studio was stretching a point. Actually, it was a dismal clump of buildings way out of town, past all bus or trolley lines.”¹⁵¹

As a result, once Mayer began to prosper, he created a studio with an aesthetic something like an Art Deco-style university campus. In her 1971 memoir, Mary Astor wrote that she found MGM “a cold place... I felt the producers to be remote in their heavily carpeted soundproof offices”.¹⁵² (Aesthetics aside, was this a subtle clue from Astor about the industrialised nature of sexual abuse that went on at the corporate suite level? Why “soundproof”? In the next chapter, first-person actress accounts tell of doors that could be locked from the inside by executives with the push of a button under the desk, literally a mechanism to facilitate rape. It would seem that thick carpets and soundproof walls would function similarly in a corporate space of institutional sexual assault?)

Whether authoritarian leanings were out in the open as with someone like a Cohn, or hidden in beautiful décor and elegant clothing as in the world constructed by Mayer, the underlying brutality was the same. A 2018, MeToo-flavoured *New Yorker* retrospective featured an interview with an anonymous former star in her 90s. She has been asked to be a source for the piece in comparing the Hollywood of her studio youth to the one then in the throes of post-Weinstein reckoning. As the former actress recalled of her experience as an MGM contract player:

If you worked for Mr. Mayer, you didn't just lollygag... I was loaned out to everybody. “Altruistic” would not describe him. If you were under contract to him, you were like a piece of chattel. You were supposed to bow and scrape and curtsy. Mr. Mayer was, in his own mind, godlike.¹⁵³

As Maas characterised Mayer in her memoir as a first-person observer:

Louis B. Mayer may have held a big job in the motion picture industry, the biggest there was at MGM. Big job notwithstanding, Louis B. Mayer was not a big man. He was a petty man, a crafty man: above all, he was a very fearful, insecure man... Louis B. was a pompous, power-mad insensitive hypocrite.¹⁵⁴

Where others of his compatriots like Zanuck were notorious sexual harassers and abusers, Mayer had a conservative view of women's propriety, and likely to that end a raging Madonna-whore complex. As Powdermaker wrote in her chapter “Front Office” in *The Dream Factory*, “[t]he taste, good or bad, of the men who make the movies will be inevitably stamped on them”.¹⁵⁵ From the highbrow position, critic Edmund Wilson argued that “[t]he big producers nailed down their favorite formulas in

¹⁵¹ Patsy Ruth Miller, *My Hollywood, When Both of Us Were Young* (Albany, GA, BearManor, 2012) 38.

¹⁵² Mary Astor, *A Life On Film* (New York, Delacorte, 1971), 211.

¹⁵³ Dana Goodyear. “Can Hollywood Change Its Ways?” *The New Yorker*. January 1, 2018.

¹⁵⁴ Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* 218.

¹⁵⁵ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 77.

all their obviousness, falsity and vulgarity”.¹⁵⁶ Of Mayer, “his” stars were too beautiful and deified, as wives and mothers were always to be.

Mayer’s conservatism and placing of some women on pedestals didn’t mean he was above “the casting couch”, as many memoirs anecdotally share and to which women he had blackballed would attest.¹⁵⁷ Yet he clearly had a unique relationship, if not to all women on his lot, to his biggest star actresses. Gabler posited that Mayer’s view of women, mothers, and elegance was one forged in the nineteenth century, and that it was for this reason the MGM aesthetic featured women who were not sassy and wisecracking, but “beautiful, elegant, smart, and yet coolly unapproachable”.¹⁵⁸

Mayer’s belief in the sanctity of traditional values thus led him to emphasise nostalgia in his own worldview, and to then enact its seepage into his studio output. With Mayer’s vision and psyche driving it, MGM became one of the studios most invested in what critical theorist and political philosopher of violence Brad Evans has coined “retrotopia”.¹⁵⁹ Consider films like *Boys Town* (1938), which served both Mayer’s love of nostalgic, wholesome, all-American fare and his conservative political alliance with the Catholic Church. While these factors-- the right wing conservatism, the pedestal treatment of (some) women, and the love of nostalgia and an idealised past-- may not seem particularly connected at first glance, they come clearer as part of a disturbing pattern when an assertion by Carl Jung is recalled: “sentimentality is the superstructure erected upon brutality”.¹⁶⁰ In this I would argue that for Mayer, nostalgia and sentimentality operated as cudgels, just as glamour did throughout the Hollywood system. All three of these cudgels, then, were especially evident at MGM. As Goodman brilliantly put it of the founder class, “[t]hey preached the good, noble, and beautiful, and they themselves fostered in their lives and works the evil, the ignoble, and the ugly”.¹⁶¹

A 2019 *Salon* article by Bob Hennelly on American capitalism’s “moral bankruptcy”, centring on the connected misdeeds of Jeffrey Epstein and Donald Trump, used language that could be exactly applied to the studio heads of nearly a century ago. Its central premise demonstrated that in areas from racism and the use of sex to the amoral pursuit of power via corruption, little had changed:

These great white men are their own law. They see themselves as the smartest guys in the room. They have the cunning to know how to hollow out others so that they can own their souls. With the precision of an acupuncturist, they pinpoint that pressure point that’s the nexus of desire, sexual pleasure or ambition.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ Balio, *Grand Design* 3.

¹⁵⁷ Malone, *Hollywood’s Second Sex* 47.

¹⁵⁸ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 214.

¹⁵⁹ Under the Skin With Russell Brand. “#001 Can We Really Stop Terror?” Online audio podcast. April 3, 2017.

¹⁶⁰ Carl Jung. *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature* (London, Routledge, 2003), 143.

¹⁶¹ In John Austin, *Hollywood’s Babylon Women* (New York, S.P.I., 1994) 90.

¹⁶² Bob Hennelly, “Jeffrey Epstein Is Exhibit A For Capitalism’s Moral Bankruptcy.” *Salon*. July 14, 2019; Will Bunch, “Robert Kraft, Jeffrey Epstein, Donald Trump, and a Day of Reckoning for America’s Billionaires.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. February 24, 2019.

Such connection between the values and behaviours of the studio founders and fascism certainly once again belies the myth of leftist Hollywood. The hazards of such modes of thinking and being, it can be asserted, went beyond the mere problem of production of problematic films. The facts of 1930s Hollywood's real flirtations with genuine fascism have been on the whole obscured, if not forgotten altogether. How many know today that Columbia head Harry Cohn kept a bust of Mussolini on his office desk?¹⁶³ In their own time, however, cultural studies intellectuals did indeed pick up on the connection. As Sharon Marcus has written of the Frankfurt School and its broader circle in *The Drama of Celebrity* (2019):

The critics who produced the first serious analyses of celebrity in the 1930s and 1940s had two reference points: the authoritarian Hollywood studio system and the fascist, propaganda-driven personality cults formed around Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini.¹⁶⁴

Of all the studio heads, Columbia's Harry Cohn is most fascinating in this nexus of psychology, worldview, and their manifestations into outright fascist practices within studio corporate culture. Like many of the founding studio class, Cohn was raised in hardscrabble, lower-class New York City around the turn of the century, interacting with gangsters and being educated in street smarts. (Unlike most of the other immigrant founder class, he was born there.) His persona was so specifically defined by his background that in the cocktail party game of guessing "who was Sammy Glick *really* based upon in *What Makes Sammy Run??*", Cohn was generally the leading contender for Schulberg's utterly amoral, unpleasant, and Machiavellian studio head. Marcus Loew, who had been part of the initial merger of MGM, described his similar background in the tenements of Lower Manhattan as a breeding ground for talent. Loew said that young men of this type had learned from their slum upbringings to see all life as a battle, in which only the extraordinary would escape. "That's why so many successes come from the East Side," Loew offered.¹⁶⁵

Cohn had left school at fourteen, surviving through various suspect activities from pool hustling to fencing stolen goods. When he arrived in Hollywood in the 1920s, he was a relative latecomer in comparison to the other studio founders. Taking over the low-rent studio CBC, often disparagingly referred to as "Corned Beef and Cabbage", he renamed the business Columbia and set himself up in jerry-rigged offices on Poverty Row. In fact, when the new group of filmmakers arrived in Los Angeles, most began in the Poverty Row section of studios, an area of Gower Street known for B pictures and extras looking for work. Frank Capra described Poverty Row as "a refuge for nervy and tenacious Jews who couldn't be bothered with the niceties of the creative process observed at many of the larger studios".¹⁶⁶ The men who became Hollywood's power elite were each able to "graduate"

¹⁶³ Karina Longworth. "You Must Remember This." Audio blog post. "The Hard Hollywood Life of Kim Novak." 2014.

¹⁶⁴ Sharon Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity* (Princeton, 2019).

¹⁶⁵ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 19.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 162.

eventually to A-list studio ownership, through both what can be positively termed business savvy but also accurately described as improper business practices.

Gabler, in one of the psychosocial sections of his study on ethnicity and the studio founders, described Cohn as centrally motivated by “the hurt of the outsider”, and that “[w]hat he believed most devoutly was that power governed human affairs”.¹⁶⁷ Due to his lower-class upbringing and ethnic outsider status, Cohn had developed a self-understanding that could never win at life by being genteel. He resolved instead to win by being tough. As Gabler continued:

In a world based on self-interest and power, one had to be the most powerful. In a world where one lacked the advantages of class and education, one had to compensate with muscle and nerve¹⁶⁸... By stripping down the dynamics of class into a kind of vicious Darwinism, Cohn obviously felt he was revealing the real rules in the game of power.¹⁶⁹

There was no room in such a worldview as Cohn’s for either empathy or abstract values like humanity or communal spirit. In later-life interview, British director Victor Saville recalled that upon D-Day and the ending of World War II, many of the cast and crew at Columbia were stood around one another embracing and crying, especially those of European and Jewish descent. Despite his own ethnic background, it was just another day for Cohn. As Saville recalled, “Harry didn’t care. He wasn’t European. He was making pictures”.¹⁷⁰

For his personality and business practices, indeed his entire ethos, Cohn was widely despised. As Rita Hayworth biographer John Kobal wrote, “many people in Hollywood... considered Harry Cohn the complete vulgarian”.¹⁷¹ While composer Albert Schwartz correctly noted of Cohn and “his vulgarity” and “lack of education” that “neither of which was a unique characteristic among the men in his position”¹⁷², Cohn was nonetheless considered particularly odious. Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. was more direct:

Cohn was not only bull-headed but a monster, probably one of the most detested men in the hierarchy, and while one doesn’t mind coarseness and vulgarity in its place, one doesn’t want it all the time.¹⁷³

Like many of his first-generation, studio-founding compatriots, Cohn hid an inferiority complex about his lack of education with mockery of intellectuals and the arts. Behind his back, writers called him an “illiterate bastard”, remarking that he couldn’t even spell the name of his own company. It was true; Cohn was known to write “Colombia” on studio documents. In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*,

¹⁶⁷ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*, 154.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 183.

¹⁷⁰ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 185.

¹⁷¹ John Kobal, *Rita Hayworth: Portrait of a Love Goddess* (New York, Berkeley Books, 1982) 88.

¹⁷² Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 156.

¹⁷³ Michelle Vogel, *Children of Hollywood: Accounts of Growing up as the Sons and Daughters of Stars* (Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2005) 109.

Thorstein Veblen asserted that in the modern corporation of the early twentieth century an industrial director did not require much intelligence. Rather, his primary necessary skill was an understanding of causality in the chain of production.¹⁷⁴ This could certainly be applied to the role of producer in both actor anecdote and the findings of Powdermaker; in some ways it probably went double for the actual studio founders.

In such an American business climate, those who had tangible or creative skills were not the ones who rose to the top; the men who could find, manipulate, and exploit the talent of *others* to personally profit were. As director Stanley Dwan shared with film historian John Kobal in later-life interview, on Daryl Zanuck:

[H]e wasn't an artist- he was a businessman. He was a guy who got money from some source and sat at meetings and made decisions, but he didn't have to do what we had to do... They are thinking of the dollar while we are trying to develop something human.¹⁷⁵

Raymond Chandler had long before articulated just this creative's perspective, writing in "Writers in Hollywood" (1945):

Hollywood is a showman's paradise. But showmen make nothing; they exploit what someone else has made.... The showmen of Hollywood control the making- and thereby degrade it.¹⁷⁶

Chandler continued:

It is the essence of this system that it seeks to exploit a talent without permitting it the right to be a talent. It cannot be done; you can only destroy the talent, which is exactly what happens.¹⁷⁷

While Cohn and some of the other more abusive studio founders and executives were known for bullying all sorts of workers and both men and women, I am now addressing the psychosocial dynamic of these men towards the star actress women, in particular— women they considered themselves to have, quite literally, created. This highly gendered Pygmalion dynamic could strike on multiple levels in Hollywood-- boyfriends, husbands, or directors all might force such a dynamic. But producers, executives, and the studio founder class had a unique relationship to such a skewed understanding of their women employees' very personhood-- feeling that they had "made" the women they "turned into" stars.

Such a dynamic was a powerful driving force of the male executive class in their mistreatment of their women employees, and foundational to a dysfunctional sociocultural milieu built on abuse as uncovered by Powdermaker. She determined that the particular sense that the star was not "real" in

¹⁷⁴ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* 185.

¹⁷⁵ Kobal, *Rita Hayworth* 68.

¹⁷⁶ Raymond Chandler, "Writers in Hollywood." In *Raymond Chandler: Later Novels and Other Writings* (New York, Penguin, 1995) 994.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

the sense of her own person who belonged to herself, but was in fact a construction designed and owned by the studio, was pervasive. Moreover, it was the biggest factor in a kind of caste system that despised actors and thus cemented their dehumanisation:

The actor is regarded by the studio as a valuable but synthetic product of make-up department, cameraman, publicity agent, director, producer, and front office... The publicity departments regard actors as property whose value they are responsible for...¹⁷⁸

As Powdermaker went on to explain in her chapter of *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* entitled “Actors Are People”, there was no expectation of autonomy or really even basic human rights within the system; rather, “[t]he star is thus regarded as the ward, property or creation of business manager, agent, publicity man, producer and executive”.¹⁷⁹ All of this was a crucial part of a system open in its prerogative to do whatever it liked with the employees it felt it had “created”.

The levels of contempt and misogyny might vary, from the axiom “I made her” to Harry Cohn’s supercilious boasting that he could “get any broad off the street” and make her into a star by virtue of *his* will. Maria di Battista quoted the philosopher Stanley Cavell in *Fast-Talking Dames* when he said, “the creation of women is the business of men”.¹⁸⁰ In this sense, the Pygmalion dynamic was not the only one running rampant in Hollywood in these times. There was a Frankenstein element as well, in the way men were destroying, cutting, demanding redesigns, and reshaping the bodies of women whom they considered their creations. Liz Conor has written in *The Spectacular Modern Woman* that these men considered themselves to be creating a woman who didn’t exist out of the technologies of film. Such abuse by bodily construction and reconstruction will be addressed far more extensively in Chapter Four, from the primary source perspective of the women upon whom it was inflicted.

Based on the findings of de Beauvoir, Powdermaker, and other theorists, it is not at all surprising that such an ownership/god-creator narrative would have developed in this system. Such systemic ownership of people, and particularly, of women by men, leads away from the specificity of Hollywood and back to theorists of gendered domination across history and disciplines. Reading these types of theorists, intriguingly, places studio Hollywood not at the vanguard of a modern media and technology industry, but rather, situates it in centuries of primal patriarchy and misogyny. As Thorstein Veblen had asserted:

[There is reason to believe that the institution of ownership has begun with the ownership of persons, primarily women. The incentives to acquiring such property have apparently been: (1) a propensity for dominance and coercion, (2) the utility of these persons as evidence of the prowess of their owner, (3) the utility of their

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 254.

¹⁷⁹ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 262.

¹⁸⁰ Maria DiBattista, *Fast-Talking Dames* (New Haven, Yale UP, 2001).

services... Women and other slaves are highly valued, both as an evidence of wealth and as a means of accumulating wealth.¹⁸¹

In this section of *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen went on to discuss how dating back to ancient times, the keeping of many women was a sign of status. Surely the glowing popular press descriptions of “stables” or “harems” of stars at the various studios is relevant here. Silvia Federici, in writing feminist materialist history of capitalism, has described the period in modernity when “women themselves became the commons”.¹⁸² Both of these connect the deep-seated sociocultural dynamic at play here to Hollywood as a specific milieu in which the buying, selling, and trading around of women by powerful men was a major part of their status-building. As de Beauvoir noticed of the economic relation in her chapter on Hollywood stars in *The Second Sex*, the actress’ career is based in her “representing capital to exploit in a man’s arms”.¹⁸³

In fact, in her prescient chapter on the actress in *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir already saw the gendered capitalist exploitations of Hollywood in the relationship between older wealthy industrialist and younger actress-mistress. She theorised that “by offering his girlfriend pearls and furs, the industrialist or the producer displays his wealth and power through her”.¹⁸⁴ de Beauvoir was probably not directly referencing the well-known story of Marion Davies and William Randolph Hearst, but later first-person recollection from Frederica Sagor Maas on Davies shows that de Beauvoir had it exactly right. Davies wasn’t exactly pimped but was quite purchased and definitely abused. Maas explained her friend Davies’ love-hate relationship with the older Hearst, “who had bought her teenage favors by promoting her father to a federal judgeship. She was an exquisite girl but with absolutely no talent” for performance.¹⁸⁵ “It was torture for her to act” because of her extreme stutter, but Hearst demanded she keep trying.¹⁸⁶ On a day’s shopping excursion, Davies opened up to her friends in a fitting room:

I’m a slave, that’s what. A toy poodle. Now doggie, turn around. That’s a nice doggie. Wag your tail, doggie. Don’t want to? Hell, you’d better if you know what’s good for you!.¹⁸⁷

Just as each of the personalities of the various power broker men of Hollywood have been psychoanalysable as to their manifestations in their individual studios, each had a different relationship to this dynamic of people-owning. The term “stable” would be a particularly and

¹⁸¹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class. With an Introd. by John Kenneth Galbraith* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1973) 40.

¹⁸² Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* 40.

¹⁸³ Simone de Beauvoir, Constance Borde, and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. *The Second Sex* (New York, Vintage, 2011) 741.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* 139.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

gruesomely accurate descriptor for Harry Cohn's Columbia. Composer Freddie Karger recalled in later-life interview that "Harry just treated people as possessions, like his horses".¹⁸⁸ Louis B. Mayer also revealed in the fact that, as David Thomson put it in *The Whole Equation*, "he was 'owner' of so many young women, their master for seven years".¹⁸⁹ As Mary Astor recalled in her memoir, "MGM had the best stable of contract players. That gives you an idea: 'stable'. As in horses, not as in permanence".¹⁹⁰ But where Mayer put his stars on pedestals to some degree, as previously discussed, Cohn was nasty, always ready to tell a star to get out as there were dozens more lined up behind them who would shut up and behave. In this, Cohn's psychosocial makeup was precisely aligned with the system atop which he sat. As Powdermaker remarked:

[a]nother characteristic of power in Hollywood is seen in the prevailing attitude toward people as property... Everyone is a piece of property with a specific price, for whom negotiations are carried on through an agent.¹⁹¹

In this quote, Powdermaker began to make clear just how much dehumanisation was at the heart of the studio system. Among many others, Harry Cohn was a particularly master dehumaniser.

David O. Selznick is another producer and power broker who has been recounted in star memoirs as aggressively domineering and controlling. Joan Fontaine described his methods of browbeating her even in her own home. As she recalled in her memoir, *No Bed of Roses* (1978):

I was told that I was ungrateful, arbitrary, and temperamental if I refused a role he arranged for me at another studio. Telegrams as long as roll of bath tissue would be thrust by Western Union messenger through the mail slot at 703 North Rodeo Drive, all berating me in tyrannical language. It was part of his psychological warfare to keep his players in line.¹⁹²

Publicly, Selznick garnered publicity like a 1944 *Look* profile of "The Selznick Girls" (Joan Fontaine, Vivian Leigh, Ingrid Bergman, Jennifer Jones, Dorothy McGuire, and Shirley Temple) in which he bragged about himself as a star-builder and star-maker of women. Behind the scenes, Selznick was defensive, however, bemoaning that the article "places me in the position of being a flesh peddler".¹⁹³ The incoherent responses of the studio executive class-- domineering and abusive, yet defensive and self-pitying about *their* mistreatment at the hands of their actor employees-- was also a sizable factor in the system. Powdermaker describes these men in interview as bitter, using phrases like "I took the bitch from a nightclub floor... all they do is complain".¹⁹⁴ In this system these constructed stars were expected to be grateful for having been brought to life (overtones of Frankenstein and his monster here deliberate). Bette Davis connected this to the politics of precarity and then, especially, of the

¹⁸⁸ Kobal, *Rita Hayworth* 164.

¹⁸⁹ Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 222.

¹⁹⁰ Astor, *A Life on Film* 139.

¹⁹¹ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 83.

¹⁹² Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses* 129.

¹⁹³ Schatz, *The Genius of the System* 336.

¹⁹⁴ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 255.

Depression: “[t]hey were all used to actors who were grateful they had been rescued from diners or under wet stones and, as long as the cash rolled in, were happy”.¹⁹⁵

The layers of irony present in a system which treated performers like clowns or a subhuman species, all the while selling them to the world as globally aspirational gods on high, was enormous. Powdermaker’s careful anthropological conclusions to these points are revelatory. One of the things that characterised Hollywood as a fascist and totalitarian system within a democratic nation, to her findings, has been its bedrock condoning of the owning of people. Powdermaker situated this unique and toxic acceptance as one that permeated all of Hollywood culture. Simply put, she stated that, in comparison with other American businesses:

[t]he concept of people as property, valued at a certain price, who can be bought and sold and managed so as to do one’s bidding is not unique to Hollywood, but is exaggerated there to such a degree that it becomes an outstanding characteristic.¹⁹⁶

This embrace of the ownership of people was one of the hallmarks by which Powdermaker felt able to categorise Hollywood as she did:

Hollywood has the elaborated totalitarian elements we have described: the concept of people as property and as objects to be manipulated, highly concentrated and personalized power for power’s sake, an amorality.¹⁹⁷

In maintaining their disciplinary practices, the executives would add to the already well-established cudgels of glamour and publicity with more overt legal maneuvers like suspensions. But verbal and emotional abuse in the form of haranguing, insults, and threats was another massive pillar of the system. All of the clichés present in popular culture for decades, like the eponymous “You’ll never work in this town again” were quite firmly based in reality, so much so as to even be ubiquitous. The attitude on the part of the studio heads that “we created you” was very real. Luise Rainer was one star who handled these tactics in a particularly courageous, even activist way. As Aubrey Malone has recounted, in a dispute between Rainer and Mayer, the studio head declared, “[y]ou’ll do what I tell you. We made you and we can unmake you.’ Rainer replied, ‘God made me’, and left his office. And Hollywood”.¹⁹⁸ Jean Arthur was another star who had been recruited from Broadway with an excellent contract, but, according to friend Joan Fontaine, was so disgusted by the treatment of women that she saw and experienced from multiple executives that she left as soon as possible.¹⁹⁹

Further irony arises in that the ill treatment and disrespect of even star actresses was undertaken by the very people whose corporate interests were dependent upon the image the public would have of said women as ethereal and powerful, leading charmed lives. Behind the scenes, many

¹⁹⁵ Davis, *The Lonely Life* 148.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. 86.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 332.

¹⁹⁸ Malone, *Hollywood’s Second Sex* 37.

¹⁹⁹ Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses* 166.

of the studio heads seemed to see abuse as a simple managerial prerogative. Once again, Harry Cohn, with strong shades of Schulberg's fictional Sammy Glick, was king of this behaviour. Gabler described the tyrannical Cohn marching around his studio with a cigar, "trailing the pungent scent of Carnival de Venise cologne", calling names and visibly enjoying frightening people.²⁰⁰

There were naturally levels to such habits of bullying and intimidation, from studio to studio, as with each abusive Hollywood practice. As already mentioned, some of the studio power class were particularly known for their dishonest business practices but for not taking part in the sexual abuse of the "casting couch"; others were sexually abusive but not financially so, a few were gentlemanly, and so on. In terms of sexual predators, Daryl Zanuck and Cohn were among the most notorious, a point to be discussed in the next chapter around actresses' own testimony.

Cheerful, centre-right, American sociologists who have been decades-long champions of the country's corporate culture have, throughout that same time, shied away from discussions of domination. They have done so on the specific grounds of American exceptionalism; "domination" may exist as a corporate feature in other countries, but not in the U.S. As G. William Domhoff wrote in *Who Rules America?*, he and his fellows like Robert A. Dahl have typically "recoil[ed] from the use of the term *domination*", seeing it as "a simple and crude concept that has no business being used in a democratic country".²⁰¹ Domhoff went on to ask, following Dahl, "do we not need theoretical concepts more sensitive than the simple crudities of domination and subjection?"²⁰²

Iconoclastic sociologists like Veblen, or outsider social scientists (for example, women) have seen it differently. The massive, twinned American legacies of racism and misogyny absolutely prove that a country having a purportedly democratic system around voting and elections reveals less than nothing about equity, power, or, indeed, domination, exploitation, and abuse in that country. Not in terms of its everyday life of the interpersonal or familial, and surely not in terms of its industrial and corporate structures. The "simple crudities of domination and subjection" do not rest in the naming of them; they rest in the fact that they exist. Not naming them does nothing to change such facts. Rosabeth Moss Kanter also worked with gender, power, and business practices early and relatively alone in American business writing, with her 1977 work *Men and Women of the Corporation*. In it, she explained a nexus of corporate theory and psychoanalysis that can be most useful here, in relation to Cohn and the other studio founders:

When a person's exercise of power is thwarted or blocked, when people are rendered powerless in the larger arena, they may tend to concentrate their power needs on those over whom they have even a modicum of authority.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 152.

²⁰¹ G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America?: Challenges to Corporate and Class Dominance*. (New York, McGraw-Hill, 2014) 209.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York, Basic, 1977) 189.

Such interdisciplinary approaches of the cultural and the psycho-sociological are quite well supported by previous and contemporary theorists of business and domination. Describing business theories of power, Powdermaker explained that real power is the ability to act and to get things done, not to control others. Nevertheless, many “business leaders” confuse this with control for control’s sake, human domination, and, instead, “coercive power”.²⁰⁴ Speaking specifically of the Hollywood founder class, Powdermaker saw them as little dictators, drunk on power over both their studio workers and the audiences of the U.S. and the world: “[t]hese men have made millions, and more money means very little to them; but they cannot get enough of power”.²⁰⁵ This point comes up repeatedly in *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*, as when Powdermaker wrote:

The front office, with occasional exceptions, rests on a combination of various types of influence which are associated with the big business executive, the political boss and the medieval lord.²⁰⁶

This was of a piece with Gabler’s broader point about the studio founders’ ethnic immigrant status and their relationship to power:

If one couldn’t control the world of real power and influence the august world of big business, finance, and politics, through the studio one could create a whole fictive universe that one *could* control. And that was exactly how the studio apparatus came to function.²⁰⁷

Neal Gabler’s point that the founders were not in fact of a monolithic personality type is well-taken, however. A dog-eat-dog life philosophy like that of a Cohn or a Loew is contrasted, for example, with that of founder of Paramount Jesse Lasky, whose own daughter described what she considered his outlier status among his contemporaries in later-life interview. A secular Jew from a comfortable San Francisco family rather than from Eastern Europe or the Lower East Side of Manhattan, she attributed Lasky’s kindness and his lack of shark-like business mentality to the fact that “[h]e did not crawl out of a ghetto in Europe or on the East Side of New York where you had to fight, to scrape to stay alive”.²⁰⁸ Carl Laemmle was another exception. Diminutive, kindly, and born in 1867, Laemmle cared more about horse racing and getting autographs than dictatorship. Bette Davis directed many scathing remarks at her decades-long boss in Jack Warner in later-life writings and interviews, but she very clearly separated him from the “casting couch” rapists of the day in her definitive character sketch: “[n]o lecherous boss was he! His sins lay elsewhere. He was the father. The power. The glory. And he was in business to make money”.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 174.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 329.

²⁰⁶ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 83.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 189.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 34.

²⁰⁹ Davis, *The Lonely Life* 149.

It's also impossible not to conclude that for all the abuse and darkness in this business, some of its unique characteristics and circumstances in the differences between the founders were nothing short of comical. Considering the Eastern European roots of the entire studio founder class, Aleichem's commentary on Yiddish theatre and its rivalries and hatreds is particularly apt here, as when he wrote:

You can be sure that each director wanted to be rid of the other, the sooner the better. But like duplicitous diplomats, they were devising different ways to deceive, swindle, and do each other dirt.²¹⁰

In another section, Aleichem continued:

These people belonged to opposing camps, factions... were often rivals, and almost without exception detested one another, could not bear the sight or sound of one another's names. Such bitter, sworn enemies were they that if one of them were to die, the other would dance a merry jig on his grave.²¹¹

Such an ethno-social industrial background set up a social milieu that, even while reading critically to deconstruct Hollywood structures about a world populated by men who vilely abused women, still at times comes off as charming in a madcap sort of way. It's enjoyable to read about the manic rivalries, double-crosses, and class conflicts of these men, who then somehow went on to marry one another's sisters and daughters. Adolph Zukor loathed Samuel Goldfish, later better known as Samuel Goldwyn, as loud, crude, and embarrassing-- so much so that he bought him out of Famous Players-Lasky.²¹² Then one of Goldfish's daughters married one of Marcus Loew's sons, while all the while they continued to be bitter business rivals. In a business move that can only be described as hilariously George Costanza-like, Louis Selznick once learned that infighting at Universal had split the company into three factions who were not speaking to one another. He simply showed up and declared himself the general manager, knowing each unit would think the other unit had made this hire.²¹³ Selznick was quoted as saying that the movie business "took less brains than anything else in the world".²¹⁴ Zukor hated Selznick even more than he hated Goldfish, at one point offering him 5000 dollars a week if he would move to China.²¹⁵ On the whole, both Aleichem's fictional characters and the studio founders and their progeny behaved, in both personal relations and business collusion, "like a chronically quarrelsome but close-knit family".²¹⁶

However, this also requires a cautionary note. Richard Maltby has asserted that the reputation for cartoonish behaviour, even when supported in anecdote, grew from both class prejudice and

²¹⁰ Aleichem, *Wandering Stars* 111.

²¹¹ *Ibid.* 293.

²¹² Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*.

²¹³ *Ibid.* 93.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Douglas Gomery. *The Hollywood Studio System: A History*. (London, BFI, 2006) 125.

antisemitism.²¹⁷ And even more relevantly in implication for film history, Maltby has theorised that such class and ethnic stereotyping are direct reasons why Hollywood as industry has been understudied. In *Hollywood Cinema* (1995), Maltby decried:

the assumption that “the fourth largest industry in America” was run by buffoons. There has never been any shortage of anecdotes caricaturing the studio heads as philistines.²¹⁸

Whether such histories are read today as heroic, humorous, or horrifying, much in them can be attributed to a simple cultural fact as to the structural design of the system: the founders did not on the whole trust one another, but they trusted the outside world even less. Conversely, they knew that due to antisemitism, they were unlikely to get financial support or even be treated fairly by gentile business interests. Industry insiders also attributed the common patterns of abuse on the part of the studio founder class to paranoia and persecution anxieties. Speaking in later-life interview, lyricist Sammy Cahn explained what he saw as the central driving thought of the studio heads, beginning with Cohn but finding commonality among them all:

[he thought]... that people were born to screw him all day long... he was convinced they were dedicated to his demise, y’know. L.B. Mayer, Goldwyn, Warner- they’re all alike in this respect. They’re all Jewish gentlemen and I think that’s got something to do with it. But they’re all the same man.²¹⁹

This leads to an important aspect of the foundational structure of Hollywood early film founders’ status as foreign-born, specifically of an ethnic group suspect in the WASPy, antisemitic American early twentieth century. That status both impacted the founders’ ideas of Americanness and the American Dream, and spoke to what whiteness meant in the California of the early twentieth century.

Consider how the themes of American success, whiteness, antisemitism, and class all meet uneasily in the term “mogul” itself. The very use of the term should, incidentally, by now be contestable by scholarly film historians, if not rejected all together. Yet it is still very much in common parlance both popularly and academically. Though it has been utilised by serious film historians throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, a fresh look in 2020 problematises the term. Its pervasiveness in mass market Hollywood literature will likely remain. But as it grew out of orientalist and vaguely antisemitic popular press that intimated the new studio heads as constituting an ethnically-othered new ruling class, it does not sit as well now in a scholarly sense. The term itself does everything, semantically speaking, to reinforce such stereotypes. As Vincent Brook explained in *Land of Smoke and Mirrors* (2013):

²¹⁷ Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* 135.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Kobal, *Rita Hayworth* 175.

The term *mogul*- derived from the pejorative *Mongol*- was coined specifically in reference to the Jewish studio heads' alleged Asiatic (read: alien) provenance and appearance, perceived boorish (read: uncivilized) behavior, and admittedly aggressive (read: unscrupulous) business practices.²²⁰

In *Taking Fame to Market: On the Pre-History and Post-History of Hollywood Stardom* (2014), Barry King deliberately began to instead utilise the term “new-immigrant background” and “new immigrant communities”.²²¹ I instead choose to replace “moguls” with “new Independents”, “studio founders”, “studio heads”, “male Hollywood power elite”, “new ruling class”, “capitalist-masculinist bosses”, or any combination of such that is appropriate by section. Other scholars, past and present, Jewish and non-, have chosen to contend with the Jewish identity of the founder class, specifically.²²² For the purposes of this feminist historical project, I am far more invested in situating them as a male, masculinist power elite, one who worked together to keep out outsiders due to not mere ethnic insularity, but monopoly and quasi-criminal business interests.

From the beginning, antisemitism had caused the questioning of the loyalties of the Hollywood power class, especially by the bigoted isolationist right. Both typical ethnic stereotyping present in American life of the time and deep antisemitic tropes were woven through Los Angeles' understanding of their new neighbours. These same currents were also highly present within the broader American (gentile) population's perception of the men running things in Hollywood. Going back to the 1920s, Henry Ford and American politicians had funded campaigns against what they termed “the Hebrew Trust”, which they accused of luring young white girls away from home to degrade themselves.²²³ Questions of loyalty or foreignness had not gone away through the 1930s and did not even into World War II.

In fact, the hard and open antisemitism of the WASP-powered U.S. of the day was always subtext to the Hollywood story. In his *Dearborn Independent*, Ford famously and frequently railed against Jews and other immigrants, and Hollywood was a particular and easy target. In 1921 he wrote that the movies are “Jew-controlled, not in spots only, not 50% merely, but entirely”.²²⁴ He excoriated the vulgar content of films on the grounds that “many of these producers don't know how filthy their stuff is- it is so natural to them.”²²⁵ Middle American anti-Semites used “Bolshevism” as a catch-all

²²⁰ Brook, *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2013) 68.

²²¹ Barry King, *Taking Fame to Market* (New York, Springer, 2014) 107.

²²² Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York, Crown, 1988); Paul Buhle, *From the Lower East Side to Hollywood: Jews in American Popular Culture* (New York, Verso, 2004); Mark Dollinger and Ava Kahn. *California Jews* (Waltham, Brandeis, 2011); Daniel Bernardi, Murray Pomerance, and Hava Tirosh-Samuels. *Hollywood's Chosen People: The Jewish Experience in American Cinema* (Detroit, Wayne State, 2012); Lisa Ansell and Vincent Brook, Michael Renov, and Steven Joseph Ross. *From Shtetl to Stardom: Jews in Hollywood* (West Lafayette, Purdue, 2016).

²²³ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*.

²²⁴ Colin Schindler, *Hollywood In Crisis: Cinema and American Society 1929-1939* (London, Routledge, 2005).

²²⁵ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 277.

term that largely coded as “Jewish”. “Bolshevik” as adjective was also laid against anything Hollywood produced that they felt was too sexual explicit or morally conflicted, and thus, “anti-American”.²²⁶

As Hilary Hallett has detailed, the Ku Klux Klan, ascendant and powerful in the 1920s, warned of the connection between commerce and seduction employed by the bogeyman Jewish bosses against whom they railed:

“[b]elieving that ‘all Protestant girls are common property and can be bought for a song’, Jewish employers underpaid working girls, seduced them with trinkets, and then discarded them ‘like an old worn-out coat.’²²⁷

(The Ku Klux Klan did not concern itself with what they perceived Jewish men doing to Catholic worker girls, or girls from other immigrant groups, but only with “American” girls.)

David Thomson has rhetorically echoed some of the nation’s xenophobic mood as the studio founders became more visible:

Was it proper or decent for a onetime scrap merchant, without education, to become the highest-paid man in America? Was it wise to let a class of aliens have such influence on the American mind?²²⁸

This discourse of “foreignness”— meaning both immigrant status and Jewishness— of the studio heads particularly reared its head in the period of the Arbuckle scandal. In fact, the call from Christians and conservatives for what became the Hayes Commission was in response to fears of immigrants defiling traditional American morals. Such anxieties were grounded in particular antisemitic tropes that Jews corrupt the morals of host nations.

The executives were so shaken by Arbuckle and the scandals that preceded him that they went all in on this self-directed censorship. The production code can be seen in this light— both to appease the Christian U.S. by putting one of their majority at the reins of content control, and also as a practical matter. It was developed so that the industry would not go bankrupt bankrolling multiple commissions to determine community-by-community standards. Hays gave the studio heads what they needed. He was a Christian, a conservative, and he preached the values of the traditional family and morality.

Just as in the last chapter I noted the tendency to link the woman, the actress, the prostitute, and the liar in culture, Jews in western cultures were often targeted by similar specious linkages. Maria Tatar has explained:

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!* 165.

²²⁸ Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 140.

As Sander Gilman has pointed out, both prostitutes and Jews have been linked by what is seen to be a sexualized relation to capital- they have 'but one interest, the conversion of sex into money or money into sex'.²²⁹

Within Hollywood, too, private correspondence, later revealed, showed the resentful working class of creatives also occasionally doubly rankled by the concurrent Jewishness of their all-powerful bosses. In a letter to a friend upon quitting Hollywood, Theodore Dreiser wrote:

The movies are solidly Jewish. They've dug in, employ only Jews with American names... the dollar sign is the guide- mentally and physically. That America should be led- the mass- by their direction is beyond all believing. In addition, they are arrogant, insolent, and contemptuous.²³⁰

Noel Coward, part of the sophisticated and insular upper-class British colony in Hollywood, wrote to a friend that he found it intolerable to watch the Hollywood Jews socialising and enjoying themselves.²³¹ Fitzgerald remarked that Hollywood was a "Jewish holiday, a gentiles [sic] tragedy".²³²

Neal Gabler went on to utilise Fitzgerald's quote in an interesting way, rather as a jumping-off point of his book's entire thesis. He wrote that while it may have seemed so to Fitzgerald, Hollywood was the tragedy of its Jewish success stories too. Noting the studio founders as constantly targeted-- by right-wing Christians, the government, and McCarthyist red-baiting, all at once-- he theorised that the sadness of their alienated situation was how much they actually believed in the American Dream. Their mindset and ambivalent, precarious place in American society is well-summed up in Aleichem's Yiddish-penned *Wandering Stars*:

Say what you will about our brethren in this golden land- that they are a bit too greedy for business, they throw themselves too eagerly into the American way of life, they become too quickly Americanized, they wish to appear more American than the Americans themselves. Some see these qualities as faults, others as virtues.²³³

With critique of the studio founders for their bad business practices and abuses of women and people of colour valid, they were still and all part of the great American wave of immigration and possibility understood in the mythos of Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. As social critic and writer Lillian Smith once wrote of the fundamental American immigrant experience:

What everyone has always wanted in this country, what most came here for, was to get away from all those others who smell bad, are sleeping in a shanty, and are going to loaf tomorrow because there is no job to go to.²³⁴

²²⁹ In Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, 1995) 63.

²³⁰ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 278.

²³¹ Ehrhard Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism* (Berkeley, California, 2007).

²³² Ibid. 2.

²³³ Aleichem, *Wandering Stars* 288.

²³⁴ In Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (New York, Penguin) 278.

This alienation did not manifest only as a metaphorical sadness, it was also a practical business concern. Gabler quoted a Jewish producer he interviewed who had been a contemporary of the first founders:

That's the important thing... The motion picture hierarchy felt that they were on the outside of the real power source of the country. They were outside of that New England-Wall Street-Middle West money.²³⁵

The founders had a perception that gentiles would not work with them, or would try to cheat them out of their fortunes if they did. All of them took the fate of William Fox in the later 1920s and 1930s as a cautionary tale bordering on a horror story. Fox had pushed questionable practices the hardest, bullying theatres and buying up all three sides of the movie business triangle-- production, distribution, exhibition-- until he was eventually investigated by the Federal Trade Commission and trust-busted.²³⁶ He ended up financially ruined, pushed out of his own company by stockholders (and the Schenck brothers), in bankruptcy court for years, and finally served six months in prison for bribery and perjury before leaving the business for good. The other Jewish members of the Hollywood founder class took Fox as a lesson: that at least they had better have the good sense to be financed by fellow Jews. In their minds, Fox had been ruined because he had been financed by gentiles who had left him holding the bag when a merger went wrong and the stock market crashed. Their lesson was to stay within the community and out of gentile business. This lesson becomes central to understanding of Hollywood as an essentially exclusionary masculinist business, that has come down through the decades as such even into the present century

The romanticisation of such exclusionary masculinist practices is also an aspect that needs to be addressed, particularly as it exists within Hollywood film historiography. Producer Pandro Berman explained in later-life interview that “[t]he original guys were all fur merchants and bouncers out of Palisades Park and things like that”.²³⁷ Later, second-generation executive Dore Schary described the first generation as a lot of “bootleggers and icemen and butchers” who had all come to get rich in Hollywood.²³⁸ Much like Dyer’s identification of the girl at the soda fountain as one of Hollywood’s founding myths, the humble origins of these “magic-makers” became part of such narrative as well. In celebrity journalism, later scholarly histories, or even in the memoirs of the stars and workers who hated them, the same language and points are repeated over and over. As Eddie Cantor remarked:

I marveled at this new world of iridescent splendor representing many millions, many romances, many miracles, and it had all come into being through the imagination and the business brains of a former furrier, a former druggist, and a former coronet player.²³⁹

²³⁵ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 5.

²³⁶ Ibid. 43.

²³⁷ In Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 226.

²³⁸ Ibid. 161.

²³⁹ Ibid. 250.

Just as mythology developed around the founders of Hollywood as tough scrappers from New York's roughest neighbourhoods, as mentioned earlier, mythology and derisive condescension-- both at once— also took hold in the historical narrative in the assertion that the industry was founded by a bunch of “cloth merchants”. Almost every book of Hollywood history has some early, quasi-admiring line in its origin story section like the following from Kenneth Anger: “the former junk dealers and glove salesmen juggled a chancy operation into a celluloid bonanza”.²⁴⁰ Or consider this piece of Babylon-legend purple prose, from John Austin's 1994 mass-market *Hollywood's Babylon Women*:

It was the days of bootleg whiskey and nouveau riche moguls who arrived in Never Never Land on the back of produce trucks as junk dealers, glove salesmen and fish mongers, junk peddlers and brothel keepers; graduates from the tough sidewalks of New York and points east.²⁴¹

The star actresses who arrived in the 1920s and 1930s also latched on to this point too. In her 1962 memoir *The Lonely Life*, Bette Davis bemoaned the lack of a national theatre in the United States, noting that instead the fates and fortunes of brilliant actors were decided by “a handful of suit and clothing merchants”.²⁴² Mae West described Hollywood producers as primarily lower-class salesmen “who had grabbed a good thing and were annoyed that they now had to have writers and actors to create the reality for the new words the talkies were spouting”.²⁴³

Such particularities of background, education, and internecine warfare meant that as the business grew and evolved, these men were particularly threatened by new blood or new ideas. Rhetorically speaking, in Gabler's words, “[w]ho needed the suit cutters, junkmen, and bouncers when they could have bright, assimilated Jews like Thalberg and Selznick?”²⁴⁴ For example and to that point, Mayer responded to the rapid rise of Irving Thalberg not as a protégé, but as a threat. He took Thalberg's rise as an opportunity to apply characteristic authoritarian moves, away from a kind of oligarchy and towards a centralised “dictatorship”.²⁴⁵ Thalberg was demoted, and died shortly thereafter.

In a nascent industry which due to both antisemitism and a responsively defensive community did begin with men from such a tight-knit group, the logical result of this zeitgeist combined with ethnic realities was a business run by fathers, sons, brothers, uncles, and cousins. I discussed the impulse to nepotism across American corporate industry in the early twentieth century in Chapter One. The development of Hollywood took place both within that broader climate, and in one doubled by specific ethnic insularity. Ezra Goodman took a more cynical view as to why the early powers of Hollywood

²⁴⁰ Anger, *Hollywood Babylon* 6.

²⁴¹ Austin, *Hollywood's Babylon Women* 108.

²⁴² Bette Davis, *The Lonely Life* (New York; Putnam's, 1962) 101.

²⁴³ Mae West, *Goodness Had Nothing To Do With It* 152.

²⁴⁴ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 230.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 233.

preferred to base their industry in nepotism, arguing that it came down to their wish not to be challenged. He described them as unconcerned with the legacy of the business at all when they were gone. As Powdermaker remarked of one of the executives she interviewed, but putting it delicately, “[l]ike other executives with similar backgrounds, he surrounded himself with assistants who had also been poor boys whom he had known in his childhood and youth”.²⁴⁶ Goodman wrote more strongly, that “[t]hey surrounded themselves with pimps and polo players, sons-in-laws and sycophants, yes men and guess men”.²⁴⁷

Just as in the 1920s, in the 1930s discussions of nepotism were in the air everywhere, from insider community jokes to congressional hearings. One quip at Universal cautioned that one had better say “sir” to the janitors because Laemmle had seventy relatives on the payroll; one could never be sure who was whom.²⁴⁸ In *The Lonely Life*, Bette Davis recalled being assigned to a picture whose director was a Laemmle relation, promoted from prop man to his first directorial job.²⁴⁹ Hayworth biographer John Kobal reported that “by the mid-thirties the humourist Robert Benchley could joke that Columbia was like a pine forest, ‘Because there are so many Cohns in it!’”²⁵⁰ The joke that a Hollywood epic should be made entitled *The Son-In-Law Also Rises* also made the rounds in town.²⁵¹ In an early 1960s interview with Goodman, silent-era director Clarence Brown declared, “[w]e were all right in the old days before the relatives got in as producers”.²⁵²

At its worst, such practices could sound like the passing on of the family plantation in the antebellum South, as when Thomas Schatz explained that “Carl Laemmle Jr., son of the company’s founder and eager candidate for Hollywood’s echelon of boy wonders, had taken over production in October 1928, when Carl Sr. gave him Universal City for his twenty-first birthday”.²⁵³ Yet where this business was different than a family-run manufacturing plant or mortgage office, for example, was that the product was in many ways women. One can begin to see the workplace culture problems on the horizon within such a structure, in terms of how abusive men might get away with virtually anything when “connected to the family”.

Regardless of motivation or intention, two things are true. Firstly, the quality of creative product and the ethics of the studios as organisations did suffer due to nepotism. It invited everything from incompetence to mediocrity to rampant sexual abuse without consequence. When combined with buzzword industrial practices of the day like scientific managerialism, it contributed to even more problems. In her anthropological study, Powdermaker identified nepotism as one of the central

²⁴⁶ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 101.

²⁴⁷ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 198.

²⁴⁸ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 70.

²⁴⁹ Davis, *The Lonely Life*.

²⁵⁰ Kobal, *Rita Hayworth* 86.

²⁵¹ Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 174.

²⁵² Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 174.

²⁵³ Schatz, *The Genius of the System* 82.

structural Hollywood problems. It was, for example, directly responsible for numerous fraudulent business practices like questionable cash advances to relatives. Misbehaviours were so prevalent that in 1949 and 1950, Warner Brothers stockholders filed suit against the company and Jack Warner personally for, among other things, “conspiracy to enrich his son-in-law”.²⁵⁴

Secondly, nepotism was not only rampant and pervasive, but quite byzantine. Tensions could arise when young executives were expected to marry the boss’ daughter, sometimes to the point that they might switch studios to avoid the arranged marriage.²⁵⁵ The situation was so widespread that in the 1930s, Nicholas Schenck was forced to address it and defend the industry in US congressional hearings.²⁵⁶ As he explained to the congressmen before him:

When you live in a society, after all, with a small group of people, it is the natural thing for boys to be thrown with girls, and for girls to be thrown with boys, and they will get married.²⁵⁷

The other reality at play in this industrial-social formation of the system was that antisemitism was very real, and a major factor for the industry. Regardless of the power being amassed in the system, the situation in terms of outside finance and gentile capital remained very unstable into the 1930s. Some of the companies who would collaborate on sound technology like Western Bell were openly right-wing and racist in ideology, and did not want to work with Jews. Even those financiers who were not explicitly antisemitic demonstrated that financing Hollywood films “wasn’t regarded as a sound practice”²⁵⁸ by the conservative large bankers in the U.S. As Gabler explained of the initial situation:

Big money, gentile money, viewed the movies suspiciously- economically, as a fad; morally, as potential embarrassments... Getting financing from the important investment houses was never easy. These institutions weren’t accustomed to dealing with immigrant Jews engaged in a vaguely disreputable enterprise like the movies.²⁵⁹

Yet even in the early twentieth century masculinist American world of open ethnic stereotyping and corporate warfare of all sorts, one thing was certain: big business was big business, money was money, and male prejudices frequently eroded when many millions of dollars were on the line. Interestingly, A.P. Giannini of San Francisco’s Bank of America became one of the first major bankers to lend to the studio founders, creating between the Jewish film producers and the Italian immigrant bank what Gabler has dubbed “a collaboration of outsiders”.²⁶⁰ From this initial breaking of the wall of

²⁵⁴ Ibid. 175.

²⁵⁵ Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 19.

²⁵⁶ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 346.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. 134.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. 53; 132.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

American banking arose the beginning of Jewish-gentile male millionaire (and later billionaire) alliances.

Fox may have been the first to get involved with WASP businessmen (to his downfall), but Wall Street money eventually came calling to each studio and studio head. Once the profits being made were noticed, the first founders went from begging for financing from all sorts of places to being courted by the biggest money in the country. As Ross delineated:

Studios also raised capital through bank loans or direct investments by financiers. Fox got money from Prudential Life Insurance and New Jersey bankers; the Goldwyn Company from the DuPonts, Chase Bank, and Central Union Trust; Triangle from the American Tobacco Company; and scores of companies found a welcome hand and ready cash at Amadeo Giannini's Bank of Italy.²⁶¹

Tino Balio noted additionally in *Grand Design* (1992) that “the construction of sound studios in Hollywood was financed largely by the Morgan and Rockefeller banking groups”.²⁶²

These new alliances meant venturing outside ethnically homogenous circles to start putting outsiders on to the boards of the studios. Jack Warner was the first to put a Wall Street banker on his board, and by the mid-1920s, “Wall Street had few compunctions about loaning money and placing its officers on the boards of movie companies”.²⁶³ A sort of game-changer took place when David O. Selznick began to make financial partnerships with East Coast old money. His alliance with old money financier Jock Whitney was particularly cataclysmic. As Thomson wrote in *The Whole Equation*, Selznick's success in getting “funding from old money, East Coast society people amused by the movies and ready to take a flutter” [was] “a step never really attempted by Hollywood before”.²⁶⁴ Speaking to its impact on the cultural milieu, Thomson also cautioned readers: “don't underestimate the small social revolution when Jock Whitney, a scion of WASP society, went into partnership with Selznick”.²⁶⁵

Making some of the biggest fortunes in the U.S. over the course of the 1920s had made the studio founders and their business respectable to the white male elite establishment. Ethnic nepotism was still in for the day to day management class, but at the investing level, an upper-echelon bank account, a studio title, and the ability to present as a white male eventually became their own cards of entry that trumped concerns of ethnicity, class, or education.²⁶⁶ As sociologist C. Wright Mills wrote in *The Power Elite* (1956), “[a]lways in America, society based on descent has been either bypassed or

²⁶¹ Ross, *Working Class Hollywood* 123.

²⁶² Balio, *Grand Design* 23.

²⁶³ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 132.

²⁶⁴ Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 223.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 242.

²⁶⁶ Contemporary American and global whiteness and masculinity studies by scholars like Sally Robinson, Thomas Di Piero, Hamilton Carroll, and Valerie Babb, among others, have been useful in thinking through how the immigrant Jewish men were both white and non-white in the American imagination and in their business lives, conversely.

bought out by the new and vulgar rich”.²⁶⁷ Old money in the US always accepts new money eventually; even the New York 400 were eventually overrun. As long as the men were men and the money was good, the Jewish-gentile problems were becoming quite secondary-- in the worlds of industry and finance.

The social world was a different story. It was a period in which even arguably the most powerful man in Los Angeles, Mayer, could not get his daughter admitted to a prep school that barred Jews. Even an attempted intercession by Hedda Hopper was to no avail.²⁶⁸ Thus parallel elite social structures were constructed. I would argue that the founders’ establishment of this parallel high society, their simultaneous wish to mimic the American upper class while creating their own, is also vital to grasp to understand some of the structural roots of oppression in the American film industry. As Gabler explained, “[a]mong the many ways that Hollywood Jews rejected the Eastern establishment, which they felt had rejected them, was to pretend it didn’t really matter”.²⁶⁹ Star Patsy Ruth Miller described her introduction at the first WAMPAS Ball as a Star of Tomorrow as “really quite elegant. We girls were presented much as debutantes at a Society Cotillion”.²⁷⁰ But in fact the starlets weren’t being presented to high society, and so this was another parallel social structure attempt.

Another social example Gabler offered was that the founders “became members of a lavish new country club called Hillcrest that mimicked the gentile clubs that barred them”.²⁷¹ Mayer and the other founder class men then devoted themselves to giving their children the most genteel educations possible, complete with French, art, horseback riding, and other of the most elite accomplishments. Such backgrounds have led film writers like Thomson to observe and describe the next generation of Hollywood elite like Irene Mayer Selznick via class and ethnicity. Thomson, who knew Mayer Selznick personally, wrote that “in her one could see and feel how the shtetl and cafe society held hands under the table”.²⁷² In the introduction to Gabler’s work of cultural history, writer and child of Hollywood Jill Robinson posited that:

[i]n this magical place that had no relationship to any reality they had ever seen before in their lives, or that anyone else had ever seen, they decided to create their idea of an Eastern aristocracy.²⁷³

Continuing, Robinson argued provocatively that thus the American Dream as it resettled in California was “a Jewish invention”.²⁷⁴

²⁶⁷ C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (Oxford, 2000) 52.

²⁶⁸ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 273.

²⁶⁹ Ibid. 249.

²⁷⁰ Miller, *My Hollywood* 18.

²⁷¹ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 6.

²⁷² Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 43.

²⁷³ In Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 1.

²⁷⁴ In Ibid. 1.

The problem with romanticisation and celebrations of heroism in the founder class is similar to that of its opposite extreme converse, in the bigoted antisemitism with which they were forced to contend. Neither allow for serious discussion of the roots of Hollywood as shaped by the ethnic immigrant male experiences of its founders. In 1995, Maltby astutely pointed out that both the “empire of their own” mythmaking or pure demonisation serve to overstate the legends of these men, while simultaneously neglecting study of them as businessmen.²⁷⁵ I would take Maltby’s point further, however, as a feminist film historian. In these founding myths’ admiration for and deification of the men who founded Hollywood, where is the space to talk about abuse, about misogyny, about harassment, rape, and assault? About systemic racism and the absolute barring of people of colour from power or success? Because this project is about male abusive power structures used against women, the ethnic insularity at play does matter in understanding a century of Hollywood culture. Without antisemitism, for example, the system would not have been grown as an industrial ethnic monoculture centrally reliant upon nepotism. Without nepotism, sexual crimes would not have been taken as such a matter of course. And so thus, without nepotism Hollywood would have been a very different industry for women and non-white people. Without a thorough account of the way the system began, as part of a post-MeToo lens on its history, it will never be possible to understand the power structures still rendering the business inequitable to the present day. All of this psychosocial and ethnic history does indeed hold relevance for the structure Hollywood came to inhabit for decades—which groups were invited to prosper (white businessmen) and which were marginalised (women, people of colour, creatives who lacked financial resources and, thus, power).

As John Allen Scott has written in theorising the epistemologies of cultural production spaces and, specifically, Hollywood, “the ever-expanding streams of cultural products that emerge from contemporary capitalist business enterprise are deeply inflected by [their] point of social origin”.²⁷⁶ Going further, Scott situates place, as for example the geographical space of Hollywood, as:

a unit of social and economic organization and as a concentrated locus of conventionalized human practices whose characteristics leave deep traces on the form and cognitive means of products (and above all *cultural* products).²⁷⁷

This also fits with cultural production and creative labour studies work by Keith Negus and Anamik Saha. What all of these creative labour theorists can be used to suggest is that Gabler’s historian’s point is an apt one: that the founders of Hollywood held a “neurotic” worship of the mainstream that didn’t want them, which played out in a dysfunctionality in their business practices. In this, Gabler rather poetically theorised a tragedy of Hollywood’s Jewish film history: “[d]ucking from these assaults, the Jews became the phantoms of the film history they had created, haunting it but never really able

²⁷⁵ Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* 125.

²⁷⁶ Scott, *On Hollywood* 3.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.* xii.

to inhabit it".²⁷⁸ But I would go a step inward, away from media transmission, and seek that dysfunction in the authoritarianism and labour conditions of the system.

In terms of corporate and psychological conditions, for example, the instances in which the founders veered not only into fascist-flavoured business dealings but outright enthrallment with actual fascists remain shocking. Their ethnic outsider status combined with their far right-tinged politics remains one of the many paradoxes of studio-era Hollywood. Studies like David Welky's have drawn attention to the studios' delicate dance with Nazism in Europe throughout the 1930s, for example-- their wish to continue doing business in the tightening atmosphere of fascist consolidation, and then overt antisemitic violence.²⁷⁹ But even such studies have, to my knowledge, little connected said business practices to the outright imitation and deification of fascist leaders by the famous studio heads. Cohn in particular had open admiration for Mussolini; contemporaries described him as "star-struck" by the Italian fascist leader and his strongman ways.²⁸⁰ Besides the aforementioned bust, he also kept a picture of Mussolini in the office that he decorated, deliberately, to mimic that of Il Duce's. Cohn's entire office took on the feeling of a kind of fascist performance, a power dynamic of fear and hierarchy. Such a fascist aesthetic is also seen in primary source recollections about Mayer and other studio executives, but Cohn took it the farthest. According to John Kobal:

In keeping with the Mussolini tradition, the Cohn office was massive and elongated, with the desk at the far end. The visitor marched down the thick carpet to the semi-circular desk, slightly raised above the floor level. Cohn remained in the shadows while he visitor was clearly lighted.²⁸¹

Jesse Lasky, Jr. described Cohn in terms nearly evocative of a cartoon villain, recalling him as "enormous behind his desk with a cigar that looked like a deadly weapon".²⁸² When asked why he had designed his office in such a specific and unusual manner, Cohn replied simply, "by the time they walk to my desk, they're beaten".²⁸³

After several years and hundreds of interviews as to the inner workings of the system, and to the proclivities of the men who had created it and profited from it, Powdermaker reached the startling, climactic conclusion of her anthropological study in *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*. Waiting until nearly the end of the text to drop her scholarly bombshell, she informed her readers that Hollywood, simply put, functions as a totalitarian state within the larger American society. She cited numerous phenomena to bolster this conclusion: that it was a cultural milieu where artists were crushed while

²⁷⁸ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 2.

²⁷⁹ David Welky, *The Moguls and the Dictators: Hollywood and the Coming of World War II*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2008) Print.

²⁸⁰ John Kobal, *Rita Hayworth: Portrait of a Love Goddess* (New York, Berkeley Books, 1982) 87.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid. 294.

²⁸³ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 152.

those with the least expertise were in charge, as well as a milieu defined by hysteria, manipulation, poor planning, and dependence upon fate.²⁸⁴ Going further, Powdermaker delineated clearly:

Hollywood has the elaborated totalitarian elements we have described: the concept of people as property and as objects to be manipulated, highly concentrated and personalized power for power's sake, an amorality, and an atmosphere of breaks, continuous anxiety, and crises. The result of this overelaboration is business inefficiency, deep frustration in human relations, and a high number of unentertaining second- and third-rate movies.²⁸⁵

What has been intelligible through analysis of primary sources-- the reactionary politics, the valueless, transactional worldview, the corrupt business practices, the personal exploitations—would confirm that Powdermaker's conclusions were correct. This was a dehumanised totalitarian system built, quite literally, on abuse. It was frequently American gangsterism with a veneer of glamour; again to quote Bette Davis, with the “creamy gloss of class”.²⁸⁶

Further, and again in line with Powdermaker's massively consequential findings, the values of the system from the top informed the corporate culture, as in any organisation. But uniquely as the world's most powerful mass medium, such values would also distill down to other industries in the U.S., and to audiences via the communicative product. In *The Concept of the Corporation* (1983), business theorist Peter Drucker asserted the contemporary corporation as a fundamentally American modern entity, and, “as a moral and technical institution in the... community”, one that sets the culture.²⁸⁷ Drucker went even further in his supposition that as goes the corporation, so goes American society.²⁸⁸ Powdermaker was specifically concerned with the transmission of fascist, totalitarian values to the general population. Thus it mattered then (and matters even more now, in a post-MeToo reckoning) that Hollywood was built on such fascist, totalitarian, and unequal foundations.

Goodman came to a similar conclusion as to what lay at the heart of Hollywood. And as a journalist there, he had a front row seat to this, the nihilist flipside of “the whole equation”. The frontispiece of Goodman's *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (1961) quoted Cohn, and the quote speaks volumes. Light years from believing in artistry, creativity, or innovation, Cohn openly and hyper-cynically reported that the industry beloved around the world and that had given him great wealth and power was, in reality, a simple scam. As Cohn retorted, “[i]t's not a business. It's a racket!”²⁸⁹ Cohn's entire oversized persona and methods of operating in business in terms of power now look as though they represented a one-man confirmation of Powdermaker's findings as to the totalitarian nature of the system.

²⁸⁴ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 327.

²⁸⁵ Ibid. 332.

²⁸⁶ Davis and Stine, *Mother Goddam* 26.

²⁸⁷ Peter Drucker, *The Concept of the Corporation* (New York, Signet, 1983) 25.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*.

Cohn's own words on his gendered view of power in the Hollywood system, specifically, are also startlingly relevant here. In 1957, Cohn was asked in interview: "What does it feel like being the president of a studio for twenty-five years?" to which Cohn, ever the blunt vulgarian, replied, "it's better than being a pimp".²⁹⁰ A rather curious and projecting sort of answer. Perhaps Cohn realised he was in fact not so different from a pimp, but dressed up with money and power? Continuing with his earlier psychologising analysis, but specific to this sexualised metaphor, Gabler has written of Cohn's worldview that "[i]n a world of prostitutes, one had always to be the procurer".²⁹¹ Primary source anecdote supports Gabler's conclusion. Writer Daniel Fuchs recalled astonishing Cohn by making a business choice purely on principle rather than on power or profit motive. Cohn's incredulous assertions to Fuchs on this point are telling:

He couldn't believe a writer would turn down an assignment just because the material was unsuitable. He thought there had to be a deeper, intricate motivation. He thought I was maneuvering. "Everybody that walks into this office is a prostitute. They don't come in here unless they're out for something. Everybody cares for only their self-interest."²⁹²

Yet another irony to this whole "racket" was just how much some of the central tenets of the very business itself lined up far more with "pimping" and procuring than with standard business practices. While other industries might have been and remain rife with labour abuses, misogyny, and harassment, they differed in not being fundamentally based in the sexualisation and trade of the bodies of women.

To these points, the practice of loan-outs specifically became, like the infamous seven-year contract, one of the issues for which stars eventually began to take their employers to court. Some executives and producers made vast amounts of money on percentage for "selling" their talent to another studio for a particular project. Further, the terms of the loan-out might mean that the lending studio would make two, three, or a dozen times more profit on the "sale" of the actor or actress; the actor or actress was merely paid in continuation of their standard weekly contract. As Powdermaker explained in *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*:

It is part of the Hollywood mores for some producers to have actors directly under contract to them personally at one salary, 'farm' them out to the studio at a higher salary, and then pocket the difference. The actor is a piece of property which the producer, in these cases, rents out on a profit basis.²⁹³

Is this not perilously close to a form of pimping?

²⁹⁰ Kobal, *Rita Hayworth* 83 .

²⁹¹ Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 183.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid. 113.

In fact the policy of loan-outs can be read particularly easily for its sexual and gendered overtones, and alongside Cohn's infamous quote. As Powdermaker determined, "[u]nderneath all the blandishments, the executive regards the star as not only his creation, but as his property, legally owned for seven years, which he can use as he pleases or loan out for a profit".²⁹⁴ This situation, she also remarked, occurred for the star "without their consent and most of the time without any advanced knowledge of the deal".²⁹⁵ Certainly this was another aspect of the gendered Hollywood system that, frankly, resembled sexual trafficking. Furthermore, not only could loan-outs be read as an ethically murky area as such, but they were in fact legally suspect as well. In the famous 1948 Paramount anti-trust case, loan-outs were identified as another trust issue-- a way studio heads collaborated amongst one another to collude for the most profits while their employees were shortchanged.

Reading through memoirs, biographies, and interviews of multiple actresses begins to offer a clear picture as to the numbers and specifics of this particular, quite nefarious practice. Ann Dvorak, previous to her path-paving 1936 court rebellion, had been loaned out by Jack Warner to Daryl Zanuck. Warner had charged \$20,000 for her services, pocketed for himself, while she earned her \$1100 a week salary at the visiting studio.²⁹⁶ At one point Dvorak was "sold" to Howard Hughes, who paid her \$200 dollars a week while pocketing \$450 to \$600 a week loaning her out to yet more studios.²⁹⁷ Dvorak's public complaint to the press, that the baby in her last film had been paid \$500 a week alongside her \$250,²⁹⁸ was the start of the "ungrateful" campaign against her in the fan magazines and, really, the beginning of the end of her career.

Actresses could not help but be well-aware of this aspect of the system, almost to a woman loathing it. Many had plenty to say about it later in life. Mary Astor explained:

The studios often loaned actors they had under contract because they made money on the deal. They could up the weekly salary and collect the difference. We were a piece of property- sold, borrowed, lent, used.²⁹⁹

Again later in the memoir she reiterated simply, "[y]ou really became a piece of property".³⁰⁰

Unsurprisingly within their well-known dynamic, to be discussed extensively in Chapter Four, the abusive situation between Harry Cohn and his leading star Rita Hayworth was also marked by this specific financial exploitation. As Hayworth biographer Kobal wrote:

Cohn could swell with pride at his good fortune. Rita was still only earning \$250 a week, but was now worth a hundred times that in the loan-out fees Cohn could obtain for her services.³⁰¹

²⁹⁴ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 255.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 83.

²⁹⁶ Rice, *Ann Dvorak* 160.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 64.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 92.

²⁹⁹ Astor, *A Life on Film* 28.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 170.

³⁰¹ Kobal, *Rita Hayworth* 106.

Hayworth was famously self-aware of herself as commodity, and famously despised her boss Cohn for the way he treated her— both points which will again be addressed in the next chapter. Within such a dynamic, it is unsurprising that this state of affairs also rankled Hayworth very strongly even years later. Hayworth rather famously offered in later-life interview, “Harry Cohn thought of me as one of the people he could exploit, and make a lot of money... And I did make a lot of money for him, but not much for me”.³⁰²

The exploitative loan-out situation continued apace for each new crop of starlets year by year. It appears in numerous primary sources over the decades. Joan Fontaine was spotted in a play by Jesse Lasky, who immediately signed her to a seven-year contract, only to almost immediately again unload her to RKO. She described then that even this early in her career, she was “[a]lready disillusioned with Hollywood after Mr. Lasky had sold me to RKO, like so many pounds of meat”.³⁰³ Fontaine described independent producer David O. Selznick as one of the most egregious of this type of power broker, in that he basically purchased his continued independent status by “owning” a stable of players and loaning them out. This lucrative arrangement allowed him to live very comfortably and within his preference to only make a film once every few years. Fontaine described making \$75,000 in salary on the last film for which she was loaned out by Selznick, while he received \$225,000 for her services.³⁰⁴

The state of affairs also crept into other aspects of the business. Interviewed as an elderly woman, Esther Williams was lauded as quite remarkable for being the first woman to make a fortune on endorsements in her own right (in her case, bathing suits). Williams remained modest, but noted that she had made the choice towards her own finances “[b]ack when the studios kept most of the money”.³⁰⁵ The practice even popped up in the fictionalised biopic *Frances* (1982). In the film, the titular Frances Farmer is informed about loan-outs by her new studio boss and told directly, “I intend to make a great deal of money on you. Since I’ve got you for seven years”.³⁰⁶

I set out to write this thesis on what the women and workers of the system endured, but came to concur with Powdermaker on a most central point: until we understand the mindsets and practices of the men in charge, it is hardly possible to contend with the conditions of the workers. For example, in neither Fitzgerald’s initial, problematic quote that posited Hollywood as “Jewish holiday, gentiles [sic] tragedy” or Gabler’s rather romanticised reworking of it was gender considered at all, by either man. This thesis has already situated the American Dream as an unjust one made by men for men, and the studio founders as having set up a Hollywood that followed suit: so where to go with this

³⁰² Nancy Anderson, “Rita Hayworth Still Ranks High as Beauty”. *Rome News-Tribune*. February 11, 1972.

³⁰³ Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses* 87.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 127.

³⁰⁵ Chris Johnson, “Esther Williams 2007 Interview.” Online video clip. Youtube. August 6, 2009.

³⁰⁶ *Frances*. Dir. Graeme Clifford. Perf. Jessica Lange, Kim Stanley, Sam Shepard. 1982.

quote? I would perhaps reconstitute it to say, more accurately and with regards to both Fitzgerald and Gabler, that Hollywood's ethnic male questions were somewhat beside the point. That Hollywood was, above all else and quite literally, in economic, labour, and personal terms, a *man's* holiday and a *woman's* tragedy.

The Hollywood film industry was one that was particularly rooted in masculine lying as corporate practice. This was even the case as countless films were produced with misogynistic plot points set around untrustworthy, lying "dames". And, as publicity materials continuously invented backstories and names for actors and actresses-- corporate practices that were ordered and dreamed up by the men in charge. Deception was, simply, the overarching corporate standard. Producers were lying to directors, agents were lying to actors, studio executives were lying to each other, studios were stealing from writers, and it was all so par for the course that it was done utterly without shame. In fact, the men who were able to lie the most effectively and do business the most amorally were often the ones, in Hollywood tradition, who rose the highest and fastest.

Alongside such a feminist materialist reading of early Hollywood's creative practices, Frederica Sagor Maas is an invaluable witness to the system in these first decades. Maas shared an anecdote in her memoir *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim: A Writer in Early Hollywood* (2010) that demonstrated that the theft of creative work was already rampant in Hollywood before sound even arrived. She detailed how the 1927 hit film *The Way of All Flesh* was not only a stolen screenplay of her husband's, uncredited, but one literally based on his personal family tragedy and thus unmistakable. A friend stuck up for him:

"But they can't just take a story like that." Johnny Butler spoke angrily in Ernest's defense. "Can't they? They do it all the time," laughed the big Eastern executive. He could have said "we".³⁰⁷

The executive (Walter Wanger) knew that if a writer sued for theft of their material, they would only succeed in getting themselves blackballed from every studio-- and so there was virtually no risk to management in continuing their illegal and unethical practices around creative work.

In other anecdotes absolutely typical of the fraudulent culture already becoming endemic to Hollywood even at this early stage, one could take several examples from the early career of Daryl Zanuck. Zanuck as Hollywood "legend" and notoriously open sexual harasser will be addressed extensively from a post-MeToo perspective in the next chapter. Yet here he is noteworthy both in relation to unscrupulous business practices and the entrenched Hollywood habit of amoral white men

³⁰⁷ Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* 175.

being able to rise through mendacity. Both points are found repeatedly in the later-life memoirs of Hollywood women. Consider this exchange between star Patsy Ruth Miller and a then green, unknown Zanuck. When Miller first met him wandering around the lot with a suitcase:

I felt sorry for the little man with the buck teeth in his heavy brown suit, so inappropriate for sunny California, so I asked him where he was from. Iowa, I think he said, or maybe Nebraska.

She gave him a lift in her car and dropped him off at an office block, “thinking, the poor little guy, he’ll be on his way back to Nebraska, or wherever he came from, within a week”.³⁰⁸ This first impression jibed with Bette Davis’ later description of Zanuck in her own memoir, in which she described him as a “sandy-haired and buck-toothed... hack writer for Rin Tin Tin”.³⁰⁹

Zanuck continued to be exemplary of how a white man could succeed stratospherically in this “flash over substance” milieu. Shortly after the inauspicious arrival from Nebraska as recorded by Miller, Zanuck sold a badly written book by a poorly educated writer to a studio for \$11,000. He had been able to impress the founder executives that the book was a prestige project due to its being printed on gold leaf.³¹⁰ Maas, too, offered yet another young Zanuck experience in her memoir in relation to lying, cheating, and theft of creative property. Because Maas had come from a multilingual literary background, she was able to catch a young Zanuck in a line-by-line plagiarism, passing off a Polish story as his own in English.³¹¹ (There is an almost identical plot point in the rise of villain-protagonist Sammy Glick in Schulberg’s *What Makes Sammy Run?*, which prompted some to choose not Cohn but Zanuck when playing the guessing game, “who was the real Sammy?”³¹²)

Also like the fictional Glick, the unlikely Zanuck began a rapid rise up the corporate ladder from scheming writer to actually powerful producer. Miller found herself to have been very wrong in her initial pity for him:

...he became my boss. Our strained relationship didn’t come about because of the passes he made at me; he made passes at all the girls on the lot, and it was no great problem dodging them which, to the best of my knowledge, all of us did.³¹³

Thus Zanuck’s sexual harassment was taken as standard. What truly enraged Miller in terms of his behaviour was when he blatantly double-crossed her out of a role he had promised her.

I became so furious I actually trembled with rage. ‘But you promised!’ I fairly shouted. ‘You gave me your word. You promised!’

³⁰⁸ Miller, *My Hollywood* 109.

³⁰⁹ Davis and Stine, *Mother Goddam* 20.

³¹⁰ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 167.

³¹¹ Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* 44.

³¹² Budd Schulberg, *What Makes Sammy Run?* (New York, Modern Library, 1952). Incidentally, Schulberg always deftly sidestepped the question by asserting that Glick was merely a composite of many of the worst people he had ever seen and known in Hollywood and their behaviours.

³¹³ Miller, *My Hollywood* 110.

He leaned back in his leather upholstered chair, took a long puff on his cigar, and said coolly, 'So I'm a liar'.³¹⁴

Primary source evidence thus clearly indicates that women frequently saw through their fraudulent male bosses. They even risked their careers and repudiated them for their disreputable, unjust behaviours in this early studio era. But as the anecdotal memoirs demonstrate, what difference did such tactics make if there was never any recourse? If the most misbehaving men were rewarded, upwards? Even more bleakly, what about the women who were perceptive enough to see how this power structure was forming, but felt that they had neither the resources nor the lack of principles to try to beat the men at their own game?

The following points made by Frederica Sagor Maas in the language of everyday anecdote should be front and centre in any politicised work on creative labour studies today— especially a gendered one. Maas was an educated, leftist, anti-capitalist woman in an industry in which none of the former were at all welcomed. The fact that she wrote her memoir at 99 meant that she had zero care for offense or her reputation. Everyone she discussed in the memoir was, for the most part, long dead. But writing the memoir at such an advanced age also meant that Maas had a great deal of wisdom to share on what she had learned about the system, in terms of power and powerlessness in gendered capitalism.

Maas explained, speaking of her cohort of women colleagues and friends, that *we* opted out of capitalism and this allowed *them* to cheat and to win. When given advice by the male executives to buy up land in Los Angeles, Maas noted of herself and the secretaries: “[s]peculation was not in their genes or mine. We were too critical of our so-called betters, did not respect them, and therefore did not emulate them”.³¹⁵ Thus Maas identified a cultural and economic milieu whereby women might be more creative, better educated, and more ethical, but stayed poor precisely because they did not wish to take part in the immoral actions of the men all around them, or to do things that went against their values. Meanwhile the men, with no such moral compunction, prospered.³¹⁶ The following is one of the most powerful primary source accounts in this entire project in terms of its overall themes:

The studio waste, dirty politics, devious schemes, head-chopping, ruthless ambition, greed, power out of control, debauchery so prevalent in this girlie business- in our young political eyes these were all manifest consequences of unleashed capitalism.³¹⁷

In her memoir, Maas did share an instance in which she for once managed to cheat the studios who didn't pay writers, by turning the tables and keeping their money and her script. The anecdote demonstrated that the only way to win in the system was often to try to beat the unethical at their own game. The implication when combined with the above quotes is that this was not a way

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* 169.

³¹⁶ Ibid. 204.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

Maas or her women friends in the business were willing to live their professional or ethical lives. Speaking of both herself and her politically activist women friends, and evoking the lost potential of the industry of the 1910s, Maas declared that what they had wanted was “a better, fairer, more disciplined world than the one in which we were earning our daily bread”.³¹⁸ She noted that this desire did not fade to a conservatism over time, but only grew stronger throughout her life-- even as the system strengthened to omnipotence in the other direction.

In fact this omnipotence of the male power structure flowed directly into the peak studio years of the 1930s, and what Powdermaker and others before and after her have referred to as the dream factory. In contemporary press materials, the terms was generally used favorably, even glowingly. Even on occasion, leftist labour activist writers might be taken in by this “factory” system as a benevolent one, in comparison to those in dangerous heavy industry. *Nation* writer on labour, politics, and California Carey McWilliams described Hollywood as an ideal industry, with no raw materials and billions in profits and happy customers.³¹⁹ Such a perspective on the system missed several points, both in terms of the fact that the system was in fact rife with dangerous working conditions on sets and in terms of exploitative contracts. Even more crucially, McWilliams misunderstood the concept of “raw materials”. While it is true studio executives were not extracting crude oil or gems out of the ground, the actors and other workers in the system were its raw materials; it was their emotional states, bodies, and financial statuses that were on the line and frequently exploited, traumatised, and discarded. With this very different understanding of the industry, David Thomson is surely correct when he asserts that “[c]alling Hollywood a ‘dream factory’ is more sinister now than when the term was first used, in the thirties”.³²⁰ I would add that this is because we can now recognise that the mythos of the dream factory as it was first coined, with its attendant fantasies of beauty, sex, and glamour, were all obscuring a deeply problematic system of misogynist and racist finance and power.

Interdisciplinary theorists, whether from the worlds of social science, cultural history, or film studies, have tended to deconstruct the fan magazine version of Hollywood as a magical land, and in particular as a “dream factory”, while continuing to explore the metaphor itself. Powdermaker concluded that “Hollywood is engaged in the mass production of pre-fabricated daydreams”.³²¹ Through her first-person interview primary sources, she found a workforce of ambivalent and conflicted people, experiencing an industry that, “with its reliance on gossip columns and its lack of stability, is unbusinesslike in many ways”, yet paradoxically, “has some of the characteristics of the assembly line”.³²² Critic V.F. Perkins concurred with this position when he argued that a creative system built upon the say-so of the corporate boss and the package-unit studio must “encourage

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Layton, UT, Gibbs Smith, 1973) 339.

³²⁰ Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 160.

³²¹ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 39.

³²² Ibid. 30.

indecision and cowardice”, with obvious effects on the filmic output.³²³

Later intellectuals continued in this vein. In the 1980s Umberto Eco wrote of entertainment and media concerns as “the heavy industry of dreams in a capitalistic society”.³²⁴ In 1991, gender studies scholar Jill B.R. Cheneff published a reminder and revitalisation of Powdermaker’s work in the *Journal of Anthropological Research*, at a time when Powdermaker’s work was not in widespread use. Entitled “Dreams Are Made Like This: Hortense Powdermaker and the Hollywood Film Industry”, Cheneff’s text is also crucial for situating the narrative of women pushed out as industrial practices such as the division of labour came in and outside finance took over, discussed in Chapter One.

Such conceptualisations continued through the decades. In modern film history scholarship, Jane Gaines seems to have been one of the first major feminist film scholars to both revitalise Powdermaker in her work, and to continue with this industrial inquiry. In “Dream/Factory” (2000), Gaines queried the Hollywood factory system as part of simultaneous trends in commodification in all American industries of the time. She proposed a paradoxical position for the Hollywood industry: both as a model for others, and as something strange, unique, and not a little ludicrous in its assembly approach to the dreams of a culture.³²⁵ Unlike coal, unlike lap dances, films are ambiguous commodities. In this key essay from 2000, Gaines, in line with Danae Clark, reminds that it has been due to publicity-driven mythologising, alongside its paradoxical Fordist nature, that this industry’s workers have rarely been studied as such.³²⁶

Rather than seeing Hollywood as a perfected industrial machine, Fordist or not, Powdermaker and other likeminded critics instead established it as a dysfunctional and deeply insecure one. For decades it has been posited that this transmitted such dysfunctional values into its communicative product; but only in recent years has it begun to be asked: what dysfunctional values did it transmit to its workers, and how did they affect them? This sort of work would become part of a broader project of developing a feminist materialist theory of the Hollywood system.

As business historian G. William Domhoff explained of Marxist scholars critical of capitalism, such thinkers hold “fervent belief that the capitalist economic system is inherently exploitative of working people and therefore unjust and dehumanizing”.³²⁷ In stark contrast, mainstream American capitalist economists who worked contemporaneously to the founding of Hollywood found dehumanisation to be a *virtue* of industrial bureaucracy, citing its dispassion.³²⁸ Primary sources herein have established, however, that the men who formed the Hollywood system were far from

³²³ In Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* 220.

³²⁴ In Balio, *Grand Design* 40.

³²⁵ Jane Gaines, “Dream/Factory”, 104 In *Reinventing Film Studies*, Eds. Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill (London, Arnold, 2000).

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America?: Challenges to Corporate and Class Dominance*. (New York, McGraw-Hill, 2014) 214.

³²⁸ Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* 22.

dispassionate, but rather highly emotional and driven by personal biases, desires, and antipathies. Besides acknowledging the foibles of the founder class, anti-capitalist or feminist materialist theorisation of Hollywood allows for an interdisciplinary approach, a true necessity in this arena of scholarship. As Domhoff explains of this approach to class in any country, it includes:

a theory of history, an explanation of capitalist economics, a moral critique of capitalist society, and a body of political tradition, as well as a sociological theory of class domination.³²⁹

In addition, this approach allows for the theoretical deconstruction of a particular capitalist system as to how it has been set up exclusively in ways that benefit the capitalists, from economics to managerial control to expertise. Again, however, most theorists have not yet worked in additional concepts to theory on labour in capitalist creative industries, like affect-- in which everything from abuse and exploitation to individual personality and trauma may be taken into account.

As at every turn in this project, I assert the importance of deprivileging the theorisations of scholars when primary source accounts to the same points are there for the taking. I instead choose to centre accounts of people who actually lived the system in their primary source anecdotes, and opinions. Within such a metric, the system was absolutely factory-like in its industrial design, Fordist, and dehumanising. In *Mother Goddam*, Bette Davis recalled that “Warner Brothers... looked like the huge factory out of ‘Modern Times’”.³³⁰ Goodman, ever one for the colourful anecdote, described MGM in Culver City as built from part of a mausoleum and looking like a jail-- such that when creatives were hired there, friends gave them joke cakes with nail files inside.³³¹ Disney was similarly lambasted, described as “grim” and “antiseptic”; Hollywood wags employing dark humour would refer to it as the Donald Dachau plant.³³²

Bette Davis was one star actress who particularly felt she saw through the bluster and faux-aristocratic stylings of the studio heads. As previously mentioned, she disdained the studio founders as charlatans, feeling that film was meant to be an important art form, and that these salesmen who had wrested power over the industry held back its potential. Davis felt, concurrently, that their lack of expertise or artistry led to their Fordist approach to cinema, wryly noting, “creative artists are not capping soda bottles ninety a minute on an assembly line”.³³³

This essential industrial nature, so at odds with creative work, was raised in fictionalised versions of 1930s Hollywood as well. In the 1982 Frances Farmer biopic *Frances*, the all-powerful studio head explains to Farmer, while trying to teach her to get in line and behave herself, “I view myself as the Henry Ford of the motion picture industry. I can’t have the fellow who puts on the wheels

³²⁹ Domhoff, *Who Rules America?* 215.

³³⁰ Davis and Stine, *Mother Goddam* 16.

³³¹ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 184.

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ *Ibid.* 177.

arguing with someone who does another job.” When the Farmer character protests that she is concerned with the production as its star, the executive retorts, “No, *I’m* concerned with everything. You are an actress. Your job is to act”.³³⁴

Even male creatives like screenwriters, valued for their minds and words and not their bodies, experienced the system this same way. Their recollections are telling. The great American novelist William Faulkner, who famously made a living part-time as a screenwriter in Hollywood, was open about his view of the system-- and his disgust with it. Interviewed by Ben Hecht, he said bluntly:

Nobody would live in Hollywood except to get what money he could from it. There was no art to the film. There never was, any more than there is to making toilet seats or socks or sausages. It’s a commodity for mass consumption... They’re platitudes strung together, repetition of plots.³³⁵

One of Powdermaker’s interview subjects, an “important producer”, reinforced Faulkner’s position when he compared “the product of the industry to cans of beans”.³³⁶ Director Dudley Nichols spoke specifically to the factory nature of the industry and its negative impact on creative output when he wrote:

It is too much the modern factory-system- each man working on a different machine and never in an integrated creation. It tends to destroy that individuality of style which is the mark of any superior work of art.³³⁷

I will give the last word here to famously blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo, who wrote in a letter to the editor of the labour radical *Masses and Mainstream* magazine:

It is not accidental that Hollywood workers speak always of the industry, never of the medium... For motion picture writers are purely industrial workers, subject to a great many of the economic ills of industrial workers in other industries.³³⁸

If even male creatives, writers and directors, were left feeling utterly powerless and dehumanised by the studio system of the 1930s, how might women have experienced it even more so, rife as it was with obsolescence, exploitation, and assault?

The next chapter will demonstrate how the system moved, in the 1930s and 1940s, into its peak era of creating and controlling women. It draws on cultural theory, but is most heavily bolstered by first-person recollections and records. In relation to the overarching class approach at play, it looks simultaneously to how the white men in charge solidified their power with tools from nepotism to the institutional sexual abuse system known as the “casting couch”, how abuses of women were

³³⁴ *Frances*. Dir. Graeme Clifford. Perf. Jessica Lange, Kim Stanley, Sam Shepard. 1982.

³³⁵ In Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 326.

³³⁶ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 27.

³³⁷ In Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* 578.

³³⁸ In Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 330.

normalised, and how dissidents were crushed. It particularly turns to contemporary critical theory on the concept of grievable lives from Judith Butler as a jumping-off point to revisiting studio Hollywood, and doing so with the current MeToo moment in mind. From this concept, the chapter will ask: what became of the many women whose lives did not matter to this system? And to the supremely powerful men who committed crimes and thrived? The final portion of this thesis will mine heavily from the memoirs and interviews of stars and other women in the system, as well as from the vitally important 1937 Patricia Douglas case, in attempting to answer these questions.

Chapter 4

Lady for A Day: Classed Success and Failure in Studio Hollywood



Roman Scandals (Dir. Frank Tuttle, Samuel Goldwyn Co., 1933).

@ harvardfilmarchive.org, 2016

“I’m not what you think I am. I’m just trying to be like this.”
“Keep trying, you might make it.”¹

-dialogue between Elsa Bannister (Rita Hayworth) and Michael O’Hara (Orson Welles) in *The Lady From Shanghai* (1947)

This thesis has examined throughout the gender-biased, hierarchical traits of early and classical Hollywood against the backdrop of American labour exploitation and industrial capitalism. The previous chapter specifically concentrated on the homosocial and pathological traits of this system. Going back to the main purpose of this study, to analyse the Hollywood actress as a classed subject, this chapter considers the highly gendered, abusive construction of women performers in studio Hollywood from the viewpoint of the actresses themselves. This is undertaken through the use of primary and secondary sources. These accounts, which counter the glamour-filled narratives of the star system, reveal the reality of a profession marked by economic precarity, social marginalisation, and sexual abuse. As the trajectories of most case studies here considered will demonstrate, the ephemeral condition of stardom served as a highly effective leverage of power wielded by studio producers and executives over actors, especially. Such power was then wielded even more particularly over women and people of colour.

As in any industrial system based on capitalist economy, Hollywood relied on a hierarchical labour scale for the profit of its managerial classes. However, what was particular about its organization in comparison to other industries in the U.S., entertainment or otherwise, was its dehumanised treatment of all workers. This emerged not only from the attitudes of the producers and top executives, but also from the assembly line nature of studio-era production.

While all workers within the Hollywood labour market faced exploitative labour conditions to one degree or another, those in performance in front of the camera were particularly devalued. In terms of its performers, the Hollywood system was one which, antithetical to Broadway and the American theatrical tradition, devalued camaraderie, training, and rehearsal. Technology was the star of the show, and actors were required to craft their performances piecemeal and out of sequence. As Hortense Powdermaker noted particularly of the status of performers in Hollywood, “[i]n Hollywood it is the human beings who are treated as if they were inanimate objects which paradoxically are given meaning by the director”.²

As raised in the introduction, the socioeconomic aspects implicit in performance and star discourse remained underdeveloped in film studies for some time.³ Jackie Stacey argued in the 1990s

¹ *The Lady from Shanghai*. Dir. Orson Welles. Perf. Rita Hayworth, Orson Welles, Everett Stone. 1947.

² Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers* (Eastford, CT, Martino Fine Books, 2013) 250.

³ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London, Routledge, 1994); Danae Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors’ Labor* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1995); Karen

that “[l]ittle attention, then, has been paid to female film stars by feminist film scholars except in terms of how the stars function within the text”.⁴ Cathy Klaprat has similarly suggested that “[w]e have... come to understand the narrative significance of the star in classical Hollywood cinema. What is less well understood is the economic significance”.⁵ Karen Hollinger, in her 2006 study *The Actress: Hollywood Acting and the Female Star*, asserted at that time that “serious scholarly analysis has yet to investigate fully the effects of commercial exploitation on female stars”.⁶ This dissertation aims to address some of the underrated questions proposing an analysis of the actress as a classed worker. As discussed in the introduction, feminist film history has produced important studies in this area in recent years, such as texts by Diane Negra, Kirsten Pullen, Adrienne McLean, and, even some outside of the discipline of feminist film history like Gloria Steinem.⁷ In employing such studies as secondary sources to augment primary evidence, I will particularly look to their “actress-as-worker” approaches.

My discussion of the actress is also inspired by feminist discussions of the woman’s body in performance within cultural theory and philosophy, as introduced by de Beauvoir.⁸ An important source of inspiration for this project has been the work of French philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray, who applies the concepts of use-value, exchange-value, and commodity price determination to describe the feminine condition or, specifically, the bodies of (as Irigaray succinctly put it) “women on the market”.⁹ Irigaray, who frequently conceptualises the woman’s body in her work, also makes specific reference to the body of the actress in *The Sex Which Is Not One* (1985).¹⁰ In these portions of her work, she adopts an interdisciplinary methodology that combines feminist theory with social economy to describe the use-value and exchange-value of women in society, with prices set by men. Her work is highly useful for my examination of the Hollywood stars included in this chapter by these metrics.

Hollinger, *The Actress: Hollywood Acting and the Female Star* (New York, Routledge, 2006); Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (Champaign: Illinois, 2018).

⁴ Emily Susan Carman, “Independent Stardom” *Female Film Stars and the Studio System in the 1930s.* *Women’s Studies* Vol 37 Issue 6 (2008), 11.

⁵ Cathy Klaprat, “The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in Another Light.” In *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison, Wisconsin, 1976).

⁶ Karen Hollinger, *The Actress: Hollywood Acting and the Female Star* (New York, Routledge, 2006).

⁷ Gloria Steinem, “The Woman Who Died Too Soon.” *Ms.*, August 1972; Gloria Steinem and George Barris. *Marilyn: Norma Jeane* (New York, New American Library, 1988); Adrienne McLean, “‘I’m a Cansino’: Transformation, Ethnicity, and Authenticity in the Construction of Rita Hayworth, American Love Goddess.” *Journal of Film and Video* 44, no. 3/4 (Fall 1992); Adrienne L. McLean, *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2004); 8-26; Diane Negra, *Off-White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom* (London, Routledge, 2001); Diane Negra, “The Vamp as Canny Laborer and Uncertain Commodity: Pola Negri in the Context of Industrial Production.” In *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, eds. Jennifer Bean and Diane Negra (Durham, Duke, 2002); Kirsten Pullen, *Like a Natural Woman: Spectacular Female Performance in Classical Hollywood* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2014).

⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, Constance Borde, and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. *The Second Sex*. (New York, Vintage, 2011) 577.

⁹ Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell UP, 1985).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

In her abovementioned work, Irigaray has argued, similarly to Thorstein Veblen, many decades prior, that society is still built on a male-centred social economy, whereby women are one of the most visible traded commodities. As she has explained, women are a “mirror of value of and for man”.¹¹ Michel Foucault famously referred to *homo oeconomicus* as a partner of exchange, as “entrepreneur of himself”--¹² but where does such a metric leave women and their bodies? In Irigaray’s conception of women as components of economies, by contrast, she has keenly delineated how:

the use, consumption, and circulation of their sexualized bodies underwrite the organisation and the reproduction of the social order, in which they have never taken part as “subjects”.¹³

Irigaray’s point about the commodity function of women in capitalist societies is especially significant when referring to actresses. As she has explained:

A commodity- a woman- is divided into two irreconcilable ‘bodies’: her “natural” body and her socially valued, exchangeable body, which is a particularly mimetic expression of masculine values... As commodities, women are thus two things at once: utilitarian objects and bearers of value.¹⁴

For the Hollywood actress, exchange-value and use-value always apply simultaneously. The exchange-value of an actress relates to her value as a sexualized object, constructed as such by Hollywood’s publicity strategies and cinematic conventions. Exchange-value is the sexualised and beautified image onscreen, in magazines, and in photographs, doing the advertising work for Hollywood, a particular film, and a particular star as cultural text all at once. A star’s use-value is her ability to perform, complete public appearances, be a good spokeswoman for the corporation, and not break down under the strain of physical or mental problems.¹⁵ In the context of modern cinema and media industries, use-value is vitally important behind the scenes, while the public face remains focused on exchange-value at all times.

Another critique of Hollywood and of its exploitative treatment of the actor to which I return repeatedly in this research is Hortense Powdermaker’s anthropological investigation of the studio system, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* (1950).¹⁶ I consider this book one of the most effective discussions to date as to the social dynamics implicit in the studio system’s constructed reality.

¹¹ Ibid. 177.

¹² Rosalind Gill. *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism*. (Heidelberg, Springer, 2017) 23.

¹³ Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One* 84.

¹⁴ Ibid. 122.

¹⁵ Susan Lacy and Stephen Sept, “Judy Garland: By Myself.” *American Masters*.

¹⁶ Powdermaker, *Hollywood, The Dream Factory* (Eastford, CT, Martino, 2013).

Powdermaker's conclusions that Hollywood functions as a totalitarian system within a democratic country serve as a central point to this entire thesis.¹⁷

Powdermaker analysed the problematics of and derision toward the seven-year contract in her work of the 1940s. Within the system, one of the major sticking points that drove the legal battles of the 1930s (and 1940s) between stars and studios indeed centred on the seven-year contract as particularly egregious. This contract, in which the studio had all the rights to force an actor into most anything, from traumatising roles to name changes, while performers had no right to leave, was correctly compared to serfdom or indentured servitude.¹⁸ Actress memoirs and interviews remark upon how when the abuses of this contract were already blatant, they were made worse by studio tactics of suspension and the adding on of extra time as penalty. In this way, the abusive terms of the seven-year contract could be stretched out indefinitely, with the perpetual tacking on of "owed time". Such readings, both contemporary and retrospective, mirrored Powdermaker's findings that had already by 1950 situated Hollywood as a dehumanised space.

Industrial historians of the Hollywood filmic system, past and present, have explained the relationship between the seven-year contract and parallel exploitative practices like loan-outs as working hand in hand to enrich studios and crush actors. Such readings, both contemporary and retrospective, mirrored Powdermaker's findings that had by 1950 already situated Hollywood as a dehumanised space. She drew particular comparisons from history to both medieval European feudalism and colonial American indentured servitude in her remarks on these Hollywood practices. Moving forward into American history, Powdermaker continued:

The fact... that the artist's unions or guilds have accepted conditions of work which most American workers would find debasing is one of the many contradictions of the community. Indentured servants during the American colonial period were bound to their masters for a number of years, but even they had a security during that period which the actors lack... The situation in Hollywood is unique in trade-union history and in economic practices since the Middle Ages.¹⁹

The 1930s saw various legal battles for actors' rights in courts to finally challenge these injustices of the system. The cases of Ann Dvorak, Bette Davis, and Olivia de Havilland are some of the most prominent examples of women stars who engaged in legal rebellions during this decade. Christine Delphy has written about contracts from precisely such a perspective within feminist materialist analyses, particularly in "*Violence économique et violence masculine*" (2002).²⁰ Delphy has

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. 85; Bette Davis, *The Lonely Life* (New York, Putnam's, 1962); Mary Astor, *A Life on Film* (New York, Delacorte, 1971).

¹⁹ Ibid. 215.

²⁰ Christine Delphy, "Violence économique et violence masculine." *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 21.2 (2002): 4.

examined various types of legal contracts as codified structures throughout history by which men have been given free rein to exploit women.²¹

In one example of later film historical argumentation that affirms such work as that of Powdermaker and Delphy, Allen John Scott notes that the long term of the Hollywood contract meant that studios could often rig the system, such that they were paying someone at their earliest rates even once they had become a star, globally known to the public. These stars “thus could not- even given their exceptionally high levels of remuneration- appropriate the full value of the rents that they generated as their celebrity expanded”.²² Scott went on to explain how such an arcane business practice did in fact impact not only the stars’ financial prospects, but how the public experienced and recognised filmic signatures: “[t]his captive or semi-captive labor force meant, too, that each studio’s films tended to be stylistically distinct”.²³ A distinct studio style is a good thing; countless careers crushed only in service to the studio alone, not.

Such typecasting was a particularly despised practice for contract actors, as it could easily destroy the long-term viability of their careers while only bringing benefit to the studios. As Tino Balio noted in *Grand Design* (1993), the studio structure was designed inherently antithetical to the good work and good projects of the individual.²⁴ The studio was more than happy functioning as it was designed when it came to individual performers-- running them into the ground with too many projects while they were “hot”, for example. These practices of typecasting could lead to physical exhaustion and collapse, as well as quickly exhaust the public’s interest in the oversaturated star. This was a form of industrial planned obsolescence; in these extremely common cases, the studio would simply figuratively leave the worn-out star for dead, moving on to the next.²⁵ Even *Variety* of the day in the 1930s described the practice as such: stars were “milked dry like a vein of gold is pinched out”.²⁶ What was painful and annihilating to the individual actor and their career was precisely what allowed the system to hum along impersonally. The case studies of this chapter will demonstrate that like all aspects of performer mistreatment within the system, such planned obsolescence affected women performers to a far greater degree than male ones.

Beyond typecasting, the studio system was also economically dependent upon processes that have thus far typically been theorised within film studies within questions of the image and

²¹ Christine Delphy, "Pour une théorie générale de l'exploitation." *Mouvements* 26.2 (2003): 69; Christine Delphy, "Violence économique et violence masculine." *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 21.2 (2002): 4; Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard. "A Materialist Feminism Is Possible." *Feminist Review*. 4.1 (1980): 79-105.

²² John Allen Scott, *On Hollywood: The Place, the Industry* (Princeton, 2005) 118.

²³ *Ibid.* 119.

²⁴ Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (New York, Scribner, 1993) 168.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory*.

representation, and only recently been approached instead from materialist labour perspectives. In *Negotiating Hollywood* (1995), Danae Clark employed Marxist concepts like commodity fetishism to think through the institutional oppression present in the Hollywood labour system. In the case of studio-era film, the actor's labour produced the image commodity, which had huge surplus value for the studio conglomerates. The actor produced the image once, yet the studio made millions when the image was reproduced and exhibited over and over.²⁷ Thus, the fetishisation of the actor (or especially, star actress) body made the studios massive amounts of money. In terms of actors, the studio's concern was to promote this public fetishisation for profit at all costs, not to improve their working conditions or to consider their health or well-being.

The validity of Powdermaker's central point, that Hollywood was a system predicated on the utter dehumanisation of its performers, is further bolstered by evidence of actors as among the lowest caste of workers on the Hollywood tree. This did not all pertain only to extras or bit players, but even to the stars sold weekly to the public in fan magazines around the world. To that point (and in what might be unbelievable to the average person with a fan-level, dream factory understanding of Hollywood), Powdermaker explained, "[t]hey are looked down upon as some kind of subhuman species".²⁸ This startlingly degrading attitude was all the more ironic in that stars amounted to an abused group within a system, all while being held up to the world as the most glamorous and fortunate type of people within it. Powdermaker's reaction to the reality of this internal status, so at odds with the world's perception of stars as the ultimate aspirational symbols, was almost incredulous: "[t]hese then are the actors, glamorous stars and folk heroes to their admirers all over the world; inhuman pieces of property, scorned, hated, and envied in Hollywood".²⁹ When she would reply to her interview subjects that the way they described actors made it sound as though they weren't even human, they would retort back to her matter-of-factly, "[w]ell, they aren't human!".³⁰ In fact the same lines have been repeated over and over, not from social science interview findings but from Hollywood insiders in primary sources. Ezra Goodman also referenced the pervasive "actors aren't people" trope in *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (1961), as when one anonymous studio publicity type explained, "They're just so many outlets. They're not people- they're outlets. They're desks".³¹

Powdermaker again showed the incredulity of the social science researcher when she took what we would now call an affective labour perspective on such a situation and treatment. She noted of dehumanisation that "[t]he assumption seems to be the movie actor is a robot and that this practice,

²⁷ Danae Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors' Labor*. (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1995) 18.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 254.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 280.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 258.

³¹ Ezra Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1961), 97.

therefore, has no effect".³² Obviously this was far from the truth. She went on to explain her actual findings to the contrary: "[a] few have accepted the stereotyped picture as some members of a minority group accept the position accorded them by a dominant group".³³ In just one example from her first-person interviews, an actress explained why she was honouring the command to keep her upcoming marriage a secret: "I'm their property, If they tell me not to talk, I don't talk".³⁴ But generally, actors knew how they were viewed within the system, and most were bitter about it. Many decades later in her own work, Judith Butler would make the following apropos point in relation to dehumanisation in *Bodies That Matter* (1993):

Consider the ordinary ways we think about humanization and dehumanization... those who have no chance to represent themselves run a greater risk of being treated as less than human, regarded as less than human, or indeed, not regarded at all.³⁵

As remarked upon in the introduction, Hollywood is the only city in the world so completely dominated by film production. All of the other world cities famed for film production were global cities first. Thus, their cultural and professional landscape from expansion to metropolis was never dominated by filmmaking, as only Los Angeles has been since the 1910s and still is. While the myths of Los Angeles—the soda fountain discovery as identified by Dyer,³⁶ the casting agent who could give a waitress the big break—quickly cemented and became part of broader American myth, reality was, as is typical, usually far less dramatic or interesting. Most serious contract players got their start after being seen on Broadway and invited to come from east to west; the vast majority of workers in the studio system were non-performers and had jobs like carpenters or secretaries.³⁷ It was only the product that had become "magical"—to the public. Time and again in their later-life interviews, aged employees' accounts of studio-era Hollywood had little in common with Tinseltown mythologies. Instead, they portrayed a quite conservative, cliquish, and workaholic town, with little glamour at all. As character actor Robert Cornthwaite recalled in interview:

It was a real company town. I guess the only thing like it would be a steel town in Pennsylvania, something like that. People had a feeling it was all glamour and parties and clubs. But the truth was it was a lot of work. Especially in those days, before the

³² Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 116.

³³ *Ibid.* 266.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 84.

Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, Routledge, 1993) 141.

³⁶ Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1998).

³⁷ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*; Frances Farmer, *Will There Really Be A Morning?* (Toronto; Farmcliffe, 1992).

unions were strong, or even before there were unions, you would work *ungodly* hours... I worked once *twenty-four hours straight* on location in Hollywood.³⁸

Johnny Grant, honorary mayor of Hollywood, also shared his insider's view: "It was what you would call a 'company town'".³⁹ Many in the oral histories remarked on life before the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), when cast and crew had no choice but to work nights, weekends, holidays: anything to finish a picture as commanded.⁴⁰ The bohemian, show people morals of which Angelenos and studio heads alike had disapproved of as detailed in Chapter One were in fact well erased in a climate of conservatism, compulsive work practices, and insecure employment. As writer Samuel Spewack explained, Hollywood "was basically a provincial city... its whole mental and spiritual climate was definitely small-town".⁴¹

While these anecdotal and personal recollections situate Hollywood as an industrial and sociocultural milieu built on the obsolescence of individual workers. Planned obsolescence has always been a money-making aspect of capitalist production for the owner class; planned obsolescence in a filmic performance industry, then, would mean careers designed to last a year or two before the performer was cast aside for the next "flavour of the month". This was especially true in gendered contexts, when young beautiful women and "fresh faces" were prized above all. Performance work in Hollywood meant a career in which decades-long stardom, especially for a woman actress, was the anomaly. Far more common were the bit players who appeared in three or four films, a few years later to be married or working as waitresses or secretaries. Film historians like Jeanine Basinger, following Richard Dyer's "fashion thesis of stardom"⁴², have for decades discoursed on the nature of "stars as novelty items achieving the temporary popularity of fads and then quickly becoming has-beens".⁴³

Hollywood film also wove the patriarchal values of the chain of obsolescence for women into the majority of its films, in terms of cultural anxieties for women. This obsolescence cycle played out literally in casting and constantly in plot, and the two often overlapped. The 1950 Lana Turner vehicle *A Life of Her Own* is a perfect example.⁴⁴ Also a small, last chance comeback film for lesser-known 1930s star Ann Dvorak, made at MGM where Dvorak had begun as a teenage dancer in the 1920s:

Ann plays Mary Ashlon, a washed-up, aging glamour girl who squandered her opportunities and serves as a ghost of Lana's modeling future if she doesn't keep herself in check.⁴⁵

³⁸ Paul Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered: An Oral History of its Golden Age* (Lanham, MD, Taylor, 2011) 105.

³⁹ Ibid. 151.

⁴⁰ Gene Tierney and Mickey Herskowitz. *Self-Portrait* (New York, Wyden Books, 1979) 28.

⁴¹ In Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 291.

⁴² Dyer, *Stars* 15-16.

⁴³ Karen Hollinger, *The Actress: Hollywood Acting and the Female Star* (New York, Routledge, 2006) 29.

⁴⁴ *A Life of Her Own*. Dir. George Cukor. Perf. Lana Turner, Ray Milland, Tom Ewell. 1950.

⁴⁵ Christina Rice, *Ann Dvorak: Hollywood's Forgotten Rebel* (Lexington; Kentucky: 2013) 254.

Unsurprisingly, Ann's character ends by throwing herself out the window.⁴⁶ What was perennially the case for actresses and showplace women was sold as a patriarchal plot point to all women viewing such films as spectators: there would always be threats in one's life in the form of other women, younger and more attractive, who would try to take what one had acquired.

Present-day analyses of gender discrimination in Hollywood have included, as major points for debate, questions around women's agency or its lack on the part of women in the system. This project, with its focus on uncovering the abuses of women in the studio system, naturally takes such questions as of the utmost importance. Virginia Braun, in her contribution to *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism* (2017), rejects what she calls the "dupe versus agent" argument. She also argues that besides creating an unhelpful binary, the latter is positioned in a perhaps-too optimistic view of women's place in an oppressive system.⁴⁷

In agreement with Braun, I too find the pure "agent" reading of Hollywood women both problematic and unproductive. Drawing attention to the myriad ways in which women were, in fact, treated as commodities, subject to all manner of abuse, by no means implies a wish to reactivate that cycle or suggest that they never advocated for themselves. To this end and as a way out of never-ending debates of optimism/pessimism or agency/victimhood, I recommend, instead, to consider stars' self-actualised speech itself.

Mary Astor in her 1971 memoir was very clear in her view that star discourse ought not be making assumptions about agency on the part of stars at all:

There was a stupid book out recently by a writer who thought he could analyze all the great stars of the past by the kinds of roles they had played during their career. Total bunk. Because actors simply did not choose all the roles they played and it is *choice* that is revelatory.⁴⁸

From a completely different viewpoint, silent star Louise Brooks frequently proffered her disdain for film studies language, particularly singling out auteur theory and "all that crappy Crapauer double talk" in her later-life film writings.⁴⁹ Brooks went on to argue that film history ought rightly instead to be based in "acteur theory".⁵⁰ In this, Brooks makes a sophisticated point from the position of an iconoclast industry insider, not unlike one made academically by Eugen Weber in 1984's "History Is What Historians Do": "nothing is more concrete than history, nothing less interested in theories or in abstract ideas".⁵¹ These are just two of many examples in which an actress contradicts star studies theorisation from the perspective of her own lived, first-person experience.

⁴⁶ *A Life of Her Own*. Dir. George Cukor. Perf. Lana Turner, Ray Milland, Tom Ewell. 1950. Film.

⁴⁷ Virginia Braun, "Rethinking Ruskin's Wife's Vulva." In *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism*. Eds. Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill, and Christina Scharff. (Heidelberg, Springer, 2017) 74.

⁴⁸ Astor, *A Life On Film* 127.

⁴⁹ Jan Wahl and Louise Brooks (*Dear Stinkpot: Letters from Louise Brooks Or, My Education with Lulu*, Albany, GA, BearManor Media, 2010) 94.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 152.

⁵¹ Eugen Weber. "History is What Historians Do." *The New York Times*. July 22, 1984.

A particularly good example of looking to actresses' own speech to settle questions of victimhood and agency would come from the writings of Frances Farmer. Farmer was a unique 1930s star famed for a tumultuous life that included many years in and out of mental hospitals following the pressures of her years in Hollywood. Farmer's case is one of the most blatant examples of serious abuse in the studio era, as she was forced into a mental institution and endured years of brutal psychiatric treatment that included a lobotomy and various experimental tortures. Her pre-Hollywood life, years in the system, and post-Hollywood tribulations are all detailed in her autobiography *Will There Really Be A Morning?* (1972).⁵² In it, Farmer commented on the public perception of stars of her era as part of a pantheon of modern gods and goddesses, contrasted with the reality the public usually missed: that the system really belonged to the men behind the scenes, with the real and unlimited power to make or destroy its performers:

...the stars of that era were unique creatures known to only one generation... There were kings and queens in those days, idols to be adored. All perfect. All untouchable. And there were the idol makers. Men who created the image but destroyed the reality.⁵³

Farmer's point here on the true power relations between idols and idol-makers reminds: when people bother to look and to listen, don't such revelations amount to a different, and far more powerful, sort of actress agency? The position of this thesis is one that strives for methodological accuracy through the revising of dominant narratives. As Braun has suggested, we might more productively move towards "[a] labour framework [that] can move us beyond the 'dupe versus agent' arguments that have stymied some feminist debate".⁵⁴ I would suggest that a reliance on primary sources from actresses themselves provides such a framework.

Mae West was one star who was particularly literate and aware in her commentary on how glamour served to obscure the true power relations of the system. She was especially bemused by the way it plucked up frightened, uneducated young girls and redesigned them into vamps, divas, and globally famed femme fatales. As a celebrated and established talent from Broadway-- actress, writer, producer-- West had quickly ascertained that the achievement of Hollywood celebrity was based entirely in star construction, and had nothing to do with talent, creativity, or hard work as understood in the theatrical contexts of the East Coast. She even recognised her own part in the perpetuation of the glamour-industrial complex, bemoaning women put into the 'Mae West model' of makeover and sexifying while lacking any theatrical training or discernible acting talent. In her 1959 memoir, *Goodness Had Nothing to Do With It*, West described the rather gruesome, Frankenstein-like creation that emerged within this studio process, lamenting her part in the creation of so many copycats:

⁵² Farmer, *Will There Really Be A Morning?*

⁵³ *Ibid.* 111.

⁵⁴ Virginia Braun, "Rethinking Ruskin's Wife's Vulva." In *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism*. Eds. Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill, and Christina Scharff. (Heidelberg, Springer, 2017) 74.

I had created a demand for the uninhibited glamor- but I was sorry for the girls being trained like seals for the part. In the hands of studio glamorizers- the makeup artists, the wardrobe wizards, the still photographers, and the glib gentry of public relations- the raw material is molded into an effigy that the public is taught to accept as a movie star. They looked well until the public discovered that the object of their bedazzlement was stuffed not with talent but with press clippings, and the lamé gown was a lame excuse for no acting ability and the static personality of a store window mannikin... the synthetic star often only got by for a little time before her lack of talent was detected.⁵⁵

Stakes for glamour and upward mobility of class through style, fashion, and etiquette were thus clearly high in most American filmic culture of the period. Becoming a star and, more tenuously, being able to maintain it meant taking successfully to the industrial reshaping processes. The (often formerly working-class) actresses had, as West had described, to pull off these classed transformations assigned by the studios and sell them to the public at all costs. But the pressures of class mobility were also present for the women watching the films and taking in their lessons. The American woman's film with plot points that revolved specifically around class issues was a veritable sub-genre of its own throughout the Depression, one with very clear lessons and dire warnings for the woman spectator. Films like *Kitty Foyle* (1937), *Stella Dallas* (1940), and *Mildred Pierce* (1945) all fit into this category.⁵⁶

According to Jeanine Basinger in *The Star Machine* (2007) in her analysis of the woman's film of this period and the actress performances within them, such woman's films functioned as something like metaphorical board games of women's experiences in modern life.⁵⁷ Whether in her choices about men, love, or career, a main character would function as a player who could go up or down spaces based on her choices. Without the right clothes and right bearing, a woman could not be make a social triumph and become the centre of the universe; therefore, she would remain unable to make the right choices in love.⁵⁸ In several of the above films, the viewer is instructed as to how lower-class fashion choices, or specifically, fashion *faux pas*, can literally ruin women's lives. This presentation of successful femininity as successful classing can be read as a filmic parallel to the making over of the Hollywood star.

Within such films that were providing classed instruction to women in the audience, one often sees class-based conflation of the sort I discuss at other points in this project. Sometimes such class anxieties of a woman performer may have been visible to the audience; other times, they were

⁵⁵ Mae West, *Goodness Had Nothing to Do with It: The Autobiography of Mae West* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1959) 173.

⁵⁶ *Stella Dallas*. Dir. by King Vidor. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, John Boles, Anne Shirley, 1937; *Kitty Foyle*. Dir. Sam Wood. Perf. Ginger Rogers, Dennis Morgan, James Craig. 1940; *Mildred Pierce*. Dir. Michael Curtiz. Perf. Joan Crawford, Jack Carson, Zachary Scott. 1945.

⁵⁷ Jeanine Basinger, *The Star Machine* (New York, Knopf, 2007).

⁵⁸ *Ibid*; Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (London, Routledge, 1997.)

relatively well-observed. Films might star an actress who, unbeknownst to her audience, still internally identified herself as a striving member of the working class, in spite of her couture wardrobe and retrained accent. This actress might then have been playing a character who was herself a member of the working class, struggling for the woman's version of upward mobility and financial stability through glamour. Several star actresses of the period are famous for such tension in their personas; Ginger Rogers is one good example.

In fact the hardscrabble upbringings of many of the stars are well-known. In Chapter Two, I discussed Clara Bow's impoverished Brooklyn roots. Bow was one of the first and most prominent of such stars, but many more followed her. Barbara Stanwyck was a Brooklyn orphan. Janet Gaynor explained in publicity interview that her childhood had "held many sterner things than school plays and girl friends. Sickness, and worry about money and the necessity of growing up and doing something".⁵⁹ No star's public persona and personal narrative is as tied up with class issues as Joan Crawford, as will be discussed further in this chapter. But first-person evidence from Bette Davis and some other unexpected upper-class young women turned stars, like Gene Tierney and Joan Fontaine, are also instructive as to actress class in the system in ways that have heretofore been overlooked.

There are many examples to be found in primary source material by actresses that demonstrate full awareness, in their own words, of class issues in Hollywood. This would include awareness about not only their own personal trajectories and star constructions, but about the productions in which they were placed. Bette Davis was a particularly keen observer of all such issues, wrote candidly about them in her memoirs, and spoke bluntly and frequently about them in later-life interview. In *Mother Goddam: The Story of the Career of Bette Davis* (1975), Davis cast a sharp eye on both the studio executives' idea of class, and the way she perceived them to produce mediocrities of film as a result. She archly mocked boilerplate films she made in the 1930s like *The Golden Arrow*, a role where she was asked to portray a secret heiress slumming as a waitress.⁶⁰ Davis noted that such material was constant in this decade.⁶¹ Davis was unsparing as to how she read the problem of quality in filmic output as stemming from the executives' understanding of class in the first place. She felt that the studio powers dumbed down films because they assumed the audience was unintelligent; to her mind, when audiences were given intelligent fare, they did in fact rise to it.⁶²

Joan Crawford, too, played dozens of similarly typed "class switch" characters so ubiquitous in Depression-era plots. Just one such example was *The Bride Wore Red* (1937), in which she played,

⁵⁹ Martin Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* (Westminster, MD, Arbor House, 1970) 186.

⁶⁰ *The Golden Arrow*. Dir. Alfred E. Green. Perf. Bette Davis, George Brent, Eugene Pallette. 1936.

⁶¹ Whitney Stine with Bette Davis. *Mother Goddam: The Story of the Career of Bette Davis*. (New York, Allen, 1975) 75.

⁶² *Ibid.*

as described by John Ellis, “a prostitute masquerading as a titled society lady”.⁶³⁶⁴ Like Davis, Crawford in later-life interviews also displayed her understanding of class striations inside of Hollywood as industry, in one case focusing on the reputations of the various studios. Interviewed by Ezra Goodman for *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (1961), Crawford drew distinction between the times she was “at the glamorous studios, like M-G-M” and those when she might be loaned for a film to an entity like Republic-- which, as she reported, “was the home of the horse opera and definitely not a glamorous studio”.⁶⁵

Out of all of the stars of the Depression-era, studio 1930s, Crawford is in fact perhaps the most apropos in a focus specifically on issues of class. Joan Crawford is a woman situated in this project-- in both her 1920s Hollywood arrival and her 1930s star persona, in both biography and fictional characters-- as one victimised by her original status and class anxieties. The 1930s saw the Crawford persona put to work over and over in her films via the reconfiguring of a working-class young woman through glamour and style. This went beyond mere typecasting; there seemed almost a compulsion to repeat in constantly demanding of Crawford the playing of roles that relived her own specific class confusion, transformation, and tension. In *The Genius of the System* (1988), Thomas Schatz called this one of the “earlier variations on the Crawford persona- the Depression-era ‘shop girl’ who makes good (and makes out)”.⁶⁶ Crawford in this period was often billed in publicity as “queen of the working girls”.⁶⁷ Always available with the perfect arch observation (especially when it came to matters of taste), Bette Davis wrote in *The Lonely Life* (1962):

This was the period when Joan Crawford would start every film as a factory worker who punched the time clock in a simple, black Molyneaux with white piping (someone’s idea of poverty) and ended marrying the boss who now allowed her to deck herself out in tremendous buttons, cuffs, and shoes with bows (someone’s idea of wealth)... Hollywood had its own type of reality...⁶⁸

In fact, such very perceptive and even scathing observance by Davis on class matters may, in part, be why Crawford and Davis have always been pitted in the popular imagination as the most dichotomous of rivals. They had some similarities in background, in fact, and yet the way their experiences shaped their personalities and lives seem to have been quite opposite. Both Crawford and Davis were scholarship students who had to wait tables for their more affluent classmates at boarding school. But where Crawford came from a poor and troubled background, Davis’ family was

⁶³ John Ellis, “Stars as Cinematic Phenomenon”. In *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*, ed. Jeremy G. Butler (Detroit, Wayne State, 1991), 310.

⁶⁴ *The Bride Wore Red*. Perf. Dorothy Arzner. Perf. Joan Crawford, Franchot Tone, Robert Young. 1937.

⁶⁵ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 322.

⁶⁶ Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York, Pantheon, 1988) 417.

⁶⁷ David Bret, *Joan Crawford: Hollywood Martyr* (London, Hachette UK, 2009).

⁶⁸ Bette Davis, *The Lonely Life* (New York, Putnam’s, 1962) 129.

old, New England, educated, and middle-class. Thus she had a class dilemma about taking the work at all, ashamed to be “a waitress”. She recalled her teenage opinions in her memoir:

At that point in my life, I was extremely aware of one’s station in life. A waitress was one level, a doctor on another, and so on. I was most certainly not in the waitress class.⁶⁹

Davis was shocked when her mother agreed that she should wait tables, and then was even more shocked when she was good at it, grew from it, and learned a lesson in snobbery, pride, and hard work. In another commonality, Davis like Crawford had a strong bond with working-class crew members, probably as a result of her own struggles. As she explained, “I have been fond of more members of my crew and counted them my best friends than I have ever been fond of in my personal life”.⁷⁰ But commonalities aside, Davis consistently comes across as far more of a self-aware and self-actualised subject. This consciousness appears to derive from the strength Davis felt in her own identity, family, and regional background.

In her own memoir, *No Bed of Roses* (1978), Joan Fontaine went into some discussion of the reputations and personalities of the biggest stars of her day as she came up in the system. She specifically referenced Crawford as “democratic, knowing every grip and electrician by name”.⁷¹ Some coworkers found Crawford phony in such habits, lacking an understanding of her background or psychology as to why such behaviours might have been sincere. Jack Palance was rude to her onset for a long enough period that he brought her to tears; she had no idea why he seemed to dislike her so. Crawford found out he was disgusted by her close-knit crew and her greetings to everyone on set, thinking them unctuous. As she wrote in her memoir:

Jack explained how I arrived on the set every morning with my ‘entourage’ (the job of hairdresser, costumer, et cetera is constantly to *be* with the star to whom they’re assigned, entourage indeed!)... Well, I meant those *good mornings*, every one of them.⁷²

Crawford’s continued understanding of herself as a working-class woman and worker in Hollywood also contributed to her “democratic” ways in friendships. She was particularly unique among stars in forging lifelong relationships with members of her fan club. As Crawford wrote in her memoir, “I understand fans because I am one myself... I adore Ingrid Bergman and once wrote her a fan letter. Like millions of others, I have worshipped at the shrine of” stars--⁷³ at which point she went on to name Hepburn, Garbo, and Garland. Throughout the memoir, Crawford expressed gratitude for the lifelong friendship of women in her fan club. After many decades in which her “democratic”

⁶⁹ Ibid. 39.

⁷⁰ Stine and Davis, *Mother Goddam* 32.

⁷¹ Joan Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses: An Autobiography* (New York, Morrow, 1978).

⁷² Joan Crawford and Jane Kesner Ardmore. *A Portrait of Joan: The Autobiography of Joan Crawford* (Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1962) 166.

⁷³ Ibid. 123.

manners and “high hat” fashion and style clashed to make her an unstable and ambivalent class actor, Crawford seemed freer by the 1960s to explain the way she saw herself in the system: “They’ve said I’ve worked with the diligence of a ditch-digger being the great star. They’re right. I’ve worked with the diligence of a ditch digger period”.⁷⁴

Another actress who is particularly resonant via the lens of class issues, who indeed experienced so much class anxiety as to become a sort of class metaphor in her own right, was Ginger Rogers. Rogers was born Virginia McMath of Independence, Missouri, and had come to Hollywood like so many, after winning a Charleston contest.⁷⁵ Even though her mother was an educated woman and a journalist, and Rogers had had dreams of being a teacher, once she arrived in Hollywood via the dance route, she garnered little respect. Feminist historians of performance, particularly dance, have analysed how male dance stars like Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly were dubbed geniuses, while their partners (even in the eponymous Rogerian state, “backwards and in heels”) were treated like glorified showgirls.⁷⁶ Hollywood conventional wisdom held that the globally famous collaboration of her life-- Astaire and Rogers-- as Katharine Hepburn remarked, “[h]e gives her class and she gives him sex appeal”.⁷⁷

Yet this partnership, world-famous and beloved, actually caused Rogers a fair bit of class trauma, in retrospect. Its scarring of her self-esteem is evident in an anecdote in later-life letters between Louise Brooks and her young protégé, Jan Wahl. Wahl had shared a story of being invited to a rehearsal with an older Rogers, in the early 1960s, with his friend accompanying her on piano. As Wahl explained in his letter to Brooks:

Ginger showed up, a veritable powdered and painted peacock hen. He keeps trying new songs. ‘It’s nice,’ she hedged. ‘But I need something with more, uh, class.’ A variation: ‘Don’t you have something classier?’ It went on and on like that until both were worn to a frazzle... To me, in *Top Hat* both Fred and Ginger are classy. I realize art is an illusion.⁷⁸

Brooks explained to her young friend how she viewed this reaction and situation, from the perspective of an older star herself:

That ‘Class’ story about Rogers is sad because if she hadn’t had her Ma around Astaire would have ‘obliterated’ her because of her lack of class. He screamed it from the beginning with her- she didn’t have class, he wanted a girl with class- a young

⁷⁴ Ibid. 166.

⁷⁵ Joe Williams, *Hollywood Myths: The Shocking Truths Behind Film’s Most Incredible Secrets and Scandals* (Minneapolis, Voyageur, 2012) 34.

⁷⁶ Kirsten Pullen, *Like a Natural Woman: Spectacular Female Performance in Classical Hollywood* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2014); Alicia Malone, *Backwards and in Heels: The Past, Present and Future of Women Working in Films* (Coral Gables, Mango, 2017).

⁷⁷ Arlene Croce, *The Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers Book* (London, W.H. Allen, 1972).

⁷⁸ Wahl and Brooks, *Dear Stinkpot* 143.

Gertrude Lawrence. And when you have to work with a guy who walks away in contempt after every scene it's tough. But she ain't got class.⁷⁹

As with Crawford, such anxieties and persona were often baked into Rogers' roles; her classed showdown with Hepburn in *Stage Door*, to be discussed later, is one prominent example.⁸⁰ In the aforementioned *Kitty Foyle* (1940), Rogers plays a secretary who marries a high society man, setting herself upon a tragic path and offering the audience a sobering lesson about rising above one's station.⁸¹ In *Fifth Avenue Girl* (1939), Rogers gives the line of dialogue directly: "Me? I haven't any class".⁸²

Aside from the handful of actresses whose redesign was, like Crawford's, worked into their publicity and personas, the average ingenue endured a process that was both very industrially serious and designed to be hidden from the public. This system was enacted, specifically, as a tool by which classes, ethnicities, even regional backgrounds would be homogenised. Such homogenisation might take place by way of complete makeover, up to and including forced plastic surgery. These physical body modifications were typically combined with name change, as well as with publicity departments' furious rewriting and obscuring of the class origins of a new actress.

As Kirsten Pullen cited critical theorists Peter Stallybrass and Allon White in *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and In Society* (2005), "the body is a medium through which tensions about class can be exhumed".⁸³ In a time when the disciplinary practices of beauty were not available to most women, a genetic accident of good looks combined with a project of beautification could mean the difference between remaining part of the masses, or becoming a showplace woman who could (for a time) make a living from her physical objectification in some manner. It is not coincidental how much deeper significance the dream of becoming a film star held for young girls raised in the Depression era.

While women in the U.S. and around the world went to films and took inspiration for their mannerisms and dress from what they saw on the screen, I would argue that actresses, too, were simultaneously themselves created by the cycle of imitation. And further, that this cycle was largely dependent upon reclassing. Actresses learned to project the upper-class beauty and luxury of the diva by playing such women in their roles, and by imitating other actresses who had already passed through the stages of bodily discipline. Actresses also learned how to become the star type through the painful and abusive disciplinary practices of the studio system. Mimesis is not only applicable to

⁷⁹ Ibid. 142.

⁸⁰ *Stage Door*. Dir. Gregory La Cava. Perf. Katharine Hepburn, Ginger Rogers, Adolphe Menjou. 1937.

⁸¹ *Kitty Foyle*. Dir. Sam Wood. Perf. Ginger Rogers, Dennis Morgan, James Craig. 1940. Film.

⁸² *Fifth Avenue Girl*. Dir. Gregory La Cava. Perf. Ginger Rogers, Walter Connolly, Verree Teasdale, 1939.

⁸³ Kirsten Pullen, *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society* (Cambridge, 2005) 109.

the relationship between spectator and star, as it usually applied in film studies theorisation.⁸⁴ In this case, mimesis means each actress forced to a disciplinary standard of weight, beauty, and physical perfection created by their corporate environment that was held to every other actress in the same employ. In other words, the actresses were imitating each other, without choice within their job environment to do so or not. The results were frequently unhealthy and dangerous.

This remaking of a person into an entirely new being, through body modification, clothing, manners, and voice, took place in the Hollywood system under the auspices of unit production. Unit production was microcosmic, efficient, and had a tendency to the bizarre when applied to the business of remaking and selling human beings. As explained in numerous primary and secondary sources, unit production meant studios had not simple Hair, Makeup, and Wardrobe departments, but rather Mae West departments, Bette Davis departments, and Errol Flynn departments-- with sub-departments in each for the one star's hair, makeup, or clothing alone.⁸⁵

One should not assume that stars and workers were somehow incapable of understanding the business or seeing its absurdities to these points simply because they did not speak in the language of film theory or philosophy. Mae West once again showed a remarkably sharp eye for the industrial realities of the business. As she wrote in *Goodness Had Nothing To Do With It*:

The studios were giant factories turning out the same length of scented tripe, dressed up with the same rubber stamp features of large cowlike heads, mammary glands, and ten-foot-high closeups of nostrils you could drive a Cadillac into.⁸⁶

Going further into the Fordist construction of bodies and personas underpinning the entire system, West also explained that:

A synthetic star (feminine) was compounded of one part good looks, two parts breastworks, and a world of mad, wild publicity. 'Shake well' was the motto- and top with a small dash of talent instead of a cherry. Often the result was like something created in the laboratory of a mad scientist.⁸⁷

Once again via his fictionalised viewpoint of the Hollywood milieu in his novel *The Little Sister* (1949), Raymond Chandler, too, shrewdly picked up on the amalgam of fantasy, classed reconstruction, and lies at the heart of the entire system. One of his characters, a star called Dolores Gonzales, derides her peers in Hollywood as "these synthetic blondes... These ex-laundresses with large bony hands and sharp knees and unsuccessful breasts".⁸⁸ Chandler's abilities at not only deconstructing Hollywood, but doing so with a mind to its classed erasure of the pasts of those it

⁸⁴ Stacey, *Star Gazing*; Shelley Stamp, *Movie-struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, 2000).

⁸⁵ West, *Goodness Had Nothing To Do With It*; Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*; Errol Flynn, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways* (New York, Cooper Square, 2003).

⁸⁶ West, *Goodness Had Nothing To Do With It* 152.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 173.

⁸⁸ Raymond Chandler, *The Little Sister* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 2016) 356.

plucked from the masses and reconstructed, are present throughout the novel. In another scene, the narrator explains:

Wonderful what Hollywood will do to a nobody. It will make a radiant glamour queen out of a drab little wench who ought to be ironing a truck driver's shirts... Out of a Texas carhop with the literacy of a character in a comic strip it will make an international courtesan, married six times to six millionaires...⁸⁹

Just as West had explained, the transformation of a human woman into a constructed new body and persona product was a highly controlled one; what she only alluded to in her description was that it was one that could involve everything from mandated cosmetic surgery to forced diets and drugs. Upon arriving in Hollywood, there were a rigid set of tasks to literally turn the woman into someone new, and then maintain her in this new persona from the perspective of the public eye. The actress was then reborn-- thus transformed into a new product who could herself sell other products-- the films she starred in, but also anything from stockings to proper (white) American womanhood.

In a popular culture piece entitled "How Old Hollywood Manufactured its Beauty" (2017), Christina Newland wrote of the nuts, bolts, and logistics of actress transformation; the deadly serious industrial smoothing of the individual:

Lisps, squints, freckles, difficult accents, flat chests, long noses- all could be fixed, lifted, or otherwise hidden. Through a clever mixture of lighting, makeup, and special costuming, any flaws could be minimized. Costumes were padded at the bust or designed to conceal perceived imperfections — narrow shoulders, thick thighs, and so on. Even the preternaturally beautiful were not spared from this harsh makeover treatment.⁹⁰

Evelyn Keyes explained to Paul Zollo for his 2012 oral history compilation *Hollywood Remembered* precisely what this process felt like from the inside:

[A]ll looked different. Because you had a whole studio seeing that that was so. From top to bottom. The sound of you, the look of you. All of you. Somebody was in charge. Clothes, hair, face. Everything. *Experts...* all of you would be done that way. The clothes. The shoes. *Everything*. That's why they looked the way they did.⁹¹

And yet, a system that was so painstaking about every hair, every pore, was as yet deeply ambivalent after the stage in which the vast majority of effort was put to a new star: appearance and looks. What about acting talent, or at least acting training? What about performance standards, theatre history, coaching? On the whole, nonexistent. No one could agree on what acting styles should be taught, if acting even could be taught, and so performers signed to studios simply weren't trained. Many ingenues, hired for beautiful faces and figures, had never acted in their lives. Even for

⁸⁹ Ibid. 335.

⁹⁰ Christina Newland, "How Old Hollywood Manufactured Its Beauty." *Racked*. April 4, 2017.

⁹¹ Paul Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered: An Oral History of its Golden Age* (Lanham, MD, Taylor, 2011) 131.

this highly common type, almost all “training” remained on the level of bodily construction and modification.

While it may not seem related at first, this strange state of studio affairs that overvalued the physical and undervalued performance was also part and parcel of the larger Hollywood culture of totemism, fetishism, and magical thinking identified by anthropologist Powdermaker. In a system where the men at the top making the decisions were neither educated nor creatives, but had a firm belief in “the breaks”, training would logically be discounted, if not frowned upon.⁹² It suited the system and its goddess mythologies that training was far too mundane and unnecessary a detail for the most magical creatures in the world. As Kirsten Pullen wrote in *Like a Natural Woman: Spectacular Female Performance in Classical Hollywood* (2014):

... the studios promoted the view that starlets were ‘inert matter, bodies without minds’ who emerged as screen goddesses after the ministrations of hair and makeup personnel, advice from wardrobe supervisors, and fitness classes held at the studios.⁹³

Of course, one of the most famous (and lie-based) aspects of the Hollywood industrial remaking of the starlet ingenue was the changing of the name. This was spoofed in numerous films as early as the early 1930s, famously even in the first *A Star Is Born* (1932). Name changes and Hollywood had gone hand in hand since the beginning, with the particular vogue for “exotic” and especially Russian names as a full-blown fad of the 1920s. This led to comical, “only in Hollywood” situations, such as when two actors with names that hinted at roots in Russian aristocracy might meet, only to find that in reality both were Italian-American, Jewish-American, or from the cornfields of Iowa or Kansas.

While there was indeed a mockable, comical element to the affected renaming of performers, it also served a much deeper function for the apparatus. In most cases, it amounted to almost a funeral for the real young woman who had lived before. This is your name now, the studio declared: you are, quite literally, a whole new person, our construction, and you belong to us. Danae Clark went so far as to postulate that the erasure of a person’s original identity was a deliberate power consolidation on the part of the studios.⁹⁴ As Judith Butler explained in her interpretation of Lacanian theory in *Bodies That Matter* (1993),

the name ... works as a politically invested and investing performative. To be named is thus to be inculcated into that law and to be formed, bodily, in accordance with that law.⁹⁵

⁹² Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*; Cynthia Baron, “Crafting Film Performance: Acting in the Hollywood Studio Era.” *Movie Acting, the Film Reader*. Ed. Pamela Robertson Wojcik (New York, Routledge, 2004) 83-94.

⁹³ Pullen, *Like a Natural Woman* 75.

⁹⁴ Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood*; Adrienne L. McLean, *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom* (New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 2004) 32.

⁹⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 72.

The name change, like the makeover, is as ubiquitous a coming-of-age plot point as can be found in the actress memoir, repeated over and over again. As Mary Astor wrote in her memoir *A Life On Film* (1971) of the end of her teenaged life as Lucille Langhanke:

“Astor?”- a famous name, a famous family, the sound of affluence to it... That’s your name, better get used to it! The name chosen by Jesse Lasky, Louella Parsons and Walter Wanger... The product had been given a name.⁹⁶

Astor was particularly adept at describing a concept that will be revisited later in this and remaining chapters in relation to trauma, but that affected actresses even in good times: dissociation. There is an undeniable link between being turned into someone else by male corporate studio interests making fortunes off one’s body and face, and justifying to oneself that “the person on the screen” and “the product” weren’t the *real* self, anyway. This survival tactic, also common to survivors of abuse, comes up in nearly every actress memoir, even when they haven’t the therapeutic vernacular to present it as more than a simple anecdote. A reader surveying numerous star actress memoirs becomes aware of a repetitive psychological confluence in women remade for the Hollywood system: of self-commodification, trauma, and coping mechanisms. Astor described seeing her name on the marquee for the first time: “it was the beginning of the feeling I was to have always... ‘What’s this got to do with me?’”⁹⁷

Colleen Moore, too, recalled the bizarre, existential moment of encountering herself onscreen for the first time. This precise instance is one that no film theorist can possibly expound upon correctly, in the face of anecdotal evidence from the women themselves as to how such a moment was experienced. As Moore explained:

Her, of course was me. Maybe that was the first thing I learned. To be objective about the creature on the screen. To think of her as her, not me... as far as I was concerned, not only then, but all the years I was in Hollywood, she wasn’t me. It wasn’t that I didn’t care about her. I cared very much. Maybe even more about her than about me... But she wasn’t me, any more than- as I was to learn one day to my sorrow and my pain- I was her.⁹⁸

Elizabeth Taylor, whose heyday was decades after Moore’s silent era one, nonetheless offered an almost identical perspective in her *Elizabeth Taylor: An Informal Memoir* (1965), going even further to characterise her screen persona not as “she” but as an inhuman “it”:

The Elizabeth Taylor who’s famous, the one on celluloid, really has no depth or meaning to me. It’s a totally superficial working thing to me, a commodity. I really don’t know what the ingredients are exactly- just that it makes money.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Astor, *A Life On Film* 1.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 14.

⁹⁸ Colleen Moore, *Silent Star* (New York, Doubleday, 1968) 39.

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Taylor, *Elizabeth Taylor; an Informal Memoir* (New York, Harper & Row, 1965) 169.

In these quotes, Moore and Taylor gives anecdotal and experiential credence to concepts raised in theoretical texts about the constructed body in labour capitalism. As John Carlos Rowe wrote in analysis of the work of Elaine Scarry:

In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry reads with care Marx's philosophical conception of human labor... which makes the alienation of the laborer from her product as psychically as it is materially impoverishing under capitalism.¹⁰⁰

It's very possible to read these theoretical concepts against the anecdotal first-person recollections of stars in publicity, or their own later-life words.

Even one's own basic bodily health and relationship to illness was not her own. Worrying about getting sick held serious pressures for the "pampered" Hollywood star, who in fact rightly understood herself as valuable studio property. In one fan magazine piece, Myrna Loy explained how important it was for her to maintain her health:

It would cost the studio thousands of dollars while I held up production. It might keep hundreds of people, extras and so on, out of work... I daren't take chances with Myrna Loy, for she isn't my property.¹⁰¹

While these surreal moments come up repeatedly in actress recollections, Astor remains one of the best at articulating them:

As well as I know the actress, Mary Astor- every movement, every shade of voice, and I learned to manipulate her into many different kinds of women- she is still not 'me'. A year ago or so I flipped on the TV set and then went into another room for a moment. I heard some familiar words and said, "Hey, that's Mary Astor!" *not* "Hey, that's me."¹⁰²

Astor thus had a quite sophisticated understanding of "the product I developed and sold for so many years, the product called Mary Astor".¹⁰³

There were the occasional new stars who seemed to recognise the significance of maintaining their own identities, and flat out refused the name change portion of the studio revamp. They were then branded "firebrand", or the all-encompassing "troublemaker". Frances Farmer spoke to this stage of new starlet construction, demonstrating how much she never fit in to Hollywood from the start:

I have always considered stage names not only absurd but degrading and never agreed to using any but my own. I went through all the usual deliberations and pressures of 'what shall we call her?' and 'She sounds like a cookbook', but I was determined to remain Frances Farmer. This was my first battle with the studio. My name was the only thing that I'd ever had that was exclusively mine and I would not give it up.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Rowe, *At Emerson's Tomb* 204.

¹⁰¹ Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* 214.

¹⁰² Astor, *A Life on Film* 50.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 51.

¹⁰⁴ Farmer, *Will There Really Be A Morning?* 112.

Bette Davis, also, refused to get rid of her “plain” name, to the studio’s horror. As she recounted in her memoir:

“Now about your name.” “What about my name?” “No glamour. Bette Davis. Ugh!” “It is spelled with an e- instead of a y. That’s unusual!” “Doesn’t have appeal. Picture names have to excite the public- intrigue ‘em. *Bette Davis!* It’s a great name for a secretary.”¹⁰⁵

Davis recounted that they proposed “Bettina Dawes” to her, to which she simply laughed and refused.¹⁰⁶ Obviously, such insubordinations were the exception to the rule, when hundreds of new women were arriving each year and wanted their chance at any cost.

Much scholarly and popular work has already considered the actress makeover in terms of clothing, hair, and makeup. In this project, with its specific, feminist cast upon class, attention is placed upon the previously overlooked aspects of voice and, especially, accent as some of the most important areas of modification and reclassing. Dozens of primary sources from actresses describe this aspect of their transfigurations-- embarrassment about regional accents betraying their roots, strenuous hours with voice and accent coordinators, and, ultimately, expected mastery of the faux-British, mid-Atlantic accent. At this stage in American history, an “American” accent was middle-class at best; too plain-spoken and decidedly unglamorous. In a woman, it was largely played for comedy and never with a beautiful leading lady in evening attire. As Kathleen Vernon has explained, a Marie Dressler or Marjorie Main would be the best examples of the plain-spoken American, comic type.¹⁰⁷ Actors speaking like “regular folks” Americans wouldn’t do for the illusion of elite luxury being continuously pumped out by the studios. As Joan Leslie recalled for her later-life interview with oral historian of film Leo Verswijver, “[t]hey said, ‘We’ll groom you and change your diction, so that you don’t have a Midwestern accent anymore’.”¹⁰⁸ Neither were certain accents like Irish, Swedish, or German acceptable. These were also played as comic and working-class, often the speech of wisecracking maid characters.¹⁰⁹

Such accent wrangling led to absurdist situations not unlike the aforementioned one with names, such as scenes in films between two American actors struggling along with faux-British vowels and phrasing, when both might in fact be farm-raised Midwesterners. In fact, the mastery of the upper-class, British-flavoured accent can be seen as both literal and metaphorical for the selling of the overall Hollywood illusion, starting with the advent of sound but especially through the 1930s.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Davis, *The Lonely Life* 102.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Kathleen Vernon, “Funny Voices: Gender and Subversion in Global Women’s Film Comedy.” *Women, Film Culture, and Globalisation* Conference. Concordia University, Montreal. September 4, 2016. Lecture.

¹⁰⁸ Leo Verswijver, *Movies Were Always Magical: Interviews with 19 Actors, Directors, and Producers from the Hollywood of the 1930s through the 1950s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003) 109.

¹⁰⁹ Gwenda Young, “Funny Girls: Early American Screen Comedians and Ethnicity.” *Screening Irish-America*. Ed. Ruth Barton (Dublin, Irish Academic, 2009).

¹¹⁰ Dan Nosowitz, “How A Fake British Accent Took Old Hollywood By Storm.” *Atlas Obscura*. October 27, 2016.

Such voice training is indicative of exactly the obscuring and reshaping of class at the heart of this thesis.

Different accents were met at different levels of classed disapproval. Midwestern might have been unacceptable, but the real bane of the studio's existence was the southern accent. With logic in which only Hollywood could ground itself, as a vogue for Southern-themed films came in the later 1930s and 1940s (*Jezebel*, *Gone With the Wind*, *The Little Foxes*), some of the same actresses who had had "southern" nearly beaten out of them as young women in their twenties were hired back in their thirties as "southern dialogue coaches".¹¹¹ The most famous Hollywood southern belle of all was famously played by a British woman in Vivien Leigh, who had to work painstakingly to get her Georgia accent exactly right. Evelyn Keyes emerges in this discussion of southern accents again by way of her later-life interviews. Zollo described of meeting Keyes that "[s]he speaks with an admittedly affected voice, the result of an active effort to lose her Southern accent upon DeMille's insistence".¹¹² Yet this is the same Evelyn Keyes whose most famous role was as Leigh's co-star-- Scarlett O'Hara's sister.

Ava Gardner was another starlet famous for a very strong Carolina accent, one that marked her as particularly poor and uneducated in the class judgment of the day.¹¹³ Joan Crawford also spoke in her memoir of working tirelessly to get rid of her southwestern Texas accent, which would return, she reported, when she was tired.¹¹⁴ Gardner needed even more strenuous lessons than Crawford to obscure her regional accent. Gardner recalled in later-life interview with Lawrence Grobel the phenomenon of returning to one's home, only to be mocked for trying to rise above one's station with a new, "Hollywood" accent: "And then when we went back to North Carolina, oh brother, I heard it from people there, saying, 'She's putting on airs.' So, you can't win".¹¹⁵

From a completely different region of the U.S., even Bette Davis had to retrain her accent just as rigorously; something that would surprise many who thought of her as the ultimate Yankee. She may have been, but again, this comes down to questions of class. Katharine Hepburn's authentic upper-class New England accent that was more British than "American" was one of *the* models for the mid-Atlantic accent, and was a peculiarity of certain elite, Eastern Seaboard American families still intact in the early twentieth century. Davis merely had a middle-class Boston accent. This was not the same for Hollywood at all. Davis recalled, just like Gardner, being mocked relentlessly for her smoothed accent when she returned home to visit. Nevertheless, she explained, "I spoke every word slowly and exaggeratedly for months and months until it all became natural to me".¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ *Jezebel*. Dir. William Wyler. Perf. Bette Davis, Henry Fonda, George Brent. 1938; *Gone With the Wind*. Dir. Victor Fleming, George Cukor. Perf. Vivien Leigh, Clark Gable, Thomas Mitchell. 1939; *The Little Foxes*. Dir. William Wyler. Perf. Bette Davis, Herbert Marshall, Teresa Wright. 1941.

¹¹² Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 128.

¹¹³ Lawrence Grobel, *Conversations with Ava Gardner* (Np: np, 2013).

¹¹⁴ Crawford and Ardmore, *A Portrait of Joan* 46.

¹¹⁵ Grobel, *Conversations with Ava* 98.

¹¹⁶ Davis, *The Lonely Life* 63.

One film that plays all these social markers comedically, but is at the same time incredibly culturally instructive as to issues in actress lives from class conflict to “the casting couch”, is *Stage Door* (1937). Set in a home for young aspiring actresses that is part-Broadway, part Studio Club, *Stage Door* is particularly adept with small details as to the many different kinds of young women seeking stardom, and the conflicts that might develop between them. Within the film, a central showdown within the “enemies who eventually become grudging friends” trope takes place between the two stars-- with Ginger Rogers playing the all-American, hardworking middle-class girl, Jean Maitland, resentful of the upper-class young woman Terry Randall (Katharine Hepburn) also seeking fame as an actress who has just arrived at the home. Maitland finds Randall’s manners supercilious and her whole presence in the residence unwelcome; she mocks her as a slumming interloper. The classed banter between the two women throughout much of the film is revelatory. Rogers affects the mid-Atlantic accent when mocking Hepburn, as when Hepburn asks, “Would you mind if I *ahsk* you a very humble question?”. Rogers replies, “If you *ahsk* it in English”.¹¹⁷ In fact, truly interesting cultural studies work has been done by Jennifer Craik in which she posited Hepburn and Rogers to be upper and lower-class versions of the archetypal feisty American woman.¹¹⁸

Raymond Chandler’s talent as a keen Hollywood class observer also extended itself to apprehension of the importance of voice, accent, and speech within the aims of the system. With his usual cynicism and hardboiled perspective, Chandler also connected the Los Angeles version of voice training with the larger point present in several of his novels: when everyone is from somewhere else and hiding who they really are, no one can be trusted. As he wrote in *The Little Sister*: “Malibu. More movie stars... More wind-blown hair and sunglasses and pseudo-refined voices and waterfront morals”.¹¹⁹ Everyone is fake, everyone is a class fraud; scratch the surface on an upper-class or “cultured” person in Hollywood, and one will likely find an imposter on the make. A comical but astute scene occurs in the novel when Detective Philip Marlowe has been flirting with a beautifully dressed and well-spoken agent’s secretary. When she realises he is a private eye, the posh accent disappears and her true, lower-class speech begins to spill over angrily:

“Why the hell don’t you lam out of here, bud? Before I throw a handful of fat coppers in your lap? Beat it, lug,” she said in a voice that could have been used for paint remover. “Oh oh. What happened to the Bryn Mawr accent?”¹²⁰

The training of accents was, certainly, one of the cornerstones of the “all glamour, all the time” philosophy; but the visual and physical remained the most important ones. Such a foundational aspect of Hollywood filmmaking meant that if an errant director, cinematographer, or star wanted to

¹¹⁷ *Stage Door*. Dir. Gregory La Cava. Perf. Katharine Hepburn, Ginger Rogers, Adolphe Menjou. 1937.

¹¹⁸ Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (London, Routledge, 2003).

¹¹⁹ Chandler, *The Little Sister* 269.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 290.

film or make themselves up with any sort of gritty realism, they were quickly punished and brought back in line. Notable Chinese-American cinematographer James Wong Howe once shot Myrna Loy for a film at MGM with slightly messed hair, as the scene was meant to depict her waking up the night after a wild party. The director, Howe, and Loy all agreed to the choices. Almost immediately, Howe was called on the carpet by Mayer's right-hand henchman, Eddie Mannix. As Ezra Goodman reported the incident, Mannix was enraged:

What do you mean shooting that kind of stuff of Loy?... Here we've spent a couple of million bucks building her up as a glamour girl and you knock the whole thing for a loop in one shot.¹²¹

Howe was ordered to redo the entire scene.¹²²

Loy is a particularly interesting star of the 1930s because frequently, her fan magazine publicity and "interviews" took a tack of pulling back the curtain on glamour, describing how strenuous and unglamorous the job of Hollywood star actually was. As with all of these sorts of texts, we can never be sure if Loy actually said these things, or if she simply had a particularly tenacious publicity man who was good at defining her image and giving her a consistent persona. For whatever reason lost to history, there were indeed multiple Loy pieces in which she addressed young working girls, disabusing them of the notion that she and her peers lived charmed lives. One key concept she wanted the fans to understand in these publicity pieces was what glamour meant to one's lived experience, as well as the notion of being studio property in terms of the inability to live a normal life. As Loy was quoted, after a long day of shooting, she was:

... [t]oo tired even to go to a neighborhood movie or the corner drugstore for a soda. I couldn't go even that far without looking 'right', you see. Not because of any personal vanity, but because the studio has spent millions of dollars on the personality known as Myrna Loy. And I can't let the studio down by slipping off my expensive mask of glamor.¹²³

Loy continued on, explaining that it was impossible for her to really go anywhere, that she hated clothes and shopping, and that the hypercompetitive nature of Hollywood meant that there was always a newer and younger actress coming up behind one. All of this lines up with Tino Balio's conclusion that the universally envied aspects of stardom were really a "dazzling illusion to the degradations of servitude".¹²⁴

When thinking of the stars of the high studio era and their relationship to glamour, many might recall the eponymous quote from Joan Crawford, in which she was said to have quipped, "I never go

¹²¹ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 313.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* 215.

¹²⁴ Emily Susan Carman, "Independent Stardom" *Female Film Stars and the Studio System in the 1930s.* *Women's Studies* Vol 37 Issue 6 (2008): 583-615.

outside unless I look like Joan Crawford the movie star. If you want to see the girl next door, go next door".¹²⁵ Yet such a position, in which the star luxuriated in the demands of stardom and appeared to thankfully accept its conditions, would place that star in the role of dutiful daughter of patriarchy, to employ a phrase from de Beauvoir and feminist studies.¹²⁶ A few iconoclastic stars, in contrast, were well-known for their resistance to the glamour treatment in favour of real performance and artistry.

Probably the most famous in this vein was Bette Davis. In both real time and later life, Davis was incredibly candid in all these matters: she never saw herself as a beauty, but as a true artist of performance. She hated the entire glamour complex as to her mind, it hindered authentic acting work. Through quite a sophisticated ideological lens, Davis saw glamour as a weapon against talent-- in much the same way it has been theorised throughout this project. Davis' belief that glamour and its artifice were really the enemy of artistry, and particularly of the talent of women, is pervasive in her speech. She did not wish to be glamorised and beautified, and battled against it from the beginning of her career until the end. In Davis' later life, she explained the entire illusion: "[t]he performances of the beautiful ladies of the screen were *trompe l'oeil*- effects created out of unreality".¹²⁷

Davis' fighting back against the glamour apparatus began almost as early as she was signed. She had come to Hollywood with some skepticism, armed with a keen mind, a good education, and a theatrical career on Broadway— but zero skills in beautification or artifice. As she recalled upon her very first screen test:

I was wearing no makeup except lipstick. I had never plucked an eyebrow. I had never even seen the inside of a beauty parlor. My hair was worn simply, with a knot in the back.¹²⁸

Davis soon realised that she had been fully dropped into the sexualised stew of Hollywood, in which expectations about her body that caused her both discomfort and outrage were utterly normalised. As Davis recalled:

My test was given official approval by Mr. Laemmle and I was offered a contract at three hundred a week with three-month options the first year if the test of my legs proved to be satisfactory. I had worn a long dress and they were afraid I was hiding some deformity. My legs- what had they to do with being an actress? My Puritan blood curdled as I followed instructions for the silent strip of film of my legs... It was truly humiliating to me, the whole performance.¹²⁹

From this point forward, Davis saw clearly that the things she valued about herself as a performer or that had mattered in New York held no sway in Los Angeles. She explained having been lucky to this point, on a respectable Broadway path garnering respect and admiration. As she put it of Hollywood,

¹²⁵ Joan Crawford, *My Way of Life: Joan Crawford*. (Greymalkin, 2017).

¹²⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (New York, Harper Collins, 2016).

¹²⁷ Davis, *The Lonely Life* 128.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* 109.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 101.

“[i]t was true that my training and my dedication impressed no one; wherever I turned I was rebuffed. My sense of dignity was outraged”.¹³⁰

Incidentally, such disillusionment on the part of women lured from success in New York on Broadway to Los Angeles and film work is ubiquitous in memoirs; Mae West, Ruth Chatterton, Kay Francis, Bette Davis, and more all remarked upon it, or eventually left because of it.¹³¹ Frances Farmer, another famous theatrical actress turned recalcitrant film star, wrote in *Will There Really Be A Morning?* (1971):

My friends had been right. Hollywood was not the place for me. I had been flourishing in the theatre. What a fool I was to come to Hollywood where they only understood platinum blondes and where legs are more important than talent.¹³²

After recognition in several bit parts, the studio decided to make a star of Davis, which meant the full remodelling that horrified her. As she explained in her memoir, “Daryl Zanuck decided that it was time to give me the glamour-star treatment. It was a great mistake. I wasn’t the type to be glamorized in the usual way”.¹³³ Davis explained witheringly that with platinum wigs and highly specific makeup, they turned her into an exact replica of Constance Bennett and Carole Lombard. She recalled how it was not remotely her style.¹³⁴ Moreover, the battles about glamour arose in her actual films, shoots on which Davis took her performances far more seriously than most Hollywood ingenues. In *Of Human Bondage* (1934), Davis did her own makeup in her death scenes from consumption, taking a deliberate anti-glamour tack. As she explained, “the last stages of consumption, poverty, and neglect are not pretty and I intend to be convincing-looking”.¹³⁵

As her star rose, however, Davis was no longer given a choice about how to look or to craft her characters, as a theatrical star would be. As she recalled:

I was cast next in *Fashions of 1934*. I was glamorized beyond recognition. I was made to wear a platinum wig. Makeup had been given the green light with nary a ‘may I?’. The bossmen were trying to make me into a Greta Garbo. They even dressed the wig like her hair, to say nothing of the false lashes and huge mouth and the slinky clothes.¹³⁶

The following year on *Bordertown* (1935), Davis had a blowout with director Archie Mayo that stopped production. There was a scene where she was supposed to have just awoken, and she had made herself up to this point in a realistic way. She was pronounced as looking “terrible”.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 114.

¹³¹ West, *Goodness Had Nothing To Do With It*; Astor, *A Life on Film*, Davis, *Mother Goddam*.

¹³² Farmer, *Will There Really Be A Morning?* 113.

¹³³ Davis, *The Lonely Life* 138.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid. 141.

“But I did just awaken!” said I, impatiently. They still didn’t know that I had no desire to be just a glamour girl. They still didn’t know that I didn’t care if I didn’t look alluring when I shouldn’t.¹³⁷

Davis continued this pattern of nonconformity through her decades-long career: being screamed at in the ladies’ room of the Oscars by a fan magazine writer for wearing a too-ordinary dress, or excoriated by the press for wearing the same dress to court every day during her famous 1937 trial in the U.K.. It meant they could not photograph her; it was simply impossible to present a star actress to the public in that way.¹³⁸

The more Davis displayed intellect, knowledge, or gumption, the more she made herself a target as a woman within the system. She wrote in her later-life memoir:

It seems that something in me created resistance in these men. There isn’t the slightest doubt in my mind that they resented my background and my assurance. They were used to empty passive slates they could scribble on.¹³⁹

It is true that while most actresses were docile and compliant, Davis was combative and quarrelsome, eventually garnering her the nickname “the Luther of Burbank” in the fan magazines.¹⁴⁰ Her rebelliousness extended from matters of makeup and anti-glamour as personal philosophy to sophisticated legal challenges to the system’s labour and economic base itself. Davis’ court battle with Warner Brothers is one such case in which the male power structure of Hollywood was able to harness male-written laws to its own exploitative ends. While well-known from the perspective of Hollywood labour history, it is, however, worth revisiting here briefly with an eye to the specific issues of this project.

Davis was a star who would not only frequently rebel around beauty and glamour, but also regularly refuse and argue about subpar roles. These lifelong habits saw her punished by being put on multiple suspensions throughout her career. As Davis explained in *Mother Goddam*:

...it took a lot of courage to go on suspension. One received *no* salary. This is what the studios counted on. We would work because we couldn’t afford not to be paid every week.¹⁴¹

Davis began to develop a substantial labour rights consciousness around the above-discussed issues: contracts, loan-outs, suspensions, and the true power relations of Hollywood. As she wrote in later life:

The very contract system that once offered me such security had become stultifying. One had bed and board in jail. I had not one whit of freedom as an artist. The privilege

¹³⁷ Ibid. 147.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Davis, *The Lonely Life* 136.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Stine and Davis, *Mother Goddam* 105.

of choice had not been mine for years... I was beginning to feel like an assembly-line actress.¹⁴²

She recalled realizing, at the time, what the particular three-month suspension she had been paying when she decided to fight Warner Brothers actually meant:

My contract had five more years to run. The time of my suspension would be added to this bondage. In other words, unlike all other forms of employment, the right to strike was not ours. Refusal to pay us was theirs; and these unpaid months would be added to the original contract. Such a contract could be for a lifetime under this incredible arrangement...¹⁴³ It is therefore not a legal contract but a life sentence.¹⁴⁴

Davis' outrage at these conditions amounted to a full-throated plea that, with shades of Powdermaker's findings, amounted to no less than a demand for performers to be treated as human beings. In terms of the autonomy of the performing individual, Davis wrote:

If they are forced as punishment not to work and therefore eventually to starve- that is the question of slavery. I suggest that the essence of slavery is not that it is less slavery because the bars are gilded, but because some authority says, "You must continue to work under contract".¹⁴⁵

In the current century, this metaphor reads as racially insensitive and even offensive; comparisons to serfdom or indentured servitude are both more accurate and more well-delineated. At the same time, it is worth including Davis' thoughts here, because they demonstrate a quite sophisticated understanding of the profession and what was at stake. An actress with such a thoughtful, and enraged, understanding of the injustices of the studio contract system for performers would naturally have been one of the first to challenge the system in court. This leads to discussion of her 1937 watershed court case.

Davis' case was momentous not just in demonstrating the nature of actresses' economic exploitation, but the misogynist logic that was used to uphold it. Davis not only rejected being commanded to perform in yet another role she despised, but she extrapolated this to a broader point: all the numerous, dehumanised things the studio could force her to do or forbid her from doing. Davis noted the practical implications for an actress' personal life: a photo taken of her at home by her husband could be considered an "appearance" in terms of her contract, and the studio could take the right to destroy the negatives. As Davis stated:

I could, by contract, not even arrange to get up a party for my favorite charity... I was absolutely *owned* by Warners and under this aegis, I could be ordered to dance in a chorus line and forced to comply.

¹⁴² Davis, *The Lonely Life* 157.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 166.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 158.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 166

As she further explained:

The refreshed thought that I could be forced into putting on a grass skirt and doing a hula if it pleased my masters and even sent out on personal-appearance tours in that condition so enraged me that when I heard Warner was serious enough to bring this to the English courts and litigation could cost me a fortune, I still refused to turn back. Once and for all I had to consolidate my position as an actress and not as a painted puppet subject to my masters' whims.¹⁴⁶

Davis was urged by friends to give up defending her case and acquiesce to Jack Warner, who was at that time threatening to sue her over her refusal to take a part. She refused.

Davis rightly pointed out that within a studio contract, being forced to dress and perform in any ways the studio saw fit with no right of refusal was standard. Such standard could mean anything from perpetual sexualised photo shoots required under an actress' "cheesecake clause" to being forbidden from drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes in public lest it be photographed. Davis' contract forbade flying, on the grounds that it was too dangerous, to take one example.¹⁴⁷ It could also mean being roped into a years-long faux romance with dates and personal appearances together included, sometimes even unto marriage— a practice well-known for being enacted on great quantities of closeted, queer Hollywood stars.¹⁴⁸

Davis' defiant court case was, then, set up as a showdown.¹⁴⁹ In many ways, it was the whole system that was on trial. From the perspective of the studios, actresses could not be allowed to make their own decisions freely. If they quit, an entire film could be wasted. The prosecutor took a smug and patronising tone throughout, telling the court that "this is the action of a very naughty young lady".¹⁵⁰ With a surefire tactic, he mocked Davis' claims of unfairness when she was paid so much relative to average people. In this he evoked charges of ungratefulness and greediness, in the in same manner the fan magazines used to successfully control performers. The prosecutors brought in producer Alexander Korda to testify for Warner Brothers. As Davis recalled in her memoir:

Mr. Korda then announced that actresses were usually willing to be bought, sold, lent and completely managed by producers... Mr. Korda admitted further that I worked terribly hard for a woman but 'she's well-paid for it'. The attendant smirk was meant to imply that *that* justified everything.¹⁵¹

In Davis' later-life recollection of the prosecutor Sir Patrick Hastings and the men testifying against her:

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 161.

¹⁴⁷ Davis, *The Lonely Life* 152.

¹⁴⁸ Kenneth Anger, *Hollywood Babylon*; Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York, Harper & Row); *The Celluloid Closet*. Dir. Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman. 1995; Diana McLellan, *The Girls: Sappho Goes to Hollywood* (New York, LA Weekly Books, 2000).

¹⁴⁹ Davis, *The Lonely Life* 168.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 166.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 165.

I had a lousy contract monetarily, and Hastings knew it... He also knew any motion picture salary seemed a fortune to the outside world and knew this was the easiest way to make a fool of me in the press- and he succeeded.¹⁵²

Warner, too, proved the misogyny of the system while testifying in open court. Cross-examined, he admitted that not only did an actress have to play any part she was given, she could be forced to appear at a convention of a political party see opposed, to have partially nude photos made into posters, or forbidden to divorce.¹⁵³

In contrast, Davis' barrister Sir William Jowett attempted modern labour and human rights argumentation, citing other contracts that, in Davis' words, "made the involved actress chattel", and making the central question "whether those in great and superior authority could force an actress to work against her will".¹⁵⁴ In his closing arguments, Jowett argued:

She is chattel in the hands of the producer. I suggest that the real essence of slavery is no less slavery because the bars are gilded... a life sentence. As the contract stands, she cannot become a waitress, as assistant in a hairdresser's shop... cannot engage in any other occupation for love or money...¹⁵⁵

As Davis wrote:

This was not a fight for more money. Warner knew this. It was a fight against slavery from the standpoint that, according to the standard motion picture contracts of the day, I could be forced to do anything the studio told me to do. They could even ask a contract player to appear in a burlesque house... These original documents were so one-sided in favor of the studio that, as Sir William Jowett, my counselor, believed, it was 'restraint of trade'- as, when under suspension from your contract, with no salary, you could not even work in a five-and-dime store. You could only starve.¹⁵⁶

Unfortunately, the lawyer's attempts were ahead of their time for 1937. (There was also the peculiarity of the Hollywood studios taking a Hollywood actress to court in the U.K., rather than in California or even the broader U.S., a factor out of the scope of this project.) Davis lost her case completely, ordered to pay Warner Brother's fees as well as her own. In a particular flourish by the paternalistic owner, Warner loudly waived the fees and welcomed her back "home". Davis was well aware what the ramifications of her quixotic gambit would have been, had it succeeded. She wrote that "Gaumont British had a big party to celebrate my defeat. If I had won, all their castles would have tumbled".¹⁵⁷ Warner had admitted as much when he explained, "there was a principle at stake... If Bette were to win, all the studios and executives in Hollywood would get trampled".¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² Stine and Davis *Mother Goddam* 81.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Davis *The Lonely Life* 166.

¹⁵⁵ Stine and Davis *Mother Goddam* 82.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 79.

¹⁵⁷ Davis, *The Lonely Life* 168.

¹⁵⁸ Stine and Davis, *Mother Goddam* 79.

Davis lost this battle, but paved the way for the next major actress case from Olivia de Havilland. She wrote in *Mother Goddam* of eagerly watching how de Havilland's own case against seven-year contracts, suspensions, and loan-outs would go, seven years after her own. Davis was right to be proud of her role in the movement towards "emancipation" and against the "immoral suspension clause"¹⁵⁹, as she was in her 1960s memoirs and interviews.

de Havilland had finally gone to court to allege the seven-year contract as a form of slavery according to California statute; this after she had been put on suspension six times and was still drawing her initial \$500 dollar a week salary even as an Oscar winner. Her co-star Errol Flynn had, by contrast, years before jumped up to \$2250 a week-- despite having no acting experience and being rather universally considered a handsome face rather than a serious thespian. As Davis wrote, "Olivia knew the case was risky; if she failed, she might never work again".¹⁶⁰ On March 14, 1944, the Superior Court of Los Angeles ruled for de Havilland; in Davis' words, they had "proclaimed that the studios were guilty of 'virtual peonage for employees' or even a 'life of bondage'".¹⁶¹ de Havilland had won all actors the decision that the studios could not perpetually tack time on to their contracts. Davis saw the importance of this decision and the change it brought to the system not just from a legal labour perspective, but from an existential one:

The Emancipation was proclaimed and what Sir William had called 'perpetual slavery' became a thing of the past. Hollywood actors will forever be in Olivia's debt... A movie star is not quite a human being... I want to say, I'm a human being just like you.¹⁶²

Film historians in academia and popular culture alike have generally considered that with this action, de Havilland helped put a major crack in the studio system that eventually helped to topple it some years later.¹⁶³ The de Havilland Decision is still a precedent today, used by modern actors and musicians in litigation with their companies. Considering de Havilland only just died in July 2020 at 104, and had still, famously, been in the news for litigation (suing Ryan Murphy for his portrayal of her on the series *Feud* in 2019),¹⁶⁴ it is evident that she and Davis were something of courageous kindred spirits in the system of their day.

Going to war with the studios on legal grounds was thus a highly risky endeavour. Yet more minor rebellions could also be risky; anything that showed one not behaving as told could in theory end with banishment. Primary and secondary sources alike make clear that actresses who resisted

¹⁵⁹ Davis, *The Lonely Life* 170.

¹⁶⁰ Stine and Davis, *Mother Goddam* 77.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 181.

¹⁶² Davis, *The Lonely Life* 170.

¹⁶³ Thomas J. Stipanowich, "Olivia de Havilland: The actress who took on the studio system and won." *Los Angeles Times*. July 1, 2016; *Hollywood and the Law*, eds. Paul McDonald, Emily Carman, Eric Hoyt (London, Bloomsbury, 2017).

¹⁶⁴ Paul Brownfield. "At 101, a Survivor of Hollywood's Golden Age Throws Down the Gauntlet." *New York Times*. March 3, 2018; Carroll, Rory Carroll, "Olivia de Havilland, 101, on suing *Feud*: TV show put 'false words in my mouth'". *The Guardian*. March 16, 2018.

glamour in either personal aesthetic like fashion or overall lifestyle were punished by the studios. Actresses who balked at nightlife socialising might have two to three times weekly nightclub appearances at hotspots like the Trocadero or Ciro's included in their contract. This happened to Ann Sheridan; her dislike of this aspect of the job was said to be why she never made it to top-tier stardom.¹⁶⁵ Ann Dvorak was another star who was almost countercultural in her lifestyle, very much against the grain in 1930s Hollywood. She and her husband farmed, wore old clothes, and drove an old car.¹⁶⁶

Frances Farmer had a similar aesthetic and values, and found that anti-glamour made her, too, a nonconformist and troublemaker as far as the studio was concerned. In her memoir, she recounted:

... I received a call from Adolph Zukor... I was escorted into his private throne room, but rather than assigning me to a new role, he took a fatherly approach and lectured me on my middle-class living habits and general deportment.¹⁶⁷

After being "advised" to dress better and get a better car, Farmer continued:

I was satisfied with the way I dressed and told him so... but Mr. Zukor was not to be put off. He screamed for glamor. I let him scream and went about my own business. We never agreed, and I never changed.¹⁶⁸

Farmer felt sure that this was the time she made an enemy of her studio head. Farmer did add, "[b]ut in all fairness to Mr. Zukor and his expectations, those were the days of limousines and sables. In contrast, I wore ready-made slacks and drove a six-year-old car".¹⁶⁹ So exasperated were the powers that be at Paramount that publicity had to attempt to come up with an angle explaining Farmer's "eccentricities"; they dubbed her "the star who would not go Hollywood".¹⁷⁰ Farmer and her employers reached a relative *détente* when the studio simply bought her clothes she was happy enough to wear if she didn't need to waste money on them, as well as a convertible for the same reasons.¹⁷¹ It rang true in the 1983 biopic *Frances* to have the titular character (Jessica Lange) protest the big makeover with, "I'm not a glamour girl. What does all this have to do with acting?"¹⁷²

These sorts of mandatory fashion and makeup choices or lifestyle branding are presented in later-life recollections as annoying and frustrating problems for those actresses who had core values and minds of their own. Yet at least these things were wearable or temporary. A grimmer part of this

¹⁶⁵ Malone, *Hollywood's Second Sex* 67.

¹⁶⁶ Rice, *Ann Dvorak*.

¹⁶⁷ Farmer, *Will There Really Be A Morning?* 117.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 118.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* 122.

¹⁷² *Frances*. Dir. Graeme Clifford. Perf. Jessica Lange, Kim Stanley, Sam Shepard. 1982.

Hollywood history and its reconstructions of women in ways that were dehumanising, abusive, dangerous, even sometimes lethal, arises with irreversible bodily modifications or damage. This category included anything from coerced plastic surgery to extreme dieting and drugs, all the way to life-endangering scenes, stunts, and forced abortions.

The American film industry was a long-standing breeding ground of both coerced and experimental cosmetic surgery. While not speaking about classical Hollywood specifically, Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth* (1991) correctly identified the imperative to surgery on a woman's appearance as a condition of keeping her job a radically exploitative cultural practice.¹⁷³ Second Wave feminists like Wolf and Susan Faludi theorised, in the 1990s, these sorts of physical assaults as part of recurrent backlash to women's liberation.¹⁷⁴ Their use proceeded such manifestations in the specific case of Hollywood and its control of the bodies of women. Rather, as in so many body modifications, Hollywood women back to the silent era had been used as guinea pigs in such procedures. A 1930 *Photoplay* article entitled "Would You Like A New Nose? How Hollywood Submits to the Knife of the Plastic Surgeon in the Name of Beauty" demonstrated how such cultural shift was not covered up, but rather touted as new scientific perfection of the body through modern technology. The article highlights one Dr. Josif Ginsburg, "a young Russian, a war-taught plastic surgeon".¹⁷⁵ In the piece, Lang introduces Ginsburg as one of the "Beauty-Makers of Hollywood" who had to that point "remodelled more than two thousand faces for the screen".¹⁷⁶ In this conceptualisation, glamour was presented as a type of medical magic by which male specialists could conjure beauty out of unperfected women.

In this respect, Wolf and her work in *The Beauty Myth* are strongly resonant with theorisation of women's bodily exploitations in studio Hollywood. As Wolf wrote in 1991:

Employment demand for cosmetic surgery brings women into an alternative work reality based on ideas about the use of human beings as workers, ideas that have not applied to men since the existence of slavery, before which a slave-owner had a right to inflict physical mutilation on his workforce. The surgical economy is no slave economy, of course; but in its increasing demand for permanent, painful, and risky alteration of the body... The employer, with this development, can, in effect, cut off parts of a woman's face.¹⁷⁷

First-person accounts did speak repeatedly of instances in which an actress was "recommended" to have a surgery, which really meant more or less ordered or forced as an employee. Frederica Sagor

¹⁷³ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women* (New York, Morrow, 1991) 39.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.; Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York, Crown, 1991).

¹⁷⁵ Harry Lang, "Would You Like A New Nose? How Hollywood Submits to the Knife of the Plastic Surgeon in the Name of Beauty." *Photoplay*, August 1930, 58-60.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women* (New York, Morrow, 1991) 39.

Maas described the process of salesmanship and intimidation that occurred in pushing surgery on an aspiring actress friend of hers:

While Norma Shearer had a cast in one eye, it was something a cameraman could deal with. What they could not deal with was a prominent nose on either male or female faces. Riza's aristocratic nose with its classical bump was a no-no... If she expected to get anywhere in Hollywood, she had to get her nose fixed. Hollywood's film noses had to be inconspicuous... No one knows how many beautiful noses have been unmercifully bobbed and sacrificed by inept Hollywood plastic surgeons over the years, with the owner finding stardom elusive even after the sacrifice.¹⁷⁸

Pauline Wagner was chosen for a contract after being discovered on Santa Monica Beach with friends:

I had a slight Oklahoma accent, so they said you have to go to school and get rid of that accent. We had to go to makeup. We had to do our hair over. They plucked all my eyebrows out—and they never did come back. They wanted to file off two teeth because they were longer, and I said, "Nobody's touching my teeth".¹⁷⁹

Notice Wagner's story included standardisation and regulation of all parts of the body-- voice, hair, face, teeth-- even when the body was put in danger, or punished. To such points, Michel Foucault famously wrote in *Power/Knowledge* (1980) of:

the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls.¹⁸⁰

This idea of the starlet in transformative, reconstructive pain as part of her improvement process is also evocative of recent work by Rebecca Louise Bell-Meterau and Colleen Glenn, who have written about the star body in terms of an erotic of suffering.¹⁸¹

Foucauldian analysis of the body in power systems is certainly useful in building on theories of the industrially designed woman's body. Feminist theorists working in adjacent and offshoot areas augment such a perspective. Such theorisation of engineered women's bodies is especially and naturally relevant in application to industrial entertainment systems from film to burlesque, in which procedures were designed specifically for men to control women. Silvia Federici is another useful contemporary feminist historian and theorist to these points.¹⁸² Just as Judith Butler has previously

¹⁷⁸ Frederika Sagor Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim: A Writer in Early Hollywood* (Louisville, Kentucky, 2010) 85.

¹⁷⁹ Anthony Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns: A History of Extras, Bit Players, and Stand-Ins*. (Oxford, Mississippi, 2012) 138.

¹⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. (New York, Pantheon, 1980) 139.

¹⁸¹ Rebecca Louise Bell-Meterau, and Colleen Glenn. *Star Bodies and the Erotics of Suffering*. (Detroit, Wayne State, 2015).

¹⁸² Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York, Autonomedia, 2004).

reworked Foucault through critical gender theory, Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* (2004) has offered something of a feminist corrective to other argumentation from Foucault. Using Foucault's work as read through and reinterpreted by Federici suggests an interpretation of the Hollywood "remodeling" procedure as disciplining done upon women's bodies by a male-dominated corporate structure in order to recreate them into male ideals.

Powdermaker's dire conclusions regarding a system that dehumanised its most publicly celebrated workers were not hyperbolic. Nor was her warning that people who are not treated like people in a system (no matter how well-paid they are) will be traumatised overblown.¹⁸³ When we look to structural design of a star-- from scouting to contract to makeover to the full career of multiple publicity appearances and film shoots at a time-- from a Marxist perspective, or simply just a realist one, the true situation is unmistakable. Stars in the high studio era were considered priceless constructed property above anything else, worth many millions. Billy Grady, MGM casting director, spoke with Goodman in later-life interview for *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*. As Goodman explained, "Grady estimated that a minimum of \$150,000 was invested in a star by M-G-M before a return came in and that a star was worth at least \$2,500,000 to the studio".¹⁸⁴

As usual, supporting evidence for complex theoretical points emerges to these points from the actresses themselves in interview and memoir. In Gloria Steinem's 1972 *Ms.* feminist retrospective on the life and death of Marilyn Monroe, she quoted one of Monroe's final interviews, in which Monroe had lamented, "[a]n actress is not a machine, but they treat you like a machine. A money machine".¹⁸⁵ Incidentally, even Monroe, held up as the twentieth century's most iconic image of beauty and sexuality far past the point of oversaturation, was subject to the same dangerous bodily constructions of "recommended" plastic surgery behind the scenes. Monroe was initially mocked and called a "chinless wonder" by Mayer; studio doctors "corrected" her with a jaw implant which dangerously reabsorbed itself into her body ten years later.¹⁸⁶

Less permanent "solutions" could bring about serious physical dangers as well, even when they weren't full cosmetic surgeries. Just as it has been explained that such procedures grew out of World War I and the techniques of battle surgeons, makeup, too, evolved and industrialised out of war capitalism in the high studio period. Lois Banner has explained how many big business beauty advances came out of World War II— such as the use of industrial products like lanolin and aerosol.¹⁸⁷ At the same time, Boris Karloff's adult daughter Sara reminded in her interview for *Children of Hollywood* (2005) that even into the 1930s and 1940s, film makeup was all lead-based

¹⁸³ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 32.

¹⁸⁴ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 317.

¹⁸⁵ Gloria Steinem. "The Woman Who Died Too Soon." *Ms.*, August 1972, 38.

¹⁸⁶ Andrew Wilson, "Hollywood Knives." *Daily Mail Weekend*. April 28, 2001.

¹⁸⁷ Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty: A Social History Through Two Centuries of the American Idea, Ideal, and Image of the Beautiful Woman* (New York, Knopf, 1983) 272.

and toxic.¹⁸⁸

Powdermaker remarked upon the self-hatred that grew out of derision of actors in the system, while Naomi Wolf has pointed out the same as a constant presence for women in patriarchy in general. These dual forces reinforced to women that they were inferior products needing to be made satisfactory in order to sell. The modern disciplines of feminist beauty studies and aesthetic theory are useful to this point. The body is never good enough, never finished, always failing, either not yet fixed or one day more aged and near its expiry date. As Susie Orbach has written, “[a] sense of needing to be done to and then doing provides a form of ongoingness to a body that feels desperately unstable”.¹⁸⁹ Continuing, she explained from the feminist performance scholar’s perspective:

the body requires constant attention. It needs to be critically assessed, to be available for modification, for fixing and fussing with, in short to be produced. Through these actions, an unstable body is reassured it exists.¹⁹⁰

Amber Tambyln ruminates on the lives of Hollywood actresses (herself and classic studio stars alike) in her postmodern, punk-infused multimedia poetry book *Dark Sparkler* (2014). Within it, she uses irony and humour as poetic devices in commentary on the scrutinized, despised, and never-good-enough actress body. In the poem “Brittany Murphy”, she writes of an actress temporarily fooling the public and obscuring her eating disorders: “The Country says good things/about the body/ They print the best photos;/the least bones, the most peach”.¹⁹¹ In another comically bitter poem, the constant, obsessive working to “perfection” are present in the actress-narrator’s longing daydream for perfection in the form of the body reduced to nothingness:

...If I shave my head/

That’s shaving off one-fourth of a pound/
66.6 percent of the three pound human brain/
would be another two pounds down.
The vestigiality of all phalanges is coming to an end./
So why keep them?/
And twenty-five feet of intestinal tract?/
Let’s half that. Anything gastric’s elastic./
Ribs can be replaced with plastic.

...

I’ll be the girl they say pink things to,/
so weightless she arrives by ghost.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Michelle Vogel, *Children of Hollywood: Accounts of Growing up as the Sons and Daughters of Stars* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005) 175.

¹⁸⁹ In Gill, *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, ed. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (London: Palgrave, 2011) viii.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Amber Tambyln, *Dark Sparkler* (New York, Harper Collins, 2015).

¹⁹² Ibid.

In fact the history of food, fat, and diet in Hollywood is a notoriously fraught one when it comes to actresses, even to the present day. Even in the current moment, when lip service is paid to axioms like “all bodies are beautiful” and body positivity movements are espoused, actresses are still actually on the whole just as mandated as ever to extreme thinness in order to play lead roles; what one 2014 Hollywood interviewee described to me as “the size 0 trap”.¹⁹³ Tamblyn writes about her time as a teen starlet in the 2000s in which conditions were still terrible; thus we can imagine how much worse they were in the studio era. Within this system, “body positivity” did not exist; there wasn’t even lip service to an idea that an actress could be anything other than a uniform and dramatically petite size. While a few casting directors were women, they were a small number; in any case, they reported to the studio executive class firmly comprised of men only. The powerbroker men of that time had no compunction about starving women down to *their* ideal and unrealistic, even dangerous shapes. The abuses around body size via food and extreme dieting were thus odious.

We can learn a great deal about Hollywood’s culture of forced dieting to emaciation via the interviews and memoirs of women in the system themselves. The MGM commissary was famous for, at Mayer’s strict instructions, serving certain actresses only boiled chicken or chicken soup. Katherine Grayson lamented the infamous chicken soup in later-life interview,¹⁹⁴ as did child star Veronica Cartwright, who recalled “gallons and gallons” of it.¹⁹⁵ This was nowhere near the most extreme studio practice for forced weight reduction. Irene Mayer Selznick told David Thomson in later-life interview that “there were cases in the old studio days when actresses with a weight problem were given worms”.¹⁹⁶ The culture of starvation was well-ingrained; this was literally a system in which healthy-sized, healthy living women were not sustainable or profitable. As Gene Tierney wrote in her memoir *Self-Portrait* (1979), “I loved to eat. For all of Hollywood’s considerable rewards, I was hungry for most of those twenty years”.¹⁹⁷

Angst around food and body size was a cultural reality for stars, bit players, and extras alike. Stars’ body concerns in this area would be dieting and slimming down to a certain aesthetic for the camera, and maintaining such at all costs. One ad of the time for a malted milk diet drink featured stars Fay Wray and Bruce Cabot, explaining, “[w]e stay slim... or we lose our contracts”.¹⁹⁸ (By contrast, extras were experiencing precarity to the point of food insecurity in this period, and worried about losing a job for looking *too* thin and thus unhealthy, malnourished, and poor.)¹⁹⁹ As Breanne

¹⁹³ Tamika Lamison. Interview by Kerry McElroy. Skype. October 10, 2014.

¹⁹⁴ Verswivjer, *Movies Were Always Magical* 53.

¹⁹⁵ Angela Cartwright and Tom McLaren, *Styling the Stars: Lost Treasures from the Twentieth Century Fox Archive* (San Rafael, CA, Insight, 2017) 140.

¹⁹⁶ David Thomson, *The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood* (New York, Knopf, 2005) 139.

¹⁹⁷ Tierney and Herskowitz, *Self-Portrait* 28.

¹⁹⁸ Karen Sternheimer, *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream: Stardom and Social Mobility*. (New York, Routledge, 2011), 79.

¹⁹⁹ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns*.

Fahs wrote in the compilation *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism* (2017), the body remains “a malleable site of cultural anxieties”.²⁰⁰

In some cases, food, body size, and health, and their usefulness in controlling of the body, were even weaponised as contractual strategy by the studios against actresses. Ann Dvorak chronicler Christina Rice went into great detail in her 2013 biography as to how Warner Brothers’ battle to get rid of the “troublesome” Dvorak hinged on a suspension around her looking too thin and unwell to be in films. Yet this was the same period were Dvorak herself was constantly complaining publicly and privately of being driven far too much, even to exhaustion, forced to work on multiple films at once.²⁰¹ Rice quoted Dvorak from a contemporaneous interview:

I can’t go on. They’re pushing me too hard. I tell you I’m tired of seeing so much Ann Dvorak around- on the billboards, in the magazines. If they keep on, there will be nothing left of me. I’ll be dead so far as movies are concerned. And something in me will die too.²⁰²

Dvorak’s own doctor admitted that it was “unfortunate people had to ruin their health to pay off yachts and homes”.²⁰³ The studio used Dvorak’s failing health as stratagem to get rid of her, assigning her to a dancing picture and knowing she would not be able to do the physical work required. In the end, the court case culminated with Jack Warner on the stand and Dvorak’s chest x-rays passed around the courtroom.²⁰⁴

In contrast, actresses occasionally found ways to enact the reverse, successfully using food towards rebellion or subversion. Paula Raymond proved a rare starlet who used weight to her advantage against the system. As she recalled of her unsatisfactory contract, in interview with Leo Verswivjer:

They did put me in some of their movies, but they were all B films, so I ate my way out of that contract, I got free in six months. I got so plump they couldn’t use me as a leading lady [laughs] and then I didn’t feel like working for a little while.²⁰⁵

No star actress meets at the confluence of so many of these fault lines-- substance abuse, diet, abortion, mental health issues, abuse by the studio heads-- in both the public imagination and in scholarly feminist film history than Judy Garland. Mayer consistently criticised Garland as fat and unattractive, only allowing her to maintain a contract if her appearance remained the same after initial extreme dieting slimmed her down dramatically. This pressure led to methamphetamine prescription

²⁰⁰ Breanne Fahs, “Mapping ‘Gross’ Bodies: The Regulatory Politics of Disgust”. In *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism*. Eds. Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill, and Christina Scharff (Heidelberg, Springer, 2017) 83.

²⁰¹ Rice, *Ann Dvorak* 161.

²⁰² *Ibid.* 88.

²⁰³ *Ibid.* 162.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Verswivjer, *Movies Were Always Magical* 149.

by studio doctors, which in turn led to a life of drug addiction and eventual death. The fact that this became such a common and normalised Hollywood story, famously used to dismiss the deaths of Marilyn Monroe and many others, is very instructive as to the misogyny of both Hollywood and broader popular culture.

In the early years of her career and publicity, Garland was still an innocent who played up her teenage diet struggles in the press. In interview, she said, “I don’t believe in dieting... now. Maybe I will later... I don’t know. But gosh, when a girl has an appetite, she has to eat, doesn’t she?”²⁰⁶ In Hedda Hopper’s 1949 column reporting upon a Garland press conference, a big roar of laughter from the crowd of reporters was recounted when she was asked, “Judy, what do you think you most missed as a teenager?”, and she replied “eating!” with a big grin.²⁰⁷ Privately, it was an agonising situation. In her own words, Garland explained:

Mr. Mayer called me his little hunchback. He said I looked like a fat monster so orders went down to the commissary. “Whatever Garland orders, give her chicken broth.” That commissary changed hands and new staff was brought in and it even burned down, but still every noon there was another damn bowl of chicken soup.²⁰⁸

Throughout her peak studio years, Garland thus lived on chicken soup, black coffee, and eighty cigarettes a day.²⁰⁹ In cheerful, publicity-mandated interviews of this same period, Garland would explain how she never should have dieted, as the baby fat had just melted off her.²¹⁰ In fact and as with so many starlets past and present, this was a lie. She was already hooked on the studio doctors’ cocktail of benzedrine-barbituates-- on which she would remain for the rest of her life.

Some of the pathos of Garland’s persona lay in her young age to have dealt with so much abuse and insult about her body and face. Her own words and testimony from those who knew her were clear that it had damaged her for life. How patriarchal, woman-and girl-hating, and revealing is the tone and “logic” of the same 1949 Hedda Hopper column:

When Judy started working at Metro, she was as round as a rain barrel... When she reported to wardrobe for a fitting, she’d be placed before a mirror with a dress-form of a fat woman standing beside her. ‘Now look at yourself’, she’d be told. Do you want to look like that dummy, or do you want to be a star? ‘Of course,’ said Judy, ‘I wanted to be a star. Some years were required to get rid of my surplus fat, and lots of energy went into it. But it was fine to be able to draw in my breath and feel my backbone against my stomach. “Now,” I thought, “I can become a star”.’²¹¹

²⁰⁶ Judy Garland and Randy Schmidt, *Judy Garland on Judy Garland: Interviews and Encounters*. (Chicago Review, 2016) 28.

²⁰⁷ Anne Helen Petersen, “Reading all the press on Judy Garland around her first breakdown and it’s totally heartbreaking.” June 28, 2013. *Facebook* post.

²⁰⁸ Susan Lacy and Stephen Sept, “Judy Garland: By Myself.” *American Masters*. Susan Lacy. PBS. New York, NY. February 25, 2004.

²⁰⁹ Alicia Malone, *Backwards and in Heels: The Past, Present and Future of Women Working in Films* (Coral Gables, Mango, 2017) 40.

²¹⁰ Anne-Helen Petersen, “Reading all the press on Judy Garland around her first breakdown and it’s totally heartbreaking.” June 28, 2013. *Facebook* post.

²¹¹ *Ibid*.

More pathos also lay in hearing Garland describe her pain in her own words, whether in interview or cowritten memoir. Garland almost always presented with a self-deprecating style, minimising her trauma by using humour as coping mechanism. Unlike a Joan Crawford, born working-class but frenetically covering it to seem wealthy and cultured, Garland would put herself down—saying that as a firmly middle-class American girl, she would never put on airs. Describing her own aesthetic, she declared, “I look like *Tess of the Storm Country*. I have a theory that I cheapen furs and jewelry. Diamonds turn to rhinestones and mink turns to squirrel”.²¹² But in private, Garland’s constant grinding down by the studio apparatus had already set her on a path of mental illness. As her former boyfriend Artie Shaw explained:

It was in her marrow! “I’m ugly, I don’t look good, I can’t sing”, like etc. etc. It wasn’t so much an inferiority thing, as something that had been imposed upon her by the environment that she lived in. Her reality was what I would call insanity.²¹³

We know now how much the actress body in early filmic systems was subject to forced substance use. Actresses were prescribed drugs for weight loss, insomnia, or to give energy. In *Frances*, the main character explained the seductive and constant industry exhortation to “just take a pep pill”, as when, for example, one might have to attend a party immediately after a fourteen-hour workday on set.²¹⁴ In many cases, the drugs were not known to be dangerous or highly addictive until years later—at least by the performers who were prescribed them and their families. By then many had developed serious physical and psychological addictions. Many died or had lives or careers destroyed because of prescription habits begun by studio doctors. Often the culture of coerced cosmetic surgery and coerced drug abuse were combined in the body of the same actress, to lethal effect. The immense cocktail of prescription medications prescribed to Marilyn Monroe is well-known.

In the case of Garland, following her Oscar win in 1955 she was starred in six pictures without a break over just eighteen months. This made evident that, as with the case of Dvorak, running actresses to the point of exhaustion was quite normalised industry standard. Describing the real work pattern outside of publicity later in life, by then fully aware of the drugs the studios had foisted upon her and what they did to performers in Hollywood, Garland explained what her conditions had been in her peak 1940s career:

I started to feel like a wind-up toy from FAO Schwartz. They had us working days and nights on end, shooting one picture and rehearsing the next. They’d give us pep pills to keep us on our feet and long after we were exhausted, then they’d knock us cold with sleeping pills and, after four hours, then they’d wake us up and give us the

²¹² John Fricke, *Judy Garland: A Portrait in Art and Anecdote* (Boston, MA, Bulfinch, 2003) 245.

²¹³ Susan Lacy and Stephen Sept, “Judy Garland: By Myself.” *American Masters*.

²¹⁴ *Frances*. Dir. Graeme Clifford. Perf. Jessica Lange, Kim Stanley, Sam Shepard. 1982.

pep pills again. That's the way we worked, and that's the way we got thin. And that's the way we got mixed up and that's the way we lost contact with the world.²¹⁵

There were several ironies in this horrific story of Garland's life in the studio system. Firstly, Garland's family had been one of the first-generation vaudeville troupers to settle in Hollywood, of the type discussed in Chapter One. They were part of the mass of performers who actually believed Hollywood's hype, that this would be a healthful, bedroom community-type performance city, far removed from the transitory, suitcase-and-train lifestyle of the vaudeville circuit. As Garland explained, "I can remember hearing Mother and Dad talking about how California would be the best and healthiest place to bring up three small girls".²¹⁶ Instead, the Hollywood system arguably killed her.

Another irony was that when Garland would make an effort to listen to non-studio doctors and live a healthier lifestyle, the studio would coerce her back into drugs and slowly killing her body. As she explained of one experience of collapse and return to work:

The doctors said I had to learn to eat, and sleep, without pills. So they put me on a diet of three meals a day and lights out at 9 o'clock. For the first time in years, I felt wonderful! As soon as I got back, all I heard was how much I owed the studio. Every day it was, "Get the weight off, Judy, you're still too fat." At 105? I went back to the crash diet and the pills. It was like a bad dream.²¹⁷

To add insult to so much injury, MGM refused to pay for Garland's psychiatric care as breakdowns and suicide attempts mounted; rather, "Mayer shamed them into making her a loan" for her treatment.²¹⁸ As director Joseph Mankiewicz candidly explained, "Judy was a moneymaker... As long as she could stand up, they'd photograph her".²¹⁹ This years-long state of the highest strain, drugs, starvation, mental crises, and constant criticism was so torturous that when Garland became gravely ill enough from pills and cirrhosis that her career was finally over, she was relieved to finally be cut loose, to simply go home and be with her family.²²⁰

Further, such abuses around drugs were to be found not just in the auxiliary aspects of production like the amphetamine-prescribing studio doctor or the pressures to thinness, but within the labour conditions of production themselves. Sometimes the drugs were an extreme method of helping performers keep working through physical pain. Pippa Scott, actress in her own right but born into a family with a father who was screenwriter on the Rogers and Astaire films, recalled her childhood spent around the RKO lots to Paul Zollo in *Hollywood Remembered*. In this later-life interview, Scott

²¹⁵ Susan Lacy and Stephen Sept, "Judy Garland: By Myself." *American Masters*.

²¹⁶ Garland and Schmidt, *Judy Garland on Judy Garland: Interviews and Encounters* 87.

²¹⁷ Susan Lacy and Stephen Sept, "Judy Garland: By Myself." *American Masters*.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

recalled being brought to watch the stars rehearse after school each day-- but instead of it being a wonderful memory, it was a “terrifying” one. Scott recalled seeing Rogers essentially drugged to keep dancing:

I remember one day at lunch time she took her shoes off and her feet were all bloody and the doctor came down and put some sort of paste on her. I think it had Novocain in it so they didn't hurt her, and she went right on. That scared me.²²¹

Joan Crawford, too, explained in her memoir how she continued to dance on special shoes with hidden special straps after a series of broken ankles.²²² There was no stopping production.

In fact, the studio way was to disingenuously adapt the theatrical mantra of “the show must go on” for take after take under highly dangerous conditions; not at all the way the mantra was used in the theatre itself. In other words, actresses were cajoled or commanded to do anything they were told necessary, under the guise of being team players. Joan Fontaine recalled that when she had split her head open during filming, the production heads decided to be “nice” to her by giving her until 5pm the next day to rest. In fact, she would have been cut out of the film had she not come back the next day, a reality of which both parties were well aware. In her memoir, Fontaine recalled the extreme pain as they tried to wash away the blood and properly dress her hair for the day's scenes:

Weak and in pain, I somehow managed to get through the scene. Only when I heard the assistant director yell, 'Wrap it up!' and the film was finished did I burst into tears. It was two in the morning.²²³

Stunts and scenes were constantly demanded that were literally life-threatening, with all of this quite normal and unquestioned in the day. And contrary to the Hollywood mythology of the pampered celebrity, actors— including stars -- were often treated extremely poorly in this area, even regularly put into great danger. Esther Williams, as both one of the most lucrative stars of her day and an anomaly as more of an athlete than an actress, was constantly pushed into potentially fatal stunts. In her films with Busby Berkeley, Williams almost died on more than one occasion. Later-life accounts from Williams recall how dangerous the shoot of *Million Dollar Mermaid* (1952) was: “wearing a metal crown, [Williams] cracked her vertebrae when she hit the water”.²²⁴ In another instance on the same film, the giant clamshell prop of one scene became stuck, and she was trapped inside. As Williams recalled in interview, “I said, it's not time for me to go, and I worked and I opened that clamshell, and I swam out”.²²⁵ A post-MeToo revisiting of historical Hollywood, with its underlying premise of male misbehaviour and lives and bodies that mattered versus those that did not, would be remiss without

²²¹ Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 290.

²²² Crawford and Ardmore, *A Portrait of Joan*.

²²³ Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses* 77.

²²⁴ Chris Johnson, “Esther Williams 2007 Interview.” Online video clip. YouTube. August 6, 2009. Web. Accessed March 26, 2016.

²²⁵ Ibid.

noting of Berkeley: at the time he was directing Williams in potentially life-threatening scenes, he had already killed several people via vehicular manslaughter while driving drunk. As was the custom for wealthy white men at the time, the studio helped to fix it by way of a few hung juries, and Berkeley had simply continued on with his elite career.²²⁶

Bit players and extras fared even worse, an important subject for a different, future parallel project in its own right. Their injuries or incapacitations were rarely of concern to anyone in the studios. In one instance, chorus girls in the Rita Hayworth vehicle *Down to Earth* (1947) were dropped in an elevator cage and trapped in debris.²²⁷ Ironically, the chorus girls were playing goddess figures, the nine muses of ancient Greek mythology. In reality, they were of little value: a perfect metaphor for Hollywood and women in itself. As Hayworth biographer John Kobal explained:

The chorus girls were hysterically screaming for help, unable to extricate themselves from the debris while the assistants rushed to summon a photographer who busied himself taking pictures for the insurance company.²²⁸

What can be said about this event, and many like it, from the perspective of feminist performance and labour history? In her 2012 article “The Body’s Failed Labor: Performance Work in Sexploitation Cinema”, Elena Gorfinkel cites Kay Dickinson to these points, noting that as “Dickinson aptly reminds us, industrial accident, mistake, and failure always bespeak a larger politics of labor and its stakes”.²²⁹

Despite advances in technology, klieg eye continued as an industrial bodily hazard that performers just had to accept, just as it had been in the 1910s and 1920s. One fan magazine, *Screen Book*, played up such dangers as harrowing, as with the piece “The Story Jean Harlow Has Never Told”. In it, Harlow described the set of *Hell’s Angels* (1930), and her battle back from near-blindness:

My eyes were burned... the mucous membrane covering the eyeball... had been burned by the excessive lights just as the exposed skin of your body becomes sun-burned... The grease-paint in my makeup had protected my face against burn but my eyes were unprotected.²³⁰

The article went on to describe Harlow needing an operation and then wearing dark glasses for eleven months. She was unable to read and personal appearances were agony due to footlights and flashbulbs.²³¹

Further, the abuses around women’s bodies in terms of reproduction-- maternity, miscarriage, abortion, even menstruation-- were nothing short of heinous. One of the most common examples

²²⁶ John Austin, *Hollywood’s Babylon Women* (New York, S.P.I., 1994) 83; Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*.

²²⁷ *Down to Earth*. Dir. Alexander Hall. Perf. Rita Hayworth, Larry Parks, Marc Platt. 1947.

²²⁸ John Kobal, *Rita Hayworth: Portrait of a Love Goddess* (New York, Berkeley Books, 1982) 205.

²²⁹ Elena Gorfinkel, “The Body’s Failed Labor: Performance Work in Sexploitation Cinema”. *Framework* 53.1, Spring 2012, 79-98: 83.

²³⁰ Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* 101.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

recounted by the actresses of suspensions without pay was for becoming pregnant without permission. In this case, not only was an actress penalised via money and time for daring to choose her own bodily autonomy to conceive a child. The studio almost always demanded an abortion.

In the past, feminist theorists like Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir astutely formulated economically driven materialist analyses of women and culture that depended upon physical concerns and the realities of the body. More recently, Silvia Federici has written extensively on labour and capitalism from a feminist viewpoint, and so devotes extensive space to questions of reproductive labour and the reproductive body in her work.²³² I would suggest that applying Federici's methodologies to women performers as second-class citizens in the Hollywood studio system requires us instead to imagine the *unreproductive* body; the body forced against its will to remain barren in order to be optimally sexually attractive and viable. This was a system in which the grotesque in these arenas was normalised; studios even kept files of their actresses' menstrual cycles within departments. The hiding of pregnancies, abortions, relationships, even marriages and children, the crafting of lies about all things personal-- all were pillars of this system in which publicity was all. This of course took place in the larger, deeply dysfunctional atmosphere of constant lying throughout the entire industry as identified as sociological marker by Powdermaker, explained at length in Chapter Three.²³³ In these areas of reproduction, this meant that publicity would valorise the virtues of motherhood and sing the praises of actresses as natural mothers, while the true industrial realities were instead coercion, loss of freedom, or loss of one's actual pregnancy through miscarriage or abortion.

There are numerous examples in actress memoir and later-life interview of miscarriages from dangerous working conditions, and even more about pressured or mandated abortions. Gene Tierney wrote straightforwardly in her memoir that "your salary was automatically suspended if it became known you were pregnant".²³⁴²³⁵ Esther Williams may have almost died several times filming her complex underwater scenes-- but it was while she was pregnant and being commanded to ever more dangerous stunts by Berkeley that she fought back. On one film, Williams demanded a professional diver to stand in for her, rather than attempt an eighty-foot dive into a lake. In this battle, Williams recalled in her memoir, she told Berkeley, "I'll do everything you ask of me, Buzz- I'll even do the ski jump over the orchestra at the end- but not the dive. I want to hang on to this baby".²³⁶ The need for

²³² Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*.

²³³ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*; Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*; Budd Schulberg *Moving Pictures: Memories of a Hollywood Prince* (New York, Stein and Day, 1981).

²³⁴ Tierney, *Self-Portrait* 96.

²³⁵ Tierney also famously gave birth to a severely disabled child. Her child's natal illness was a result of a fan with German measles coming to meet her, against doctor's orders, as Tierney volunteered at the Hollywood Canteen during World War II.

²³⁶ Pullen, *Like a Natural Woman* 65.

such pleading— to employ such a strategy with a supervisor so as not to incur a miscarriage from an eighty-foot drop at work-- now reads as nothing short of barbaric.

Yet in terms of the employ of such a “dutiful daughter” strategy— begging rather than seeking one’s legal rights or threatening justice for abuse-- it was one that was definitely put to use in a Hollywood far removed from labour equity, let alone women’s emancipation or burgeoning feminist ideas. From Williams’ cajoling not to be forced into a miscarriage to Joan Crawford calling Louis B. Mayer her “father”,²³⁷ agreeableness and acquiescence were not only prized but expected, and most especially from women. Consider once more the title of this thesis project. *Class Acts* plays upon and beside some of the colloquial language of the so-called Golden Age, studio system era of Hollywood. The performing woman in this highly regulated system was required to be a “class act”, an upright and alright woman who performed glamour and upper-class identity and simultaneously fit gracefully (read: without complaint) within the insular Hollywood community. This meant not protesting or “talking back”— not when paid in miniscule amounts relative to the system, not when ordered to put her life at risk for a scene, and not when told her very body or the life of her unborn child were not her own decision.

One can imagine that for older women later in life, recounting how they were forced to abort wanted pregnancies against their will would be some of the most agonising and confessional moments to these texts. Even more painful was when husbands and mothers would agree with the studio that for the good of the career, the pregnancy had to be terminated. In these cases, the women present themselves as standing alone with no support, making for difficult reading. As one of the most recent sections just finished going over the mental health issues triggered in Judy Garland through decades in the studio system, the story of her first pregnancy and how she was pressured by both employer and loved ones into unwanted abortion is particularly difficult:

My mother told me, “You can’t have this baby.” Well, I was stunned. I said, “It’s mine, I have to have it.” “No, you don’t. This is not the right time. David agrees with me.” The next morning they took me to a shabby little office outside of Los Angeles. And that was that. But the marriage was never the same. I was despondent... The only thing I did well, it seemed, was work... They still regarded me as their personal property... MGM cracked the whip.²³⁸

In terms of all of this industrial history, the alarming and egregious conditions and lack of safety procedures, or even basic human dignity, are most dramatic. But beyond these, the studio system also abused women performers in myriad ways that were quite banal. In primary source interview, people from all different professions in the Hollywood studio era recall how dull and uninteresting a typical workday could be. The women held up as international goddesses were in fact

²³⁷ Crawford and Ardmore, *A Portrait of Joan*.

²³⁸ Susan Lacy and Stephen Sept, “Judy Garland: By Myself.” *American Masters*.

far closer to punch-clock drudges, like their young women fans, than the latter would probably have ever realised. Young ingenue contracts, which almost always went nowhere beyond some cheesecake photos and maybe a screen test, might not even be enough to pay the basic bills in a studio apartment; a world away from millionaires and glamour.²³⁹

One of the most rich and fascinating primary source memoirs of this entire project, especially in terms of race and white supremacist Hollywood to be discussed in its epilogue, has been Mearene Jordan's 2012 memoir *Living With Miss G*. Jordan was a young Black American woman who became Ava Gardner's maid in the late 1930s, before transitioning to a role more akin to personal assistant, secretary, and confidante. Jordan lived with Gardner for decades all around the world, and her writing is keen and full of the sharpest observations on race, gender, and Hollywood. As Jordan quoted Gardner in her later life memoir:

MGM had scores of 'starlets' like me. Fifty bucks a week, and the option to fire you after the first three months or any three months after that if they didn't like you. It was a constant turn-over. It was cheap labor; okay, it was a job.²⁴⁰

Both Jordan and Gardner could see clearly through the illusion of glamour in the system to the way women were actually treated. In fact, Jordan's memoir and many later-life interviews with Gardner both include specific recollections of just how much money they had and how it was spent. The "fifty bucks a week" in the early years went for bills and groceries for the two young women; they often lived on tuna fish even with Gardner a "Hollywood starlet". None of these anecdotal points are out of line with those of the many other women read and quoted within the project. But they would be wildly out of line with public perceptions of what it meant to be a "starlet", then and now. This demonstrates the utter triumph of Hollywood's self-dealing mythos and its all-powerful publicity.

Returning to the earlier mentioned Myrna Loy fan magazine piece in which she disabused her young women fans of the glamour of the system is fascinating from this perspective. Although again, we cannot be sure where Loy and her thoughts actually are in this article-- it is possible that Loy never even saw it, or it may have been an authentic interview. Nonetheless, it is a revelatory text in her speaking directly to the fans and comparing their lives. Her words here are quite convincing towards the idea that actresses, even stars, and workaday women were really on one single continuum:

"Girls write me," Myrna explained, "like this: Day after day I have to sit at my typewriter. I am a secretary. My boss is a hard taskmaster. I have to do everything perfectly, or else. All I can do is take orders and like it. But you lead a glamorous life. You're paid for being made love to. Do you wonder that I envy you, who can be your own boss?"... "I'd like to tell that girl," said Myrna emphatically, "I'd like to tell her in good plain English that I am not my own boss... after the Public there is the producer, the supervisor, the director, the script writer, publicity department, cameramen, sound men. I am not my own boss, girls. I am top-heavy with bosses... Then there are the girls who write me

²³⁹ Grobel, *Conversations with Ava Gardner*.

²⁴⁰ Mearene Jordan, *Living with Miss G*. (Smithfield, NC, USA, Ava Gardner Museum, 2012) 16.

like this: 'I work in a store, selling lingerie. I go to work at nine a.m. If I'm late, if I stay out with a cold, there is the deuce and all to pay. At five-thirty I have to punch the clock and go home. How would you like a life like that- you who can loll in the sun, plunge into swimming pools, lunch at places like the Brown Derby, the Vendome, and other spots I've read about?' "I'd like to tell such young ladies,' said Myrna grimly, 'that my work is nine parts drudgery and one part thrill and glamor. There is nothing I know of that is quite so exhausting as working under hot lights."²⁴¹

Loy went on to explain her own day, in comparison to those of the working-class girls who envied her so much:

When we began to work I got up at six every morning, as I always do when in production. It takes from two to three hours to dress, get to the studio, have my hair dampened and waved every single morning. Get into make-up and costumes... You may be able to pound the keys or sell merchandise with frazzled nerves, but you can't go before the camera that way.²⁴²

Another standard fan magazine piece would be something like the Ginger Rogers interview article, "Did I Get What I Wanted From Life?", by Gladys Hall. In the article, Rogers describes herself as "[a] star too tired to do anything but go home, and go to bed and to sleep [with] the studio and its slavery".²⁴³

In this project's introductory literature review, I situated Richard Dyer's *Stars* as foundational to the modern academic discipline of star studies in 1979. Yet away from the semiotic or symbolic interests of the scholarly field, a journalist had already quite astutely reconfigured the low-status socio-economic and socio-political place of the star, nine years prior. Like both de Beauvoir and the imminently-discussed Francesco Alberoni, British film critic Alexander Walker too wrote of Hollywood stardom from a European vantage point as a specifically American phenomenon. In *Stardom: The Hollywood Phenomenon* (1970) Walker has offered a quote to this central point, of servitude obscured by glamour, that is as identical to the central findings of this thesis as might be found anywhere:

the star system in the 1930s gradually took on the reality, if not the appearance, of a star serfdom. Glamour was its camouflage and fame its dazzling illusion. But behind the grandeur of being a movie star lay all the gradations of servitude.²⁴⁴

Both Powdermaker as anthropologist and later film historians who have incorporated oral history into their work also offer similar conclusions on, contrary to its many myths, the banality of the system. In *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*, one of Powdermaker's interviewees was a star aging out of film in her later thirties. She had been raised by a stage mother and pushed into Hollywood as the only life and career she had ever known. As Powdermaker explained of her (pseudonymously):

²⁴¹ Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* 142.

²⁴² Ibid. 214.

²⁴³ Ibid. 206.

²⁴⁴ Alexander Walker, *Stardom: The Hollywood Phenomenon* (Los Angeles, Stein and Day, 1970) 240.

Miss Purposeful is exceptional in that she does not regard herself as a great actress. She says simply that acting is what she had been trained for since childhood, what she had experience in... she does not think of her profession as a glamorous one. She knows too well its monotonous routine, even after one is a star. She gets up at five or five-thirty to be at the studio in time to have her hair washed and set, to be made up, and so on. Then there comes the long day, which may end as late as seven or eight o'clock, if there is overtime.²⁴⁵

A similar but interesting perspective combining that of the insider and the outsider came from one Whitey Hendry, MGM studio policeman, interviewed by Ezra Goodman for *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*. Hendry explained the studio security force's bemusement that one of the major aspects of their jobs was removing curious fans from the premises, with so many attempting to sneak in and get a glimpse of Hollywood glamour:

I don't get it. You'd think there was something hot inside the studio, like a million dollars or an oil gusher. All there is a lot of big barns coated in plaster and dozens of guys and dames standing around doing practically nothing all day. There's nothing to see because that's how they make movies. It takes eight hours to get a shot of a guy lighting a cigarette or taking his hat off. Most of the time is spent in fixing lights and mikes and shoving things around.²⁴⁶

Thus far throughout this project, actresses like Patsy Ruth Miller, Louise Brooks, Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, France Farmer, and Joan Fontaine, amongst others, have been situated as self-aware class subjects who were able to self-report on their experiences and observations.²⁴⁷ Whether as interviewees or as memoirists, they generally lived to old age to describe their systemic experiences. From the perspective of feminist film history, incorporating their first-person experiences into the historical record is key. Returning briefly to this chapter's earlier discussion on the "dupe versus agent" historiographic debates as articulated by Braun,²⁴⁸ no woman profiled here was a purely activated subject who never suffered mistreatment, just as no woman was a pure patriarchal victim with no agency or mind of her own. That said, by living to tell their own tales, these women did at least triumph over the system to some degree. No matter what abuses they experienced, their experiences have been recorded for perpetuity.

On the other side, it is indubitable that countless women were drummed out of Hollywood by abuse or obsolescence into poverty and complete obscurity. Women who were cheated, manipulated, lied to, and then cast aside, those who died young and tragically, or those who otherwise served as long-suffering casualties of Hollywood are common archetypes of Hollywood. Yet in the schema I

²⁴⁵ Powdermaker, *Hollywood, The Dream Factory* 243.

²⁴⁶ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 326; "Hollywood May Be Heaven to Yokels but Thesps Want to Live Elsewhere", *Variety*. May 21, 1947.

²⁴⁷ Miller, *My Hollywood*; Brooks, *Lulu in Hollywood*; Davis, *The Lonely Life*; Davis, *Mother Goddam*; Crawford, *A Portrait of Joan*; Farmer, *Will There Really Be A Morning?*; Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses*.

²⁴⁸ Virginia Braun, "Rethinking Ruskin's Wife's Vulva." In *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism*. Eds. Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill, and Christina Scharff. Heidelberg: Springer, 2017.

suggest here, being mistreated by an unethical system is not in fact what made women victims. Such states of victimhood arose after, by being forgotten, not having a chance to speak for themselves; when the things that were done to them were successfully papered over by the perpetrators of the crimes, who carried on as captains of industry and even remained celebrated as heroes and creative geniuses in posthumous contexts. In this sense, simply listening to the truths of such women rehabilitates Hollywood history towards justice— and points towards how a movement like MeToo finally came about.

Other than Garland for gendered, classed abuse in the system, there is perhaps no star most interesting in exploring the interstices of abuse and victimhood in studio Hollywood than Rita Hayworth. Paradoxical in many ways, Hayworth's life and career both naturally demand analyses through the lenses of class and gendered abuse. Hayworth is a fascinating figure for several reasons picked up on by feminist film historians: both an ultimate example of body and image construction, with her processes of self-improvement and whitening all fully documented, but also self-aware, damaged but yet still resistant. Her famous, poignant remark-- that men went to bed with Gilda but woke up with her--²⁴⁹ leaves a great deal to consider within the perimeters of this project.

With *Being Rita Hayworth: Labour, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom* (2004), Adrienne McLean incorporated the previous work of Danae Clark, Jane Gaines, and other feminist film historians who had begun to move in the directions of star labour studies.²⁵⁰ McLean artfully made connections between cosmetic surgery and body modifications for actresses, often coerced, and labour exploitation itself.²⁵¹ The actress in the studio system was not only a labourer in her performance of an acting role on film to be displayed on a public screen. Her physical body itself became itself the production of labour, to a final sleek, thin, unblemished, and whitened result.

In the case of Hayworth, the improving and whitening processes were quite public and part of her star persona. Hayworth, born Margarita Cansino to a European Spanish father and a white American mother, was not technically a woman of colour, as she has been analysed in various film studies over time.²⁵² Yet, as McLean delineated, there were many progressive Hayworths, from Margarita Cansino to Rita Cansino and then on to the final, anglicised Rita Hayworth. Some of them were certainly performing Latina-ness and coded as non-white to the public, to then be "whitened".²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Barbara Leaming, *If This Was Happiness: A Biography of Rita Hayworth* (New York, Viking, 1989).

²⁵⁰ Adrienne L. McLean, *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2004).

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Priscilla Peña Ovalle, *Dance and the Hollywood Latina: Race, Sex, and Stardom* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2011).

²⁵³ Adrienne L. McLean, "'I'm a Cansino': Transformation, Ethnicity, and Authenticity in the Construction of Rita Hayworth, American Love Goddess." *Journal of Film and Video* 44, no. 3/4 (Fall 1992): 8-26.

Due to the inherent pressure from the men in her life to make it big in Hollywood, rather than true ambition of her own, Hayworth is a particularly fascinating star to analyse in terms of ambivalence. She had a hatred for the entire illusion of stardom and indeed, the entire system. As McLean theorised in her study of the actress, Hayworth was a star who particularly realised that a star's "power" is a false one that merely obscures her commodity status. Hayworth's former husband Orson Welles was perceptive and blunt:

... the rage she expressed toward Hollywood... She hated being a movie star so! She didn't like being "Rita Hayworth". She didn't believe in it... It was just work. She was just a laborer going to her job as she had from the age of twelve... She wanted to escape from "Rita Hayworth". But she couldn't walk out yet, she had to earn a living.²⁵⁴

Hayworth was well-aware of her own formation from childhood to teenage performer. In her later life interviews with John Kobal, she said herself, "I learned a certain kind of discipline... I was so disciplined that I felt like the Charlie Chaplin character in *Modern Times*, when he works in the factory".²⁵⁵ The ingrained work ethic from childhood meant that she would work through bleeding feet from too much dance rehearsal without complaining. As Hayworth's male co-star Lee Bowman asserted,

I can't talk about her exploitation. We were all exploited to some degree. They wanted hours out of you. Not talent. If you had talent as well, fine. Man hours. They didn't care about you as a human being.²⁵⁶

As she became a bigger and bigger star, Hayworth was less acquiescent about what was expected of her. The following anecdote is telling. Doing studio photographs with Columbia's Robert Coburn after years of stardom, she either couldn't or wouldn't turn on "the old cheesecake". As Coburn recalled, "And she said, 'I'm sick and tired of this cheesy Hayworth... She just didn't feel like it- just didn't feel like it'".²⁵⁷

Some of Hayworth's own conclusions about the system and what it did to her, as well as how she saw herself, are incredibly powerful. I would argue that despite all that she suffered, such reflection, and the ability to have it saved for posterity, removed Hayworth from the "Hollywood victim" column, and instead made her a self-actualising subject. The following from a later-life interview is among the most sophisticated and poignant to be found in the entirety of primary source actress material in this project:

... the image is very strong. It's like a... They forget the humanity of a person. They think of you as a thing. It's all so overblown. It's very difficult. I've been married. I've

²⁵⁴ Ibid. 81.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. 11.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. 164.

²⁵⁷ Kobal *Rita Hayworth* 281.

had two girls.. I was certainly a well-trained dancer. I'm a good actress. I have depth. I have feelings. But *they* don't care. All they want is the image.²⁵⁸

Even nearer the end of her life, when Hayworth had early Alzheimer's but was not yet diagnosed, she was still being called upon to show up to events and to perform. As her biographer Barbara Leaming wrote:

It is a grotesque commentary on the Hollywood star system that, although she was no longer even remotely functional as a performer, 'Rita Hayworth' remained an attraction, a marketable commodity.²⁵⁹

Hermes Pan had the last word to this point: "Well, that's Hollywood publicity, you know. They'll squeeze the blood out of you if they can".²⁶⁰

As the above quotes would imply, while Hayworth's Hollywood narrative has more of the victim in it than any other major star actress save perhaps Garland or Monroe, she also did exhibit subversion and resistance within the system. Film historians (Richard Dyer, Kirsten Pullen, Adrienne McLean, Priscilla Peña Ovalle) have picked up on these points in her performance, particularly in relation to dance.²⁶¹ Dyer even wrote "Resistance Through Charisma: Rita Hayworth and *Gilda*" as early as 1978. Yet many of these film historians have focused on the textual evidence of her performances onscreen for such clues. Working extratextually in labour and industrial history, different instances of Hayworth as subversive are available—for one, her alternately whispering or shouting insults inside her dressing room, which she knew was bugged by the boss who was stalking her, Harry Cohn.²⁶² While she may have been shy, or pleasant, or acquiescent most of the time, Hayworth did not hesitate to fight back against Cohn, who she envisioned as a kind of template for all Hollywood tyrants.²⁶³

Cohn was particularly invested in battling Hayworth at every turn, showing her disrespect, insulting her, and not treating her with even a modicum of the respect one might expect for his top moneymaking employee. The reasons included a complex psychosexual mix of jealousy and classed contempt that are better addressed in the final chapter on sexual abuse and the realities of "the casting couch". Here, however, suffice it to say that such rote humiliations meant that at one point as a rising star, Hayworth was forced to battle for a raise from just 250 to 300 dollars a week. Finally the studio agreed to give it to her-- if the fifty dollars a week extra went directly to her acting coach.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁸ Ibid. 15.

²⁵⁹ Leaming, *If This Was Happiness* 351.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Richard Dyer, "Resistance through Charisma: Rita Hayworth and *Gilda*." In *Women in Film Noir*. E. Ann Kaplan (London, BFI, 1978); Pullen, *Like A Natural Woman*; McLean, *Being Rita Hayworth*; Priscilla Peña Ovalle, *Dance and the Hollywood Latina: Race, Sex, and Stardom*.

²⁶² Leaming, *If This Was Happiness*.

²⁶³ Ibid; Kobal, *Rita Hayworth*.

²⁶⁴ Kobal, *Rita Hayworth* 102.

This level of control and, moreover, bad business spawned from pure spite was coming from men, we are reminded, who would nightly bet 1000 dollars a hand on cards as a rote occurrence. After the end of her international socialite marriage to Aly Khan, Hayworth returned to Columbia in need of money and work. This made Cohn gleeful, able to order around “royalty” and to have:

...her face, hands, feet, and body once again... studio property to be used to sell toilet articles: nylons, headlamps, face creams, three different brands of cigarettes and other affiliated Columbia investments.²⁶⁵

In this same period, Cohn also employed the Hollywood misogynistic standard of women’s obsolescence specifically as a method to humiliate Hayworth.²⁶⁶ In *Pal Joey* (1957), Cohn forced Hayworth to play the older woman who loses the male love interest to the younger woman (Kim Novak).²⁶⁷ This was all the more demeaning an order by Cohn because when the film had initially been slated for production a decade earlier, Hayworth had been slotted for the younger role.²⁶⁸

In retirement in 1968, Hayworth was interviewed for a local Florida newspaper. The reporter, John Hallowell, described her reaction when asked about Cohn, and it is certainly one that betrays a good deal of not just anger but trauma:

At the mention of his name she flinches, as if slapped... after a long pause, Hayworth snaps back, eyes crackling. “I used to have to punch a time clock at Columbia. Every day of my life. That’s what it was like.”... It is as if Harry Cohn, dead all these years, stands before her... “He felt that he owned me... He was very possessive of me as a person- he didn’t want me to go out with anybody, have any friends. No one can live that way. So I fought him... You want to know what I think of Harry Cohn? He was a monster.”²⁶⁹

In a different later-life interview, Hayworth said basically the same thing, explaining simply: “Cohn was extremely possessive of me. I belonged to *him*”.²⁷⁰

In recent pages, I have focused on the abusiveness and toxicity of the Hollywood studio system towards performing women in ways that even laypeople would be familiar with— plastic surgery, hazardous on-the-job conditions. But some of the scholarship I am introducing here through a new lens of class, specifically second-class status, goes more into depth as to how glamour itself was used in abuse, by the men in charge, to keep the women they “owned” under control. This was not just happening in the sense of glamour as a reifying tool that propped up the system, much-discussed already. I mean, instead, a specific order of operations where the men at the top retained all the

²⁶⁵ Ibid. 273.

²⁶⁶ John Kobal, *Rita Hayworth: Portrait of a Love Goddess* (New York, Berkeley Books, 1982); Barbara Leaming, *If This Was Happiness: A Biography of Rita Hayworth* (New York, Viking, 1989); Adrienne McLean, *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2004).

²⁶⁷ *Pal Joey*. Dir. George Sidney. Perf. Rita Hayworth, Frank Sinatra, Kim Novak. 1957.

²⁶⁸ Kobal, *Rita Hayworth*.

²⁶⁹ John Howell, "Rita Hayworth: Hollywood Is Still Her Town, But No One Knows She's There." *St. Petersburg Times* 23 June 1968.

²⁷⁰ Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 137.

power by forcing extravagant lifestyles as a deliberate strategy to keep actors docile. As Karen Sternheimer pointed out in *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream* (2011) in something of an understatement, “despite their large paychecks, stars were often not as financially independent as they might have seemed on the surface”.²⁷¹

By the 1930s and 1940s, stars were taxed at up to 90%, while exorbitant expenses were still required to present a 1920s-style lavish life to the public.²⁷² Many of the stars commented on these practical realities in their memoirs.²⁷³ Joan Fontaine recalled how, on a visit to the White House, she tried to be courageous and speak up for the performers’ position to a member of FDR’s cabinet. The argument she made took what we would today call a creative labour industries argument:

Boldly, I told, Mr. Hopkins, then adviser to the president, that I felt the tax structure was most unfair to those in a profession whose years of prosperity were uncertain. This would apply especially to athletes, actors, writers, and musicians... Saving for the uncertain and perhaps lean years ahead was virtually impossible under this system.²⁷⁴

And yet, just as in my previous discussions of the common public conflation of the conservative power class at the top with the mass of creatives holding up the pyramid, the powerful in American politics held the same misapprehension:

Mr. Hopkins did not agree. “Those boys in Hollywood are getting away with murder. This administration is out to fix them.”...Mr. Hopkins remained unconcerned with the individual’s problem.²⁷⁵

Bette Davis, too, wrote on this subject that, “we, the latest to arrive in Hollywood, had to pay taxes”.²⁷⁶

And further, empirical evidence is clear: contrary to public opinion (then and now), not even most who appeared in films were millionaires. Far from it, when the vast majority of performers in the system were not stars, and even stars themselves might have money troubles! Tino Balio has reminded that into the Depression, “the acting profession in Hollywood remained a poorly paid one”.²⁷⁷ In a 1938 article in the already-ubiquitous genre of “washed up but trying for a comeback”, Alice White was candid about costs, and illusion versus reality:

“I was making \$150 a week,” she said. “I needed \$1,500 to keep up my end of the parade. I was a star and I was paid like a bit player. And simply couldn’t keep up the front that was necessary.”²⁷⁸

²⁷¹ Karen Sternheimer, *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream: Stardom and Social Mobility* (New York, Routledge, 2011) 77.

²⁷² Schatz, *The Genius of the System* 299.

²⁷³ Davis, *The Lonely Life*; Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses*.

²⁷⁴ Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses* 139.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Davis, *The Lonely Life* 130.

²⁷⁷ Balio, *Grand Design* 157.

²⁷⁸ “Still Beautiful Blond, Alice White Comes Back.” *Mason City Globe-Gazette*. August 25, 1938.

Once again, Bette Davis was clarifying and astute in later-life recollection, explaining:

For an actress, there are certain expenses that are prerequisite even if she doesn't succumb to the excesses of Hollywood. There are servants, clothes, transportation-minimal symbols of station...²⁷⁹

Davis alluded here to the highly gendered nature of this aspect of the system. Star actresses' positions were highly precarious; in a sense their time was always numbered and a return to the working classes always either looming or likely. In this reading, the actress, even the Hollywood star, was a temporary interloper into the world of manufactured glamour and fantasy. She would be cast out with age and diminishing exchange-value of face and body, with fresher faces perpetually surging behind. Within this formula, an elite luxury lifestyle in clothes, car, and home could perhaps extend one's shelf life a little longer; or rather, without the means to keep up such a lifestyle, the wash-up state began that much earlier.

Indeed, the intense pressure from the studios to "look like a star" was not a simple matter of image, style, and aesthetics, or even of publicity. As employers, the studios normalised a deliberate strategy of burdening stars with such extravagant lifestyles that they were powerless to quit or fight back against abusive conditions. Joan Fontaine was quite aware of this devil's bargain and laid it out in her memoir:

Studios also encouraged the actor to buy a large house, several cars, and to hire servants- perhaps to purchase a yacht or racehorses. This was considered necessary for the star's "image". It also brought him to heel very quickly when the studio applied pressure. If it did not, the trick was to submit a horrendous script which the actor would be forced to turn down, thereby putting himself in layoff.²⁸⁰

Unsurprisingly, the good fortune to prosper one's way out of the system versus the likelihood of washing out of it precariously was also gendered. A sizable amount of male stars retired extremely rich; Harold Lloyd was one who may have seen a career decline with sound but had nonetheless bought up half of Los Angeles with real estate investments and wound up staggeringly wealthy.²⁸¹ It was more prevalently women who, once forgotten, went broke. It was especially the case if the woman were unmarried. Both stylised film histories and first-person accounts from the 1930s abound on this point. Of Lupe Velez and her home and lifestyle in the 1940s, Kenneth Anger wrote, "[t]he mortgage was overdue on this outmoded Zorro-era pile. Lupe was by now completely zonked by debt".²⁸²

²⁷⁹ Davis, *The Lonely Life* 150.

²⁸⁰ Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses* 128.

²⁸¹ *Hollywood*. "Comedy- A Serious Business. Episode 8." Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

²⁸² Anger, *Hollywood Babylon* 332.

We can see actresses like White, Fontaine, and Davis as something of truth-tellers of the system on these topics. They exhibited class consciousness and opinions of exploitation and mistreatment based on their own backgrounds and perspectives. Obviously, the studio preferred the dutiful daughter model, whereby the best stars were the most obedient and most capitalism-affirming. This was even more the case when it was known to the public that a star had come from the working class. Danae Clark has asserted that it was not enough for stars to simply live in this exploitative system. They were required as part of their employment to prop it up ideologically as well, to present it as wonderful and, specifically, *not* exploitative.²⁸³ Stars like Joan Crawford, with her happy and defiant “spend, spend” position, undoubtedly contributed to Hollywood’s “proof” of the American Dream. An excellent interdisciplinary quote to this point comes from cultural theorist Tony Bennett on the state of workers in culture in general, but certainly with a specific resonance for women workers in showplace professions, and actresses in the Hollywood system:

They must be induced to ‘live’ their exploitation and oppression in such a way that they do not experience or represent to themselves their position as one in which they are exploited.²⁸⁴

As early as the 1960s, Italian sociologist Francesco Alberoni had developed a theory of celebrities as the “powerless elite”, a concept echoed by contemporary scholars like Barry King and introduced in Chapter Two.²⁸⁵ Continuing from this point, Karen Sternheimer explained in *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream*:

Alberoni contends that although stars might have significant wealth and fame, in the grand scheme of things Hollywood celebrities tend to have little real power... they are not the true power brokers in American life.²⁸⁶

In Alberoni’s deconstruction, celebrity is “a cultural product of the economic power elite” that supplies fantasy, both keeping the masses focused away from their own exploitation and from fomenting for any change to the system. In this construction, the illusion of celebrity power allows actual power to engage in criminality, being carried out by corporate rulers and politicians while people aren’t paying attention.²⁸⁷ (The increasing acceptance of alternative theorisation within star studies of stars as sociological subjects was evident when, in 2007, Su Holmes and Sean Redmond included Alberoni’s “The Powerless ‘Elite’: Theory and Sociological Research on the Phenomenon of the Stars” in their *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*).²⁸⁸

²⁸³ In Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood* 21.

²⁸⁴ Tony Bennett, James Curran, and Michael Gurevitch. *Culture, Society, and the Media*. (London, Routledge, 2005) 49.

²⁸⁵ Barry King, *Taking Fame to Market* (New York, Springer, 2014) 127.

²⁸⁶ Sternheimer, *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream* 6.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 15.

²⁸⁸ Francesco Alberoni, “The Powerless ‘Elite’: Theory and Sociological Research on the Phenomenon of the Stars”. In *Stardom and Celebrity*, eds. Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (New York, SAGE, 2007).

Looking at everything from class backgrounds and childhood traumas of star actresses to their treatment as labourers in the industrial Hollywood system, the state of precarity and the illusion of celebrity life versus life as it was actually experienced and lived become evident. Until recently, only a few feminist film scholars like Molly Haskell, Maria DiBattista, and Jeanine Basinger have specifically thought through women's stardom in terms of this economic lens: rightly situating the star actresses as "career girls" from working-class backgrounds.²⁸⁹ Newer scholarship on affective labour and interdisciplinary work on trauma theory also complicate this picture in new and needed ways.

As DiBattista described in *Fast-Talking Dames* (2001), going against the grain of the star theory of the day, star actresses were, on the whole, poor women from troubled backgrounds with little guidance, support, or education on life and the world.²⁹⁰ Molly Haskell was another feminist film historian who had come to this "problem" of the star actress at an early stage through such a lens, in the 1970s. Haskell asked, "[a]nd yet, what was the 'star' but a woman supremely driven to survive, a barely clothed ego on display for all the world to see..."²⁹¹

In *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960* (2013), Jeanine Basinger added crucial argumentation to this point more astutely than any other scholar encountered thus far. As she wrote of Hollywood's star actresses:

Most of them started out as poor girls struggling to be taken seriously... Since they were no longer their original non-famous self but weren't the other self on the screen either, a strange hybrid self grew up somewhere in between. This third person, unobserved by the public, limped along through life.²⁹²

Basinger's observation is so important and astute because it comes not from the perspective of the textual but the sociocultural, and speaks not to the gap between actress and role, but the gap between the real, original woman and the glamorised studio product into which she had been morphed. It also works both more cleverly and more realistically with the questions Richard de Cordova was grappling with in his "triple person theory", challenged in the introduction as an example of the abstract and amorphous in film studies. Basinger's theory is, by contrast, a triple person theory that actually makes sense in lived reality.²⁹³ It recognises the working-class individual behind the glamorous star persona, and the inherent conflict in such a dynamic.

²⁸⁹ Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974); Maria DiBattista, *Fast-Talking Dames* (New Haven, Yale UP, 2001); Jeanine Basinger, *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960* (New York, Knopf, 1993); Basinger, *The Star Machine* 2007.

²⁹⁰ DiBattista, *Fast-Talking Dames*.

²⁹¹ Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape* 5.

²⁹² Jeanine Basinger, *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960*. (New York, Knopf, 1993) 169.

²⁹³ Richard De Cordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America*. (Champaign: Illinois, 1990).

There is much proof to these points of actress class and status to be found in primary sources in terms of references to labour. Even more telling are primary source accounts as to relationship between the fundamentally unstable actress self as created by the studio system, dis-ease, and trauma. Indeed, this evidence emerges both from highly successful stars and from failures and “washouts” alike. As Basinger reminded, “[b]ecoming a star was not easy, and remaining a star was even harder”.²⁹⁴ Several men in the system, actors and choreographers, had interesting insider’s observer views in later-life biographer interviews. Leading man Lee Bowman explained of the star actress’ inherently troubled, dehumanised position:

These gals were very isolated from life, like living on an island. From the outside they were so big, their position so high, that nobody had the nerve to phone them or believe that they were available...²⁹⁵

Jack Cole added in the same vein as to the coping mechanisms of the women in their isolated lives:

...things could get to be a pretty hard grind, and hooch would be the kindest thing at the end of a day. That’s why a lot of them drink- you work six days a week without a break, always dieting to keep your figure, knowing the next day the camera would be three feet away from you picking up every crumb you swallowed. You get no time to develop a relationship that wasn’t linked to business, while at work they’d treat you like an object- wash your hair, dye it, dry it and set it. Then make-up, gadoonk, gadoonk. Home, learn your lines, sleep and try and fit a husband in there somehow. You can’t expect them to understand- so you drink.²⁹⁶

Such observations from against-the-grain film historians and primary source interviewees alike bolster equal to anything else found in this project thus far my starting point assertions, as to class and glamour. They, too, refute the Mulveyian conceit that the star is a glamorous woman who is able to “play down” into ordinary roles. In fact, all evidence points to the contrary.

Contemporary performance studies theory has suggested that bodily transformation is a process that can transcend class and economics. Jie Yang has written in the compilation *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism* (2017) of the potentiality, originally posed by philosopher José Gil, of seeing bodies as “infralanguage”: that is, as entities that have transformative powers of communication. Within this conception, “they can then transduce and transform broader social and economic forces, such as employment, class status, gender and family relations”.²⁹⁷ In terms of this project, I would argue that sometimes they can, but often they cannot. In the case of Hollywood, it might have been entirely possible to project a class shift through one performer’s bodily transformation. But one could not control how it was received, or if it “worked” (take the drumming out of Hollywood of numerous accented stars with the arrival of sound, Brooks’ seeing through of Rogers’

²⁹⁴ Basinger, *A Woman’s View* 185.

²⁹⁵ Kobal, *Rita Hayworth* 164.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 183.

²⁹⁷ In *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism*. Eds. Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill, and Christina Scharff (Heidelberg, Springer, 2017) 122.

class status, and Maas' seeing through Crawford's, for just three examples of reclassing failures). More importantly, there is no guarantee that the body will be able to bring about any fundamental change at all, beneath cosmetic transformation.

To finally augment such discussion of the success or failure of women classed or reclassified by the studio-era Hollywood system, as well as the relationship between such processes and trauma, I would add an unexpected figure in the most famous Hollywood actress of all time: Marilyn Monroe. Due to the periodisation of this project, Monroe has not come up often simply for chronological reasons. But also, within popular culture narrative her voice has been silenced in terms of class consciousness, labour issues, even antiracist activism, because of her studio constructed status as the ultimate sex goddess.

Marilyn Monroe was a child of Hollywood, born there in the middle of the silent era. This in itself was rare in the second and third generation of American star women, who had mostly migrated to Southern California from other places, from Brooklyn to the Deep South. In this I would argue that Monroe's life story as class subject, in all its mythology, pathos, and violence, is less an American story and more a truly Hollywood one.

Monroe was born in 1926 to a mother working in the system through precarity, working-class problems, and mental health issues. Gloria Steinem was one of the first major feminists to revisit Monroe and her legacy from a feminist perspective, writing a seminal profile of the actress in 1972 for *Ms.* magazine.²⁹⁸ She then wrote a full monograph in 1988, entitled *Marilyn: Norma Jeane*. In it Steinem did enact a labour and class reading of the star through biography, writing of Monroe's mother as:

a beautiful, delicate twenty-four year old who was divorced from a first husband, separated from a second, and making a tenuous living from a job in a film lab that was part of Hollywood's hidden working-class world.²⁹⁹

Gladys Mortenson could not keep her job and her new baby, Norma Jeane, too, and so boarded her out for care for five dollars a week. Passed around to various homes, Monroe at one point as a child lived with a British acting couple, who "taught her to... speak without the working-class 'ain'ts' and 'it don'ts' of her early years".³⁰⁰ For the rest of her life, her favourite colour for houses, rooms, and clothes was white, and she loved to spend hours in luxurious bubble baths— both clear reactions towards cleanliness and order after such a dingy upbringing. Monroe's famous biography-- of the English couple, and then the orphanage in which she wound up being raised as her mother was ultimately institutionalised-- were a genuine snapshot of working-class, Depression-era Hollywood and the precarity of life there.

²⁹⁸ Gloria Steinem, "The Woman Who Died Too Soon." *Ms.*, August 1972.

²⁹⁹ Gloria Steinem and George Barris. *Marilyn: Norma Jeane*. (New York, NY, New American Library, 1988) 54.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 60.

For a steady period before Steinem's rehabilitative work, most feminists rejected looking at Monroe or her persona on the grounds that she was a hypersexualised and compliant construction of patriarchal men. In fact, she was not. Monroe was politically aware and angry, even activist in her thoughts on class, poverty, and justice. She had strong beliefs on these subjects due to her background and spoke passionately about them in interview. It was simply that few reporters or newspapers would run with any quotes from her that were thoughtful, intelligent, or, simply, not sexualised.

The stories of Monroe as a penniless starlet, living in her car and off peanut butter, occasionally taking nude photos to survive, are now canon.³⁰¹ The part of Monroe's biography of this period less well examined is that as a penniless starlet, invited as decoration to parties that also doubled as high-stakes executive card games, she was utterly disgusted by the wealthy Hollywood men. These card games were spaces where the bosses would not only casually win and lose fortunes, but where they would exhort new up-and-coming starlets to wait on them and be "up for a good time". They were also spaces where they made colluding deals. (Loretta Young was blackballed for nine months after leaving Twentieth Century-Fox when the other executives were told they couldn't touch her, to offer one such example. Such backroom cross-studio negotiations were commonly known to take place over gambling parties, in which the bosses of the various studios would come together).³⁰² Monroe wrote candidly:

When I saw them hand hundred- and even thousand-dollar bills to each other, I felt something bitter in my heart. I remembered how much twenty-five cents and even nickels meant to the people I had known, how happy ten dollars would have made them, how a hundred dollars would have changed their whole lives. I remembered my Aunt Grace and me waiting in line at the Holmes Bakery to buy a sackful of bread... And I remembered how she had gone with one of her lenses missing from her glasses for three months because she couldn't afford the fifty cents to buy its replacement. I remembered all the sounds and smells of poverty, the fright in people's eyes when they lost jobs, and the way they skimped and drudged in order to get through the week.³⁰³

This pride of the poor, and lifelong identification with them, meant that Monroe preferred to play to her working-class fans. She spoke in interview of the responsibility she felt to give them their monies' worth. A few scholars have indeed written about Monroe's deep commitment to civil rights and her two-way connection with working-class and minority communities in this respect. As Steinem wrote, "[s]he considered herself one of them, and they seemed to sense that".³⁰⁴ Referencing "the hard way I'd lived",³⁰⁵ Monroe displayed both strong class consciousness and a drive for social justice.

³⁰¹ Sarah Bartlett Churchwell, *The Many Lives of Marilyn Monroe* (New York, Metropolitan/Henry Holt, 2005).

³⁰² Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* 175.

³⁰³ Steinem and Barris, *Marilyn: Norma Jeane* 82.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 84.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 94.

In fact Monroe really never evinced a desire to identify with the upper-class, but instead preferred solidarity with the people of the Los Angeles in which she had been raised. When she reported such things directly in interview, she was ignored. To this day, Monroe's body and performance style have been coded as excessive, vulgar, or working-class by film critics who have betrayed classist snobbery, chauvinism, or both.³⁰⁶ It is clear she was an example of a star whose body did not overcome its true origins through infralanguage, as in Gil and Yang's postulations. However, and this is key, if one were to simply listen to Monroe's own thoughts and silenced interviews, she never really wanted to anyway.

It becomes clear that while star actresses suffered innumerable bodily infractions and workplace hazards, a classed look at women in Hollywood demands even more of a focus away from stars, towards nobodies, has-beens, or washouts-- all euphemisms for failures in a definitively cruel town and business. If standard practices were so psychologically fraught for stars, highly successful women in the business, imagine the same psychological and affective states for women who never made it, or had, only to then lose everything. Moving in this direction, the picture becomes even darker: one of even more rampant sexual abuse, dire poverty, addiction, and suicide.

Nothing proves the truth of Alberoni's alternate reading of celebrity and stardom than the Hollywood trope of the has-been, and how it was already shockingly well-established even by the early 1930s. In fact in 1930, at the very dawn of the sound era, *Photoplay* was already asking, "Where are the stars of yesterday?"³⁰⁷ Before the industry was even two decades old, it had an entire lexicon of the "washed up" and its other discarded people. Indeed this was already a central point of one of Hollywood's self-referential *ur*-texts, *A Star Is Born*, by 1937.³⁰⁸ The story about the actress who had been a star, lost her success, and was begging for one more chance was also a popular one in the fan magazines. One 1928 article in *Motion Picture Classic* profiling Florence Turner exemplified the narrative:

She waits for the studio telephone call that will give her a few days' work. Young-looking and slim, a capable actress, a brilliant pantomimist . . . What does she ask? Stardom? No. Meaty little parts. Character roles. A chance to come back.³⁰⁹

As Turner went on to explain in the article (with shades of Norma Desmond-level grandiosity), "[c]ertainly I cling to pictures. And why not? I was big once. I can be big again as a character actress... I know that eventually I shall be a 'star' again".³¹⁰

The hallmarks of the toxic Hollywood system have been incorporated through this and each chapter, with one of the largest being the perpetual, pervasive climate of fear as identified in

³⁰⁶ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*; Thomson, *The Whole Equation*.

³⁰⁷ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 160.

³⁰⁸ *A Star is Born*. Dir. William A. Wellman. Perf. Janet Gaynor, Fredric March, Adolphe Menjou. 1937.

³⁰⁹ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 57.

³¹⁰ *Ibid*.

numerous primary sources³¹¹— in the particular case of actresses, fear of slipping, losing, being “over”. Such fears remain pervasive even today, in the age of Botox and personal trainers; they came up repeatedly in the speech of the Hollywood women subjects of my 2014 Los Angeles fieldwork interviews.³¹² Whether discussing 2013 or 1933, obsolescence has remained a central, dehumanising fixture of the system, and a fear of almost all women within it in particular.

All of this was part of the quite brutal, Darwinian power structure laid out in previous chapters, in a system marked so particularly by hierarchy, cliquishness, and insecurity. Astor wrote in her memoir of the ubiquity of:

some of the brother-can-you-spare-a-dime stories of actors who had brief, brilliant careers and then nothing... success was not continual and permanent... you become a has-been, an old-timer and a veteran very quickly. The success life-span is normally very short.³¹³

With perhaps a little too much candor, a 1930 *Photoplay* article on “the stars of yesterday” explained:

You don’t hear of the others—the girls who didn’t marry millionaires and the men who did not succeed after their brief heyday. Hollywood doesn’t like to talk of its failures. Success is all that really matters in Hollywood.³¹⁴

Powdermaker described this constant social and psychological state in the industry as the “fear contagion”, situating it as part of the larger, general climate of fear and intimidation.³¹⁵ This success fetishism and its parallel fear phobia are backed up repeatedly in actress memoir and interview anecdote. Speaking of her life in studio stardom after “escaping” to royalty, Grace Kelly was blunt to such points:

I hated Hollywood. It’s a town without pity. Only success counts. I know of no other place in the world where so many people suffer from nervous breakdowns, where there are so many alcoholics, neurotics and so much unhappiness.³¹⁶

This was a system where it was normal for one’s closest friends to stop taking their calls when they were on their way down, only to greet them with an unashamed “Hello, darling!” if only they had managed to come back up and secure another hit. There were few solid friendships; Powdermaker described socialising in which most parties at the home of a Hollywood insider had an entirely different group of guests invited than the year before.³¹⁷

³¹¹ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*; George Tiffin, *A Star Is Born: The Moment An Actress Becomes An Icon* (London, Head of Zeus, 2015); Tamika Lamison, Interview by Kerry McElroy. Skype. October 10, 2014.

³¹² Tamika Lamison, Interview by Kerry McElroy. Skype. October 10, 2014.

³¹³ Astor, *A Life on Film* 139.

³¹⁴ In Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 160.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.* 30.

³¹⁶ In George Tiffin, *A Star Is Born: The Moment An Actress Becomes An Icon* (London, Head of Zeus, 2015).

³¹⁷ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*.

Additionally and traumatically, a business built on glamour, lies, and illusion, in a city that despised and cast out anyone at the first sign of failure, meant that the ability to obscure one's real situation was an essential part of staying afloat. This meant the absolute necessity of hiding when everything was going wrong and desperately clinging to the façade of the star-- or risking losing in-crowd status—which would be catastrophic. In *Children of Hollywood*, Peter Ford, son of Glenn Ford and Eleanor Powell, described how he and his mother had to try to survive after his father had left, recalling, "my mother and I were left alone in a huge old mansion... We couldn't afford to pay anyone else to help maintain the household".³¹⁸ Powell returned to work on a dancing tour and tried to play it off as accepting a challenge. Only she and her son knew that they were simply broke and she had no choice. In terms of a century of Hollywood mythology, consider the working-class, precarious, even gothic reality behind the scenes of glamour in just this one family story of major stars alone:

Sadly, although we struggled to keep it, the house had to be sold. We just couldn't afford its upkeep. Many nights we would sit down to a meal of Hamburger Helper and beans; we honestly couldn't afford anything else. The vegetables we grew in the yard that everyone thought were for show were not; we ate them.³¹⁹

Ford continued, explaining the saga of trying to sell the house and the total necessity of keeping up the star façade:

Because we couldn't afford anyone to help us, on the day of a showing Mother and I would spend all day cleaning... When they eventually showed up with their clients, hopeful potential buyers, Mother would always make sure she was outside lounging in the sun by the pool. She played the part of the retired movie star perfectly. She was entirely believable reading a glamour magazine wearing her dark glasses, and doing her best Joan Crawford. Who would have believed that just minutes before she had been furiously cleaning the toilets, with me following behind with the vacuum and dust cloth.³²⁰

Powell knew that their very survival depended upon her not showing weakness and smelling like a failure in such a town, to keep "doing her best Joan Crawford".

Instances also abound in primary sources of actresses dropping down to second-act careers as extras. As Powdermaker observed:

the star has not as much assurance of continued income as the big industrialist, and there is hardly a star who does not have at least a twinge of anxiety when he sees a former star of the old silent films working as an extra.³²¹

³¹⁸ Vogel, *Children of Hollywood* 89.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.* 93.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ Powdermaker, *Hollywood, The Dream Factory* 261.

Even SAG 's 1935 report to the Roosevelt Administration's NRA discussed the situation, with *Variety* writing about it and affirming that "[i]f one takes a glance at any group of extras, he will find many of the stars of yesterday".³²²

Even more interesting were the former stars who wound up with low-paying, non-performance jobs at the studios like wardrobe clerks (where, presumably, former friends on the lot would delicately pretend to forget they "knew them when"). This practice is a strong concrete example towards the assertion I made in the introduction that the line between the Hollywood star and the wardrobe mistress, clerk, or maid was not such a bright one after all. All of them worked for the male studio heads who controlled their professional and social destinies, with precarity and failure infinitely more likely than enduring success. Discussions of precarity in the context of performing women, while still as yet not usually historicised, have become common in recent years, with important scholarship from Rebecca Schneider, Nicholas Ridout, Shannon Jackson, Jose Muñoz, and Lisa Duggan.³²³ In "Situating Precarity Between the Body and the Commons" for *Women and Performance*, Tavia Nyong'o has theorised Judith Butler's taking up of the topic as deeply rooted in (anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-misogynist) moral philosophy.³²⁴

There was a special pathos to the second acts of such actresses, in particular— the ones who transitioned away from beauty and body performance to working-class positions, perhaps even within the same studio. In his work on the history of Hollywood extras, Anthony Slide has identified women like Fay Lamphier, who went from Miss America to bit player to Paramount stenographer.³²⁵ Paula Raymond explained to Leo Verswijver in later-life interview how she had gone from playing Cary Grant's wife onscreen to working as a secretary.³²⁶ In their later-life memoirs, stars write about such women in ways that show they were afraid of them, almost as if they were the ghosts of Hollywood future, haunting their ways around the studios and showing younger women their potential fate. Colleen Moore came to the set at the height of her stardom to show off her new car and \$4000 dollar mink coat. The director, wanting to scare her into prudence, made a point to take her around and show her \$7.50-a-day extras who had previously made thousands a week and been presented to kings and queens. As Moore recalled in *Silent Star* (1969):

³²² "Actors Report to NRA." *Variety*. January 8, 1935, 11.

³²³ Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider. "Precarity and Performance: An Introduction." *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, no. 4 (2012): 5-9; Shannon Jackson, "Just-in-Time: Performance and the Aesthetics of Precarity." *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, no. 4 (2012): 10-31; Jose Muñoz and Lisa Duggan. "Hope and Hopelessness: A Dialogue." *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19, no. 2 (July 2009).

³²⁴ Tavia Nyong'o, "Situating precarity between the body and the commons", *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*. 23.2 (2013): 157-161.

³²⁵ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 160.

³²⁶ Verswijver, *Movies Were Always Magical* 148.

I had a violent chill. I could see myself some future day sitting on a curb, wearing a ragged dress and an old battered hat, waiting for some movie star not yet born to arrive on the set in a new Packard town car, wearing a new mink coat.³²⁷

Janet Leigh, a starlet several decades later, had a similar experience that showed this phenomenon was longstanding to Hollywood culture. In her memoir, *There Really Was A Hollywood* (1986) she recalled all the new people she had met on set as an ingenue in the late 1940s:

Gertie (wardrobe), a personal lesson learned right from the start. (She was Gertrude Kirkwood, the silent picture star, once married to giant luminary Jack Kirkwood. She was penniless, down and out. She showed me her scrapbooks and she broke my heart. She wasn't a particularly adept wardrobe mistress... *Oh boy, never me, I hoped.*)³²⁸

While some women kept themselves solvent with menial jobs on the lower rungs of Hollywood, others experienced the life of a washout in a prideful way, going off to endure poverty and obscurity away from Los Angeles. Ann Dvorak's biography described a woman completely aware of how quickly one became a has-been in Hollywood. Dvorak became a recluse, too embarrassed to try for television work even when she and her mother, former silent star herself Anna Lehr, were completely broke. Dvorak had lost millions after improper management of funds by one of her later husbands. One of her friends recalled, "[i]t was quite a comedown. She'd been one of Hollywood's wealthiest women. Now she was living on her Social Security and her Screen Actors Guild pension".³²⁹ Lehr was constantly sending friends letters begging for small loans, with words like "[e]ven fifty dollars will help a humiliating situation".³³⁰ In the end with the help of her mother, pension, and rent subsidies, Dvorak eked out her life in a 250-a-month apartment in a rundown part of Honolulu, Hawaii.³³¹ As Christina Rice detailed:

After Ann Dvorak died in the winter of 1979, the National Enquirer... depicted a desperate, paranoid, impoverished woman living in squalor, a moment away from landing on the streets.³³²

A particularly pathos-filled image is that of former star Mae Murray in faded and frayed clothes and small Los Angeles apartment, trying to raise the son she had produced with a prince ex-husband who had stolen her money. Frederica Sagor Maas told this story most poignantly, remembering 1920s Murray in a yellow Rolls-Royce complete with chauffeur and borzoi dog. "Ten years later, here she was occupying a tacky studio apartment, same as mine. She too had no car".³³³ Maas, herself having

³²⁷ Moore, *Silent Star* 160.

³²⁸ Janet Leigh, *There Really Was A Hollywood* (New York, Penguin, 1986) 55.

³²⁹ Rice, *Ann Dvorak* 293.

³³⁰ *Ibid.* 291.

³³¹ *Ibid.* 294.

³³² *Ibid.* 293.

³³³ Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* 202.

fallen on lean times far from her star screenwriter days, realised that Murray and her child were often hungry, and would offer them food on pretense of leftovers so as not to embarrass them. After some time, she no longer saw Murray.

For a long time I wondered what had become of her. Then the Los Angeles Times ran this item about her: 'Mae Murray arrested for vagrancy when discovered sleeping on a bench in New York's Central Park.'³³⁴

Murray was, like the studio founder class of men who had built her up and tossed her aside, a child of the Lower East Side. She had had a mother who had worked as a maid. How had she found her way back to New York? The men never did, did they? In fact and just as Maas had bitterly realised earlier of this new system, the men who had designed it and who ran it tended to somehow stay rich—even if, paradoxically, they went broke in business. The women were cheated, discarded, or pushed out; either way, forgotten. I include such examples here as representative of many. I would unequivocally suggest that in a quantitative data analysis of the later-life former star actresses, stories like Murray's and Dvorak's have proved far more common than triumphant lives of lifelong comfort and luxury.

Joan Fontaine wrote about this dilemma of the former Hollywood success on the sliding down trajectory: "[t]o stay and brave it out... or slink away into obscurity? Some simply committed suicide".³³⁵ In fact there were many dramatic suicides brought about by the circumstances of the new sound era and then the Depression. Diana Serra Cary (Baby Peggy/Peggy Montgomery) offered an extremely perceptive remembrance of the years of sound shift as another silent actress turned later life chronicler and film historian. Her recollection was about more than stalled careers, but rather about the deeply dehumanised values of the whole business. As Cary told Tony Villecco in interview:

Many of them committed suicide. Every weekend somebody would walk into the ocean or put their head in a gas oven or run the car in a closed garage... producers... did not realize [film] had valuable qualities apart from sound. The medium and the people who had pioneered silents were both the victims of Hollywood's first experience with a 'throw away society'. They made no attempt to salvage anything or *anyone*, from the wreckage. It was a social phenomena.³³⁶

In another later-life interview, Cary astutely addressed many of the themes of this project via her own career: the confluence of a cruel, dehumanising system, and the stigma of the has-been. Cary was also particularly representative of the generation who became has-beens not just due to aging, but due to factors out of their control like new technologies. As she explained in a 2015 interview at age 96, she was considered an untouchable wash-up at seventeen— not because she wasn't talented or attractive enough, but because she had "come from silents" and taken extra roles on her comedown:

³³⁴ Ibid. 171.

³³⁵ Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses* 132.

³³⁶ Villecco, *Silent Stars Speak* 10.

"[t]hey talked about silents as the stone age. And they treated former stars terribly, just terribly... I was considered second-rate. I spent most of my life as a nobody".³³⁷

Certainly the dysfunctional and dehumanising peculiarities and pressures of the unique new professional and social culture of Hollywood, as well as the vicissitudes of interwar history combined with the lack of mental health services, lent a great deal to the sense that suicide was "in the air". The arrival of sound followed by economic collapse had exacerbated Hollywood suicide into a crisis, as Cary explained, but there was more to it than that. Something was rotten in the state of Southern California. Alexander Korda, visiting European director, blithely referred to "[t]he regular Santa Monica suicides- by drowning", asking rhetorically, "[w]ho could be happy here?"³³⁸

There were many strategies, corporate, journalistic, and personal, to hide such realities. In Zollo's oral history *Hollywood Remembered*, it is noted that in 1930s Los Angeles, mental states were so precarious (so inherently shrouded in a place with such a "magical" global reputation to uphold) that the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce struck bargains with local funeral homes prohibiting any "funeral route... along Hollywood Boulevard, as it was deemed too depressing for the community at large".³³⁹ A 1948 private letter from agent Leland Heyward proves, too, to be a remarkable and perceptive artifact of the sociocultural milieu. In it, Heyward explains that when someone commits suicide in Hollywood, it upends the whole pantheon of gods and goddesses mythology and shows the truth of the entire sordid place. Therefore, that person needs to be excoriated and blamed for their own problems, so as not to upset the machinery and the illusion.³⁴⁰ Even the fan magazines were tasked with tamping down Hollywood's true reality. A 1950s publicity piece by a Charles Samuels entitled "Suicide, Hollywood's Rarest Headline" has a nervous and defensive tone throughout, explaining to the public that, really, suicides almost never happen in the industry.³⁴¹

In fact, suicide was common. But what none of the above anecdotes centre is, specifically, women's failure, or women's abuse, and how both led to women's suicides. By the 1930s, there was a rash of aging silent stars who had died of drug overdose, suicide, or both-- Alma Rubens, Olive Thomas, Marie Prevost, and Barbara La Marr were just some of the most famous.³⁴² Florence Lawrence's gruesome poisoning of herself with ant paste was another of the most infamous of this variety.³⁴³ Lawrence's story is an eponymous one in Los Angeles history, as any cemetery tour could

³³⁷ Tom Lamont, "'I Spent Most of My Life as a Nobody': The Last of the Silent Movie Stars." *The Guardian*, May 23, 2015.

³³⁸ Ehrhard Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism* (Berkeley, California, 2007).

³³⁹ Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 255.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines*.

³⁴² Anger, *Hollywood Babylon*; Austin, *Hollywood's Babylon Women*; Amber Tamblyn, *Dark Sparkler* (New York, Harper Collins, 2015).

³⁴³ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 165.

attest.³⁴⁴ But what if, to pose an alternative reading of all of gendered film history, Lawrence was not classified as merely another romanticised Hollywood misery case? Isn't this a trope which only obscures material realities with legends of curses and doom? Lawrence was a businesswoman whose career went wrong, in part because she was injured in a workplace accident and never compensated.³⁴⁵ Why are such tales always inherently gothicised, never written about in simply practical terms?

To focus on historical experiences of suicide amongst successful or once-successful stars may be to say that if it can be agreed upon that people committed suicide in large numbers in the 1930s for economic and material reasons, actresses largely fall into such a Durkheimian category of suicide; not a category that their characters might have fallen into.³⁴⁶ What was going on here was far removed from performativity of the diva.³⁴⁷ In fact it was an acknowledgment that one had failed in this performativity, that one was not the image one presented to the public. It also proved that one was not separate from or immune to the problems of the masses at all, let alone immune to the problems one had before one left the life of the ordinary woman and became a star. This project has attempted to demonstrate just how firmly actresses remained situated within the working classes. Their experiences with suicide are no different. The key fact is unavoidable-- almost all of these women committed suicide in response to destabilised cinematic prospects or looming poverty. No matter what image emergent tabloid culture had created of them or how they strived to live up to it, it is highly unlikely that these women ever forgot their origins or ceased to think of themselves as "working girls".

Many actresses certainly did reach the end of their ropes, either financially or in terms of mental health, and did commit suicide. Lupe Velez told friends how tired she was of fighting for everything before she killed herself in 1944; specifically, that she had had to fight men her entire life.³⁴⁸ Carole Landis ended up committing suicide in 1948 due to a combination of financial problems and a failed love affair with a married male star, who took no responsibility and continued to thrive in Hollywood.³⁴⁹ Some remarks she made near the end now read as particularly candid and heartbreaking:

³⁴⁴ Michael Ankerich, Michael. "Life Is Good At Hollywood Forever: A Chat With Karie Bible, Tour Guide". *Close-Up and Long-Shots* blog. April 2, 2016.

³⁴⁵ Paul McDonald, *The Star System: Hollywood's Production of Popular Identities* (New York, Columbia, 2001); Tamblyn, *Dark Sparkler*.

³⁴⁶ G. D. Smith, "Death in Hollywood." *British Medical Journal* 323, no. 7327 (2001): 1441-442.

³⁴⁷ *Diva Dolorosa*. Dir. Peter Delpeut. 1999; Angela Dalle Vacche, Angela. *Diva: Defiance and Passion in Early Italian Cinema* (Austin, Texas, 2008); *Ma L'Amor Mio non Muore*. Dir. Mario Caserini. Perf. Lyda Borelli, Mario Bonnard, and Gian Paolo Rosmino. 1913; *Rapsodica Satanica*. Dir. Nino Oxilia. Perf. Lyda Borelli, Andrea Habay, Ugo Bazzini. 1915. Film.

³⁴⁸ William Carr, *Hollywood Tragedy* (New York, Lancer, 1962) 129.

³⁴⁹ Austin, *Hollywood's Babylon Women* 25.

You fight so hard and then what have you got to face? You begin to worry about being washed up. You get bitter and disillusioned. You fear the future because there's only one way to go and that's down.³⁵⁰

In the mass-market *Hollywood's Babylon Women* (1994), author John Austin made as astute point as to the value of actresses' lives. With a fundamental aspect of the business being that these women were property of the studio, while they were in demand, their persons were fanatically protected. If they died *then*, they were lost property, lost assets, and balance sheet liabilities to the powerful men of the system.³⁵¹ Thus stars were fantastically insured, even down to their famous body parts, and not allowed to participate in activities deemed risky in the slightest. But once they were pushed out or cast aside, they were of no value. They literally no longer existed to the system. Crucially, in either of these cases, giant star or has-been, they were not humans, but valuable or discarded property— just as Powdermaker had determined and women like Moore, Astor, and Taylor had intuited. It becomes impossible, with so much evidence, not to recognise the living-on-glamour, pampered star as a... *studio* construction.

There is one last notorious death from this era that has become both a particularly oversaturated metaphor, a tragic sign of the times in Depression-era Hollywood, and the grandest gesture possible from a fed-up starlet: that of Peg Entwistle. In 1932, Welsh actress Entwistle notoriously dove off the "H" in the Hollywood sign, leaving a suicide note at the bottom.³⁵² Entwistle had had far more success on Broadway and been quite admired; Bette Davis wrote in her memoir of seeing Entwistle perform in the theatre in New York and it being a deciding factor in her choice to pursue acting professionally.³⁵³ After Entwistle's jump, there were other copycat suicides from the sign.³⁵⁴ While the act showed a flair for the dramatic, to say the least, it can also indubitably be read as a commentary on the treatment of actresses in the system. What if film historians and feminists alike were to make a conscious effort to continually cut through the tropes of "lost angels" and all of the other Hollywood clichés baked into myth for a century running? And rather, to ask whom such myths actually serve in such an abusive capitalist-industrialist system?

Dream factory narratives long ago erased women pushed out of economic power in the system, so it makes sense that they either neglect all the women's death and misery upon which the system was predicated, or perversely, find a way to sexualise it. The latter is central to the self-referential narrative of "addiction/darkness" in Hollywood and the foundation of the "beautiful-

³⁵⁰ Ibid. 27.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² "Peg Entwistle Dies in Hollywood Leap." *New York Times*, September 20, 1932.

³⁵³ Davis, *The Lonely Life*.

³⁵⁴ G. D. Smith, "Death in Hollywood." *British Medical Journal* 323, no. 7327 (2001): 1441-442.

glamorous-dead” mythos.³⁵⁵ It amounts to discussing “doomed” women like any prurient, sexy topic, up to and including lurid death photos or shots from the coroner’s slab. But, working backwards: who “doomed” them? Who succeeded at their expense? And why has the rumination on so many Hollywood tragedies as something macabrely sexy been normalised, while either improving the conditions of women and workers in the system or granting them dignity has not?

The reality is that the mythos of gothic Hollywood has supported the system and its profitability, obscuring its foundational origins in the use and destruction of people. The star system, which has served Hollywood’s capitalist ideology for over a century, has contributed to the covering over with glamour the actual dark realities of the system.³⁵⁶ As Leland Heyward so astutely noted, it was far more sensible to romanticise personal problems and death than it was for a such a high-profile industry to accept its culpability in them via its mistreatment of its workers. Deaths should be tragedised, romanticised, and forgotten. Should it be impossible to explain possible criminal aspects to an actress death that might threaten the male studio power class with culpability (Thelma Todd, Carole Landis, Marilyn Monroe, and many more), they should be turned into prurient, lurid conspiracy theories— gothicised.³⁵⁷

To take a final case study, what can be gleaned about gendered class and labour from a star who didn’t just become a has-been or a washout, but had a flameout notorious even by Hollywood standards-- followed by a fantastically horrible life story of which she wrote with great anger and insight? This final star actress I would like to consider is quite different than just about all the others so far. She has been written about often, but never really in relation to class and labour, or in her own words on such topics: Frances Farmer. Farmer has acquired a macabre cult status among star actresses of her generation over the years, due to both a lurid and documented biography, and the gruesome and brutally frank detail in *Will There Really Be A Morning?* (1972).³⁵⁸ This text shared, in gory detail, Farmer’s fall from stardom, her struggles with the law, and her many years in asylums.

Like Mae West or Bette Davis before her, Farmer exhibited in her memoir a keen eye for how Hollywood tried to transform her, the evils of the system, and the abuses of the people running it. She also, like Davis, had a voice in her writing that was rightfully enraged (evocative of the obscure song written many decades later about Farmer, their fellow Seattleite, by Nirvana; “Frances Farmer Will Have Her Revenge on Seattle” (1993) contains the lyrics “She’ll come back as fire/To burn all the liars/Leave a blanket of ash on the ground”).³⁵⁹ While the memoir has been analysed as problematic

³⁵⁵ William Carr, *Hollywood Tragedy* (New York, Lancer, 1962); Anger, *Hollywood Babylon*; Austin, *Hollywood’s Babylon Women*; Jackie Ganiy, *Tragic Hollywood: Beautiful, Glamorous, Dead* (Scotts Valley, CA, CreateSpace, 2013).

³⁵⁶ Anger, *Hollywood Babylon*; Thomson, *The Whole Equation*.

³⁵⁷ Anger, *Hollywood Babylon*; Austin, *Hollywood’s Babylon Women 27*; Gloria Steinem, “The Woman Who Died Too Soon.” *Ms.*, August 1972.

³⁵⁸ Farmer, *Will There Really Be A Morning?*

³⁵⁹ Kurt Cobain, “Frances Farmer Will Have Her Revenge on Seattle”. *In Utero*, DGC Records, 1993.

to truthfulness and provenance (it has been suggested that Farmer's friend wrote some of its most prurient sections after the actress had died), the earlier sections do read in Farmer's voice. They offer a great deal of compelling insight into the wrongs of Hollywood for workers, women, and just about everyone but the white men in charge.

Farmer's specific case is, in fact, overdue to be re-examined in terms of class and labour issues. She was beautiful, intelligent, educated, passionate, connected, and a talented trained theatrical actress. If she could end up exiled from Hollywood, institutionalised for decades, locked away, assaulted, raped, and impoverished, what could (and did) become of women like completely unprotected bit players and extras?

Farmer's candid recollections of her youth and upbringing were, like Crawford, Davis, Gardner, and many other self-reporting actresses in this project, specifically class-conscious.³⁶⁰ Farmer was raised in a middle-class family in Seattle, but her family fell into difficult circumstances during the Depression. She wrote:

I knew that I would have to work my way through college, for there was never any extra money in the family. But jobs were scarce during those Depression years, and the pay was low... during the next four years I waited tables, worked in a perfume factory, posed for art students, ushered in a downtown theater, and acted as a summer camp counselor.³⁶¹

At the same time, Farmer displayed a perfect understanding in experiential terms of the continuum of women: that, far from spectator theory's assertions that the woman fan was an acolyte looking up at a goddess star, they had similar lives and experiences. From this perspective, they were all existing along the same line of women within the culture. She wrote:

I did feel sadness for the girls I had worked with in the factory. For the most part, they were unschooled, and imprisoned in a dull, drab world... I was the outsider, the strange one who spent all her money on books, and this made a barrier between their world and mine... By the same token, the affluent, soft-spoken sorority girls, with their bright-colored roadsters, were cut off from this world as surely as the factory girls were severed from mine.³⁶²

After drawing attention for several lauded Broadway performances and being brought out west to Hollywood, Farmer was offered a seven-year contract, starting with a six-month option, at \$100 dollars a week. The letter she wrote to her mother, and her initial feeling, that she "felt like an

³⁶⁰ Joan Crawford and Jane Kesner Ardmore. *A Portrait of Joan: The Autobiography of Joan Crawford* (Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1962); Bette Davis, *The Lonely Life* (New York, Putnam's, 1962); Whitney Stine with Bette Davis. *Mother Goddam: The Story of the Career of Bette Davis* (New York, Allen, 1975); Lawrence Grobel, *Conversations with Ava Gardner* (Np, Np, 2013).

³⁶¹ Farmer, *Will There Really Be A Morning?* 48.

³⁶² *Ibid.* 55.

heiress"³⁶³, are both extremely telling as to the middle- and working-class concerns of women in Hollywood— and how far removed their real lives usually were from the glamour apparatus:

Dear, dear Mamma... although I can never consider movies as my life's work, I can use it as a stepping stone. Then, there is the money to consider, and they are starting me off with a good salary with the prospects of more. I remember enough about what the lack of money has done to your life... There is nothing to poverty except spiritual disintegration, and so with every ounce of strength I have, I'll spend my days getting myself and my family out of it... I know how you've felt all these years of a makeshift existence.³⁶⁴

But while proud to be making money and supporting her family, the realities of actress reconstruction enraged Farmer, while the phoniness of the system disgusted her. Her description of a first screen test for Paramount is telling:

I was in [the hair and makeup] chair for hours, during which time my hair was hacked off and my eyebrows shaved off... Finally... they allowed me to look at myself in the mirror. A strange, sleek creature stared back at me, and I was horrified. Nothing was left of Frances Farmer.³⁶⁵

She cried when she got home and looked at her eyebrowless face in the mirror, scrubbing off the makeup. "They'll not make a goddamn wampas baby out of me,' I stormed".³⁶⁶

Farmer also had many highly incisive observations about her fellow crop of starlets, indeed of the entire reconstruction process as enacted upon all new Hollywood arrivals. She was quickly able to recognise the dangerous falsity of the whole system as to how it worked to chew people up and spit them out. The first cohort to which she belonged was with all the other six-month contract hopefuls, and there were very few artists or intellectuals among them:

There was an abundant array of beauty-contest winners and muscle-flexing beachboys, none of them trained to act. None sensitized to a performance, and few whose minds existed farther than Ciro's or the Brown Derby. It was an untutored assortment, but from this raw meat the talent coaches waded through and selected, as one would a prize bull or a promising filly, a prospect with potential.³⁶⁷

But such a policy of simply signing reams of attractive people with no other discernible skills was a set-up for heartbreak and danger, as Farmer could see (and most of the others apparently could not). She described how the majority of this group of aspirants might play a bit part or two and then be dropped. The system functioned by eliminating some week by week, not unlike a reality show competition:

Most of the options were never picked up and hundreds of young people were left stranded in Hollywood to shift for themselves. Their pride prevented them from

³⁶³ Ibid. 72.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid. 71.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid. 111.

returning [home], and they ended up hanging around casting offices begging for menial jobs in order to exist.³⁶⁸

As Farmer moved up in the system, her observations grew sharper, as did her disgust. She was angered, when she received one of her first big roles, by gossip as to how she had obtained it-- to the point that it set her feelings about the milieu permanently:

From that moment on, I hated everything about Hollywood. The brassy lingo. The lack of sensitivity and individuality. The gristmill philosophy. The yes-men. The crude and influential giants. The Seventh Avenue intrigue. The cruel caste system.³⁶⁹

Previous chapters and sections have discussed how little control stars had over the lies made up about them and their backgrounds by publicity departments for the fan magazines. While most evidently accepted it as part of the rules of the game, Farmer did not. She recalled, “[t]he hokum I read about myself sent me into a rage. It was demeaning”.³⁷⁰

Besides the disgust Farmer had for the beautification and publicity processes, even the actual experience of performing in Hollywood was extremely distasteful to her, in terms of the seriousness with which she took her theatrical training. She complained that she belonged in theatre, that it was impossible to grab onto the material of Hollywood when every day is only sitting, waiting, and shooting out of sequence. Farmer’s first film was “a dull, professionally humiliating experience. After working all day on the set, I would go back to my small apartment, lock myself in, and weep half the night”.³⁷¹ She was wracked with anxiety that she was selling out her artistic talents to this money-saturated system.³⁷²

Despite her vociferous disgust towards Hollywood, Farmer did have some years as a star, a great deal of publicity complete with a quasi-arranged marriage to fellow studio creation Leif Erickson (William Anderson of Pensacola, Florida), and some acclaimed performances. Nonetheless her mental health was deteriorating. In retrospect Farmer recognised overwork, growing as it did concurrently from the dubious practice of loan-outs, as “a prime cause of [her] smashup”.³⁷³ With shades of Ann Dvorak, Farmer collapsed on the set of *Ebb Tide* (1937), at which time the studio sent her to the hospital. She recalled:

There were times when I knew that I was incoherent, and yet the studio was determined to get one more scene out of me regardless of the personal consequences. A great deal of money was riding on a product, me, and every effort was made to secure the expected profits.³⁷⁴

³⁶⁸ Ibid. 112.

³⁶⁹ Ibid. 113.

³⁷⁰ Ibid. 114.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid. 120.

³⁷⁴ Ibid. 204.

Writing later in life about her initial mental breakdown, Farmer paints a picture of a crisis directly brought on by the dehumanised system that had taken control of her, and the nature of life as a star:

I had reached a point where I believed all incidents and relationships, whether impersonal or intimate, seemed to pivot on the fact that I was a movie star. There was no sympathetic concern over a woman who was obviously cracking under emotional pressure. I was a property, something that could draw a certain gross at the box office, and nothing more.³⁷⁵

Evoking Powdermaker's anthropological conclusions on the dysfunctional and dehumanised Hollywood environment, Farmer wrote of this period:

In every sense of the word there was no one whom I could trust. This was not the fancies of an ill woman, but was a reality, for Hollywood has never been known for its brotherhood."³⁷⁶

A stop for drunk driving led to a combative battle with the police, which led to arrest and some very unstarlike pictures plastered all over newspapers around the US and the world. As Kenneth Anger explained in the gossip style of *Hollywood Babylon*, "[h]er downfall brought forth little compassion in Glamor Town which had exploited her. She had been a difficult 'troublemaker'; they were glad to be rid of her".³⁷⁷

This started the many decades-long period of Farmer's life (and her memoir) marked by institutionalisation, and, allegedly, some of the most horrific abuse to be found in this entire project. The sheer surrealism of "movie star in an early twentieth century American 'insane asylum'", however, made for countless horrible and yet believable anecdotes that cemented a fundamental truth. The power of stardom, what ordinary people believed it was (even built as it was on lies), was far stronger than reality. After pages of graphic descriptions of all manner of abuse and torture in her first asylum, being kept in a straitjacket and beaten, the memoir describes Farmer then being asked by a nurse for her autograph. As she wrote:

The absurd comedy I had just gone through peppered my thoughts with Hollywood and the power it exerted- a power so frightening that its influence was felt even in the solitary cell of an asylum.³⁷⁸

In another instance, she was mobbed by the women in a hundred-person mental ward when a nurse foolishly introduced her to her new fellow inmates as the movie star Frances Farmer. Farmer recalled the terror of the situation, but then had the following surreal revelation:

³⁷⁵ Ibid. 202.

³⁷⁶ Ibid. 199.

³⁷⁷ Kenneth Anger, *Hollywood Babylon* (München, Rogner & Bernhard, 1985) 228.

³⁷⁸ Farmer, *Will There Really Be A Morning?* 45.

I had been frightened by the women in the ward screaming and tugging at me, but they were no different from those on the outside who would run down the street in hot pursuit of an autograph, or pull your clothes, or do any of a thousand other embarrassing things to obstruct privacy.³⁷⁹

Most horrifically, in the memoir Farmer alleged repeated rapes by both men in the system like doctors and orderlies, and men from outside who would pay to be smuggled in among the mental patients. While these sections seem not to go into great detail deliberately, Farmer intimates that her sexual abuse was more pervasive, as sexual access to a Hollywood star inside a mental hospital was its own prurient thrill for her rapists.³⁸⁰

The most telling anecdote of the memoir in terms of the enormous power of Hollywood myth surrounding its workers, and its confluence with the abuse of its women, occurred when Farmer went before a panel of doctors to seek parole from the mental hospital in 1945. She answered the doctors honestly that she was afraid “of being thrown back into a world where money and ambition created a pressure pot”,³⁸¹ and that she hoped to seek other work should she be released. Remarkably, even the team of mental health experts was just as blinded by Hollywood mythology as a typical fan:

They were not satisfied until I admitted that my attitude toward so rewarding a career was a flaw in my makeup and not a reflection against my profession. Since they evidently considered making movies a sign of mental soundness, who was I to challenge such wisdom? Only a crazy woman would turn away from wealth, fame, glamor... I wondered if I had been a waitress or a shoe clerk or a cleaning girl, would they have placed so much importance on whether or not I resumed my work?³⁸²

This demonstrated how the very social superstructure itself had absorbed the glamour mythos completely; it was simply insane to not want to be a movie star.

This battle, that anyone who didn't want to be a movie star *must* be mentally ill, even continued with Farmer's own mother. Their history, in which her mother both repeatedly committed her and disparaged her to the press outside their house, was a complicated story in its own right. But in terms of career and class, it also had implications. As Farmer recalled in the memoir of one of their fights, “I don't like making movies, Mamma,’ I said through my teeth. ‘I've told you that over and over. I hate everything about it and if I go back, it's for one thing- money!’”³⁸³ Furthermore, Farmer observed during their argument:

The room was disgusting...Trash was piled under the sink and dust was on top of everything. So this is the house of a movie star's mother, I thought bitterly. Not at all like the fan magazines would picture it...³⁸⁴

³⁷⁹ Ibid. 110.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid. 181.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid. 20.

³⁸⁴ Ibid. 16.

Everything about Farmer's life story—as she experienced it, rather than as reported by the press or third parties— challenges the omnipotent sociocultural value of celebrity.

Farmer's extreme case again begs the question: what if instead of gothic mythologising, these “tragic” or “beautiful, glamorous, dead” Hollywood women were viewed as suffering from precarious economic states, dangerous working conditions, pervasive sexual assault, financial exploitation, stress and pressure, mental health issues, previous and adult life traumas, and addictions? Just as glamour was a capital-reifying structure used to regulate these women in life, this extremely harmful myth formulation has acted as a similar, system-reifying cleanup tool in so many ruined lives and wrongful deaths. From an industrial perspective, this mystique of darkness and damaged and lost people can be quite demystified. This was a system that was chewing people up and spitting them out, quite literally ruining lives. The term “the genius of the system”, one coined by critic André Bazin and then utilised by later scholars,³⁸⁵ has referred within film studies to the ways in which studio Hollywood filmmaking functioned via all its separate parts to create a singular work of art. I would argue instead that because its product was people, the real “genius of the system” was in its ability to dehumanise, exploit, and discard without consequence. This is all well in keeping with Powdermaker's conclusion of the system as an authoritarian-totalitarian machine.

As Richard Dyer wrote in *Stars*:

The general images of stardom can be seen as a version of the American Dream, organised around the theme of consumption, success and ordinariness. Throughout, however, there is an undertow that, as it were, ‘sours’ the dream.³⁸⁶

Dyer was writing in a basically ungendered context here. I would instead repurpose this phrase separate from Dyer's original meaning. I would argue the dream was soured due to the misogyny of American business in particular and the Hollywood system, specifically. It was soured by an industrial-corporate structure built on white male abuse and capitalist crime, and by its abuse and erasure of the real women working in films. The fact that it must be reminded that stars represented a tiny fraction of the system is proof of the power the enduring Hollywood dreamland mythos still holds, even today. As Richard Maltby has clarified, stars were only 4% of actors--³⁸⁷ and actors in turn were only one group of workers among many. And so: if the above case studies detail how the system was experienced by star women, what about all of the extras, bit players, and generally powerless women? When they were mistreated, abused, or cast aside, what recourse could there have been? The confluence of sexual crimes and silencing of the powerless by the powerful were both highly gendered and

³⁸⁵ Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System*; (New York, Holt, 2015).

³⁸⁶ Dyer, *Stars* 31.

³⁸⁷ Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* 148.

foundational to the whole system. These questions— around sexual assault, impunity, power, coverup, truth, and justice-- centre this project's concluding chapter, and its most important case study.

Chapter 5

The Awful Truth: Reclassifying a Century of Institutional Sexual Abuse in Hollywood



Miriam Hopkins in *The Story of Temple Drake* (1933, Stephen Roberts, Paramount)

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“You couldn’t go to the citizen news, no way, the studios owned Hollywood, one of the laws I learned. Everyone was afraid, except the men- who were pursuing girls”.¹

-Silent star Peggy Montgomery/Diana Serra Cary, interviewed for *Girl 27* (2007)²

The previous chapter addressed ways in which industrial and cultural practices within classical Hollywood could put in place a system not just of professional, but personal exploitation and abuse of actresses. Drawing on primary and secondary sources, this section of the dissertation has focused on the disciplinary and/or dehumanising measures that the studios imposed upon female performers and especially to stars, from forced bodily transformation to labour hazards. Throughout this project, I have endeavoured to demonstrate how such practices were not only driven by misogyny manifested as a second-class personhood imposed upon women, but also by income inequality, male-centred capitalist abuse, and pervasive and accepted criminality in Hollywood and Los Angeles proper. This chapter will address the most prominent gendered feature of abuse in the Hollywood system in stand-alone fashion, as it is the most relevant to a MeToo-era feminist revisiting of earlier Hollywood histories. This aspect of abuse and control of women in the system is the most notorious— one that in light of the massive cultural shift of the last several years rightfully demands its own chapter. This would be sexual crimes by men upon women in Hollywood-- harassment, coercion, assault, and rape, often colloquially, and far too cheerfully, grouped under the umbrella of “the casting couch”.

Such a sociocultural norm was the ignored or accepted industrial dynamic of Hollywood for decades. It only finally reached a tipping point in 2017 with the twin cases of Bill Cosby and Harvey Weinstein. These then finally began to spur intense discussion about everything from workplace policies in Hollywood to new looks at historicised harassment and assault cases by the likes of James Toback, Hugh Hefner, and dozens more.³ The cases quite rapidly brought about cataclysmic change,

¹ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

² Peggy “Baby Peggy” Montgomery also appears as a primary source in this thesis project under her later-life pen name of Diana Serra Cary, with which she wrote fiction, memoirs, and critical film histories. She appears in her on-camera interview for David Stenn’s *Girl 27* as Peggy Montgomery.

³ Hudson Hongo, “The Worst Excerpts from the Newly Unsealed Cosby Files.” *Defamer*. July 6, 2015; Jay Hathaway, “Bill Cosby Asked Agency To Supply Him With Broke, Out-of-Town Models.” *Gawker*. July 24, 2015; Noreen Malone and Amanda Demme. “I’m No Longer Afraid’: 35 Women Tell Their Stories About Being Assaulted by Bill Cosby, and the Culture That Wouldn’t Listen.” *New York*, July 26, 2015; Jordan Sargent, “Bill Cosby Charged With Three Sexual Assault Counts Relating to 2004 Incident.” *Gawker*. December 30, 2015; *Costand vs. Cosby*. 21 Nov. 2005. *Scribd.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/270730200/First-Cosby-Unsealed-Doc>>; Associated Press. “Read Excerpts From Cosby’s 2005-2006 Quaalude Deposition.” *Los Angeles Times*. May 23, 2016; Hillary Weaver, “2016: The Year That Women in Hollywood Fought Back.” *Vanity Fair*. December 19, 2016; Amber Tamblyn, “I’m Done With Not Being Believed.” *New York Times*, September 16, 2017; Biba Kang, “Hugh Hefner Has Immortalised Himself As A Disgusting Creep By Getting Buried Next To Marilyn Monroe”, *The Independent*, September 29, 2017; Vivian Kane, “Hugh Hefner Is Still Exploiting Marilyn Monroe, Even In Death”, *The Mary Sue*. September 28, 2017; Jessica Valenti, “Hugh Hefner Didn’t Start The Sexual Revolution- He Profited From It”, *Marie Claire*, September 28, 2017. Suzanne Moore, “I Called Hugh Hefner a Pimp, He Threatened to Sue. But That’s What He Was”, *The Guardian*, September 28, 2017; Ross Douthat, “Speaking Ill of Hugh Hefner.” *New York Times*, September 30, 2017; October 5, 2017, 2:59pm. Tweet; Jodi Kantor, “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers

and what has been considered the revolutionary moment of MeToo. While initially founded by non-Hollywood civil rights activist Tarana Burke in 2006 as a movement to help survivors of sexual abuse

for Decades.” *New York Times*. October 5, 2017; Rebecca Traister, Why The Harvey Weinstein Sexual-Harassment Allegations Didn’t Come Out Until Now.” *The Cut*, October 5, 2017; Jake (jaketapper). “Hollywood producer I know: “Shocked it’s taken so long for a Harvey Weinstein behavior expose. One of the most open secrets in Hollywood.”, October 5, 2017, 2:59pm.Tweet; Cavan Sieczkowski, “Celebrities Stand With Women Speaking Out Against Harvey Weinstein.” *Huffington Post*. October 6, 2017; Samhita Mukhopadhyay, “As Long As Men Like Harvey Weinstein Run Hollywood, We Will Not See True Parity For Women in Media”, *Mic*, October 6, 2017; Lee Moran, “Seth Meyers Rips ‘Systemic Misogyny’ That Enables Powerful, Predatory Men”, *Huffington Post*, October 13, 2017; Kayleigh Donaldson, “Hey Hollywood, Don’t Forget David O. Russell Is An Abusive Jerk.” *Pajiba*. 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October 12, 2017; Ryan (RyanGosling). “I want to add my voice of support for the women who have had the courage to speak out against Harvey Weinstein. Like most people in Hollywood, I have worked with him, and I’m deeply disappointed in myself for being so oblivious to these devastating experiences of sexual harassment and abuse. He is emblematic of a systemic problem. Men should stand with women and work together until there is real accountability and change.” October 12, 2017, 1:13pm. Tweet. “Tippi Hedren: Weinstein Reminds Me of Alfred Hitchcock’s Abuse.” *The Daily Beast*, October 13, 2017; Megan Garber, “Harvey Weinstein and the Power of Celebrity Exceptionalism.” *The Atlantic*. October 13, 2017; Amanda Terkel, “There’s Something Horribly Familiar About The Accusations Against Harvey Weinstein.” *Huffington Post*. October 13, 2017; Sarah Polley, “The Men You Meet Making Movies.” *New York Times*. October 15, 2017; Jess Joho, “Screenwriter Close To Weinstein Calls Out Hollywood: Everybody F****ing Knew.” *Mashable*. October 16, 2017; Willa Frej, “Hillary Clinton Compares Donald Trump with Harvey Weinstein”, *Huffington Post*, October 16, 2017; Jason Cherkis, “The Most Powerful Journalist in Hollywood Protected Harvey Weinstein For Years.” *Huffington Post*. October 17, 2017; Molly Ringwald, “All the Other Harvey Weinstains.” *New Yorker*. October 17, 2017; Whitney Kimball, “Here’s Another Sweep of Sexual Assault Allegations From Hollywood, Including One More For Roman Polanski.” *Jezebel*. October 22, 2017; Matthew Garrahan, “Harvey Weinstein: How Lawyers Kept A Lid on Sexual Harassment Claims.” *Financial Times*. October 23, 2017; Brit Marling, “Harvey Weinstein and the Economics of Consent.” *The Atlantic*. October 23, 2017; Ronan Farrow, “Weighing the Costs of Speaking Out About Harvey Weinstein.” *The New Yorker*. October 27, 2017; Lupita Nyong’o, “Lupita Nyong’o: Speaking Out About Harvey Weinstein.” *New York Times*. October 29, 2017; Emanuella Grinberg and Janet DiGiacomo. “Amid Harassment Allegations, A Sisterhood Forms To Take Down James Toback.” CNN, October 29, 2017; Amy Kaufman and Daniel Miller, “Six Women Accuse Brett Ratner of Sexual Harassment Of Misconduct”, *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 2017; Ronan Farrow, “Harvey Weinstein’s Army of Spies.” *New Yorker*, November 6, 2017; Stassa Edwards, “This Is What a News Cycle That Holds Sexual Predators Accountable Looks Like” *Jezebel*. November 9, 2017; Clover Hope, “Los Angeles D.A.’s Office Now Has a Task Force For Sexual Assault Cases in Hollywood”, *Jezebel*, November 10, 2017; Bobby Finger, “Jeremy Piven Says Recent String of Sexual Assault Allegations Aren’t ‘Productive’”, *Jezebel*, November 11, 2017; Will Bunch, “The 2017 Revolution No One Saw Coming.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. November 12, 2017; Selma Hayek, “Harvey Weinstein Is My Monster Too.” *New York Times*. December 12, 2017; Cavan Sieczkowski, “Elizabeth Perkins Names James Woods During March Against Sexual Harassment”, *Huffington Post*, November 13, 2017; Lydia O’Connor, “Hundreds in Hollywood Protest Rampant Sexual Misconduct.” *Huffington Post*, November 20, 2017; Meissa Hampton, “Hollywood’s Biggest Union Turned a Blind Eye To Sexual Abuse”, *The Guardian*, January 18, 2018; Diana Moskovitz, “Prosecutor Asks Judge To Let Nineteen More Women Testify That Cosby Drugged and Sexually Assaulted Them.” *Jezebel*. January 19, 2018; Maureen Dowd, “This Is Why Uma Thurman Is Angry.” *New York Times*. February 3, 2018; Bobby Finger, Bobby. “A Gentle Reminder That the Hollywood Machine Is Still Letting Men Off the Hook”, *Jezebel*, April 24, 2018; Megan Garber, “Bill Cosby and the Slow Death of Celebrity Impunity.” *The Atlantic*. April 26, 2018; Sarah Ellison, “NBC News Faces Skepticism In Remediating In-House Sexual Harassment.” *Washington Post*, April 26, 2018.

to overcome trauma through collective empathy, the MeToo movement became a global phenomenon in 2017, after the actress Alyssa Milano launched it as a hashtag in response to the public Weinstein revelations.⁴

The moment and movement that began in the fall of 2017 now begins to look like a collective societal realisation that Hollywood had still been operating under early twentieth century, pre-feminist gender and power dynamics, long after many industries had modernised or at least begun to attempt to regulate such conduct. The fact that this was understood as “the way things were” even by the general public is shocking if one stops to consider it; for a century, people rarely did, and that was the point. As feminist philosopher Kate Manne has written, “[w]e must accept the *banality* of misogyny, to adopt a famous phrase of Hannah Arendt’s”.⁵

In fact the slippage of the term “casting couch” into the vernacular of the twentieth century sums up the climate of quid pro quo and coercion in early Hollywood quite succinctly. First and foremost, instead of continuing to uphold the term “the casting couch” in contemporary scholarship at all, we might more correctly take steps towards beginning to refer to it accurately. As such, it would now be better understood and named as the accepted traditional Hollywood system of institutional abuse-- an industrial locus of harassment, assault, and rape. It was the widespread sexual objectification, use, and abuse of women in the Hollywood system, born of male sexual sociopathy emboldened by power.⁶ Such behaviours can be situated, over one hundred years, as one of the central markers of the system that established it as one in which women were inherent second-class subjects.

Sexual quid pro quos to either win a role or keep one have surely been a part of performance history in pre-cinematic, theatrical contexts, as well as non-American ones. Primary source memoirs and interviews, however, add credence to the early establishment of the Hollywood system of sexual abuse, specifically, and to the naming of it as “the casting couch”. As Matthew Dessem wrote in 2016 in a historical revisiting of the practice and its etymology:

⁴ Alyssa Milano (@alyssamilano). “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted reply ‘me too’ to this tweet.” October 15, 2017, 4:21pm. Tweet; Abby Ohlheiser, “The Woman Behind ‘Me Too’ Knew The Power of the Phrase When She Created It- Ten Years Ago.” *Washington Post*. October 19, 2017; Sandra E. Garcia. “The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags.” *New York Times*. October 20, 2017; Racquel Leone Shewfelt, “Remembering Patricia Douglas, The First Woman To Call Out Hollywood For Sexual Assault”. In *#MeToo: Essays About How and Why This Happened, What It Means, and How to Make Sure It Never Happens Again*. Ed. Lori Perkins. (New York, Riverdale, 2017); Michelle Rodino-Colocino, “Metoo, #Metoo: Countering Cruelty with Empathy.” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* Volume 15, Issue 1 (2018); Catherine MacKinnon, “Where #MeToo Came From, and Where It’s Going”. *The Atlantic*. March 24, 2019; Carly Gieseler, *The Voices of #MeToo: From Grassroots Activism to Viral Roar* (London, Rowman and Littlefield, 2019); Rosanna Maule, “Not Just A Movement for Famous White Cisgendered Women: MeToo and Intersectionality.” *Gender and Women’s Studies* Vol. 2(3): Issue 4: 2020.

⁵ Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (Oxford, 2017) 211.

⁶ Sexual abuse has unquestionably been visited on men in Hollywood as well, particularly young male actors, and a queer male MeToo Hollywood history is surely due to be written by another scholar momentarily. This project focuses on the rampant heterosexual abuse of women by men in Hollywood that became so endemic to the system that it well permeated popular culture, and was a commonplace to most.

The term casting couch first appeared in *Variety* on Nov. 24, 1937...[a] Tribune reporter was writing about a new system at Chicago's WBBM whereby only women were allowed to audition female radio talent—and if you wonder what might have prompted WBBM to ban male executives from the process, well, no one comes right out and tells.⁷

Screenwriter Lenore Coffee admitted as early as the 1920s that the “casting couch was no fiction” and that the “sweater girl who gives her ‘all’ was the same as the one who ‘gave the same thing to a foreman to get a better job’”.⁸

Along such lines of acceptance or normalisation of this system, these very discussions of definition and first principles understanding of the casting couch as system require one final reckoning with some of the same previously-discussed divides in this project. I am referring here once again to the historiographic debates of agency versus victimisation, and optimism versus pessimism, but now in post-MeToo contexts-- and in this case referring specifically to the sexual field of Hollywood. Five or ten years ago, feminist cultural historians like Hilary Hallett fell on the side of situating the casting couch in cultural values like “working class pragmatism”.⁹ Hallett suggested, in discussing the casting couch in *Go West, Young Women!* (2013), both that taking part in the casting couch might have been an enterprising business move on the part of a woman, and also that the film industry held no monopoly on casting couch-type behavior in businesses.¹⁰ While I understand the impulse to place various types of work on the women's labour continuum, having employed such myself within this thesis, I would nonetheless argue that taking an “it happened in any job”, ordinariness-of-Hollywood tack on these coerced sexual labour behaviours is misguided. The migratory, attractive, and sexualised performing woman's body on display and potentially for sale *did* make this a unique business and continues to do so— when it was new in the 1910s and 1920s, when it was ascendant and all-powerful in the studio era, and even to the present day. Further, a position like Hallett's in said book was offered before whole new discussions surrounding consent, rape culture, sexual harassment and assault, and MeToo in Hollywood and beyond. The “casting couch” was not mere working-class practice, transaction, or victimless crime. Rather, it was an institution built inherently in power imbalance, crime, misogyny, and violence. It seems to me that in continuing to defend the rights of women to participate in the casting couch in the name of pragmatic freedom, post-2017, one would be in danger of inadvertently defending a system of industrial rape.

Contemporary research done by Ellen Wright and Phyl Smith on the pornographic metafiction of the era has demonstrated that “the casting couch” as shorthand for a particular comic-erotic scenario was already known to the public by the 1930s. In particular, Wright and Smith have analysed

⁷ Matthew Dessem, “Maria Schneider's Rape Scene In *Last Tango in Paris* Was Coerced, Says Schneider in 2007, Bernardo Bertolucci in 2013, Every Media Outlet in 2016”. *Slate*. December 3, 2016.

⁸ Hilary A. Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley, California, 2013) 150.

⁹ Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!* 150.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

“Tijuana Bibles”, comic underground pornography pamphlets, for which casting couch scenarios were common fodder. Preservation of the art and content of the Bibles as a particularly American mid-century media form has also been undertaken in popular culture compilation by Bob Adelman and Tim Pilcher, as well as in scholarly curated collection at Duke.¹¹ One such vignette reads as though it could have been sourced from the Weinstein exposés of the 2010s, rather than a century before; in it, the producer (complete with antisemitic name of Mr. Shysterberg) maneuvers a young woman into a hotel room to “discuss a contract”. This is followed by a graphic sexual assault, again, played comically with puns, such as the need for an actress to “get under a good director”.¹²

The widespread nature of these practices, and the fact that in primary source recollections they were anything but harmless fun, leads to an interesting corollary question: how should we revisit the concept of camp in the age of MeToo? What is its relation to psychology, socialisation, and, specifically, trauma in the constructed star actress position? Camp in Hollywood contexts has allowed for feuds and insults to seem like guilty pleasures in film history. It makes qualities stereotypically associated with both the feminine and the actress like bitchiness, high dramatics, or emotionality amusing. And it trivialises sexual abuse to “Tinseltown gossip”. This project proposes instead a new interdisciplinary (and non-comedic) perspective towards dealing with the same sociocultural wounds, in the form of trauma theory.

In fact, primary source research provides an abundance of evidence as to these practices as they occurred, from newspaper articles where they were hidden in plain sight to silences and gaps in interviews of the studio era. While this chapter points out that in recent years, older women have felt more free to speak of things as they really were, there was in fact always a great deal of evidence available in both popular press and in earlier actress primary sources like interview and memoir. Primary source excavation and the case studies herein support the argument that women did break these silences before 2017, but often, film fans and mainstream scholars alike simply read *past* them.

In addition to the analysis of the quid pro quos of the casting couch as economy, or of the rampant and accepted practices of sexual abuse, I have also attempted with this project and its class focus to uncover specific instances where men in Hollywood were able to generate wealth for themselves from the selling of women for sex. This both contrasted with and paralleled the buying and selling of women’s bodies and contracts on the level of actress/performers. Some of such practices to be discussed within this chapter include everything from the exploitative “legitimate business” practice of loan-outs to the ubiquity of manager-pimp husbands. Firstly, it should be established that there has

¹¹ Bob Adelman, *Tijuana Bibles: Art and Wit in America’s Forbidden Funnies* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1997); Tim Pilcher, *Erotic Comics: A Graphic History From Tijuana Bibles to Underground Comix* (New York, Abrams, 2008).

¹² Phyll Smith and Ellen Wright. “How To Land Jobs in Hollywood’: Tijuana Bibles, Historical Knowledge, and the Casting Couch.” *Women in Hollywood Symposium*. De Montfort University, Leicester. May 28, 2018. Conference Paper.

existed not only a metaphorical connection but also a literal one between the Hollywood industry and pimping back to its absolute earliest days.

One of the first men from Hollywood's founding generation of power arrivistes to blur categorization between producer and pimp was Mack Sennett. The history of Hollywood as film capital literally begins with Sennett and D.W. Griffith roaming around the village in 1910, taking the first-ever film of its streets.¹³ Sennett was known as the king of comedy in the 1910s, moving from actor to director to producer and, finally, to head of his own studio. Sennett was famous for his Keystone Cops, and for the series' establishment of a definitive style in the first Hollywood decade. But he was equally famous for the Sennett Bathing Beauties.¹⁴ Directly moving from the vaudeville tradition of *tableau vivants* of women as a collection of sexualised bodies, rather than establishing a new industry on a framework of film actresses as individual performers, Sennett's formation of the Bathing Beauties troupe amounted to the amassing of a stable of women-- one that other studios quickly imitated. Primary and secondary sources alike report that it was common knowledge that the Bathing Beauties were expected to perform sexually as well, for Sennett and his friends, as a sort of traveling group of good-time girls.¹⁵

In something like a primary source whisper network, star actresses repeatedly commented on Sennett and his activities, having uncomplimentary things to say. Mary Pickford ended a collaboration with him because of his vulgar content and coterie.¹⁶ Gloria Swanson was eager to be released from her Keystone contract, considering herself a serious actress and not wanting to be confused with the Bathing Beauties and their particular reputation.¹⁷ Louise Brooks, too, sharply ascertained the early Hollywood film industry as read through the activities of Sennett and company as already a sort of economic system of male-female relations akin to a free-floating brothel; she wrote about it candidly in her later-life critical work.¹⁸ Brooks did not mince words about her perception of Sennett and his deplorable gangster hangers-on controlling stables of women. In her interview in Richard Leacock's 1984 documentary *Lulu in Berlin*, she noted of Sennett and his friends, "[t]hey decided it would be perfectly fine to own beautiful women. Actresses".¹⁹ Further, Brooks had observed that for these men, the heart of the whole system was that "money was a means for power and to sleep with beautiful women".²⁰ In her memoir *Lulu in Hollywood* (1982), she also detailed how studio executives whose

¹³ *Hollywood*. 'In the Beginning- Episode 2.' Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; *Lulu in Berlin*. Dir. Richard Leacock. 1984.

¹⁵ *Lulu in Berlin*. Dir. Richard Leacock. 1984; *Hollywood*. 'Comedy Is A Serious Business- Episode 8.' Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London; Kenneth Anger, *Hollywood Babylon* (New York, Penguin Books, 1985).

¹⁶ Mary Pickford, *Sunshine and Shadow* (Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1955); *Without Lying Down: Frances Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood*. Dir. Bridget Terry. 2000.

¹⁷ *Hollywood*. 'Comedy Is A Serious Business- Episode 8.' Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. BBC. London.

¹⁸ Louise Brooks, *Lulu in Hollywood* (New York, Knopf, 1982).

¹⁹ *Lulu in Berlin*. Dir. Richard Leacock. 1984. Film.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

sexual advances were refused later found ways to damage and destroy her career and the careers of peer actresses.²¹ She was speaking here of the 1920s, but the putative intimidation methods described were virtually identical to those used to silence women who came forward in the cases of Cosby and Weinstein up to 2017, in just several of the most well-known contemporary examples.²²

Primary source evidence from women who experienced early studio Hollywood begins to paint a picture of an industrial milieu that was already becoming a free-for-all of male sexual license, opposite its attempted clean-living image and even by the silent era. It was a social-industrial arena that blurred work and leisure time. It was also one that provided endless entertainment for the men involved, while it was often experienced at the same time as fraught and frightening for the women. These accounts generally portray men utterly unconcerned by any ethical questions around their behaviour, and women who had absolutely no recourse to any of the abuses surrounding them. In one of the most apt concepts I have found in the entirety of this project, feminist philosopher Drucilla Cornell once referred to Hollywood as a masculine libidinal economy *par excellence*.²³ But Cornell, like most other feminist film theorists and philosophers several decades past, was theorising *within* the site of filmic narrative. I would crucially amend this key characterisation for my purposes here, to encompass the geographical space of Los Angeles and the cultural-industrial milieu of Hollywood itself, instead. Thinking through Cornell's phrase, such parallel milieus-- sexual playground for men, danger zone for women-- can be traced all the way back to the beginning.

Most of the women cited in this project as primary sources spoke to some degree about their experiences with the sexually abusive climate of studio Hollywood.²⁴ As with Brooks, oftentimes the older the woman was and the further away from her career, the more candid she might be. Frederica Sagor Maas' memoir, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* (2010), written when the author was 100 years old, indubitably falls into such a category.²⁵ The book offers a picture of a climate that had already settled into sexual abuse as male prerogative by the 1920s. Maas described becoming increasingly disillusioned with her work as screenwriter, her personal life, and indeed the whole business: "what I saw going on all around me- it was a bacchanal".²⁶ The systemic nature of the use and abuse of the young women around her was especially startling to Maas as an educated, independent creative and not a performer herself. In one instance detailed in her memoir, Maas attended a drunken banquet for

²¹ Louise Brooks, *Lulu in Hollywood* (New York, Knopf, 1982).

²² Ben Child, "Rose McGowan: I was fired for flagging Adam Sandler casting call sexism." *The Guardian*, June 25, 2015; Ronan Farrow, "Harvey Weinstein's Army of Spies." *New Yorker*. November 6, 2017.

²³ Drucilla Cornell, *At the Heart of Freedom: Feminism, Sex, and Economy* (Princeton, 1998); *Clint Eastwood and Issues of American Masculinity* (New York, Fordham, 2009).

²⁴ Joan Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses: An Autobiography* (New York, Morrow, 1978); Louise Brooks, *Lulu in Hollywood*; Tony Villecco, *Silent Stars Speak: Interviews with Twelve Cinema Pioneers* (Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2001); Paul Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered: An Oral History of its Golden Age*. (Lanham, MD, Taylor, 2011).

²⁵ Frederika Sagor Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim: A Writer in Early Hollywood* (Louisville, Kentucky, 2010).

²⁶ Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* 74.

the head of Hearst Publications, who was visiting from the East Coast. As neither a nightlife aficionado nor a predatory male in the in-crowd of the studios, she had been warned not to go, that she would be shocked by what she saw of her male colleagues and bosses. In a style of party that prefigures other notorious rape-enabling parties of the studio era that conclude this chapter's case studies, performing women, aspiring starlets, and call girls were all conflated and "given" to men on a one-to-one ratio.²⁷ Maas observed her daytime colleagues drunkenly offering money to women, and was particularly dismayed to see her dressmaker friend and colleague from the costume department:

half-naked, lying across a chair, her hand stretched out to receive the hundred-dollar bill being pressed into it by Eddie Mannix- gross, ugly, hairy, vulgar Eddie Mannix, Louis B. Mayer's bodyguard.²⁸

Maas ended this episode in her memoir by noting that she cried all the way home for the sordidness of the business in which she found herself employed. Exhibiting a feminist materialist perspective, she also cried that the dressmaker, a talented artist, would feel so economically pressed as to resort to offering sexual favours to men like Mannix at all.²⁹

The culture of casual sexual harassment as quid pro quo for hoped-for roles had also already been well-cemented, not only behind closed doors in terms of acquiescence or assault but in "light-hearted", socially acceptable public displays. Maas described the industry restaurant the Montmartre in the early 1920s, where hopeful ingenues, including future stars like Mary Astor, were:

circulating as models in fashion shows, good-humoredly tolerating the quips and ignoring the insults when their derrieres were caressed or pinched while passing executive tables. After all, executives were privileged, and to be noticed by them might lead to a screen test.³⁰

Even as a writer, Maas was not immune from the completely expected physical assaults by the industry's most powerful men in such half-industrial, half-social spaces. As she recalled, "Joe Schenck amused himself with the amorous sport of pinching the bottom of every female within reach, including me".³¹

In the workplace, Maas was friendly with directors Edmund Goulding and Marshall Neilan, both of whom she saw as highly predatory. According to Maas, "[t]hese two men initiated more young women [sexually]... than one can possibly imagine. The carrot stick that they dangled was the promise of a screen test".³² Maas continued:

²⁷ Ibid. 76.

²⁸ Ibid. 77.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. 35.

³¹ Ibid. 91.

³² Ibid.

Few, if any, of these seductions bore fruit. The sexual route was definitely not the way to go for anyone seeking to climb the ladder of success. It would, if anything, work against you unless you had talent that could not be denied.³³

Thus, the rules of the casting couch were already being set. It would generally involve powerful men demanding sexual favours from women already in the system, or a more common, shabby iteration: whereby naive people would acquiesce to sex with males in charge thinking it would advance their careers by getting them their start with work from the men in charge, when it was actually more likely to do no good or ostracise them. In other words, not only was the casting couch predatory, abusive, and criminal, it was, on the whole, fraudulent as well.

Within her memoir, Maas continued in explaining the lessons of her associations with the two men. She detailed how she had cautioned Goulding that if he were not careful he would end up like Arbuckle— destroyed by his sexual misbehaviours and with a ruined career. In reply, she reported, “[h]e laughed with amusement and continued with his jollies”.³⁴ In Goulding’s rebuff, it becomes evident that, simply, he was right and Maas was wrong. For one, Arbuckle was an actor, and so (as this thesis has established) relatively lacking in Hollywood’s systemic power-- even as a man. Arbuckle had also made the fatal mistake of winding up in a high profile scandal, and on the wrong side of international publicity. Directors and other behind-the-scenes men had both more authority and more anonymity— and thus could behave with far more impunity. It could be said that Goulding well understood his place in the budding system, the culture of both his studio and industry, and how as a powerful man he had little to worry about:

Somehow, he got away with it and died in his bed. His lifestyle was no secret. Everyone from the grips to the executives knew what he was up to. Sexual excesses were rampant everywhere but particularly at MGM. If anything went wrong, MGM managed to save itself from notoriety.³⁵

As for Neilan, Maas described Sally O’Neil as a star ruined by her association with the older and predatory director after he introduced her to alcohol and drugs. Her Hollywood career ended with her abandoned, broke, and struggling with addiction. Maas wrote of O’Neill that “[w]hen Mickey Neilan got through with her, she was in her twenties... When Mickey Neilan and MGM dropped her, she vanished”.³⁶ This commonplace of women “vanishing” while men thrived, continuing blithely on with their activities and crimes to perpetuity, is one that has arisen in previous chapters of this project. It is one that I have referred to in previous chapters as an absolute norm of the system in everything from planned obsolescence of careers to ageism-- but in this chapter it manifests as sexual use and abuse followed by the discarding of the powerless party.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. 75.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Just as the studios had learned very well how to weaponise publicity and public opinion through the use of the terms “ungrateful” or “difficult” against performers, especially women ones, the same could be put to use in employer-employee relations behind the scenes. As just established, the political economy of the “casting couch” most typically meant it was directed at “nobodies”-- starlets with no protection, or women attempting to struggle upwards. But even contract players and women succeeding in the system were expected to be deferential to men at all times. Labour theorists of creative industries have examined national traditions as one clue towards the development of dysfunctional industries like Hollywood. Matt Stahl has explained that “[t]he contemporary doctrine of managerial prerogative (‘duty to obey’) is evidence of the persistence of servility as a core characteristic of Anglo-American employment”.³⁷ Within contemporary labour theory, this concept is situated as a systemic problem of bad industries-- but in the case of Stahl’s work, as an ungendered one. What happens when the “servile” employees are young, attractive, powerless women who can be ordered to take their clothes off, while the managerial masters are mostly uneducated, mostly unscrupulous, wealthy men with near-unlimited power— including to make or break careers? A disaster that lasted, unchecked, for a century.

In their discussions of sexual misconduct and abuse in interviews and memoirs, many actresses have told the truth about things that were done to them only once they were well into older age. This has also often meant once the predatory men of whom they spoke were dead. In attempt to add such witness testimony on sexual abuse to both the historical record and star studies, the prior decades of personal and institutional silence also necessitate reckoning. How then to talk about the “unspeakable” things women endured while struggling into or inside the system, when their very unspeakability is what allowed the system to maintain itself for a century? Judith Butler, reading through Slavoj Žižek in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) but preceding the previously mentioned turn to trauma theory in performance scholarship, has attempted to explain how performativity attempts to get a handle on “the unlivable, the nonnarrativizable, the traumatic”.³⁸ MeToo’s utterly massive disruption of this systemic silence, beginning in 2017 has, by contrast, finally helped move many discussions-- about dehumanisation, exploitation, abuse of power, sexual assault, rape, and harassment-- out of the category of the nonnarrativizable in performance histories.

Just one example of many can be found in the 2018 *Vanity Fair* interview by Dana Goodyear, “Can Hollywood Change Its Ways?”. The article centrally featured an anonymous 90-year old former starlet still living in Beverly Hills to the present day. The piece’s interview revolved around the former starlet’s quitting the business after being propositioned by her mentor, executive Harry Ruskin. She

³⁷ Matt Stahl, “Specificity, Ambivalence, and the Commodity Form of Creative Work”. In *Theorizing Cultural Work: Labour, Continuity and Change in the Cultural and Creative Industries*, eds. Mark Banks, Rosalind Gill, and Stephanie Taylor (London, Routledge, 2014) 80.

³⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*. (New York: Routledge, 1993) 188.

had just turned sixteen. After refusing, and being found hiding and crying within the studio confines, she was called in for a meeting with Mayer, whom she had considered a fatherly figure:

“I said, ‘But, Mr. Mayer, do you know what Harry wants me to do?’”... He was behind this enormous square desk, and he came around, sat on the arm of the chair, put his arm on my shoulder, pulled me toward him, and said, ‘You’ll get used to it.’”

She wouldn’t. She went home and burned all her films, photographs, scripts, and memorabilia... When Mayer realized that she was serious about refusing to play along, he threatened to destroy her career: wagging his finger under her nose, he said she’d never work on a soundstage again. “Mr. Mayer,” she said, ‘that is my heartfelt desire.’³⁹

While a classed sociological phenomenon that found its primary success in the targeting of unknown and unprotected young women, the “casting couch” did on occasion land on star actresses as well. And while it was most typically enacted by men of the executive class, sexual abuse of new, young actresses by male star actors, who had acquired a modicum of power in the hierarchy, did happen too. In her oral history interview with Paul Zollo, silent actress Priscilla Bonner was candid about her harassment and its impact on her career in later-life interview, recalling how she was thwarted from stardom by John Barrymore and removed as leading lady from *The Sea Beast* in 1925:

I had great confidence in myself and I knew I was talented but I *wasn’t* willing to give personal favors and that was the thing he demanded. It’s the truth. It’s a very bad subject for me. Dolores Costello [who Barrymore later married] was given the part. She wore all my clothes that were fitted for me!... I was *shocked* and deathly afraid of him. He fired me. He didn’t want me once he saw he couldn’t have me. I made up my mind to quit pictures and marry. The experience disheartened me you know, with John Barrymore.⁴⁰

Bonner concluded simply, “Various things happened, some of them nice things, some of them heartbreaking. It’s a heartbreaking business”.⁴¹

Evelyn Keyes, too, was another star who in later-life interview explained her sexual abuse at the hands of an established male star. In her Zollo interview, Keyes shared an assault by Frederic March when she was an eighteen year-old unknown and new to Hollywood. She was so shocked she simply froze, and he eventually gave up. Keyes’ perspective on her position in Hollywood, especially relative to March’s, is valuable:

I never had much to do with him after that. He lost my respect... That’s a *lousy* thing to do to a young girl who has just come to town and really doesn’t know her way around any place. I *really* didn’t. I hadn’t traveled *anywhere*. We had *no* money. And he *had* to know that...⁴²

³⁹ Dana Goodyear, “Can Hollywood Change Its Ways?” *The New Yorker*. January 1, 2018.

⁴⁰ Tony Villecco, *Silent Stars Speak: Interviews with Twelve Cinema Pioneers* (Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2001) 33.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Paul Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered: An Oral History of its Golden Age*. (Lanham, MD, Taylor, 2011) 132.

Indeed there are unique theoretical concerns and underpinnings to the exploration of the brutal sexual economy of studio Hollywood in the words of women who lived it themselves, including its aforementioned conflation with mere camp or “Tinseltown legend”. One particular story has come down through Hollywood history as both salacious and sexually titillating gossip over time, while its real meaning and the horrific implications it betrayed in terms of the system’s control over reproduction have generally been missed. Such Hollywood tales around sex and abuse, both institutional and interpersonal, particularly demand new reckonings in this era. This is the story of Loretta Young, Clark Gable, and the coverup of Young’s biological daughter with an adoption story. It is a strong example of the sort of excavations and recalibrated analyses that need to be undertaken in what I argue for as a MeTooing of Hollywood’s history.

Young famously adopted a baby as a single woman, a year and a half after leaving the public eye for vacations and then “illness”. The industry open secret seeped into greater Los Angeles and eventually popular culture: that the baby was biologically Young’s, the product of an on-set affair with the married Gable. And that as a devout Catholic, Young had not acquiesced to the industrial standard of studio-demanded abortion, rather going into seclusion to give birth and then reclaim her own child months later with the phony adoption story. This gossip-ready tale sounded like one in which both parties were up to typical Hollywood shenanigans.⁴³ In fact, the dream factory mythos has been well-served through the decades by legends of steamy affairs between beautiful co-stars. Even Young’s own family believed in this “affair” story. The reality of the story in terms of male power on both the corporate and personal/sexual levels is much uglier.

In fact, Young finally revealed that her daughter was not the product of a consensual encounter at all, but of a rape by Gable while they were isolated on location on a train. Young explained that she had never registered what had happened to her as rape until she heard about the concept of date rape on television in older age. She had always considered herself a Catholic woman who had failed to protect her virtue. Her daughter, Judy Lewis, explained in the 2007 David Stenn documentary *Girl 27* that when she had finally been able to talk about the situation at all many years later, Young was still ashamed, calling Lewis a “walking mortal sin”.⁴⁴

While this was a case of a crime by an internationally famous and beloved male star, the studio aspects of the incident were equally sinister. It was wildly out of the question that the studios would have taken Young’s side against Gable, one of the most celebrated and lucrative stars in the world. Thinking of Gable receiving any consequences for what he had done merely seems preposterous, even today. But it is of note in terms of patriarchy, misogyny, and power that it was not only the case that Young could not expect any support from her employers in disciplining her rapist, for example. Beyond this, she literally had to flee from them to protect the life of her child. The studio

⁴³ Anger, *Hollywood Babylon*.

⁴⁴ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

itself functioned not merely as collaborators in Gable's crime, but as criminal conspirators in their own right. Young had not concocted her scheme to run away to give birth with the help of her studio, as any kind of joint effort between them to protect her career and image. She fled the U.S. so that Twentieth Century-Fox would not know that she was pregnant and be able to force her to have an abortion, something against her religion.

I have tried within this project to make discussion of bodily modifications to actresses that were extreme or abusive a more central point of discussion for feminist film history. Yet forced abortion as part of the unproductive, sexualised body (as discussed in Chapter Four in relation to the work of Silvia Federici)⁴⁵ went a level further. It was not only dehumanising on the level of trauma, but an actual crime against human rights. A woman fleeing to another continent to avoid being forced into an abortion by her employer (after being raped by a coworker) sounds nearly fantastical now, and yet, it was another normalised aspect of Hollywood culture. Sexual scandals brought studios trouble, and public trouble via bad publicity that could affect the bottom line was the cardinal sin. Therefore, any sexually inappropriate situation would always be the woman's fault for bringing it to light, rather than the fault of the perpetrator.⁴⁶

Even more common in uncovered stories of sexual abuse were the power dynamics of studio executives and founders' sexually predatory behaviours. Evelyn Keyes also shared of David O. Selznick, "[h]e chased me around the desk a few times".⁴⁷ This type of interaction as a matter of course, even down to the colloquial phrase "chased around the desk" meaning "normalised strategies of physical escape to avoid being raped in an office by an employer", echo the casual euphemism of "the casting couch". Such behaviour on the part of Selznick, specifically, was corroborated by Joan Fontaine in her own memoir. Asked about Selznick's troubling ways with women employees by a friend, she wrote, "I had first met Ingrid Bergman in D.O.S.'s office balcony, where I saw her wince under his embrace".⁴⁸

Harry Cohn has been discussed extensively in Chapters Three and Four in regard to everything from background to psychology and flirtations with fascism. Yet Cohn's sexually charged abuse of his marquee star in Rita Hayworth is more apropos in discussion of the casting couch, various forms of pimping, and sexual abuse. The sexually abusive behaviours of men of the studio power class often worked hand in hand with contemporaneous sexual abuse upon actresses by their managers and even their spouses. This speaks to my characterisation of many studio heads and

⁴⁵ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*. (New York, Autonomedia, 2004).

⁴⁶ This was a consistent refrain in the oral history interviews I conducted with older women who had worked in the system in the 1950s and 1960s, on my 2014 Los Angeles fieldwork trip.

⁴⁷ Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 133.

⁴⁸ Joan Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses: An Autobiography* (New York, Morrow, 1978) 149.

executives as glorified pimps and traffickers, but also to how such roles interlocked simultaneously with parallel abuse in the personal arena as well.

Just as I argue that a separate corollary project should be undertaken that specifically studies the dynamic of male director-actress sadism and abuse, there is need in American performance history scholarship to analyse the dynamic of the abusive husband-manager pimping his wife or partner. Such a study would include a shocking number of “Golden Age goddesses”, from Hayworth to Maureen O’Hara.⁴⁹ Hayworth was one of the many starlets who had a Svengali or Pygmalion relationship with an older man, who pushed and coerced her into a career of fame for his own profit. In Hayworth’s case, his name was Eddie Judson.

When Hayworth met Judson and he decided to take over turning her into a star, he was 41 and she was 18.⁵¹ Hudson, like many of the “Hollywood husbands” of this period, did not work, but styled himself as his wife’s “manager”. In Hayworth’s own words, “he married me for an investment”.⁵² This meant a major part of Judson’s “investing” in this period was first to reshape all sorts of bodily “problems” in his wife-- voice too high, weight needing to be slimmed down-- and then to trade her around town to various studios for his own profit. This then blurred into trading her around town and demanding that she actually provide sexual services to various producers and studio types to ascend the corporate ladder; thus, becoming the husband-as-pimp.⁵³ Eventually, the personal control mixed with not only patriarchal misogyny but racism as Judson forced Hayworth to have the painful and experimental series of electrolysis treatments that moved up her hairline, in efforts to give her a less Latin and more Caucasian look. As Hayworth’s hairdresser and confidante Helen Hunt told biographer Barbara Leaming of the appointments, “[s]he hated to go there worse than anything... Eddie Judson made her go. He was the one who decided it should be done”.⁵⁴

Finally, as Hayworth understood Judson was taking all of her own earnings and hiding or spending them, she began to make moves away from him. He responded with threats of violence and blackmail. Just as the last chapter offered the image of Ava Gardner and Reane Jordan huddled

⁴⁹ Maureen O’Hara and John Nicoletti. *'Tis Herself: A Memoir* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2004).

⁵⁰ This dynamic also has a major, parallel branch in the pornography industry of 1970s and the rise of porno chic to be studied. The “suitcase pimp” as abusive manager-partner living off his wife and creating of her a porn star is a ubiquitous tale of the period as seen in oral history compilations like *The Other Hollywood: The Uncensored Oral History of the Porn Film Industry* (Legs McNeil, Jennifer Osborne, and Peter Pavia, New York, Regan, 2005); the memoirs and interviews of Linda Lovelace (Linda Lovelace and Mike McGrady, *Ordeal* (Secaucus, Citadel Press, 1980); Linda Lovelace and Mike McGrady, *Out of Bondage* (Secaucus, Stuart, 1986); the fictionalised version of her life, *Lovelace*. Dir. Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman. Perf. Amanda Seyfried, James Franco, Peter Sarsgaard. 2013; or modern feminist journalistic reflections on Lovelace as case study and in terms of exploitative 1970s porn-- Lindy West, “Lovelace Doesn’t Suck, But Linda’s Life Kinda Did”, *Jezebel*, August 9, 2013; Hannah Marriott, “Gloria Steinem and Catharine Mackinnon on Lovelace.” *The Guardian*, August 26, 2013.

⁵¹ John Kobal, *Rita Hayworth: Portrait of a Love Goddess* (New York, Berkeley, 1982).

⁵² *Ibid.* 39.

⁵³ Barbara Leaming, *If This Was Happiness: A Biography of Rita Hayworth* (New York, Viking, 1989); Kobal, *Rita Hayworth*.

⁵⁴ Leaming, *If This Was Happiness* 41.

together and living off canned tuna,⁵⁵ Hayworth can be situated too as quite destitute when a newly-single starlet. She was so broke, in fact, during the times she was trying to extricate from Judson that she would have to call her friend, choreographer Hermes Pan, and ask him if she could come to dinner. She had no food and no money for food.⁵⁶ In this, a glamorous young starlet was no different than any non-celebrity woman in the highly dangerous period after leaving an abusive partner, well-analysed by feminist social scientists for decades.⁵⁷ All of this was, in massive understatement, the farthest cry from how Hollywood was billing itself and selling its dream factory mythos.

Hayworth's persona and life in Hollywood are particularly evocative towards feminist studies. In particular, they have great experiential resonance with Joan Riviere's classic 1929 psychoanalytic text "Womanliness as a Masquerade".⁵⁸ In this essay, Riviere suggested femininity as an unconscious performance towards the avoidance of retribution from men; a mask to be put on so as not to be vilified for violating patriarchy. Riviere's work importantly prefigured feminist writers on similar topics, from Irigaray to Butler to Naomi Wolf.⁵⁹ Hayworth's patriarchal masquerade was both strong and ambivalent— she knew enough to know that she hated being forced into Hollywood performance and stardom and who she resented, but she nonetheless typically went along with what men did to her and told her to do, as part of being docile and "nice". She recognised herself as a product, saying in later-life interview, "I had to be sold".⁶⁰ And yet such passive strategies would frequently be disrupted by angry flashes of rebellion, from leaving her grifting husband to standing up to Harry Cohn.⁶¹

In fact, Hayworth's general acquiescence to Hollywood male abuse was deeper and darker than someone simply trying to be a corporate team player or a good sport. Hayworth was a long-time survivor of sexual abuse by her father. I would note here that this horrific fact, in terms of how many of the star actresses of Hollywood have also been survivors of incest and rape, is also a separate topic of its own that demands address in the post-MeToo landscape.⁶² Taking Frederic Jameson's cultural theorisation on torn ideology as a starting point, the biggest ideology-tearing, glamour-shattering point about Hollywood (now but even more especially then) would have been truth-telling about all the

⁵⁵ Mearene Jordan, *Living with Miss G.* (Smithfield, NC, Ava Gardner Museum, 2012).

⁵⁶ Kobal, *Rita Hayworth* 73.

⁵⁷ Silke Meyer, "Hitting Home: Why Separation Is Often the Most Dangerous Time for a Victim of Domestic Violence." *The Conversation*. November 25, 2015. Web.

⁵⁸ Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade." Edited by Neil Badmington and Julia Thomas. In *The Routledge Critical and Cultural Theory Reader* (London, Routledge, 2008).

⁵⁹ Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, Cornell, 1985); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, Routledge, 1990); Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York, Morrow, 1991).

⁶⁰ Kobal *Rita Hayworth* 39.

⁶¹ *Ibid*; Leaming, *If This Was Happiness*.

⁶² In brief, some of the actresses who self-reported childhood sexual abuse within the primary sources of this project include Louise Brooks, Joan Crawford, and Marilyn Monroe; the fact that they did so in eras when this was absolutely taboo, as well as modern statistics on sexual assault, would suggest that the numbers were astronomically higher than only those who shared their abuse.

sexual abuse that was foundational to the system.⁶³ If it had truly been understood that Hollywood functioned far less as a dream factory and more as an abuse, assault, and harassment factory of women, many of whom were previous survivors of abuse and locked into patterns of repetitive victimisation, the whole thing might have collapsed.

This connection between earlier life trauma and later abuse in the system is not a tangential one. For these purposes, it is worth unpacking Hayworth's unique habits of both crying on sets and going nearly catatonic between scenes. In 1935, a *Milwaukee Journal* reporter came to the set to profile the young Hayworth, and found her crying openly; she filed her story writing, "[s]uch bewilderment I have not seen in a long time... She just didn't know what it was all about".⁶⁴ Hayworth was thus frequently described as either extremely shy or simple and stupid by some of her contemporaries. In fact, these people would not have had the lexicon to recognise or analyse adult survivors of rape and incest. In reality, Hayworth was exhibiting classic dissociation techniques, as well delineated in trauma theory from practicing psychologists and trauma scholars like Cathy Caruth, Laura S. Brown, and Ruth Leys.⁶⁵ She was not shy so much as she was quite traumatised. As Hayworth's second husband Orson Welles confessed frankly:

It's the saddest story in the world... She had the terrible thing with her father. And the *continuation* of that in one form or another. Her first husband was a pimp. Literally a pimp. So you see what she was. *All her life was pain.*⁶⁶

Later-life interviewees have commented on Cohn's particular mistreatment of Hayworth, unique for a star— especially the most lucrative one on the lot. As Jack Cole explained:

They didn't treat Rita the way the other studios treated a star... Just do it! As if you were some kind of horse... [Cohn's] whole thing was just that he didn't treat her as if she was a star at all but just some broad who worked at the studio and if she didn't like it, fuck her... Zanuck was that way with Monroe.⁶⁷

Most shared that the central reasons for Cohn's particular abuse of Hayworth as jealousy, but also connected it to his old-fashioned "values" and patriarchal dichotomy of worthy versus worthless women. Hayworth had been brought to Cohn's studio by her husband Judson when he was essentially pimping her. Hence, in Cohn's worldview, she was a lower-class woman and not to be respected. As her friend and makeup artist Bob Schiffer recounted, "[t]hey were always demeaning to

⁶³ Adrienne L. McLean, *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2004); Frederic Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory. Essays 1971–1986. Vol. 2: The Syntax of History* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1988).

⁶⁴ Kobal *Rita Hayworth* 29.

⁶⁵ Laura S Brown, "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1995); Cathy Caruth, "Introduction." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1995); Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago, 2000).

⁶⁶ Leaming, *If This Was Happiness* 51.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 302.

her”.⁶⁸ Hayworth biographer Barbara Leaming was more detailed in asserting the reason why: “[h]er own husband’s having offered her sexually to other men seemed to have cheapened Rita in Cohn’s eyes, and his attitude toward her never really changed”.⁶⁹

Primary sources reveal that while women on the lower rungs of contract performance would simply be dropped for sexual insubordination, the situation with top-grossing women stars was more complex. If such a woman felt she had acquired a small amount of power to refuse or fight back against harassment and assault, she might be right; there could be cases where both the actress and the studio executives knew the woman was too lucrative a star product to be fired. In these instances, studio men might find ways to punish the star in other, putative manners. In the case of Cohn and Hayworth, his inherent contempt for her origins followed by his inability to force her into sex with him made him not only hate and disrespect her, but even to spy on her and jealously surveil her constantly. Kate Manne’s description in *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (2017) of the misogynistic social environment would certainly fit the bill in description of Cohn’s Columbia. Manne has described such environments as marked by:

particularly intense and/or invasive forms of policing (for example, surveillance, scrutiny, and suspicion) for girls and women (in the relevant class), as compared with male counterparts.⁷⁰

Those who had already arrived and refused to continue sex with bosses, or those who never had, needed to be harassed and controlled in other ways. In the case of Hayworth, then, she was both Cohn’s marquee star and a woman he simply could not have. Daryl Zanuck, too, seemed to harbor a hatred for Hayworth for the same reason, holding her contract first and then selling her over to Cohn. Director Stanley Dwan described how Zanuck made the choice to drop Hayworth, to his mind, because she would not acquiesce to sex with him:

The only reason I can think of why she was dropped was because she wouldn’t play the game. A lot of the big guys didn’t like the girls who wouldn’t come to their parties and if a girl said ‘no’ they could exercise their power by dropping her and getting somebody more congenial.⁷¹

As with Cohn, Daryl Zanuck has been addressed in other chapters herein in terms of disreputable business practices. I am situating Zanuck here one last time in this chapter on sexual abuse and sexual crimes--- deliberately so. Zanuck was, in some ways, the most egregious and representative of the ways in which the sexual abuse aspect of the industry functioned, even in comparison with the other men in the ruling class of the studio era. Many Zanuck stories appear in the primary sources of the project, most surrounding sexual sociopathy and sexual assault. The stories

⁶⁸ Ibid. 61.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Kate Manne, *Down Girl* 64.

⁷¹ Leaming, *If This Was Happiness* 71.

multiplied as Zanuck's power increased from his new arrival 1920s to his "magnate" 1930s and beyond. I have written in previous chapters of Daryl Zanuck as a kind of epitomised version of the Hollywood power white man-- devious, manipulative, and cynical in his dealings with writers and performers, especially women. But if Zanuck is taken as an example of sexual criminal and thus viewed through the lens of Hollywood as systemic field of sexual abuse, the concentric circles of power, privilege, and rape become clear. Zanuck behaved with impunity as producer in the cheating of creatives in money and on deals; Zanuck also behaved with impunity in forcing his women employees into sex. Both come to rest within corresponding hideous, overarching attitudes of *droit du seigneur*. Zanuck's conscious self-styling into first a "genius" and then a magnate led him up the ladder to the highest power position possible-- a position from which he then took the "right" to rape numerous women while being lauded as one of the patriarchs of Hollywood.

Unlike a Louis B. Mayer or a Harry Cohn, who have been subjects of numerous biographies and are highly present in film history, little work has heretofore been done on Daryl Zanuck. As Richard Maltby has written, "Zanuck was one of the most influential figures in the history of Hollywood production, but as yet he has been paid little critical attention".⁷² In this case, Maltby was referring to film historical work in a general sense. Post-MeToo and the downfall of Weinstein, new critical attention upon the person and career of Zanuck would certainly not be of the admiring, Great Man variety. Instead, it by necessity must situate him as a major purveyor of sexual predation. Historiographically speaking, there is imperative to take narrative power back from the now long dead men of studio Hollywood's power class. It is in fact past time to revisit their actions and reputations in a time when they cannot use their publicity and PR machines to spin back— or enact their practices of intimidation, "disappearing", or other widespread and highly successful, coordinated actions of criminality.

In an environment filled, quite literally, with sexual predators who faced no repercussions, Zanuck was one of the most notorious in his shamelessness and blatant actions. As Aubrey Malone has outlined in *Hollywood's Second Sex*, Zanuck was likely a sex addict and master purveyor of his individualised version of the casting couch. In this case, it meant that he continuously demanded and received "fresh meat" in the form of new ingenues brought to his office. Common practice for Zanuck was that after he had used new women sexually, he would simply stop taking their calls; thus the dangled promise of a contract was never fulfilled at all after sex.⁷³ Women already signed to the lot had a different relationship to Zanuck's various forms of abuse. They were fully acquainted with his belief he could touch them sexually any time he chose, call them names, or silence them. To Zanuck, women fell into two categories: "broads" and "tramps" whom he could harass, assault, and discard,

⁷² Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995) 130.

⁷³ Aubrey Malone, *Hollywood's Second Sex: The Treatment of Women in the Film Industry, 1900-1999* (Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2015) 67.

and “librarians” or “cold potatoes”, who lacked sex appeal or rejected his advances.⁷⁴ In one instance, Zanuck was urinating on some flowers on the studio lot when his assistant tried to shield him. A chortling Zanuck waved his penis at the aide with the words, “[i]f you know a young lady on the lot who hasn’t already seen *this*, I want her in my office by 5 tonight”.⁷⁵

Within *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*, Hortense Powdermaker referenced this sort of behaviour and attitude as pervasive in Hollywood, but as more sophomoric than horrific—in what seems a strange blind spot for a woman social scientist (but also perhaps understandable as a quite normative one in the late 1940s). She wrote in *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* that in the industry:

Attitudes that are primarily those of an adolescent type of boasting about sexual power and the use of sex to further careers, which of course is not confined to Hollywood, but is merely more open and frequent there.⁷⁶

In reality, things were not nearly so benign as they seemed to Powdermaker in the era. As mass market writer John Austin wrote:

Daryl Zanuck was noted for playing matinees in his back office around 3:30 every afternoon with the contract player of his choice. Daryl ‘signed the checks’, so to speak, and decided which options were picked up every six months... [to] come to his office for... ‘a story conference’ or to ‘...discuss future projects!’ [was] the ‘traditional rite of passage’ entered into by many of the female contract players at the studio.⁷⁷

Zanuck was also known to demand that women tell other women on the lot how excellent their sexual experience with him had been.⁷⁸ Far from mere “locker room talk”, such openness around the harassment, abuse, coercion, assault, and rape is its own proof of the true workings of the system.

Further, these were not “just” questions of misogyny or being asked to accept highly demeaning behaviours in the workplace. There were absolute labour stakes at hand as well, as to whether an actress would be allowed to continue to work or not at all, if she were to wind up sexually on the wrong side of a powerful man. Many women were discarded or fired, and many also quit of their own accord. Numerous primary sources indicate women who left Hollywood because they refused to acquiesce to the abuse and harassment; most were simply labelled failures, has-beens, or washouts for their principles. Such anecdotes often came from less famous or well-known women and men in the Hollywood system back to the 1920s. These have been voices traditionally even more silenced and ignored than those of women stars, who were even themselves relatively powerless in

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 50.

⁷⁶ Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers* (Eastford, CT, Martino Fine Books, 2013) 24.

⁷⁷ John Austin, *Hollywood's Babylon Women* (New York, S.P.I., 1994) 37.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 67.

the realm of sexual crimes.⁷⁹ In Paul Zollo's oral history *Hollywood Remembered*, elderly crew member Burl Smith explained his family's trajectory to Hollywood:

My mother was an Indiana farm girl and she came to Hollywood to break into the movies. But she did not get into the movies. A lot of people who came here didn't make it. They didn't become extras. Because there were only x number of jobs. You had to have something special, or somebody had to like you, or- I'm sorry to say- you went to bed with someone. And many... girls would never do that.⁸⁰

As the men "won" the system they had created, the women who left it or were pushed out from it were almost always forgotten, classified as completely disposable and of no consequence. In just one such case, silent and early sound star May McAvoy gave a later-life interview to film historian William Drew. As Drew explained:

It is often alleged that May McAvoy left films in 1929 because her voice was unsuitable for talkies or that she had a lisp-- claims that she vigorously denied. In truth, when I knew and interviewed her toward the end of her life, May had a lovely voice even then. It was a joy to hear her speak. What actually precipitated her departure from films was an old and all too familiar reason. Her plight will have particular resonance in the "Me, too" era. The sad truth is that May was a victim of sexual harassment perpetrated by Warners' production executive, Darryl F. Zanuck. It was very hard for May to tell me about this even all these many years later. But her resistance to constantly being stalked by Mr. Zanuck is what brought an end to the wonderful stellar career of May McAvoy.⁸¹

The more comprehensive digging into primary source studio Hollywood history, the more one finds such examples of the rape culture of the studios in full sight. It also becomes clear that such systemic practices were equally visible to men as well as women. This meant that even men who did not participate did take part in normalising or covering for the men who were criminally abusing women all over studio Hollywood. The son of late MGM casting director Fred Datig was contemporarily interviewed. He described his father as straight-laced and well-behaved, in contrast to his own boss, Benjamin Thaw. As Datig explained of his father:

His big boss at MGM, Benjamin Thaw, that's all he did. My father just had to keep signing these cute girls and put them in his office. Thaw was an animal, a sex maniac. He was in charge of all talent. He was a friend of Louis B's.⁸²

In their early post-Weinstein reckoning piece of January 3, 2018, "Hollywood on the Brink", *New York Times* film critics Manohla Dargis and A.O. Scott revisited MGM and the other studios' practice of "six month option girls... to be passed around the executive offices" as something that "sounds a lot like

⁷⁹ Joan Sangster, in particular, has advocated for working-class focus within oral history scholarship; see Joan Sangster, "Reflections on the Politics and Praxis of Working-Class Oral Histories", In *The Canadian Oral History Reader*, edited by K. Llewellyn and Freund (Kingston, McGill Queen's, 2015).

⁸⁰ Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered* 288.

⁸¹ William Drew, "Movies of the Silent Era and the Thirties". Facebook post. September 8, 2019.

⁸² Anthony Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns: A History of Extras, Bit Players, and Stand-Ins* (Oxford, Mississippi, 2012) 95.

prostitution”.⁸³ Continuing with this connection between present and past, Dargis wrote that “this tawdry glimpse into the industry, with its powerful men and passed-around girls, is deeply embedded in its history, its lore, and its very identity”.⁸⁴

It is well-established, then, that Cohn, Zanuck, Thaw, and many others like them were, to put it bluntly, rapists. What, then, is the connection between their positionality as extremely powerful businessmen to their unapologetic stance as sexual abusers? What about the connection of the field of sexual crimes to their status as genius impresarios, in their own minds? It was established in the last chapter that the women entering the Hollywood studio system were recreated and reclassified by its ruling class men, put into dangerous positions in terms of body modifications and labour hazards. In contrast, an executive’s *self*-directed refashioning reads like both an exploration of patriarchal machismo and a delightful rich man’s holiday.

As Zanuck explained in interview in Ezra Goodman’s *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (1961): “[a]nd then, I decided to become a genius. Hollywood was full of ‘yes men’, so I decided to be a ‘no man’”.⁸⁵ Zanuck continued his comical, light-hearted story of his own ascent: “being a genius, I had to live that way. I took up polo, big-game hunting, and skiing... It’s great fun being a genius and I am going to continue playing the role”.⁸⁶ In the design of this system-- the wealth, power, white male camaraderie, and concurrent prerogative to abuse-- some contemporary words from Kate Manne on the nature of misogyny again from the perspective of feminist philosophy are apropos:

... the moral standards that work to protect [the] historically privileged and powerful [man] from moral downfall... also protect him from the ignominy of shame and the corrosive effects of guilt, as well as the social and legal costs of moral condemnation. They enable him to form views and make claims with the default presumption that he is good, right, or correct.⁸⁷

Sociological excavation of the Hollywood system of sexual abuse, based on actresses’ own words in memoir and interview as to who was targeted and who was left alone, also offers concrete, highly classed conclusions. Women from upper-class families, women with theatrical success and celebrity, or women who arrived in Hollywood somewhat older were much less likely to be expected to play along. Actresses who arrived married or with a strong male partner or agent as protector might also be left out of the “casting couch economy”. In this way, the sexual exploitation system was able to operate via patriarchal stereotypes and the politics of respectability.

⁸³ A.O. and Manohla Dargis. “Hollywood on the Brink.” *New York Times*. January 3, 2018; , Pamela Hutchinson, “Moguls and Starlets: 100 Years of Hollywood’s Corrosive, Systemic Sexism.” *The Guardian*. October 19, 2017.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ezra Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1961) 167.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 168.

⁸⁷ Manne, *Down Girl* xiv.

Some of the young women who came of age as child actresses, groomed to advance to ingenue work in the studio system, were kept highly cloistered and innocent as the studio commodities they were. They presented themselves as some of the last to know how the system really operated in terms of sexual abuses. In a June 1940 article for *Silver Screen*, Judy Garland reported solemnly that if any man ever tried to take her somewhere and not let her leave, she would call her mother.⁸⁸ After growing up an MGM child asset of premium value, Elizabeth Taylor wrote in her later 1964 memoir:

I was too young to know why all of a sudden a young woman would be blackballed and never heard of again. Evidently that casting couch bit did happen. Of course, I never even heard about it until years later.⁸⁹

However, even world famous, studio-raised children and teenage girls could be targeted. Another high-profile woman who shared not one but many incidents of sexual harassment and assault in later-life recounting was Shirley Temple. Considering that Temple was the world's most famous child star, the stories she shared are even more sickening. At times she experienced outright pedophilia, with some incidents detailed taking place when Temple was as young as twelve. Most of the assaults she documented occurred when the studio was attempting to remake her as adult ingenue; at ages sixteen to eighteen, she was still a teenager not of age, and so these crimes were even more heinous. A 2018 magazine article by Rob Chirico explained:

Temple wrote in her autobiography that on her first visit to MGM, she met one of the studio's producers, Arthur Freed. During a private meeting, Freed unzipped his trousers and exposed himself to her, saying, "I have something made just for you."⁹⁰

Like Keyes, Fontaine, and Bergman, Temple also had a David O. Selznick story. Hers was particularly horrific as she was an underage girl and it involved imprisonment:

Coming around my side of the desk, he reached and took my hand... Glancing down, I saw the telltale stocking feet. Pulling free, I turned for the door, but even more quickly he reached back over the edge of his desk and flicked a switch I had learned...was a remote door-locking device. I was trapped... we circled and reversed directions around his furniture.⁹¹

One executive's perspective on his sexual rights to the women (and girls) in his employ as recounted in Temple's memoir *Child Star: An Autobiography* (1988) was extremely telling. When she rejected this producer's advances, he said, "[I]ook, I'm going to be a big executive. We're going to have to get along... What I had in mind was just a workplace formality". Temple replied, "It may be in

⁸⁸ Mary Jane Manners, "The Ugly Duckling Who Became a Swan." *Movie Mirror*. June 1940.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Taylor. *Elizabeth Taylor: An Informal Memoir* (New York, Harper and Row, 1965) 12.

⁹⁰ Rob Chirico, "Though She Suffered Abuse, Shirley Temple's Story Is a Model of Child Star Resilience." *Ranker*. 2018.

⁹¹ Shirley Temple, *Child Star: An Autobiography* (Boston, Hall, 1989).

your contract, but not mine”.⁹² Her description of an attack by comedian George Jessel was equally hideous:

We were standing a pace apart, eyeball to eyeball. In one swift movement he opened his trousers and, with a sudden reach, encircled me with one arm... I could feel his other hand groping to lift my shirt... this new assault seemed unreal, but little could I do but thrust my right knee upward into his groin... I felt no mercy.⁹³

As Chirico worded it, “[f]or the entirety of her brief film career, Temple was forced to fight off sexual predators”.⁹⁴ As Temple explained in her memoir, this constant barrage of attempted rapes was part of her decision to leave Hollywood for good. Temple was both very young and literally one of the most famous faces in the world; this seemed to make little difference. Temple wrote of her disappointment, disillusionment, and disgust with the industry: “[m]ore and more the... movie business seemed populated with a bunch of copulating tomcats”.⁹⁵

Respected or degraded status, and thus the difference between attempted sexual assaults or being left alone, often played out even more strongly through family associations or career status. Actresses who were understood to be “of good family” with upper-class roots, or those who could at least project an upper-class veneer of untouchable, outraged propriety, might be respected or let be. Hollywood can be understood as both a space completely grounded not only in gender inequality, but also in a robust madonna/whore complex of the kind Mayer lived by and as described in Chapter Three.⁹⁶ As well, a patriarchal system being run by lower-class men, ethnic immigrant outsiders, would have held a fear of wealthy, patrician American fathers if they were captains of industry or politically powerful in their own right.

One telling woman to this point and in relation to the sexual exploitation economy of 1930s Hollywood was Tallulah Bankhead. It should be noted that in Bankhead’s case, the ever-presence of the (negative) relation between the casting couch and class status would be particularly and obviously significant. In addition to Bankhead’s employment of humour and wit as show business survival strategy,⁹⁷ and her Broadway theatrical start, she also benefited from origins heavily grounded in white American male power. With both a grandfather and uncles as senators and her father a Speaker of the House, she was highly touted in both her theatrical and filmic careers as an upper-class woman. One newspaper excitedly opened with the headline “Society Girl Goes On Stage” whilst

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Rob Chirico, “Though She Suffered Abuse, Shirley Temple’s Story Is a Model of Child Star Resilience.” *Ranker*. 2018.

⁹⁵ Temple, *Child Star*.

⁹⁶ Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York, Crown, 1988).

⁹⁷ Tallulah Bankhead, *Tallulah: My Autobiography* (New York, Harper, 1952).

discussing Bankhead's male family members.⁹⁸ With that pedigree behind Bankhead, studio Hollywood was unlikely to allow its members to victimise her.⁹⁹

Along these lines, a similar type of ingenue more likely to avoid "casting couch" harassment or assault was the highly chaperoned, "debutante" starlet. Gene Tierney is a particularly good example of how an upper-class young woman in Hollywood might have experienced aspects of the sexual quid pro quo system very differently. She is also one classifiable as a self-aware class actor in her own autobiographical writings and recollections. Tierney was born to an upper-class Connecticut family, attending finishing schools like Miss Porter's and boarding school in Switzerland. As she recalled in her later-life memoir, "Hollywood was a world beyond my horizon. In my circle, you finished school, married a Yale boy, and lived in Connecticut".¹⁰⁰ Tierney had even made her official East Coast society debut, and a real-life debutante was a fascinating thing in Los Angeles. She explained further:

I had attended boarding schools, traveled abroad, made my debut. By Hollywood's definition, I was high society. I realized I wasn't ready for the movies, or the tough, often erratic men who made them. My background, I think, had made me more interesting to them than I really was.¹⁰¹

Once on the West Coast, as such an upper-class East Coast debutante, Tierney was chaperoned by her mother. She explained of this period, while:

"show business is partly a flesh market"...¹⁰² "I had heard in New York that the casting couch was a way of life in Hollywood: it posed no threat to me... innocence can be a very effective defense".¹⁰³

Tierney continued to avoid suspicious sexual situations with strategy. She had been a contract starlet languishing at Paramount when she was asked by an executive at Columbia to come and "discuss future projects", in the Zanuck-coded phrase. As Tierney wrote in her memoir, "I made the appointment, but I couldn't go into a strange man's office by myself, not when you had heard all those stories about Hollywood, casting couches and all that stuff".¹⁰⁴ She asked agents to accompany her, at which time she signed a (legitimate) contract with the studio.¹⁰⁵ Tierney went on to write about the way the casting couch hierarchy was understood by actresses themselves, in terms of class and status, explaining:

I heard Bette Davis say once, and I agree, that the casting couch existed only at a certain level. It tempted the fringe people, the women- and men- who lacked talent or confidence. At best, they might have picked up a bit part. They were not smart enough

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Gene Tierney and Mickey Herskowitz. *Self-Portrait* (New York, Wyden Books, 1979) 10.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 25.

¹⁰² Ibid. 217.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 25-26.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 149.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

to know that it wouldn't last. Once they came across, the bosses didn't want them around.¹⁰⁶

Ann Miller also laid out the highly classed, patriarchal complex of Hollywood well in her own recollections of Harry Cohn:

I never had any problem with him because I had a very strict, very strong mother... He had great respect for me, so therefore I probably never saw him the way a lot of the girls probably did that he didn't think were *quite that nice*.¹⁰⁷ (italics mine)

Many of the women who wrote later-life memoirs put themselves forth as part of the same "untouchable" category that Miller had, of the sort who were not propositioned as "nice girls" or "too-valuable property". As Mary Astor wrote:

[i]t's quite possible that I lost a few jobs because I wouldn't snuggle up to a director or a producer... However, nobody dared to make a pass at me for I was heavily chaperoned. I was as zealously guarded as the crown jewels. The security extended even to going to the ladies' room.¹⁰⁸

Joan Fontaine, born and raised in Japan to a very colonial British family, arrived in Hollywood having been partially raised in California— but with their British accents and upper-crust international manners, she and her sister Olivia de Havilland were treated implicitly differently than the standard arrival midwestern carhop or southern beauty queen. As Fontaine recalled in her memoir:

Irving Thalberg had hired me for *No More Ladies* because he wanted a 'lady' for the role. The other Hollywood producers were looking for sex kittens, starlets they could put under contract who would be available, both night and day, to entertain their out-of-town business associates.¹⁰⁹

Yet Thalberg was only Fontaine's initial employer, for a brief period. She soon learned that even an actress under contract and coded as a lady could eventually run into trouble-- particularly if she refused the social-sexual aspects of the job as expected of her. In fact, first person account and primary source documentation from actresses offers numerous examples of how much the above-mentioned "socialising with and entertaining of gentlemen" was understood to be part of the job. Fontaine told such a story in her memoir *No Bed of Roses* (1978), one that quite literally laid bare the sordid strategies that grounded the entire system in her day and for decades more. It seemed that Thalberg's rationale for hiring her and treatment of her had been the outlier; once he was gone, she was considered fair game for many of the normal sexualised indignities of the business, upper-class background and bearing aside. She wrote of the "press junket", whereby starlets were invited (ordered) to come along on excursions with theatre owners, distributors, press, and other men in

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 26.

¹⁰⁷ Kobal, *Rita Hayworth* 61.

¹⁰⁸ Mary Astor, *A Life On Film* (New York:, Delacorte, 1971) 7, 15.

¹⁰⁹ Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses* 76.

peripheral Hollywood industries who needed to be feted and provided with actresses with whom to “socialise” on these “business trips”.

A handful of starlets would be taken to a resort or a hotel outside the city. Here male guests of the studios would be wined and dined, currycombed, backslapped, given their pick of the new crop with whom to spend their idle hours away from their wives... It was an accepted practice.¹¹⁰

In her memoir, Fontaine writes of being commanded to attend one such out-of-town event at Lake Arrowhead. She did go, but she also brought her mother as chaperone. When ordered to “get rid of the old lady” and come back to the bar and socialise, Fontaine begged off, saying she had photos to take in the morning. She realised the whole trip was basically a fraud, little more than an established pretense for adultery at best or assault at worst. As the men in charge realised Fontaine was not going to play ball, she explained of herself and her mother, “[b]y midafternoon, with our luggage we were unceremoniously herded into a studio car and sent down the hill toward home and Hollywood”.¹¹¹ Fontaine continued:

When I returned to the studio the next day, all hell broke loose. I’d been snobbish, standoffish. Who did I think I was? If I didn’t cooperate, I’d be fired. There was no room at the studio for a starlet who was ‘difficult’.

Fontaine’s commentary on the deployment of the word “difficult” against actresses is an incisive commentary on the entire system, quite well ahead of its time. In analysing how men were able to get away with any and all manner of abuse and even crime, Fontaine commented pithily, “[h]ow many sins this word covered for those who needed an alibi!”¹¹²

Then the story takes a quite interesting and unique turn, in light of both a MeToo lens on this period of Hollywood history, and a focus on class. Fontaine’s notably aristocratic, non-American mother was furious, and she marched into the offices of the studio head who had threatened to fire her “difficult” daughter (almost certainly Cohn). In a system in which these men were all-powerful and never challenged, Fontaine’s mother openly excoriated the founder, and even drew the pimping analogy; in Fontaine’s words, “[s]he denounced him for an uncouth, conniving procurer and stormed out”. The result? “My contract was dropped”.¹¹³

Other strategies at making of oneself an exemption from casting couch sexual abuse might be more specific to the actress’ background or personality. This group at times included women who presented as very religious, traditional, or proper. Maureen O’Hara deliberately played up her foreignness and religiosity to get out of doing things she didn’t want to do like pose for cheesecake

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 87.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

“leg art”.¹¹⁴ Just as the Irish Catholic O’Hara prided herself on her class and geographical background in saving her from the iniquities of the casting couch, so too did Bette Davis define herself by her New England background and its traditions in opposition to modern Hollywood. She felt her stubbornness and outspoken belief in doing what was right allowed her to focus on her craft, rather than allowing studio men to focus on her body. Still, a more sheltered background was not a panacea for the exploitations of women in Hollywood. Davis writes in her memoir that although she presented as the most New England virginal type in Hollywood, “hopelessly Puritan”,¹¹⁵ and had arrived as an invited Broadway success, she was nevertheless subjected to the dehumanising actress treatment all the same. Davis wrote that, “I was sneered at in many a cubby hole- crowded like cattle in the marketplace”.¹¹⁶

Davis recalled an instance of being horrified and traumatized when her scene work for a day was a test of a love scene repeated with fifteen different leading men in a row, that culminated in them laying on top of her on a couch with passionate kisses. As the director continually shouted, “Who’s next?”, Davis recounted thinking, “WHO’S NEXT!”.¹¹⁷ While this scene was completely above board, part of normal industrial studio practices, and not an instance of interpersonal sexual exploitation, it was experienced like a casting couch experience for Davis all the same. She lay there feeling utterly dehumanised and with her sense of herself as a talented actress shaken. Her recounting in her later memoir provides both an interesting and intelligent first-person view of what sexual objectification in Hollywood felt like, and a classed one:

My ancestors were revolving in their graves. Aside from my mortification, the fact that I might just as well have been a dummy further enraged me. The camera was concentrated exclusively on the men as they ravaged this anonymous thing. From any angle whatsoever, it was disgusting. I wasn’t even a woman. I was a mattress in a bawdyhouse.¹¹⁸

She continued in describing the affective aspects of the entire sexualised experience, writing that she had blocked most of it out (a classic trauma survival technique): “I only remember that from the daily shooting to the billboards, falsely picturing me half-naked, my shame was only exceeded by my fury”.¹¹⁹

Another strategy to avoid sexual victimisation was to be older, with one’s own money and career, and firmly aware of one’s own persona and values. Mae West is the clearest example of this type. West did not come to Hollywood until she was a remarkable 37, as a New York native, a

¹¹⁴ Ruth Barton, “Maureen O’Hara: Pirate Queen, Feminist Icon?” *Eire* 41.1 (2006), 142-168; Sheldon, Michael Sheldon, “Maureen O’Hara: I Wasn’t Going to Play the Whore”, *The Telegraph*, November 8, 2014.

¹¹⁵ Bette Davis, *The Lonely Life*. (New York, Putnam’s, 1962) 131.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 67.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 138.

Broadway star, and producer in her own right. This would still be a startling pedigree today; in 1930, it was a complete anomaly. West had produced plays like *Sex*, and always been free and open in her quotes about sexuality and her right to live in her own way. Once in Los Angeles she formed her own production company.¹²⁰ Making many millions a year, at one point she was the highest-paid person in the US after William Randolph Hearst. Connecting this fact to both gender and class, West quipped, “[n]o wonder Mr. Hearst and his high clean living moral values was writing editorials against me. He hated to see a woman in his class”.¹²¹

West’s acute self-awareness and innate confidence were gifts that allowed her to keep herself safe. She had scorn for upstart Los Angeles compared to her native New York City, as when she noted quite clearly, “I’m not a little girl from a little town making good in a big town. I’m a big girl from a big town making good in a little town”.¹²² In regard to the studio bosses, like her theatrical bosses before, West wrote, “I was an outlaw. I didn’t conform or say ‘Yes sir’”.¹²³ Once she got to Hollywood from Broadway, West was similarly iconoclastic, even bemused, about a business of which seemingly everyone else was in awe. She found 1930s Hollywood well over-mythologised, writing both that it was “as queer and odd an industry as possible”.¹²⁴ She also remarked that “the interior of the fabulous beast was found to be empty”¹²⁵, and that “nothing is real here”.¹²⁶ Seeing through the system with intelligence, West was determined it would not ruin her. As she wrote later in her memoir, “I watched myself and others and held on to reality”.¹²⁷

In terms of the institutional power imbalances between men and women within the filmic system, West was extremely clear that women should avoid falling into the trap of thinking that the sexual quid pro quo system might be of benefit to them. She explained, “[m]y advice to those girls who think they have to take their clothes off to be a star... Never be obvious. Let both the men and the women wonder”.¹²⁸

A more radical strategy employed by an east to west-migrating theatre actress also involved not being acquiescent or in awe of the people in Hollywood. Frances Farmer strategised to simply be “unfeminine” as possible, to avoid sexual aggression by presenting as deliberately miserable and hostile. Farmer explained in her memoir:

¹²⁰ Joan Mellen, "The Mae West Nobody Knows." In *Women and Their Sexuality in the New Film* (Hammond, Horizon, 1974).

¹²¹ Patricia Meideros, *Images of Women During the Great Depression and the Golden Age of American Film* (San Diego: UCSD, 1988) 246.

¹²² Mae West, *Goodness Had Nothing to Do with It: The Autobiography of Mae West* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959) 25.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 159.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 153.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 148.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 153.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 171.

¹²⁸ Mae West and Joseph Weintraub, *The Wit and Wisdom of Mae West* (New York, Putnam, 1967) 27.

I had heard all the wild stories before leaving New York and was jokingly warned that the casting couch was a way of life in California. It was, but I made a firm, irrevocable decision to be accepted for myself and not for my sexual availability. Both men and women made approaches, I insulted them. I was a loner, unfriendly and unavailable.¹²⁹

Within my own 2014 Los Angeles fieldwork interviews, accounts were indeed shared that supported the idea that one would lose work if not at least appearing to be sexually available or “up for fun”. These interviews initially primarily drew from a pool of younger women currently working in Hollywood, and asked a myriad of questions around body issues, labour conditions, and financial equity in the industry today. But it was when I was able to secure interviews with much older actresses and producers, now retired, that the most content on the sexual abuse aspects of the business was volunteered. This was naturally particularly true of their time in the industry in decades passed, when—as this thesis endeavours to prove—such sexual abuse was entirely permissible and endemic. 1960s television star Barbara Bain, the first woman to win three consecutive Best Actress Emmys for her work on *Mission Impossible*, explained how she was instructed by agents not to wear her wedding ring to auditions. She refused.¹³⁰ But again, there were classed issues at hand, as in all cases here. Bain worked in television, but was married to major film star Martin Landau. This surely afforded her a level of protection— even if she may also have lost out on some roles for not being sexually available. As Bain explained (using yet another common euphemistic colloquialism that demonstrated sexual abuse normalisation), “people probably think I was run around the couch, I wasn’t”.¹³¹

Bain thus functioned as a protected woman within the system. Yet within these 2014 fieldwork interviews, several other interview subjects from the late studio era shared, by contrast, very traumatic histories of rape and sexual harassment. These women who experienced abuse in pre-feminist eras had known that there was no recourse for women at the time should an incident occur. One interview subject told of numerous instances of sexual harassment and assault as rampant and par for the course as a young woman in the 1960s studio system. She described a workplace environment in which a male crew member casually sexually assaulted her as she stood on a ladder.¹³² In an entirely different instance, after she was raped by an executive, it was she and not the male accused who was run out of the A-list production company. Remarkably, the firing was explained to her as to be “for her own good”; all hell would have broken loose with the famous studio head in anger at *her* for causing trouble, had she stayed around, rather than at the rapist.¹³³ It was understood that if she ever wanted to “work in this town again”, she should leave quietly. All the more notably, this treatment happened to a young woman who was not even unprotected, but rather quite connected within the system. Her

¹²⁹ Frances Farmer, *Will There Really Be A Morning?* (Toronto, Farmcliff, 1992) 111.

¹³⁰ Barbara Bain. Interview by Kerry McElroy. Telephone. September 9, 2014.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Anonymous, Interview by Kerry McElroy. Notes. Los Angeles, California. August 17, 2014.

¹³³ Ibid.

father was a screenwriter who wrote for A-list stars.¹³⁴ One can imagine the reality, then, for the vast majority of young women who showed up with no support-- from either patronage systems, or laws gradually introduced over decades towards workplace protections.

Even more tellingly, these instances did not take place in the high studio era, but in the early to middle 1960s. By this point, the women's liberation movement was in fact in the air and changing other industries— but not Hollywood. Finally, in terms of historiographic justice and the ethical imperatives of this project to record and give credence to such stories before they are gone, many of the older subjects expected little interest in their lived experiences after the fact. In fact they were surprised a feminist academic in the 2010s would care about these stories at all. (Notably, this research trip occurred three years before MeToo began.) The above survivor of rape and harassment who had worked in casting and production in the 1960s television studio system was gratified to share her story, saying simply, “[n]o one has ever asked us”.¹³⁵

Finally, another key pre-MeToo digital media text provides an excellent portrait as to how the system functioned perfectly to silence women who were unprotected— and cover for men's sexual crimes. As a journalistic piece, it offered a provocative new vision of reckoning with histories of rape in Hollywood, also just a few years before the Weinstein case truly shifted the terrain of women's stories on the system. This was Noreen Malone and Amanda Demme's 2015 popular culture piece for *New York* magazine, “‘I’m No Longer Afraid’: 35 Women Tell Their Stories About Being Assaulted by Bill Cosby, and the Culture That Wouldn’t Listen”.¹³⁶ The piece was notable for its multimedia format, in which each woman, most now in their sixties to seventies, was presented in stylised portraiture. Next to her face, the reader was presented with a clickable link in which her individual story of rape by Cosby was shared— where, when, and what she experienced during and going forward in the rest of her life. The stories are poignant, horrific, and with an undeniable weight when all grouped together so powerfully. They also clearly lay out some of the culture of intimidation and male networks that were so strong and protective of the male power and misbehaviour of their time. As one woman explained in her interview, she was told upon sharing the details of her assault with her employer,

“‘[y]ou do know that that’s [Playboy publisher Hugh] Hefner’s best friend, right?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ She says to me: ‘Nobody’s going to believe you. I suggest you shut your mouth’”.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.; permission given for all quotes and anecdotes in this section, but 2020 follow-up request for approval was met with request to be labelled as Anonymous, and honoured. All protocols for working with human subjects in oral history research were followed. The project was certified with an ethics certificate from my home institution, Concordia University, for its entirety.

¹³⁶ Noreen Malone and Amanda Demme. “‘I’m No Longer Afraid’: 35 Women Tell Their Stories About Being Assaulted by Bill Cosby, and the Culture That Wouldn’t Listen.” *New York*, July 26, 2015.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

This misogynistic cultural tendency to disbelieve women was pervasive— as was its parallel understanding by women of the futility of coming forward and reporting abuse. Often these realities were only finally disrupted by silence-breaking much later, once cultural shift had begun. This is a common trajectory of many of the actress oral histories found in both the Malone and Demme article, as well as in the many other primary sources of this project.

One of the most important interdisciplinary additions to this entire project in the vein of speaking, silence, and the traumatic nature of abuse is the incorporation of the work of trauma studies scholar Cathy Caruth.¹³⁸ Caruth's work on trauma and memory has been at the forefront of its field. It is also extremely applicable to the utilisation of actress memoir and interview towards truth-telling, for example, or to the role of abuse in the creation and continuation of the Hollywood star. Caruth is particularly key in terms of her advocacy for trauma studies outside of the discipline of psychology. While she has written on and done work with veterans and crime victims in social science methodologies, Caruth initially began to study trauma from a humanities perspective with Paul de Man.¹³⁹ Against singular disciplinarity, she has argued that:

the irreducible specificity of traumatic stories requires in its turn the varied responses-responses of knowing and acting- of literature, film, psychiatry, neurobiology, sociology, and political and social activism.¹⁴⁰

Along these lines of trauma, a sociological concept theorised by Pierre Bourdieu is also particularly germane to the discussion of this traumatic sexual field: symbolic violence. Bourdieu's understanding of symbolic violence was specifically fleshed out in his 1998 text *Masculine Domination*, itself a rejoinder to de Beauvoir's feminist *ur*-text in *The Second Sex*. In this concept he refers to the perpetual silencing and subjugation of women in both society and interpersonal relationships.¹⁴¹ Black theologian and American social ethicist Joan Martin explains the concept well within her intersectional approach towards applying class theory to the study of American white supremacy, specifically:

[F]or Bourdieu... class, as a conceptual tool, also permits the investigation of hierarchical modes and uses of 'symbolic power' or 'symbolic' violence in the social world shared by classes- for example, slaveholders, their wives, overseers, and the enslaved.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1995); *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 2016).

¹³⁹ E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2005).

¹⁴⁰ Cathy Caruth, "Introduction." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1995) ix.

¹⁴¹ Michael Burawoy, *Symbolic Violence: Conversations With Bourdieu*. (Durham, Duke, 2019).

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 67.

In the case of Hollywood, this could mean a grasping of symbolic violence as veiled, misrecognised violence—the entirety of horrific and abusive institutional behaviours excused under the casual term “the casting couch”, to take one glaring example—which then allowed for real, overt physical violence to proceed unabated. This as an accepted, central, and yet euphemised aspect of Hollywood as sociocultural space would fall under what medical anthropologist Arthur Kleinman has theorised as “the violence of everyday life”.¹⁴³

Other examples of symbolic violence, ones that will need to be addressed frankly going forward in this era even if it causes discomfort, include instances in which male scholars, critics, and film historians have to this point reinforced the violence done to women in the system with their writing. This could be from obtuseness, flippancy, sexist attempts at cleverness, or simply undistilled misogyny. Feminist historians like Mary Daly have understood the ways in which masculinist, gendered historiography has enabled misogyny for decades;¹⁴⁴ Silvia Federici has written of instances in which the male historian’s indifference to gendered realities become “complicity”.¹⁴⁵ Attention needs to be called to misogynistic historiography by male historians on the sexual abuses of the Hollywood system that, post-MeToo, are even more out of step with where scholarship towards these topics has now been evolving for some time. Such instances of symbolic violence also amount to a habitus on the part of some number of Hollywood film historians to excuse the crimes of the men in power, or to reinforce their misogynistic underpinnings.

In one such instance, Steven Ross in *Working Class Hollywood* (1998) remarked upon the failure of the dream that an alternative labour, leftist film industry might have emerged to challenge Hollywood. On the few occasions where it was attempted and such a non-Hollywood alternative business failed to get off the ground, Ross has attributed the failures to naivete and mismanagement. But he has also written of what we would now understand as sexual misconduct on the part of the labour activists, too. Obviously from a labour history perspective, such revelation is all the more disappointing. For all their high-minded revolutionary ideals and utopianism, activists succumbed to the exact same temptations as the establishment capitalist studio heads when handed a modicum of power around pretty young women they could exploit. The Motive Motion Picture Company, founded in 1918 by a wealthy socialist sympathiser, appointed George Williams as its president. As Ross explains in his book:

Williams, who was entrusted with the critical responsibility of selling stock, was more interested in fun raising than fundraising. While traveling in Philadelphia he boasted of sleeping with two women in exchange for promises of acting jobs; after another trip to San Francisco, he brought three aspiring starlets back to the studio ‘and took naked

¹⁴³ Arthur Kleinman, “The Violences of Everyday Life.” In *Violence and Subjectivity*, edited by Veena Das, 226-41 (Berkeley, California, 2000).

¹⁴⁴ Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston, Beacon, 2016).

¹⁴⁵ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York, Autonomedia, 2004) 163.

pictures of them'.¹⁴⁶

Ross went on after this anecdote to note the company's demise in 1920, seemingly more disappointed in Williams for failing to be good at promoting socialist film than willing to grant any humanity to the women upon whom the anecdote actually centres. Further, one would hope that post-MeToo, such predatory behaviour would not be referred to in scholarly historical writing as men having "fun".

Even more egregious, more recent but still preceding MeToo by over a decade, were some strongly misogynistic points in David Thomson's *The Whole Equation* (2005). Thomson tends to employ an arch and iconoclastic writing style that behooves his primary roles as critic and screenwriter rather than as academic. Thus, he has a more subjective and opinionated presentation than one would find in a work of purely academic film historical scholarship. Nonetheless, in making the point that Mayer could have his sexual pick of women on his lot and give any girl a typist job next to the glamour of movies, Thomson described this as Mayer's ability to have "some hopelessly hopeful young woman swallow his grey cum and call it cream".¹⁴⁷ Such a description is not only uselessly vulgar. It represents a type of masculinist film historical writing so enthralled with its own crudity that it neglects to contend at all with the ethical, legal, and corporate wrongdoing at play here. Taking his point further, Thomson turned his cultural archetype of the young woman in Hollywood—who would instead be correctly described as a victim of workplace sexual harassment and abuse—into a conniving adventuress. In Thomson's attempt at an ironised conception, the hellish sexual economy as situated throughout this chapter was nothing more than a delightful game of quid pro quo for all involved:

If the girl was smart enough, why, she could see the light and even put it to Mayer as a business proposition- he was open-minded with money- that the swallowing of cum could be industrialized in a suitably removed part of town.¹⁴⁸

Hopefully, male film historians will have realised by now that the time for such flippant views of mass, systemic industrialised sexual abuse and of the women who were victimised by these practices is over.

The above concepts— symbolic and real violence, gendered class, but also habitus in cultural-industrial systems on the part of both capitalists and historians— can be useful in a classed reading of Hollywood sexual exploitation as a two-tier system. This discussion has so far primarily focused upon sexual abuse and mistreatment of stars, or at least the ways in which stars perceived Hollywood's malevolent sexual economy. And yet it was the sexual sociopathy and highly abusive practices

¹⁴⁶ Steven Ross, *Working Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America*. (Princeton, 1998).

¹⁴⁷ David Thomson, *The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood* (New York, Knopf, 2005) 150.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

(coercion, harassment, assault, and rape) of unknown women that were far more central to the system. Discussion of sexual abuse practices for these women, the forgotten and unknown, deserves to be centred and to close out this chapter; it is indubitably true that these practices were inflicted far more often on the women on the lower rungs of the system. With no recourse, they were the ones most manipulated, abused, assaulted, silenced, threatened, discarded, and forgotten.

It is worth adding here that when the men at the top were acting with such sexual impunity to commit crimes and abuse women, and in such an unstable and fluid system where half of Los Angeles seemed to be an aspiring performer or producer, mimetic misbehaviour was an unsurprising consequence. Specifically, it is unsurprising that men lower down in the system would take their cues on what they could do to women and get away with from the men above. In other words, the habitus of the Hollywood film industry towards sexual abuse spread through Los Angeles and even the US proper. Talent agents, photographers, and other conniving men who simply self-styled with these titles ran various scams on women, sometimes to defraud them financially, sometimes to seduce or rape them. Men who called themselves producers while trying to pick up women in Los Angeles were ubiquitous, and this was already an established practice by the 1930s.¹⁴⁹ Small-time “agents” would set up shop simply by renting sparse office space. Sometimes they would get a deal on the rental property by agreeing to introduce their “stable” of “girls” to the building owners.¹⁵⁰

Such a sociocultural milieu led to a shadow industry in Hollywood, developed by a network of connected pimps and traffickers who were able to build very successful, criminal sex businesses that catered to the studio executive class. Pasquale “Pat” DeCicco was one such minor player, a “talent agent” who was really part time talent agent and full-time pimp to studio executives. As John Austin has explained, “[i]rreverently known behind his back as “De Sicko”, he used his title and connections as a front to procure women for Louis B. Mayer and other MGM executives”.¹⁵¹ DeCicco’s profile, and this broader aspect of Hollywood culture, demonstrates that my earlier assertion that the business was a front for many types of pimping was far from metaphorical. The culture of trafficking and procuring was very well entrenched. Several oral histories recall a particular bit player who appeared as a police officer in *Casablanca*. This man had a far more prominent career as a notorious pimp, who had set up shop at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel in the 1930s and remained encamped there in his lucrative field into the 1980s.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Barbara Leaming, *If This Was Happiness: A Biography of Rita Hayworth* (New York, Viking, 1989) 39; Anger, *Hollywood Babylon*.

¹⁵⁰ This is, again, an aspect of Los Angeles and Hollywood life that is still remains quite recognisable, based on both popular press pieces and the 2014 fieldwork aspects of this project; Lela Edgar, “Creepy Agents, Shady Managers and the Plight of Hollywood’s Non-Famous Actresses.” *Hollywood Reporter*. December 11, 2017. Web. Accessed March 1, 2019.

¹⁵¹ Austin, *Hollywood’s Babylon Women* 78.

¹⁵² Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns*; Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered*.

One historical anecdote along these lines does not come up in standard Hollywood histories at all, but yet provides an excellent vector of these various sordid aspects of the business in the studio era. When Margaret Mitchell's novel *Gone With the Wind* was being made into a film, it was a cultural phenomenon before it even went into production. A world-famous search for the actress to play the lead role of Scarlett O'Hara was undertaken. The only real "search for Scarlett" came down to the scores of A-list actresses judged by David O. Selznick in Hollywood offices. Fan magazine publicity campaigns, however, tried to lead ordinary women to think they might also have a chance. As a result, some unscrupulous travelling salesmen throughout the United States billed themselves as Selznick's talent agents, in order to seduce aspiring actresses wherever they found them. This was widespread enough of a practice that it became a full-fledged scam. As Aubrey Malone has written, hundreds of girls and young women showed up to Hollywood with notes written to "introduce" them to Selznick on hotel stationery. Many were too humiliated to go home after realising they had been so tricked.¹⁵³ As Malone continued of the men, "[v]ery few of these were caught, though in Flagstaff, Arizona, two of them were arrested on charges of statutory rape. Five more were arrested in Alabama".¹⁵⁴

A picture has thus clearly emerged of "the casting couch" as a highly classed phenomenon. The women most likely to get caught up in this sexually exploitative or abusive field, or to think it would actually be beneficial for them to acquiesce, tended to be young, uneducated, and—crucially—unprotected, from lower or working-class backgrounds and with no one advising or supporting them in Hollywood. Therefore, a study of real labour conditions and abuses in Hollywood, especially in terms of sexual abuse of women, must by necessity look beyond stars. It should look even more to women on the margins: extras, bit players, workers from various departments—both because these women were more vulnerable to abuse, and because by the nature of their powerlessness, the things that they endured and indeed their very existences have largely been lost to history. In a post-MeToo/Time's Up classed reckoning, such women deserve just as much historiographic justice as celebrities.

Aside from all the abuses of the system and the specific hard times of the Depression, the regular cycle of oversaturation, rejection, obsolescence, and failure that had plagued the business since the beginning in terms of women hopefuls continued as ever. It was even more prominent in the 1930s, present in popular culture, literature, and film itself. It remains astounding still how such a young city and industry developed such a fully-formed cultural mythology, both good and bad, within little over a decade—a point addressed in Chapter Two in terms of the literature pleading with girls to stay home. A *Screen Book* article from 1933 was already calling Hollywood "Heartbreak Town", and describing it as a place that "has brought nothing but sorrow, disillusionment and discontent to

¹⁵³ Malone, *Hollywood's Second Sex* 43.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

thousands".¹⁵⁵ Another fan magazine described Los Angeles as "this heartless town on the shores of the blue Pacific".¹⁵⁶

If the lives of contract actresses became more difficult in the downturn of the Depression, as did the lives of women in non-performance jobs within the Hollywood system, it is evident that conditions would have been even worse for extras. There was a continuous push-pull between extras, Central Casting, and the studios as to whether these positions were legitimate work that deserved protections, or casual day labour without rights. In the latter assertion, extra work was characterised as enjoyable side activity rather than livelihood. Obviously, this characterisation was the preferred studio strategy, employed whenever possible to absolve themselves of both public and legal excoriation about exploitation. One 1939 report on extras, commissioned by the studios and reprinted in the *Hollywood Reporter*, contended that "the extra has always been an occasional worker- to be used when there was work for him the same as any migrant field worker".¹⁵⁷

In fact the situation was so fraught that the NRA commissioned a study on conditions of extras in 1933.¹⁵⁸ The founding of SAG, the Screen Actors Guild, also in 1933, was touted another sort of community outreach, a democratic resolution to "the problem of the extra". The first SAG secretary, actor Kenneth Thompson, announced:

For the first time in motion picture history, there are no class distinctions and no castes among the players. The star and the extra will work together to solve their mutual problems.¹⁵⁹

Assuredly, this did not happen. Almost immediately, there was contention within the union about whether to even accept extras or not, a far cry from the noble claim in Thompson's announcement. One SAG magazine piece in the period asked the rather shocking question (with shades of Powdermaker's later findings) in its headline: "Are Extras People?". Eventually in 1937, extras were allowed to join- as "B class members", utterly belying the progressive, classless mission initially proclaimed in SAG's mission statements.¹⁶⁰

The initial NRA report of 1933 had been filed specifically around questions of dangerous working conditions and abuses for extras, especially women and children. The film *Riff Raff* (1935) is one particularly notorious case that has been extensively profiled by film historians thus far. It is especially interesting here in terms of its treatment of women extras. Anthony Slide has delineated the horrific details of the production most clearly:

¹⁵⁵ In Martin Levin, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* (Westminster, MD, Arbor House, 1970) 59.

¹⁵⁶ In Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 102.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 115.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 73.

¹⁵⁹ Kerry Seagrave, *Extras of Early Hollywood: A History of the Crowd 1913-1945* (Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2013) 90.

¹⁶⁰ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 209.

Forty women were called to the MGM set at 5:30 P.M.... In the rain scene, they were soaked and hurled down by the full force of water from three fire hoses, backed by wind machines. Driven water, cold and sharp as icicles, blinded them and flung them about. Many were skinned from ankles to thighs. One woman was knocked unconscious. Another was paralyzed for hours.

The shooting went on for twelve hours until 5:30 in the morning, during which the women were not even provided with towels. These extras were paid \$11.25 for the twelve-hour, life-threatening shoot.¹⁶¹

Clearly, as Slide has articulated, “[l]ife for the average female extra in the 1930s was far from glamorous”.¹⁶² The employment conditions of 1930s Hollywood could be so dire that many extras lived five or six to some rooms or a small apartment:

with two sleeping on the bed, one on the Chesterfield, one on the reclining chair, and one on the floor with a pillow. One extra would always have to stay to answer the telephone. Whoever worked paid for the groceries.¹⁶³

The women would also share clothes, especially important for auditions and the obtaining of roles in a beauty and body-based business.

In addition to such working women’s solidarity, there were also occasional spots of women’s rebellion and resistance. In the classed power dynamic of the era and amidst so much abuse and danger, such moments are especially worth revisiting with a mind to the current MeToo/Time’s Up moment. Extras were known, on occasion, to riot when there was not enough work for such a number of hungry people, forming into angry mobs.¹⁶⁴ Even more interesting in a feminist MeTooing of studio history is the successful revolt by “sixty-five angry chorus girls” on the set of *Murder at the Vanities* (1934): fed up with how little clothing they were being allowed to wear, the young women mobbed the director and pulled off his pants.¹⁶⁵

Another aspect of working-class Hollywood, one that had much to do with women’s safety and independence, could also be the difference between work and starvation: the car. At the nexus of sociology and geography, the car had quickly already become a specific marker of Los Angeles life. Not having a car and taking the bus or streetcar there placed one in the lower classes, marking them as a “nobody”.¹⁶⁶ Federica Sagor Maas returned from some years in New York after the flush Hollywood 1920s to leaner times back in 1930s California. She recalled, “I had no car; I had to take the bus. It took nearly half a day to get to Beverly Hills- three buses with interminable waits

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 115.

¹⁶² Ibid. 107.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 8.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 106.

¹⁶⁶ Mark Garrett Cooper, *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood* (Champaign, Illinois, 2010).

between".¹⁶⁷ In addition, Los Angeles' unique sprawling development as a series of connected suburbs rather than a centralised, eastern-style city meant that the ownership of a car equated with basic mobility. It could also be a matter of life and death. Those without cars might find that they couldn't work. Extras had to depend upon friends or loved ones in networks of support; as one reporter quipped, "[w]ithout the thousands of 'boy friends' who dutifully haul extras back and forth, the movie industry in Hollywood wouldn't last ten minutes".¹⁶⁸ First-person accounts are common in which bit players might have sold everything they owned in dire times, anything to hold on to the final lifeline of looking respectable and prosperous in Los Angeles-- their car. This is another cultural reality of southern California life that has, in many ways, lingered to the present time.¹⁶⁹

The previous six-to-a-room sketch would be one of women who were working together, and maintaining or at least holding on at the middle level of the extra caste system. For those at the lower ends, Slide has reported, "[t]he situation was so dire that a small group of extras actually built themselves a shantytown near Universal City".¹⁷⁰ These realities could not be more contrary to the dreamland culture young Hollywood was selling to the rest of the United States and world. In fact, one would obtain a far clearer picture of real life in 1930s Los Angeles via the Poverty Row culture of extras than anything in star publicity or a fan magazine piece. Within the city, this culture arose in the delis, poolrooms, and drugstores around the Poverty Row studios at Sunset and Vine. The area's social club was known as the Strugglers' Club. The club had their own newspapers, dues, and even a baseball team. Most fascinating, they held an annual beauty pageant to crown "Miss Struggler".¹⁷¹ This forgotten history indicates a parallel and working-class Hollywood all but obliterated in typical histories. As Bette Davis recalled of the industry she plunged into in the late 1920s before becoming a superstar, "[t]he reality for most was a low working-class wage, social ostracism, and the constant threat of unemployment. The profession was rigidly stratified into an aristocracy of labor".¹⁷²

Some alternative fiction of the time did go beyond the fan magazine characterisations of Hollywood as romanticised "Heartbreak Town". Such novels instead offer a grittily dark picture of what life on the lower rungs of Los Angeles was like, even horrifying in their extremities. To wit, Horace McCoy's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1935) centres on the actual, dehumanised phenomenon of the marathon dance.¹⁷³ This was a brief, macabre pop culture fad that saw Hollywood's wealthy show up in to watch bedraggled, out-of-work victims of the Depression dance until they collapsed. Wearing

¹⁶⁷ Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* 201.

¹⁶⁸ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 107.

¹⁶⁹ The ineffable sociocultural status of the car, and the absolute, humiliating horror of public transportation as career suicide for people who work in Hollywood, was presented to me repeatedly even in my 2014 fieldwork and interviews.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* 45.

¹⁷² Davis, *The Lonely Life* xiii.

¹⁷³ Horace McCoy, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (London, Profile, 2011).

evening attire and furs, Hollywood's elite amused themselves by betting on their preferred couples like racehorses. Such a "fun" activity resembled the cruelty of something out of medieval times. As Budd Schulberg wrote in *Moving Pictures: Memoirs of a Hollywood Prince* (1981):

The marathon dance was in vogue then and we went a few times to the Santa Monica Pier to watch the young unemployed zombies drag themselves around the floor in a slow-motion *danse macabre* that earned them a handful of desperate dollars... Even more appalling than the victims on the dance floor were the regulars, affluent resident sadists in the same front-row seats every night, cheering on their favorites who kept fainting and occasionally throwing up from exhaustion.¹⁷⁴

McCoy's fictional version of life on the lower rungs of Los Angeles' entertainment industry, set in the particular milieu of the marathon dance, offers perhaps one of the most pessimistic plotlines and endings in modern American fiction. Both members of the story's central dance couple, Robert and Gloria, are failed extras, who had once been, respectively, an aspiring director and actress. At one point, to keep them in the competition Gloria agrees to exploitative sex with the corrupt contest runner out of desperation. After the pair dance for weeks, and Gloria's sexual sacrifice, they are nonetheless eventually eliminated unjustly, and left with nothing. In the mold of classed Hollywood sexual abuse as asserted in this chapter, Gloria by novel's end has acquiesced to a coerced version of the casting couch, yet wound up discarded and destitute anyway. With no prospects and no hope left after their elimination, Gloria begs Robert to kill her. He complies, and the novel ends with him arrested for murder.¹⁷⁵

In short, the lives of extras, stand-ins, and other working-class women in Depression era Hollywood could clearly be brutal, as far as possible from the mythos of the dream factory. While all of this paints a picture of an industrial and social milieu that was far, far from what it promised to virtually any of its new arrivals, it is clear that for women, for the working classes, for anyone lacking power based on gender, class, or race, it was always going to be that much worse. Here I will offer a final analysis, of what appears to me to be the most powerful case study of this entire project— that of Patricia Douglas and MGM in 1937. Douglas' story is highly instructive as to the treatment of women on the lower, powerless levels of studio Hollywood. It clearly speaks to the masculinist and criminal omnipotence of the studios in this era. Finally, in attempting to insert the Douglas case into academic film history, I again assert the importance of incorporation of such sociocultural narratives and trauma theory into scholarship.

In fact, there has only recently been the beginning of some feminist attention brought to Douglas and her case after its initial uncovering by writer and filmmaker David Stenn. The 2017 popular culture compilation *#MeToo: Essays About How and Why This Happened, What It Means and How to Make Sure it Never Happens Again* includes Racchel Leone Shewfelt's chapter

¹⁷⁴ Budd Schulberg, *Moving Pictures: Memories of a Hollywood Prince* (New York: Stein and Day, 1981) 131.

¹⁷⁵ McCoy, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*

“Remembering Patricia Douglas, The First Woman To Call Out Hollywood For Sexual Assault”.¹⁷⁶ To my knowledge, scholarly work, in feminist film history or any other discipline, that analyses the Douglas case or even brings it into the historical record has not yet been attempted. This demonstrates how the countless cases of abuse of women in Hollywood have operated in the cultural track of the everyday, but also been subject to erasure. The Douglas case is a prime example of one sorely in need of restorative historiographic justice.

This chapter has established that in the 1930s sexual harassment and abuse were par for the course for women in the system, but that none were considered as fair game as extras. Extending back to the 1920s and Chapter Two, when the moral panic had been that women extras and dancers arriving in Los Angeles were little more than sex workers in disguise, little had changed. Even language and slang provided jokey terminology that implied such women were willing participants, “easy” or “up for it”. Women extras were called “movie moths”, analogous to the later term “groupie” for their hanging about the light of the film world. Eventually “moths” came to mean women extras who provided sexual favours.¹⁷⁷ Similarly, a “Central Casting girl” was one who was euphemistically open for sex.¹⁷⁸ These jovial terms implied consent and acceptance of the system. There was no such accompanying language to euphemise widespread harassment and rape.

This was the era (as explored in the Busby Berkeley section of the last chapter) of dance as Fordism, with camerawork that highlighted hundreds of women’s bodies in perfect synchronicity.¹⁷⁹ The musical numbers of the day brought so many young girls into the system because it wanted their bodies *en masse*, as explained in Lucy Fischer’s work on modernism and dance in studio Hollywood.¹⁸⁰ Because of this, the studios had developed specific preferences for ideal chorus dancers: seasoned chorus girls from Broadway and otherwise back East were out. Besides being considered too cynical, at mid-twenties they were too old. Chorus dance extras were also required to be petite as leading men were frequently short; showgirls from back East were often tall and prized for long legs. Desirable Hollywood chorus girls thus were local talent from southern California, and around age sixteen. Nonetheless, these were considered roles for adult women. Betty Grable’s mother forced her to audition for chorus parts at just thirteen years old, by lying and saying she was fifteen.¹⁸¹ Patricia Douglas was yet another semi-anonymous teenage chorus line dancer in Hollywood musicals in the later 1930s.

¹⁷⁶ Rachel Leone Shewfelt, “Remembering Patricia Douglas, The First Woman To Call Out Hollywood For Sexual Assault”. In *#MeToo: Essays About How and Why This Happened, What It Means, and How to Make Sure It Never Happens Again*. Ed. Lori Perkins. (New York, Riverdale, 2017).

¹⁷⁷ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 11.

¹⁷⁸ Daniel Mallory Ortberg, “Code Words for ‘Sexually Active’ in Classic Films.” *The Toast*. August 26, 2015.

¹⁷⁹ Lucy Fischer, “City of Women: Busby Berkeley, Architecture, and Urban Space.” *Cinema Journal* 49.4 (2010): 111-30.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Stephen Rutledge, “Born This Day: Pinup Girl, Betty Grable.” *World of Wonder*. December 18, 2017.

Peggy Montgomery, had, as mentioned in previous chapters and sections, gone from mega child star of the silent days as Baby Peggy to just another teenage MGM dance extra.¹⁸² At sixteen, she was a contemporary of Douglas'. Montgomery recalled how much she had hated working in the film industry at that time, describing the set as a place of extreme vulnerability. As Montgomery experienced Hollywood of the time, studio lots were dangerous places—filled with teenage girls surrounded by grown men who spouted obscenities freely and were openly sexually aggressive with them, without regard to their ages. Montgomery described how she and her peers were, in this fraught environment, seen as sexual fair game— always being pursued and grabbed, or told to pull up their skirts.¹⁸³

At the time of the case at hand in 1937, Patricia Douglas was nineteen years old. Her work can still be seen today, as she appeared in the chorus in numbers of *Gold Diggers of 1933*— at fifteen years old.¹⁸⁴ In 1937, Douglas answered a studio casting call for dance work at the Hal Roach Studios in Culver City, then a remote location not proximate to the main MGM studios. The location was also not served by either phone service or public transportation. This is generally notable in light of the previous sociocultural discussion of the importance of the car in Los Angeles life, but even more so, a fact that becomes relevant in the narrative of the particular evening. Douglas, along with the 119 other dancers who had answered the casting call, thought they were coming to work on a standard movie shoot. The women had no reason to believe a casting call to the Roach Ranch would not be legitimate. But as David Stenn wrote of Douglas in his ground-shifting 2003 piece for *Vanity Fair*, “It Happened One Night... at MGM”:

Had she possessed a savvier nature, she might have noted a disturbing detail: though an orchestra and bar were being assembled, this “location set” lacked any sign of a crew, lights, or cameras.¹⁸⁵

Douglas later explained that (probably like many of her peers), she never would have gone to the casting call had she known it was not for legitimate film work.¹⁸⁶

In fact, the women had not been called to work on a film at all. They had been called as hostesses, dancers, and otherwise “entertainment” for a blowout “stag affair”, put on by Mayer and MGM to celebrate the company’s external sales representatives and distributors. The celebrants were the salesmen who drove the studio’s business in small towns and cities across the U.S. All were men, brought in in from around the country. Throughout the train ride west to Los Angeles, on MGM’s

¹⁸² As Chapter Three detailed, Montgomery was forced to return to work in Hollywood as a teenager to support her family, when all the millions she had made as a 1920s child star for them were wiped out in the Depression; Chris Gardner, “The Last Living Silent Star: Child Actress Baby Peggy Made the Equivalent of \$14 Million a Movie and Lost It All”. *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 4, 2016.

¹⁸³ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*; *Gold Diggers of 1933*. Dir. Mervyn LeRoy. Perf. Warren William, Joan Blondell, Aline MacMahon. 1933.

¹⁸⁵ David Stenn, “It Happened One Night... at MGM.” *Vanity Fair*. April 2003.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*.

private train, the crowd of salesmen was drunk and rowdy. They already knew they had been promised the chance to meet and spend time with “the girls”: the mythological Hollywood starlets. Archival footage captures the men arriving after their celebratory journey, pulling into the station and being greeted by Louis B. Mayer and the rest of his MGM executive entourage. Mayer referenced “his” police chief in his welcoming speech to the men (in addition to their own police department, MGM had its own schools and railroad), and of course, “his” “girls”.¹⁸⁷ A viewing of footage of the speech is today experienced with more than a little grotesque foreshadowing, in light of the party and what occurred:

Our fine Chief of Police Davis remarked to me a moment ago [that I] must think a lot of these men to have sent the beauty that he sees before him... These lovely girls- and you have the finest of them- greet you... And that’s to show you how we feel about you, and the kind of good time that’s ahead of you... *Anything you want.*¹⁸⁸ (italics mine)

The connection between masculinist capitalism and the symbolic and real violence that could be taken to its logical, pathological end is clear here. The men were being rewarded for being good lower-rung employees, with the congratulatory trip was sold to the men as a corporate thank you:

We want you to go back to your respective territories firmly convinced that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, under the leadership of Louis B. Mayer, is bending every effort to back up the men who provide the one connecting link with the exhibitor, and through him, the public.¹⁸⁹

Yet these well-performing employees were not being rewarded with bonuses or gifted with watches. They were instead being promised a few days of the Hollywood Dream before returning back to wives and families in Kansas City, Chicago, or Boston. In this, the milieu was simply a lower-caste version of the same dynamic Joan Fontaine described between starlets and executives: forced company for unfaithful husbands, performing women expected to provide “companionship” to visiting married men, being brought to remote locations difficult to leave.¹⁹⁰ Where the top contract starlets might be expected to provide such companionship if the men were millionaire business magnates or press agents, this party was the working and middle-class version of the same. In this case, it meant that these travelling salesmen were owed, promised, and being given Hollywood women and girls, at the level of extras, dancers, and bit players, full stop.

Thus a situation was created where more than a hundred young women, many if not most underage, were brought under the auspices of legitimate performance work to a remote location as unwitting party companions. The festivities schedule read “Yippee! Get Set for Wild West Show at Roach’s- It will be a stag affair, out in the wild and woolly West where ‘men are men’”.¹⁹¹ The

¹⁸⁷ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ David Stenn, “It Happened One Night... at MGM.” *Vanity Fair*. April 2003.

¹⁹⁰ Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses*.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

unsuspecting young women arrived for their casting call. In the dinner hour, Mayer, Mannix, the rest of his entourage of executives and hangers-on, and some male MGM stars also obligated to attend began hosting the three hundred conventioners at the Ranch. The “party” soon devolved into chaos. As Stenn wrote:

Delegates mistook the professional dancers for party favors and treated them accordingly; without telephones or transportation, the young women had no means of escape. Tricked into attendance, then trapped into service, they were left to fend for themselves.¹⁹²

Several of the waiters later testified in court. Henry Schulte offered:

The party was the worst, the wildest, and the rottenest I have ever seen. The men’s attitude was very rough. They were running their hands over the girls’ bodies, and tried to force liquor on the girls.¹⁹³

Another waiter, Oscar Buddin, testified that all of the men were drunk, and that he saw “girls get up and move from the tables because the men were attempting to molest them”.¹⁹⁴ Some of the women even began to beg the male stars in attendance for help getting out. The atmosphere became increasingly violent.

One of the salesmen, a man from Chicago called David Ross, was described as among the most aggressive in pouring alcohol into resisting women’s mouths. Ross had latched onto Patricia Douglas for the evening, first asking her to teach him a dance but then trying to force her to drink. Douglas was a non-drinker and became sick; when she ran outside, ill, Ross trapped her in the backseat of a car, began to beat her, and raped her. Eventually, a parking attendant saw a man run off as he heard Douglas screaming that she had been attacked. With her face swollen, she was taken away in an ambulance, in a highly disturbed state, hospitalised, and ill for several days.¹⁹⁵

In the following period, Douglas showed courage to a level that was nothing short of remarkable, considering not just her age but that Los Angeles was a city that lived in absolute fear of the studios and their total power. No one stood up to them when they owned the police, the local government, and the district attorney, not to mention could ruin one’s career for life for stepping out of line in any fashion. For a woman, in fact a lone underage dance extra, to speak the truth and go to war with them was unheard of. Douglas swore out a complaint against Ross, who had skipped town back to Chicago, for rape. The case was empaneled in front of the grand jury to determine if Ross would be indicted. He was brought back from Chicago. As Stenn wrote:

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ David Stenn, “It Happened One Night... at MGM.” *Vanity Fair*. April 2003; *Girl* 27. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

the Douglas complaint was unique and historic. No woman had ever dared to link a sexual assault to a Hollywood film studio, especially the almighty MGM. Even if a victim were to win her case in court, the stigma would wreck her name and her career.¹⁹⁶

The case quickly situated upon the same model of coverup and criminality by which the studios routinely operated. The district attorney charged with bringing Douglas' case to justice, Buron Fitts, was notoriously corrupt, in fact taking campaign donations from MGM even as the case was underway. The local newspapers published Douglas' name and home address, but yet made the choice to refer to the complaint as being against "a local studio".¹⁹⁷ MGM was obsessive about its wholesome, clean, and "high class" image. They released a statement feigning confusion, "astonishment", and total innocence of any knowledge of the victim's complaint.¹⁹⁸

In reality, behind the scenes they were panicked. In his seminal pre-MeToo documentary *Girl 27* (2007), David Stenn also incorporates the film's meta-history—how he was able to obtain the relevant materials from the MGM archives where they had been buried for decades. Stenn uncovered smoking gun footage of the partygoers arriving, Mayer's *carte blanche* speech to them, and the convention's program. He also found the cache of MGM executives' fearful internal memos shared around the studio as the case was ongoing— with what strategies the matter should be handled, who needed to be enlisted in the coverup and how. A private letter from William Randolph Hearst to Mayer on the Douglas case was found in archives of Mayer's papers. With both men conservative, right-wing Republicans, Hearst lamented to Mayer that the whole affair was very damaging, to the movie business but also to the "fraternity". "I am going to do everything I can now to help this situation, of course," promised Hearst. "But the public will be sympathetic with a poor little extra girl".¹⁹⁹ The situation called for drastic measures. In their minds, according to Stenn, "[n]ow a nobody had MGM at her mercy".²⁰⁰ Stenn situated what came next in terms of studio strategy as an unprecedentedly thorough victim-blaming campaign.

The first step, besides publicising all of Douglas' personal information in the newspapers, was to have her followed by Pinkerton detectives. They surveilled her house continuously. The next step was to intimidate anyone and everyone who might testify into changing their stories— and they did. Some out of coercion, many out of fear, and a few out of bribery, with the latter rewarded with money or studio jobs. In this highly patriarchal and misogynistic period, just as in the Arbuckle case the decade before, everyone "knew" the axiom: "tramps" couldn't be raped. Therefore, Douglas simply needed to be proven a tramp, a promiscuous drunk. In reality, she was a teenager, a virgin, and didn't drink, so this required a great deal of lying, finessing, bullying, and bribing. In the end, MGM's efforts

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

¹⁹⁸ David Stenn, "It Happened One Night... at MGM." *Vanity Fair*. April 2003.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

to subvert justice worked well. Consider the testimony of her peers, young actresses, dancers, and extras:

In studio-sponsored interviews, 19-year-old Virginia Lee assured reporters that the alleged orgy was actually “a jolly affair, with lots of good clean fun.” Grace Downs, a bottle blonde from Pittsburgh, portrayed Douglas as an “unrefined” lush who had swigged scotch “from a quart bottle” all night. Sugar Geise, a 27-year-old chorine whose stage mother socialized with Buron Fitts, described a prior sighting of Douglas “passed out” in the Knickerbocker Hotel bar.²⁰¹

“Evidence” continued to be brought forth, suggesting Douglas was soliciting at the party as a sex worker, but that men kept turning her down. Doctors were asked to suggest she had had venereal disease.²⁰²

The fix and coverup continued in the leadup to the trial, and at the trial even in the public courtroom itself. As soon as the defendant Ross arrived in Los Angeles, he was brought into conference with Mayer’s personal lawyer. Only two of the other young women at the party, out of 120, agreed to testify for Douglas. Even some of the male stars like Wallace Beery, who had initially spoken in affidavit of the dangerous environment with which the women had been faced at the event, had by then recanted their testimony. As Stenn put it, “held in the Los Angeles Hall of Justice on June 16, 1937, the grand-jury hearing traumatized Douglas all over again”.²⁰³

Two aspects of what went on there made Stenn’s statement about retraumatization egregiously true. Speaking to the jury, one of the members of the MGM team of lawyers pointed at Douglas and said witheringly to the jurors, “Look at her. Who would want *her*?”²⁰⁴ Apparently he was implying Douglas was not pretty enough to be a “Hollywood girl”, or for that matter, to be raped. The misogyny and cruelty in open court were unfathomable. They speak to the understanding posed by Powdermaker of Hollywood as system built on dehumanization as highly apt,²⁰⁵ and also to that system as having spilled over into other Los Angeles cultural arenas like the legal system.

The second horrifying sequence of events at the trial was that at one point on a recess, Douglas was maneuvered by the press to be standing directly next to her rapist. She screamed and threatened to jump out the window while Ross stood calmly smoking a cigarette, all while reporters with flashbulbs were shouting for her to look at him so they could get a picture of the two together. In Kate Manne’s definition of sexism and misogyny from the philosophical perspective, sexism is the “justificatory branch”²⁰⁶, while misogyny is the “social environment [that is] the law enforcement branch of a patriarchal order, which has the overall function of *policing* and *enforcing* its governing

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

²⁰⁵ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*.

²⁰⁶ Manne, *Down Girl* 79.

ideology”.²⁰⁷ Thus this whole courtroom and grand jury experience can be read as a massive exercise in misogyny in order to defend and maintain the studio Hollywood order. As in the case of Arbuckle/Rappe sixteen years prior, the justificatory aspects— that “tramps” can’t be raped, that “unattractive” women can’t be raped, that young women have no power against the almighty system— demonstrated the sexism that fuelled the misogynistic labour and sociocultural milieu and allowed it to thrive.

Manne continues in *Down Girl* to these points, supplementing with the work of philosopher José Medina and noting that:

Medina (2011) brings the role of hierarchy into clearer view... in arguing that the surplus credibility enjoyed by dominant group members results in testimonial injustice for subordinate group members.²⁰⁸

Hierarchical injustice can be found in the manner in which Ross was whisked immediately into Mayer’s inner circle upon arriving in Los Angeles. Douglas was in her hometown, while Ross had been only a carousing tourist. This didn’t matter. Ross was a white man and MGM employee, and Douglas was a threat; therefore naturally, the wagons needed to be circled around him. Hierarchical injustice also helps to explain why the grand jury declined to indict Ross, and why he was able to leave back on a plane to Chicago, off scot-free. As Tracy Davis has written in her historical work on performing women, rape laws in the western world have historically been designed to protect the property of upper-class men, namely their wives and daughters: “[w]hat happens to working-class women has usually been of little concern to the courts”.²⁰⁹ Medina’s testimonial injustice, too, helps to explain why Ross was able to stand calmly and unworried as the woman he had raped grew completely overwrought in his presence. The likelihood of Ross facing justice or even any repercussions at all, with the full weight of the studios behind him in the Los Angeles court system and against the word of a 19-year old extra girl, was very low.

Amazingly, however, Douglas did not give up. Even more remarkable was the course of action she chose— one that is still bold and thought-provoking now, let alone in 1937. Just twenty-four hours after the initial case was dismissed, Douglas refiled her case in U.S. District Court, enlisting a famed celebrity attorney. It was the first filing of its kind in American history, in which a woman plaintiff filed a federal case about rape *as a violation of her civil rights*. Going further, Douglas based her case on the fact that her rape was precipitated by being brought to a mock job by trickery and then entrapment— that the women had been coerced to the remote location under false labour pretenses, and were thus nearly defenseless against attack in the situation as a result. In the MeToo era, Douglas’ courage and

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 63.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. 190.

²⁰⁹ Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991) 172.

ingenuity can serve as a model for thinking about sexual assault in terms of the individual's rights, worker's rights, civil rights, and personhood even to the present day.²¹⁰

Douglas was so principled, in fact, that she may not have realised how dangerous the path she was undertaking could be to her very life. She had filed the second suit personally against not only Ross the sexual assailant, but *also* against Mayer, Eddie Mannix, Hal Roach, several other MGM executives, and “John Doe One to Fifty” (the partygoers). The claim accused the men of “unlawful conspiracy to defile, debauch, and seduce” Douglas and other dancers “for the immoral and sensual gratification of male guests”.²¹¹ As Stenn has pointed out in both his articles uncovering the case and in *Girl 27*, now Mayer and Mannix were in personal and professional jeopardy. Douglas needed to be stopped at all costs. Further, insurance would not cover any costs should they be awarded to Douglas; rather, they would come directly out of MGM's profits.²¹² This was another absolutely unacceptable prospect. Considering what has been established in all previous chapters about the Hollywood power class' connection to pimping, trafficking, and gangsterism, I would argue that in retrospect Douglas was lucky she was not killed; and that probably the simple reason alone was because the case was already so high-profile.

Thus with the second trial, the studio's efforts to not only surveil and smear Douglas, but to continue to coerce and bribe anyone else involved in the story, kicked into even higher gear. Stenn found evidence within the MGM archives of the collusion, as it was all there in the open in the form of internal memos— one executive ordering another to give work to one of the witnesses as a matter of utmost urgency, for example.²¹³ The studio also threw all their weight and power in the city into leaning on lawyers and judges, using their legal team's acumen to stall and derail the case. It worked. The case moved glacially until it sputtered out. It was ultimately dismissed, but the details of how and why were opaque and lost to history. MGM had won, and so had the criminal, abusing men at the top and bottom levels of its corporate structure. The case was forgotten, and so was Douglas: an ending that has transpired many times before and since, in instances in which women have attempted to stand up to an all-powerful corporate structure. It was committed to archives, dropped from popular memory, and its major players lost to history.

In his work, Stenn made a compelling choice to write the meta-history of his research on this forgotten case. He recalled being in the MGM archives and finding decades-old evidence for the first time, materials that no one had cared enough to destroy: “I stared slack-jawed at the on-camera,

²¹⁰ In this, Douglas preceded the 1970s feminist arguments of legal scholar Catherine MacKinnon, who argued court cases across the U.S. and wrote numerous opinions that postulated misogynist pornography as a violation of the civil rights of women—both its performers and the women harmed by it within the community (Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, Harvard, 1987); Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Only Words* (Cambridge, Harvard, 1993).

²¹¹ David Stenn, “It Happened One Night... at MGM.” *Vanity Fair*. April 2003.

²¹² *Ibid*; *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

²¹³ *Ibid*.

incontrovertible proof— Mayer pimping starlets, conventioners consorting with Harlow and Gable, a brazen plug for the Wild West party”.²¹⁴ In addition to the uncovering of such powerful primary source evidence, Stenn’s project is incontestable as part of the prehistory of MeToo. As a male film historian, journalist, and biographer working in the early 2000s, Stenn nonetheless managed to prefigure the themes of the movement more than a decade before the Cosby and then Weinstein tipping points. Both the articles and documentary presciently contend with not only gendered studio power dynamics, but also what was at stake in truth telling and historical justice for women in Hollywood history.

It is worthy and unsurprising that since 2017, Stenn has revisited the Douglas case and his findings for articles for *Vanity Fair* and *The New York Times*, now updated for the present cultural moment. In these rehabilitated pieces, Stenn rightfully situated Douglas as a “#MeToo Pioneer” far ahead of her time, who had been crushed by the system.²¹⁵ In his early 2018 *New York Times* piece written not long after the Weinstein case broke, Stenn’s tagline read: “In 1930s Hollywood, Patricia Douglas tried to stand up to her rapist, and was destroyed. If only she’d lived to see her legacy”.²¹⁶ After explaining how Douglas had been “hounded into exile by Hollywood’s most omnipotent men”, Stenn went on to make the point that she undertook her entire endeavour with no support, no help from friends or family, and certainly no collective outrage, no movement, no social media organising, and no hashtags. It’s an obvious point but an astute one.

Stenn’s uncovering of such obscured and forgotten Hollywood history, via the triumph of male power and criminality, indubitably connects with those themes of this project as presented in earlier chapters:

Before Eddie Mannix died in 1963... he was asked what ever became of “that girlie” who took on MGM. “We had her killed,” Mannix allegedly retorted. Though in hindsight his meaning was metaphorical, the insinuation remains chillingly clear: post–Patricia Douglas, no rape case on record would implicate MGM. And so successfully did the studio expunge its Wild West party from history that, though it was national news at the time, not a single published source since that I could find—on MGM, Mayer, Mannix, Hal Roach, or Hollywood—mentions the once notorious event.²¹⁷

In fact, such social-industrial realities of power and disappearance had everything to do with the quasi-feudal, all-powerful system the studio founders and male power class had set up for themselves in Hollywood, delineated over the previous four chapters. Film historian Kevin Brownlow confirmed this in the multipart documentary series *Hollywood* (1980), when he explained, “[a] studio in effect is a small principality. With the vice president of production being the prince”.²¹⁸ “Sovereigns” in

²¹⁴ David Stenn, “It Happened One Night... at MGM.” *Vanity Fair*. April 2003.

²¹⁵ David Stenn, “The Systematic Crushing of a #metoo Pioneer.” *New York Times*. January 5, 2018.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Hollywood*. “Single Beds and Double Standards- Episode 3.” Dir. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. 1980. *BBC*. London.

such systems have power by virtue of the fact that they are exceptions to the rule: there is the law, and then there is their unique ability to suspend the law or apply it to their own purposes.²¹⁹

The ability to so utterly and completely control the industry, city, and their people meant that these studio executives could control not only the present but also the past. This is partly why I so strongly contend that MeToo must not only be a contemporary movement, but part of a broader feminist historiographic ethos. And also, why MeToo is by necessity so tied up with histories of unknowns or unsuccessful former actresses, those whom I have grouped throughout this project as the “failures”, “has-beens”, or “nobodies”.

In her post-MeToo 2018 reckoning piece, “Can Hollywood Change Its Ways?”, Dana Goodyear wrote of women who had come forward in a trickle over the decades beyond the 1930s:

...despite them, the silence found places to hide. Women who spoke out were deemed ‘crazy’, unreliable witnesses and reckless self-saboteurs, or they were “difficult”, not likely to get the next job.²²⁰

We should also here recall Joan Fontaine’s observation as to the multitude of sins covered—for men— by the simple employment of the word “difficult” against any woman deemed a “troublemaker”.²²¹ In her piece, Goodyear also envisioned the mythological Cassandra as a kind of patroness of the MeToo movement:

Cassandra, the classical figure of the discredited woman, is also a victim of sexual assault and retribution: when she rejects Apollo, he spits in her mouth and curses her to proclaim truths that no one believes.²²²

Jack Warner once remarked that part of a studio executive’s job was clashing with talented people, but “[y]ou never hear a peep from the duds”.²²³ Where a Mannix, a Cohn, or a Zanuck would be malevolent, Warner here presents as perhaps more naïve or dim: what made someone a “dud”? And why did one “never hear from them”? The answer was far more obvious than Warner’s oblivious musing. The studio system was masterful at creating non-persons, at disappearing people-- as Powdermaker proved with empirical social science, as countless anecdotes herein corroborate. As Judith Butler has written in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004):

sometimes these normative schemes work precisely through providing no image, no name, no narrative, so that there never was a life, and there never was a death... power... work[s] in part through regulating what can appear, what can be heard.²²⁴

²¹⁹ Ibid. 62.

²²⁰ Dana Goodyear, “Can Hollywood Change Its Ways?” *The New Yorker*. January 1, 2018.

²²¹ Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses* 87.

²²² Dana Goodyear, “Can Hollywood Change Its Ways?” *The New Yorker*. January 1, 2018.

²²³ Whitney Stine with Bette Davis. *Mother Goddam: The Story of the Career of Bette Davis*. (New York, Allen, 1975) 170.

²²⁴ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London, Verso, 2004) 146-147.

Within the research and as he got closer to the Douglas story (and Douglas herself), Stenn was able to meet descendants of involved figures, who had painful, poignant, and candid things to share with him. For example, he uncovered another utterly buried case of a failed lawsuit against the studios by a woman, MGM contract player and singer Eloise Spann. Spann had been raped by an executive and become pregnant, had an abortion, and come forward, filing a five million-dollar lawsuit. When Spann saw what happened to Douglas, however, she withdrew her suit and went to live privately— and tragically, miserably. Stenn found Spann’s adult son, Jack Terry, who had never known this case as part of his mother’s life story at all. He only knew her as a woman always plagued by mental illness, as someone who would never sing, and one who eventually died by suicide, hanging herself in 1960 at the age of 43.²²⁵ Once given the facts of his own family story, Terry shared in his interview for *Girl 27* that he hoped the men at the top at MGM have paid the price for their crimes after death— “they’ve ruined, harmed, killed too many people”.²²⁶

Additionally, the film presents powerful moments with the daughters of the late Clement Soth, the parking attendant who had come across the screaming Douglas and seen Ross run away. Soth’s daughters told Stenn the truth in their on-camera interview— that their father had agreed to perjure himself for the promise of a lifetime job, pretending he did not in fact recognise Ross when in fact he knew he was the assailant. Soth was given a job as a driver on the MGM lot and kept it the rest of his life. His daughters demonstrated some moral equivocation about their father’s actions, but their final conclusion was powerful. In *Girl 27*, they explained that to their minds, their father had been justified, and done what many men with families to feed might have done in the Depression. His testimony wouldn’t have changed anything, they felt; he would have ruined his life trying and failing to help “to get those studio men”.²²⁷ Yet Soth’s daughters wanted to speak up honestly in this century, explaining that it was because “this happens to so many women. If we can tell the truth for this one woman, we are doing something important”.²²⁸ Thus Stenn’s work included some elements of genuine generational reckoning around Hollywood’s sexual assault culture that could never have been predicted.

Most importantly and compellingly as documentary film, the central detective story of the project— what had happened to Douglas? Where had she gone? When had she died?— took a shocking turn. Stenn explained that in his understanding, “women like this came to tragic ends. It never occurred to me she might be alive waiting to be spoken to”.²²⁹ In fact, she was alive: 86 years old and living in a tiny, run-down apartment in Las Vegas. The contact between Stenn and Douglas, one that eventually grew into a close and loving friendship complete with conflict and tension,

²²⁵ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

becomes a central point of the documentary's second half. The viewer can recognise that with *Girl 27*, Stenn was committed to doing part of what today we might classify as corrective MeToo historiography, but then, was a type of investigative film historical research towards gendered justice that did not even have a name. Stenn's commitment to speaking with a woman who lived the abuse of the system, and getting her story before it was lost forever, was already one I shared before I ever heard of this documentary; it was the reason I sought out as many elderly women as interview subjects as possible while doing my own 2014 Los Angeles fieldwork.²³⁰

The reaction a viewer has to watching Stenn's *Girl 27*, realising in real time that Douglas is still alive, and then suddenly being presented with her in the flesh as interview subject, is a jarring one. It demonstrates compelling documentary technique. But also, as the viewer becomes privy to Douglas' recollections and understandings of the past and present, there are concurrent realisations. It becomes evident that Douglas' story, told through interview, matches up particularly well with the assertions and lexicon of contemporary trauma theory. It thus provides a compelling model for feminist historical work that meets at the nexus of anecdote and scholarship, while bringing together many of the themes of this project in one life story.

As interview subject, the elderly Douglas presents in the film as blunt, honest, witty, feisty, and guarded, at various turns. She explained how Ross' assault affected the rest of her life, that she had been a virgin, that after the rape she was never able to physically enjoy sex, trust a man, or fall in love. "That was taken from me," she explained.²³¹ Douglas never dated again after several brief failed marriages by age 35, and basically became a recluse, avoiding relationships with any people at all. She exhibited classic signs of not only depression but numerous clinical markers of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, both in the details of her life's trajectory and in its recountings throughout the filmic interviews.²³² Douglas spent the many more decades of her life as an absent and depressed mother, staying up all night watching television and eating junk food, while her own mother raised her children. Combining depression and PTSD with low self-esteem, Douglas peppered her interviews with Stenn with self-deprecating and even self-hating comments. As Stenn put it, "[a]ll her recollections of herself are laced with self-laceration: she says she was 'naïve', 'stupid', 'a lousy mother', 'a walking zombie who glided through life'".²³³ Douglas also could never watch movies with rape scenes; she could not

²³⁰ Jennifer Warren, Interview with Kerry McElroy. Tape recording. Pacific Palisades, California, July 31, 2014; Ellen Wright. Interview by Kerry McElroy. Tape recording. Los Angeles, California. July 31, 2014. Anonymous, Interview by Kerry McElroy. Notes. Los Angeles, California. August 17, 2014; Judy Chaikin, Interview by Kerry McElroy. Telephone. August 18, 2014. Barbara Bain, Interview by Kerry McElroy. Telephone. September 9, 2014.

²³¹ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

²³² Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1995) 5; Laura S Brown, "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma", in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1995); Cathy Caruth, "Introduction." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1995); Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago, 2000).

²³³ David Stenn, "It Happened One Night... at MGM." *Vanity Fair*. April 2003.

even use the word “rape” when describing what Ross had done to her, instead only finding herself able to use the word “attacked”.²³⁴ She also recalled the nightmares she had of Ross’ face that had continued for many years of her life.

If the rape permanently damaged Douglas’ ability to live a normal life or form relationships, as she herself understood with great self-awareness, the public decimation she received from MGM was equally or more damaging: “It ruined my life. It absolutely ruined my life,’ says Douglas”.²³⁵ In interview so many decades later, Douglas specifically referenced the moments where she was confronted with Ross in the courtroom and tried to jump out the window, and the scornful and dehumanising remarks from the defense attorney that had implied she was too unattractive to rape: “I often wondered if that man knew what he had done to another human being”.²³⁶ Scholarly analysis of human cruelty on this scale is apropos to Douglas’ case. As Judith Butler has written in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), “[t]he derealization of loss- the insensitivity to human suffering... becomes the mechanism through which dehumanization is accomplished”.²³⁷

The documentary’s plot continues with more twists, as Douglas herself had never been privy to the story of how her case had died, who had made it happen, or under what circumstances. In this portion of the film, Stenn conducts the archival research, interviews subjects like the late district attorney’s son, comes up with a clearer picture of what happened, and brings his findings back to the elderly victim and survivor about her own case. Ultimately, what Stenn learned was that MGM had not only gotten to the corrupt district attorney. They had even gotten to Douglas’ lawyer and her own mother. Everyone was paid off, from family to press to doctors to lawyers, and everyone betrayed her.²³⁸ As Budd Schulberg explained, “The power MGM had is unimaginable today. They owned everyone- the D.A., the L.A.P.D. They *ran* this place.”²³⁹ Douglas’ case subsequently sat in federal court for three years, while her own lawyer never showed up. Ross was never subpoenaed at all, living out the rest of his life in the Midwest and dying of natural causes there.

Douglas’ interviews are sometimes warm, but are more often wary as she is interviewed throughout the documentary. In her lifelong dissociative habit, as when she explained never being in love or trusting anyone, she presents as someone numb for so many years that they able to muster little feeling for anything at all. In terms of their shared history-correcting endeavour, at one point in the film Douglas tells Stenn, “I’m not impressed by what we are doing here”.²⁴⁰ Certainly aside from individual trauma, after the way she was treated in the system and the lessons she learned about power and class in Hollywood, Los Angeles, and the U.S., Douglas wasn’t exactly wrong to be cynical

²³⁴ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ Butler, *Precarious Life* 148.

²³⁸ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

²³⁹ David Stenn, “It Happened One Night... at MGM.” *Vanity Fair*. April 2003.

²⁴⁰ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

about the effect of sharing her story. As she told Stenn, “I thought I would die with this. Who would care?”²⁴¹

The film exhibits many meta-moments in which Douglas is overcome with discomfort, hanging up the phone on Stenn or suddenly asking him to leave. “I don’t want to talk anymore” is a common and abrupt phrase from her throughout the footage, followed by the click of the phone.²⁴² This sounds in some ways like a textbook example of what Kristie Dotson has termed “testimonial smothering” on the part of victims and survivors of abuse, assault, or crimes. As Kate Manne explains, “Dotson’s (2011) term... denotes a kind of self-silencing on the part of the speaker. This is due to it being unsafe or risky to make certain claims, likely futile anyway”.²⁴³ Manne has also theorised victimhood as a kind of performance; “claiming victimhood effectively involves placing oneself at the *center of the story*”.²⁴⁴ Based on the way Douglas had lived her life for five decades, it is unsurprising that this self-centring, of appearing as an interview subject and rape survivor, made her incredibly uncomfortable. Her ambivalence—the extreme discomfort of speaking combined with a need to tell the truth—is a common dilemma for survivors of traumatic abuse.²⁴⁵ It is apparent in Douglas’ speech, demeanour, and choices throughout Stenn’s documentary.

In fact, the viewer can see Douglas, even decades later at 86, still struggling with the sheer horror of what was inflicted on her, still uncomprehending of it. As she says in the film, “[w]hen he was attacking- I can’t use the other word- he said he wanted to *destroy* me. I didn’t know why anyone would want to destroy me”.²⁴⁶ In reaching these moments of extreme discomfort, feeling panicked and wanting to hang up the phone or stop talking, Douglas exhibits a common survivor’s response as explained by Cathy Caruth: “the trauma thus seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence”.²⁴⁷ Caruth has delineated that “traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences”.²⁴⁸ Continuing, she asks:

How can one bring the traumatic experience to an end, when one feels completely unable and unwilling to resign oneself to the fact that one has been subjected to this horrendous event or series of events? How can one resign oneself to the unacceptable?²⁴⁹

And yet, just when Douglas would present as too depressed or defeated to involve herself any further with the project—unwilling to continue revisiting what had happened to her so long before, telling Stenn to leave her alone—her courage and spirit would return, and she would share further,

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Manne, *Down Girl* 3.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. 225.

²⁴⁵ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*.

²⁴⁶ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

²⁴⁷ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 153.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. 174.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. 178.

remarkable perspectives in the interviews. These are stunning moments in the documentary, not just from an 86-year old woman, but from one who had suffered such a complete injustice at the hands of powerful men as to make her turn away from the world for decades. “What was it I accomplished?.. What’s so special about my story?”, Douglas asked Stenn.²⁵⁰ Such queries seem to be examples of Miranda Fricker’s concept of the hermeneutical injustice: “when people lack the conceptual resources to understand and articulate their social experiences”.²⁵¹ When Stenn explained that thanks to Douglas, he had even obtained corroboration from people who had lied for the studios against her back in the 1930s, or apologies from the family members of those who had taken part in the cover up, she began to understand. “Pretty gutsy, wasn’t I?... You knew you’d be blackballed. Me, I didn’t care. I just wanted to be vindicated, to hear someone say, ‘You can’t do that to a woman’”.²⁵² Continuing in the film as on-camera interview subject, Douglas explained: “I never sued about money,’ she stresses. ‘That’s not me. And it wasn’t for glory; it was just to make them *stop having those parties*’”.²⁵³

Yet despite Douglas’ stated imperative towards justice—the end of rape-enabling studio parties— It is common knowledge that what happened to Douglas did continue anyway for many more decades, both in the sexual free-for-all culture and in the standard machinery of silencing for any woman who came forward. This was a fact of which she was surely aware, and which had certainly contributed to her initial cynicism towards Stenn’s project. Nonetheless, by the end of the film (and her life, as she died shortly after Stenn connected with her and she appeared in *Girl 27*), Douglas had developed a very different understanding of her legacy than she had had before being rediscovered. It demonstrated a change in her, with both happiness that she had spoken and pride that the historical record would be permanently altered towards justice:

When I die, the truth dies with me, and that means those bastards win... Before you found me... I was getting ready to die. I’d buy less food; I wasn’t planning to be around long. Now I don’t want to go. Now I have something to live for. And for the first time I’m proud of myself.²⁵⁴

In this incredibly powerful thought process at the end of her life, Douglas echoed precisely the same courage she had shown as a teenager. She may not have realised it, but she was also evoking the climactic ending of the powerful poem “A Litany for Survival”, by Audre Lorde (1978):

and when we speak we are afraid/
our words will not be heard/
nor welcomed/
but when we are silent/
we are still afraid

²⁵⁰ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

²⁵¹ Manne, *Down Girl* 44.

²⁵² David Stenn, “It Happened One Night... at MGM.” *Vanity Fair*. April 2003.

²⁵³ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

²⁵⁴ David Stenn, “It Happened One Night... at MGM.” *Vanity Fair*. April 2003.

so it is better to speak/
remembering/
we were never meant to survive²⁵⁵

In terms of women in Hollywood history as the overall thrust of this thesis, and Douglas' specific case, Manne's words to this point are definitely apropos here: "coming forward can be an expression of agency and an act of subversion, insofar as it wrestles the moral narrative away from the dominant and default versions".²⁵⁶

In fact, Douglas was both correct to be heartened by change and proud of herself, and cynical that history would be corrected to accurately reflect the abuse that she and so many others experienced. In 2003 when Douglas died, long before MeToo, Stenn argued with *The New York Times* as to why she did, or did not, merit an obituary. The response was that no legal precedent was changed in terms of her biography: she was simply a "wronged woman".²⁵⁷ Once again, Butler's work on bodies and lives that matter and are grievable is relevant here, in terms of her theorisation on the cultural and historical power of the obituary:

I think we have to ask, again and again, how the obituary functions as the Instrument by which grievability is publicly distributed. It is the means by which a life becomes, or fails to become, a publicly grievable life, an icon for national self-recognition, the means by which a life becomes noteworthy... if a life is not grievable, it is not quite a life; it does not qualify as a life and it not worth a note.²⁵⁸

Butler has also contended here that "[i]t is not just that a death is poorly marked, but that it is unmarkable. Such a death vanishes, not into explicit discourse, but in the ellipses by which public discourse proceeds".²⁵⁹ In light of the social changes wrought by MeToo, the tack the *New York Times* took in the early 2000s as to who deserves to be memorialised as a historical figure or not now seems quite misogynistic. A woman who is a victim of systemic sexual assault is not "merely" a "wronged woman", but both a valuable human life and a sociocultural marker of the abuses of that system.

Douglas' treatment in Hollywood, then in her long post-Hollywood life, and even in death via the denial of the obituary, are all incredibly evidentiary as to my point of value or disvalue of lives of women in the system (and in patriarchy). Her life, and Stenn's revolutionary project, are both proof positive of the need for a radical praxis of reclamative history when it comes to the history of Hollywood. Jane Gaines has discussed a particular dilemma in working in these histories: "the historian wonders how to speak 'for' those almost beyond abjection- those who no longer exist".²⁶⁰ In this question, she parallels Kate Manne's position from the perspective of feminist philosophy: we may

²⁵⁵ bell hooks, *Talking Black: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, South End, 1989) 17.

²⁵⁶ Manne, *Down Girl* 223.

²⁵⁷ "The Systematic Crushing of a #metoo Pioneer." *New York Times*. January 5, 2018.

²⁵⁸ Butler, *Precarious Life* 34.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 35.

²⁶⁰ Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (Champaign, Illinois, 2018) 118.

not know how to speak for women who have been wronged through the enacting of historical justice, but nonetheless we must attempt it anyway. As Manne has written, in instances when “[j]ustice was not done... you may be called upon to play this role for the sake of women no longer able to tell their stories, or testify in their own defense”.²⁶¹ In this interpretation, to not do so, to not correct the record is both the enabling of misogyny and the refusal to reckon with the abuse the woman experienced while living. Without this “assist” of moral justice from writers and thinkers of the present, this giving voice to a dead woman, “she will be finished, silenced, forever silent”.²⁶²

David Stenn seemed to grasp, a decade-plus before MeToo, that the most solid way out of this dilemma would be to try to get the women’s own voices and words down to posterity before they are lost. Once they are gone, historians’ only option will be to try to decipher experience and affect; thus, allowing these women to speak for themselves in interview before death should be a scholarly ideal. Reevaluating the previous words in memoir and interview of those who are gone is the second-best option, one that also amounts to a form of long-overdue historiographic justice.

Douglas’ case is notable for many reasons: the sheer volume of evidence and yet the concurrent complete success of the institutional coverup, the fact that the woman involved was found and given the chance to speak for herself before her death, and the development of a MeToo historiographic approach before such a position had a name at all. The rediscovering of Douglas’ case can now be read as an important precursor to current, ubiquitous cases and approaches in this vein. As Ezra Goodman, Hollywood writer and journalist who worked from an ultimate insider’s position as publicity journalist turned film historian, once remarked:

It may well be that Hollywood is ultimately not susceptible to authenticated, final documentation, that everything is elusive, apocryphal and in the domain of the gossip columns. If that is so, then it may also well be that some anecdotal incident, some minor, off-the-cuff nipup, caught on the fly and set to paper, can be more indicative of moviedom and its works than the most ambitious, three-ply research project.²⁶³

The case itself, from 1937 to the present, also raises many key questions that connect with the themes of this project. How many women in Hollywood went unremembered to history? More pressingly, how many were classified as “nobodies” not because they lacked talent or drive, but because they were fired, threatened, and silenced due to sexual crimes? How many such women were pushed out, while the men who committed the crimes against them not only thrived in consequence-free lives and careers, but to this day have had buildings and awards and scholarships named after them? As Butler has remarked simply, “[s]ome lives are grievable, and others are not”.²⁶⁴ Systems decide which are which. In the case of Hollywood, the latter included nobodies, has-beens,

²⁶¹ Manne, *Down Girl* 305.

²⁶² *Ibid.* 307.

²⁶³ Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* 375.

²⁶⁴ Butler, *Precarious Life*, xiv.

failures, and, most often, women, the working-class, and people of colour— those who made up the second and lower classes in the Hollywood system. Butler has made the connection between non-entity status in a system and the acceptability of abuse, noting that such people are perennially “subjected to violence, exposed to its possibility”.²⁶⁵

I would note in closing that after many years, I began to conclude this project in the summer of 2020, when a top story in the news was that of the arrest of Ghislaine Maxwell. Maxwell served as a procurer of teenage girls for her companion, the late billionaire serial rapist Jeffrey Epstein. The Epstein/Maxwell case has evidenced a highly classed element in its patterns of abuse of women and especially underage girls, one that very much echoes the systemic abuse in Hollywood found throughout this project’s primary sources. Epstein and Maxwell made highly deliberate choices to use underage girls as victims who came from lower-class towns and tumultuous lives, perhaps a highway’s drive away from his palatial estate but socioeconomically a different world. They drew in their victims and bought their silence by paying them in tips and jewelry, threatening their families with violence if they ever talked.²⁶⁶ This choice of powerless young women from lower-class backgrounds was not only deliberate, but was predicated on the girls’ fundamental non-personhood, in the eyes of their wealthy traffickers. A confidante has revealed what Maxwell said to her about the (hundreds? thousands?) of young women who had their lives destroyed by Epstein-Maxwell sex trafficking: “they’re nothing, these girls. They are trash”.²⁶⁷ In this, the Epstein/Maxwell case demonstrates that the ways of the studio system are still very present; that, in the words of William Faulkner, “the past is not even past”.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Ibid. 20.

²⁶⁶ “Hunting Grounds.” *Jeffrey Epstein: Filthy Rich (Episode 1)*. Dir. Lisa Bryant, Netflix, 2020. Television.

²⁶⁷ Vanessa Grigoriadis. “They’re Nothing, These Girls: Unraveling the Mystery of Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein’s Enabler”. *Vanity Fair*. August 12, 2019.

²⁶⁸ Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie. *Faulkner and Race*. (Oxford: Mississippi, 2007) 37.

Epilogue

Things To Come: The Case for Post-MeToo Historiographic Justice in Gender, Class, and Race



MeToo street art featuring Marilyn Monroe, contemporary UK

@creativecommons

“[I]t’s heartbreaking that this pleasure was ever derived at the expense of someone else’s humanity. The art form that we love should not carry such a ghastly price. So hope is good.”¹

-Manohla Dargis on the enjoyment of studio-era Hollywood films post-MeToo, January 3, 2018

This thesis has attempted, over five chapters and the use of extensive first-person primary sources, to provide an alternative reading of how the Hollywood studio system was experienced by women, with a particular eye to stars and other actresses. It has queried these conditions on the levels of the industrial, the personal, and their confluence. The project has set out to trouble standard film histories and historiographic methods, contending that they have oftentimes continued to function down through the years as reinforcement of the myths and deifications of bad actors. This epilogue will deal in the epistemological and ontological promise of such work— why it is so important to think in terms of historiographic justice, how it can be attempted going forward, and what can happen if it is.

One of the many things I have learned in attempting such a large scale, interdisciplinary excavation of women’s experience of the classical Hollywood system is simply how massive a project this entails in terms of cultural history. There is so much more to say, but not time and space to say it. I am happy to have (I believe) gotten at the heart of the illusory nature of glamour that underpinned the system, and demonstrated, instead, how the system was truly experienced by star actresses living a hidden second-class status. The thesis thus attempts new perspectives on star studies via the application of theories of gender, labour, and class. At the same time, accounts embedded in primary sources, especially working-class ones, has bolstered the project’s initial corollary assertion: that the line between star women and other women workers in the system existed on a continuum, and not as any sort of goddess/supplicant relationship. And further, that such a continuum was completely intertwined with the progressions of women’s failure, dismissal, and has-been status; progressions that masculinist Hollywood had cemented as utterly normative.

To this end, primary sources herein have also uncovered a great deal of material on non-star, working-class women in the system, and the difficulties, abuses, and traumas they experienced that matched and exceeded those of star women: labour hazards, the full brunt of the sexual abuse system of the “casting couch”, crushing poverty, and dehumanisation. While I simply cannot delve into all of these aspects in the lives of non-star women (from non-performing employees to bit players and extras) here, I hope that this may become the follow-up project to this work with its focus on stars. I close this project with the full knowledge that in 2020, we have for three years now been learning to rethink performance studies, film studies, and women’s history (among other things) in an altered, post-MeToo landscape. To that end, I attempt with this epilogue to bring together the themes of this

¹ A.O. Scott and Manohla Dargis. “Hollywood on the Brink.” *New York Times*. January 3, 2018.

project that are being revisited in such a landscape-- capitalism, labour, class, patriarchy, misogyny, white supremacy, trauma, and historiographic justice. Harkening back to the stated goals of this project in the introduction, one of them was, as a moral and political imperative, to attempt to correct the historical records of Hollywood. This has been argued for as part of a deeper ethos of historiographic justice for women who endured a male power system fuelled by conspiracy and criminality. In this epilogue, I consider the themes of the project one last time, proposing concentric areas of interest in which I have uncovered important areas needing attention, and to whence I hope to take this work next. I suggest strongly that we take an intersectional approach to these issues, and look to parallel systems of abuse and dehumanisation in American culture that also require interrogation and dismantling. To that end, I close by offering possibilities for a radical futurity of a post-2017 Hollywood-- one that would definitively condemn a century of misogyny, greed, exploitation, and white male power and abuse to finally allow for the equitable space that was dreamed of before 1920.

I have attempted over these five chapters to establish Hollywood as to its gendered class structure. As Joan Martin has explained in her parallel usage of Bourdieu's key theory of social fields in classing American race via slavery:

For Bourdieu, the point is to understand (among other things) how objective structures, individuals, and groups within them function in relation to concrete class and status positions through forms of capital- economic, symbolic, cultural- in the 'fields' of interrelated social space.²

In these Bourdieusian terms, the social fields structurally examined here have been the Hollywood socio-industrial film community, Los Angeles, and California and the American west.³ Through the use of both sociological research and many primary sources, it has also been possible to grasp how the above forms of capital— “economic, symbolic, cultural”— each functioned, respectively, in the studio Hollywood context and the Los Angeles social space that accompanied it.⁴ My original work here, I hope, has been the addition of gender, patriarchy, misogyny, and misogynistic violence into such discussion. For example, habitus is a well-known concept in the Bourdieusian *oeuvre*: as Martin enacts it here, “habitus is the outcome of the collective history of an individual and of the group”.⁵ Therefore, I think it is possible to make the case that the habitus of the Hollywood studio system was to abuse women and to discard them, particularly through branding them either troublemakers or has-beens. Contiguously, the system was also marked by the habitus of its male

² Joan M. Martin, *More than Chains and Toil: a Christian Work Ethic of Enslaved Women* (Westminster, John Knox Press, 2000) 56.

³ Mathieu Hilgers and Eric Mangez, *Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields: Concepts and Applications*. (London, Routledge, 2015).

⁴ Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers* (Eastford, CT, Martino Fine Books, 2013).

⁵ Martin, *More Than Chains and Toil* 65.

power brokers towards nepotism, criminality, and immunity from consequence for said abuse of women.

The historiographic imperative of all of this, whether it comes from scholars of film or of other interdisciplinary and interrelated fields contended with here, all seems to reduce to the same common element. As I outlined in detail in the introduction, it is the assertion that truth-telling about history and abusive men and systems amounts to both a political ethos and a moral necessity. Such reopening forces a reckoning with the difference Jane Gaines, under the subtopic “Unthinkable Events” in *Pink-Slipped* (2018), has rightfully pointed out as falling into Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s gap between *historicity one*, “what happened” and *historicity two*, “that which is said to have happened”.⁶ In the case of this project, I would contend that the difference between the two cannot be bridged without a gender, class, and race-based approach to the history of the system. Also in *Pink-Slipped*, Gaines has discussed unknowability as a historical condition: a “specific sort of ‘unknowability’ as in *which* knowledges are allowable at *what* historical junctures and which are decidedly *unwelcome*”.⁷ Certainly systems like Hollywood, which have long decided who are the winners of its history and how much the majority of its male power brokers deserved to be lionised, absolutely resisted the “reopening” of its histories as “unwelcome” for many decades. This seems to be changing since MeToo and 2017, but time will tell if such change holds, historiographically speaking.

To take but one example from the case studies herein: the complete manner and ease with which the studios were able to intimidate and silence virtually everyone in the Patricia Douglas case is proof of the absolute efficacy of the conspiracy of silence. The evidence uncovered by David Stenn as to how the studio powers were also able to so utterly erase a national news story from existence reinforce such a conclusion. The details and outcome of the Douglas case lend credence to the unwelcome knowability of widespread sexual abuse as a cornerstone of the industrial and social systems of Hollywood.

Many systems have been completely well-oiled by abuse of women into modernity, from the corporate world of Wall Street to clothing manufacture. There are others, such as performance in male-owned entertainment and sex industries, that have been veritably built upon it. In the case of either, had the truth about the centrality of gendered abuse been open, their continuation in such forms would have been threatened much earlier. Charles Mills’ “White Ignorance” (2012) makes arguments to these points around the enabling of American racism; the fact that they are equally applicable to the enabling of American misogyny gives credence to the theory of concentric intersectionality of abuse in Hollywood that I will introduce by the end of this epilogue. Mills has asserted that racism’s success is predicated on a “negative epistemology of ignorance”: the system

⁶ Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (Champaign, Illinois, 2018) 64.

⁷ *Ibid.* 3.

operates and maintains itself upon deniability.⁸ On not learning, not seeing, not knowing, *not wanting to know*. If the annihilation of one person— from a rape victim in Hollywood to a lynching victim in the Jim Crow South— meant that person went away, and only that one “valueless” person’s life was destroyed, it could be as if the incident never really happened. The system could continue to thrive. In light of the application of this negative epistemology of ignorance to an understanding of misogyny and sexual abuse in the Hollywood system, it becomes clearer what pernicious and effective reifying tools glamour and publicity actually were. They enabled the miscarriage of justice and crimes against humanity, and they helped to enact conspiratorial coverups seamlessly.

David Stenn seemed to understand this malign reality when he chose to open *Girl 27* with a stark and angry biblical verse, Luke 8:17, complete with ominous drums: “For there is nothing hidden/That will not be disclosed/ and nothing concealed/ that will not be known/ or brought out into the open”.⁹ As I conclude, I have found my approach to these historiographic concerns very much aligned with Stenn’s, as well as with Gaines. Gaines has explained that Foucauldian historical archaeology, or “history-as-critique”, has as its political goal “to effect an epistemological disruption of the historical ‘going story’”:¹⁰

Researching and writing ‘lost’ stories enacts something like *restoration as restitution*. That is, historical telling becomes symbolic *restitution* for acts of exclusion, obliteration, exploitation- reparation, really, for what had happened in the past.¹¹

I have attempted to argue that the use of trauma theory from scholars like Cathy Caruth combined with feminist materialist and political philosophy from theorists like Luce Irigaray, Christine Delphy, Toril Moi, Janice Radway, Rosemary Hennessy, Chrys Ingraham, Judith Butler, and Silvia Federici may help to theorise gendered, systemic historical horrors in new ways, in the wake of MeToo.¹² This is especially true when such theory augments all-important first-person recollections available via primary sources. As Caruth has written:

The attempt to gain access to a traumatic history, then, is also the project of listening beyond the pathology of individual suffering, to the reality of a history that in its crises can only be perceived in unassimilable forms.¹³

⁸ Charles Mills, “White Ignorance.” *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*. Eds. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (New York, SUNY, 2012).

⁹ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

¹⁰ Gaines, *Pink-Slipped* 159.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 77.

¹² Christine and Diana Leonard. “A Materialist Feminism Is Possible.” *Feminist Review*. 4.1 (1980): 79-105; Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, Cornell, 1985); Toril Moi and Janice A. Radway, *Materialist Feminism* (Durham, Duke, 1994); Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham, *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference, and Women’s Lives* (New York, Routledge, 1997); Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London, Verso, 2004); Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York, Autonomedia, 2004); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 2016).

¹³ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1995) 156.

Caruth takes this trans-individual, pan-historic approach to trauma to suggest that trauma is always historical in the first place. In the last chapter I discussed Patricia Douglas' PTSD, in terms of her status as victim of both sexual assault and the Hollywood system itself. Grounding such in the work of Caruth and other trauma theorists allows for strong connections between Douglas' unconscionable personal ordeal and questions of history, truth, and the individual within collective experience.

Powerfully, Caruth has contended:

If PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptoms of a history they cannot entirely possess... traumatic experience... is not a pathology, that is, of falsehood or displacement of meaning, but of history itself.¹⁴

This is the sort of historical traumawork that has been done in texts like Barbara Leaming's psychoanalytic biography of Hayworth *If This Was Happiness* (1989), Sarah Churchwell's similar exploration of Monroe in *The Many Lives of Marilyn Monroe* (2005), and Stenn's *Girl 27*.¹⁵ I would add as a small side note here, that the word "traumawork" is an apt and important one, as it encompasses more than the individual dealing with what was done to her, or a society recognising a collective social horror that needs to be addressed. There is also a meta-question in traumawork as to the very acts of historiography and scholarship themselves. In fact as Joan Acker, Kate Barry, and Joke Esseveld have reminded in the article "Objectivity and Truth: Problems in Doing Feminist Research", the feminist scholar will have moments of trauma in reading and absorbing these stories as well. They may echo with things in her own personal experience and manifest both intellectual and affective discomfort.¹⁶ There may be moments of actual nausea— I personally experienced these myself in watching *Girl 27*, in reading the memoir of Frances Farmer (and many other instances). Gaines has written, citing Linda Orr, of these "historian-subject relations", that "[e]very writer should leave space to show how undefinable and traumatic his or her objects of study are".¹⁷

In the case of *Girl 27*, the film demonstrates via Douglas' awakening how it can be necessary to speak trauma in order to break it.¹⁸ Moreso, it demonstrates how one individual experience may stand in, culturally, for an entire sea of similar experiences that were never reported, never listened to, never believed, or only met with injustice. How many Patricia Douglases were there? How many Eloise Spans? The unknowability is, itself, historiographically traumatic. Feminist psychologist Ingeborg Kraus has written about trauma in terms of its collective nature and its link to collective

¹⁴ Ibid. 5.

¹⁵ Barbara Leaming, *If This Was Happiness: A Biography of Rita Hayworth* (New York, Viking, 1989); Sarah Bartlett Churchwell, *The Many Lives of Marilyn Monroe* (New York, Metropolitan/Henry Holt, 2005); *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007. Film.

¹⁶ Joan Acker, Kate Barry, and Joke Esseveld. "Objectivity and Truth: Problems in Doing Feminist Research." *Women's Studies International Forum* 6.4 (1983): 423-35.

¹⁷ Gaines, *Pink-Slipped* 122.

¹⁸ *Girl 27*. Dir. David Stenn. 2007.

memory. She has detailed how systems that produce trauma sustain themselves by demanding people's silence; trauma in traumatising systems continues to sustain itself by demanding people "keep silent, to shut up about what has been done to someone".¹⁹ The converse of that? To break the silence: "if we want to reverse trauma, we have to tell the truth".²⁰

If trauma is, in Caruth's words, "always the story of a wound that cries out, that addressed us in the attempt to tell us of a reality of truth that is not otherwise available",²¹ then we should be able to figure out what, precisely, this crying wound has been. Almost surely, it would be that the Hollywood system was quite literally built on the abuse of women. To return full circle to the themes of this project, gender in the Hollywood studio system was a class issue, in that women were second-class citizens whose bodies, lives, and futures had lesser value. While not every woman was abused, the acceptance of such practices as normative was a functional part of the system. In this sense, *Hollywood itself is a traumatic history*. It is an understatement to point out that this is why MeToo was both so overdue and so powerful. It would also suggest that how much of mainstream Hollywood film studies has simply looked past what was there in plain sight, all along.

With this conclusion-- that Hollywood itself has functioned as a traumatic history for many of its workers, most especially women— there are parallel topics or concurrent considerations to which I wish I had space to devote. I console myself with the fact that I will pursue them in future projects. I hope to use this same lens of classed abuse of women going forward into other historical periods that this project did not have time to touch upon. These amount to several more of Kirsten Pullen's "nodal moments", historical points wherein it seemed the situation might change for women for the better, and yet it ultimately did not.²² The fall of the studio system in the early 1960s is one such moment; the continuation of abuse and ever more misogynistic films in the 1970s, even as much of the world was altered by the women's liberation movement, is another.

But one final area to which I simply could not devote a whole chapter does need to be examined here in this epilogue, because its abuses are so interwoven with the gendered abuse endemic to the system. This is the understanding of Hollywood with a mind to critical race theory. If Hollywood needed to be classed to understand its gender troubles, then I will briefly draw attention to the possibilities for its injustices and abuses around race to be classed as well. As Nancy Isenberg has remarked, "[c]lass had its own singular and powerful dynamic, apart from its intersection with race".²³ At the same time, while examining a system built on dehumanisation and hierarchies that weighted different workers, different genders, and different races as more valuable than others, the

¹⁹ Ingeborg Kraus, "Trauma as Pre-condition and Consequence of Prostitution." *Trauma and Prostitution*. September 9, 2016.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 4.

²² Kirsten Pullen, *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society* (Cambridge, 2005).

²³ Nancy Isenberg. *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (New York, Penguin, 2016) 2.

concepts of the traumatised industrial space, and of lives that have been considered grievable and non-grievable, are again highly useful here.²⁴

Just as all previous chapters have considered Hollywood a capitalist-masculinist space of misogyny, Hollywood is equally visible as a capitalist-white supremacist space of racism. While theorists from the 1700s to the late twentieth century were theorising and debating on the “natural rights of man”, that still left out everyone but white men. My position is, then, that a country built on the buying and selling of people of colour could easily and naturally then go on to create the specific exploitative corporate conditions of Hollywood.

In Chapter One, I briefly touched upon Hollywood as a white supremacist milieu (in a white supremacist country). Numerous anecdotes from primary sources from Mearene Jordan, Ava Gardner, Budd Schulberg, and dozens more support just how ironclad white supremacy was in studio Hollywood; in many ways it functioned identically to the Jim Crow South.²⁵ The doubled abuse and exploitation of non-white creatives and performers is clearly something that needs to be addressed in parallel to the focus of this project. To a broader intersectional point, an industrial system founded on dehumanisation and the buying, selling, and trading of people cannot be discussed frankly without acknowledging its foundation in a country that just decades before still had slavery of Black human beings. This is why this concluding section focuses upon white supremacy and anti-Black racism, specifically, when of course there have been many other races, and racist dynamics, present in Hollywood from the beginning. There already exists a great deal of classed scholarship on important women in Hollywood history neither black nor white-- from Dolores Del Rio and Lupe Velez, conceptualised as upper-class and working-class versions of Latina stars, to Anna Mae Wong as Chinese-American star born in California and her multiple identities.²⁶

These connections between the treatment of Black Americans and the treatment of women and performers did not go unnoticed even in the highly racist period of studio Hollywood. Such parallels were drawn by intellectuals outside the system and stars alike.²⁷ I strongly reject comparisons of Hollywood contract performance to slavery; such language of metaphor now reads as insensitive and even offensive. It is neither historically accurate nor appropriate, particularly in American contexts, to compare other states of being to chattel slavery. However, I do think

²⁴ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*; Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*.

²⁵ Budd Schulberg, *Moving Pictures: Memories of a Hollywood Prince* (New York, Stein and Day, 1981) 204; Mearene Jordan, *Living with Miss G* (Smithfield, NC, USA, Ava Gardner Museum, 2012); Lawrence Grobel, *Conversations with Ava Gardner* (Np, Np, 2013).

²⁶ Diane Negra, *Off-White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom* (London, Routledge, 2001); Priscilla Peña Ovalle, *Dance and the Hollywood Latina: Race, Sex, and Stardom* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2011); Mary Ann Farquhar and Yingjin Zhang. *Chinese Film Stars* (London, Routledge, 2010); Graham Russell Gao Hodges, *Anna May Wong: From Laundryman's Daughter to Hollywood Legend* (Hong Kong, 2012); *Golden Gate Girls*. Dir. Louisa Wei. 2013; Nancy Wang Yuen, *Reel Inequality: Hollywood Actors and Racism* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2016).

²⁷ This metaphor and language turns up in quite constant use in the studio era in primary sources, in an era where casual racism by white Americans was utterly normal and acceptable.

comparisons to American indentured servitude work well, and these, too, are present in both scholarship and primary source material from stars themselves. In her chapter on the despised, paradoxical position of actors in *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*, Hortense Powdermaker wrote that they “work under serf-like conditions... They are regarded as property, to be bought and sold at a profit”.²⁸ As early as 1976, Cathy Klaprat was working from an outlier position in film studies when she wrote that “[a]lthough stars may have been well compensated, they were indentured employees, placed in a subservient position by the option contract”.²⁹ Klaprat’s concept of the star as indentured servant meshes well with discussion in Chapter Four of alternative theorisation from Europeans like Francesco Alberoni and Alexander Walker on stars as “the powerless elite” and “star serfdom”, respectively.³⁰

Thorstein Veblen was another interdisciplinary scholar who linked historical systems of American exploitation to modern business practices of the twentieth century. In his own time, he recognised abuse as inherent to American systems of ownership, all while doing so opposite parallel tracks of gender and capitalism alone among his contemporaries. Veblen’s postulation, discussed in Chapter One, that human societies first evolved concepts of slavery from the abducting of women captives as war spoils was a central point within his work.³¹ More problematically, Veblen repeatedly employed the term “slavery” to the conditions under which women lived opposite men. While today we by necessity and justice take more care with language, this made for provocative conceptualisation over a century ago from a dissident male economist.

There are many instances in the primary sources of this project of Hollywood studio-era writers and actresses lacking modern racial sensitivity drawing the slavery analogy in memoir and interview--actors were “slaves”, studios were “plantations”, their mansions were “the most beautiful slave quarters in the world”, contracts were “white slavery”, and so on. Budd Schulberg, with his insider’s view, argued that until agents arrived on the scene:

stars were merely incredibly high-paid slaves, their three-to-five thousand-dollar-a-week salaries not protecting them from producers who could shove them into any sort of role or picture they chose.³²

SAG itself argued against the seven-year contract on the grounds that it “amounted to professional slavery”.³³

²⁸ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 280.

²⁹ Cathy Klaprat, “The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in Another Light.” In *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison, Wisconsin, 1976) 341.

³⁰ Alexander Walker, *Stardom: The Hollywood Phenomenon* (Los Angeles, Stein and Day, 1970);

³¹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class. With an Introd. by John Kenneth Galbraith.* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

³² Schulberg, *Moving Pictures* 446.

³³ Balio, *Grand Design* 153.

The specific language of the antebellum American South is not lost here. But such linguistic slippage, offensive at it is today, allows for an overarching point on race and intersectionality. While being both accurate and careful to avoid racially insensitive metaphors, scholars would nevertheless be remiss to shy away from comparing systems of exploitation in the U.S.' institutional structures for fear of being misconstrued as making an argument that "glamorous white women movie stars endured the same conditions as slaves". While there is without question no comparison of suffering or bodily autonomy between actresses and slaves in American history, it is not at all surprising that a country built on slavery *could* be the one in the world to so completely and successfully build such a highly successful and enormously profitable system off the dehumanised bodies of its performers—actresses, yes, but also actors, other entertainers, and even athletes.

In the studio era, just as actors (maladroitly) attempted the imagery of southern American, Black slavery as metaphor to their own conditions, they also (more benignly) compared themselves to athletes being traded around who, similarly, had no say in the matter. Jimmy Stewart once explained, "[y]our studio could trade you around like ball players. I was traded once to Universal for the use of their back lot for three weeks".³⁴ Just as actors began to go to court in the 1930s and 1940s on the grounds that practices like loan-outs and seven-year contracts conflicted inherently with basic human rights, similar rebellions picked up steam in the world of sports in the American mid-century. Where the American entertainment world still operates under the de Havilland Rule, American professional sports maintain the Curt Flood Rule. It states that a player needs to consent to be traded after putting in a certain amount of years with one team and building a life in that city.³⁵ The fact that Curt Flood was a Black man advocating for players' labour rights in the 1960s, and that his baseball career was then destroyed for it,³⁶ makes these parallels absolutely compelling for further exploration. In a Bourdieusian sense, the fields of Hollywood performance and the fields of American professional (male) sports are quite interlinked. While this is not my project to undertake alone, I think a collaboration between a feminist performance historian and a male sports historian, especially a non-white one, could be a fascinating exploration of the common malign dynamics at play in the two societal arenas. Important scholarship has been done on these sociological and industrial American realities in recent years; William C. Rhoden's *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete* (2010) is, among others, one excellent example.³⁷

³⁴ In David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London, Routledge, 2003) 562.

³⁵ Dave Zirin and Jesse Hagopian. "Black Athletes and the Black Freedom Struggle". *The Zinn Foundation People's Historians Online* lecture series. May 15, 2020. Web.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ William C. Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete*. New York: Crown, 2010; Lee Moran, "LeBron James Tears Into NFL Owners: 'Old, White Men' With 'Slave Mentality'", *Huffington Post*, December 22, 2018.

In other words, I wish to assert in this epilogue that some of the features that have been uniquely sinister, totalitarian, and exploitative of women in Hollywood's industrial system are not unconnected to the U.S.' shameful past in terms of race across numerous fields and industries. In this positioning, I hope that this thesis' grounding in concepts of intersectionality allows it room to briefly here speak concurrently class of gender and the class of race in the United States.

With understanding of both Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's theorisation of intersectionality and Gloria Anzaluda's hybridised concept of the crossroads,³⁸ the grappling with of multiple second-class identities within the Hollywood system would have been, naturally, at least doubly challenging. How did a non-white woman in Hollywood also simultaneously deal with racism and misogyny in the studio era? Many such anecdotes have by now seeped into popular culture: the brilliant actress Hattie McDaniel not allowed to sit at the banquet table with her *Gone With the Wind* co-stars, even as she won her Oscar. The tragedy of Dorothy Dandridge or the diminishing of the career of Lena Horne, both recognised for beauty and star power but never allowed to play a lead. Had their careers been allowed to reach full flower commensurate with their talents, it would have required pairing with a white leading man at a time when miscegenation laws were still rampant across the US.³⁹ As a result, both Dandridge and Horne were relegated to guest singing numbers in many studio-era films, shunted off away from the plot with its all-white cast and their entanglements.⁴⁰

How then to begin to grapple with these already well-established concentric circles of racism and misogyny, but also adding the same unique lens to class and labour placed upon all actresses in this project? For that I will turn to a final case study, only in brief here but deserving of far more attention in future work. Theresa Harris was a Black American actress and singer, who sought and achieved conservatory training despite being born to sharecroppers in Jim Crow Texas. In Hollywood, she appeared in hundreds of films. In one of her most famous roles, she is a scene-stealing companion to Barbara Stanwyck in *Baby Face* (1933), powerfully singing the film's motif song, "St. Louis Blues".⁴¹ On the surface, this would seem to have been a successful career for a Black woman

³⁸ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw; *On Intersectionality: The Seminal Essays* (New York, New Press, 2012); In Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, Routledge, 1993) 124.

³⁹ This "rule" was so absolute that even in tackling a social realist problem about racism, the 1949 "passing" film *Pinky*, director Elia Kazan was not allowed under any circumstances to use a light-skinned Black actress like Lena Horne. The Black lead woman character was played by the white Jeanne Crain. Similarly, Helen Morgan and Ava Gardner played the biracial Julie in both versions of *Showboat* (1936 and 1951). Gardner freely admitted in later-life interviews (Grobel, *Conversations With Ava*) that the part should have gone to her friend Horne, who helped her to prepare for it, and to practice her songs. In the interviews, Gardner (an early antiracist advocate in racist Hollywood) pronounced the anti-Black prejudice in Hollywood that pigeonholed her friend Horne into side performances maddening and absurd.

⁴⁰ Donald Bogle, *Dorothy Dandridge: A Biography* (New York, Amistad, 1997); Jill Watts, *Hattie McDaniel: Black Ambition, White Hollywood* (New York, Amistad, 2005); Donald Bogle, *Brown Sugar: Over One Hundred Years of America's Black Female Superstars* (New York, Continuum, 2007); Deborah Vankin, "His Art Centers on African American Actors Whose Film Titles 'Fade to Black'." *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 2017.

⁴¹ *Baby Face*. Dir. Alfred E. Green. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, George Brent, Donald Cook. 1933; Peter Stanfield, "An Excursion into the Lower Depths: Hollywood, Urban Primitivism, and St. Louis Blues, 1929-1937." *Cinema Journal* 41, no. 2 (2002): 84-108.

in studio-era Hollywood. Yet in those hundreds of films, Harris was almost always relegated to playing a maid; if not a maid, some sort of labourer or criminal. Once one has seen Harris' showstopping performance in *Baby Face*, one is able to recognise her over and over again, in the background of many of the 1930s biggest films— almost always appearing as a maid to the biggest white women stars of the day. Further, Harris was often uncredited for her roles, even when they were speaking parts and integral to the plot. Harris was not at all unaware of her situation, simply grateful to have work as some bit players might be. In a contemporary interview with Black newspaper *The Afro American*, Harris was blunt, particularly for 1937:

I never had the chance to rise about the role of maid in Hollywood movies. My color was against me anyway you looked at it... My ambition is to be an actress. Hollywood had no parts for me.⁴²

Visually speaking, once the spectator becomes aware of her, Harris begins to present almost as a sort of filmic phantom. Her cinematic presence evokes a ghostly victimhood of Hollywood's racism; as a woman so talented yet one always hovering around in the background. It was not where she belonged. This fantastic, phantasmic quality of Hollywood's racist tragedy becomes so palpable, in fact, that in 2013 I created an experimental film entitled *Maid, Uncredited (White Space/Negative Space)* which employed montage and pastiche, combined with broken effects and a jerky macabre style, to bring attention to Harris in her many background parts.⁴³ That same year, playwright Lynn Nottage produced a play dramatizing Harris' life, *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark*, for the New York stage.⁴⁴

Harris' case meets at a unique nexus of labour, class, misogyny, *and* race in studio-era Hollywood, in comparison to every other case study herein. As has been evident since the introduction, I strongly advocate for this concept of women in Hollywood as living on a classed continuum. The ways this manifested for Black actresses at times beggars belief. Research on Black actors in studio-era Hollywood reveals that, operating under the universally acknowledged fact that a Black actress would never play a lead, conventional wisdom passed around Hollywood's Black community was that a Black woman's best bet was to "be a maid to play a maid". That is, a trained Black actress should set her sights on becoming an actual domestic servant to one of Hollywood's white stars, as the best chance for obtaining background work in films.⁴⁵ Even with knowledge of white

⁴² Fay M. Jackson, "Dainty Theresa In Gang Film". *The Afro American*, August 28, 1937, 22.

⁴³ *Maid, Uncredited (White Space/Negative Space)*. Dir. Kerry McElroy. Perf. Theresa Harris. 2013. Film. Presented at "Rethinking Race and Sexuality: Feminist Conversations, Contestations, and Coalitions" conference, Simone de Beauvoir Institute, Concordia University, Montreal, April 2013.

⁴⁴ Lynn Nottage, *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2013; Kenneth Jones, "Nottage's *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* Gets Extra Week at Off-Broadway's Second Stage." *Playbill*. April 27, 2011; Kenneth Jones, "Vera Stark, Ready for Her L.A. Closeup, Opens Sept. 26th; Sanaa Lathan Stars", *Playbill*. September 26, 2012.

⁴⁵ Donald Bogle, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams: The Story of Black Hollywood* (New York, One World Ballantine, 2005); see also Charlene B. Regester, *African American Actresses: The Struggle for Visibility, 1900-*

supremacist studio Hollywood, this remains a shocking historical fact. Finally and in interesting parallelism, where I have looked to the concept of camp as reinforcing of misogynist trauma, feminist scholar of camp Pamela Robertson has in one instance in her work queried camp as concept via its racial problematics, focusing on the portrayals of jovial, wisecracking Black maids in the films of Mae West, and West's relationship to them.⁴⁶

I would end this section on race and the inherent intersectionality of my project, centred as it is on American class and gender, with a fellow white feminist's interpretation of institutionally racist *and* sexist American society. I would add to Anita Sarkeesian's words below that this is the even more specifically lens through which I am viewing the Hollywood system within this project:

Once you have a systemic and institutional framework, you see how oppression manifests in many subtle ways under the systems of what Bell Hooks (sic) — calls "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy."⁴⁷

As hooks herself explained the term:

We can't begin to understand the nature of domination if we don't understand how these systems connect with one another. Significantly, this phrase has always moved me because it doesn't value one system over another. For so many years in the feminist movement, women were saying that gender is the only aspect of identity that really matters, that domination only came into the world because of rape. Then we had so many race-oriented folks who were saying, 'Race is the most important thing. We don't even need to be talking about class or gender.' So for me, that phrase always reminds me of a global context, of the context of class, of empire, of capitalism, of racism and of patriarchy. Those things are all linked — an interlocking system.⁴⁸

I am clearly advocating as a scholar most strongly for both such an intersectionality of class, gender, and race, and its connection with the by now much-discussed concept of historiographic justice. In terms of work on Hollywood, it should always be important to weigh such factors in the separate spheres of both the scholarly and the lived experiential. Scholarship that decentres the traditional omnipotence of white male capitalists, and critiques their habits from nepotism to sexual abuse, is an important step. Scholarship that calls out white male film historians on their biases that have led to lauding of the system and the men who created it is another. More alternative readings of the Hollywood system by women and non-white scholars also move in the right direction. Yet all of these possibilities remain largely in the academy. Henry Louis Gates has written of the tendency for

1960 (Bloomington, Indiana, 2010); Miriam J. Petty, *Stealing the Show: African American Performers and Audiences in 1930s Hollywood* (Oakland, California, 2016).

⁴⁶ Pamela Robertson, "Mae West's Maids: Race, Authenticity, and the Discourse of Camp." Ed. Fabio Cleto. In *Camp: Queer Aesthetic and the Performing Subject: A Reader* (Michigan, 1999).

⁴⁷ Anita Sarkeesian. "How To Be A Feminist" Panel, *All About Women 2015*." *YouTube*. March 9, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jzcs4ti_bdl.

⁴⁸ George Yancy and bell hooks. "bell hooks: Buddhism, the Beats, and Loving Blackness." *New York Times*. December 10, 2015.

academics, especially historians, to become too self-congratulatory in pointing out past injustice, rather than asking if systems have actually changed or are working to do so:

Academic critics write essays, 'readings' of literature, where the bad guys (you know, racism or patriarchy) lose... We pay homage to the marginalized and demonized, and it feels as if we've righted an actual injustice.⁴⁹

Gates' makes an excellent point here: ethical shifts in fields of historiography are a good start, but also just that.

Correcting the historical wrongs of Hollywood also means formulating new visions for the industry, today, so that women and non-white creatives are able to advance, and not to be harassed or abused. Concrete plans towards change, as the evils of the industry continue to be contemporaneously and systematically exposed, are what are truly needed. These will include, and are already including, the use of digital medias activism, everything from the crowdsourcing of information about bad actors (digital updates of age-old "whisper networks") to Time's Up initiatives like legal aid and sexual harassment helplines.⁵⁰ This is work that moves from the historical and the theoretical to the contemporary industrial and political. To start, consensus needs to be developed about the evils of the industry in the first place, and how it successfully implanted its particular values upon the sociocultural milieu of Los Angeles for the last century. As Marx said of all capitalism, but as may be particularly appropriately applied to Hollywood:

...capitalism has created more brutal and insidious forms of enslavement, as it has planted into the body of the proletariat deep divisions that have served to intensify and conceal exploitation.⁵¹

Beyond the capitalism of the industry and the values it imparted on those involved with it, Los Angeles had its own unique sociocultural issues that, I would conclude, had much to do with the overall climate of dehumanisation fostered by the film industry therein. Writer and immigrant to the US and California Louis Adamic wrote in his 1932 autobiography *Laughing in the Jungle* that Los Angeles is truly the figurative jungle, the ultimate expression of Americanness as malevolent dysfunction:

Los Angeles looks rather nice... Actually, and in spite of all the healthful sunshine and ocean breezes, it is a *bad* place- full of old and dying people, and young people who were born old of tired pioneer parents, victims of America- full of decadent religions and cults and fake science, and wildcat business enterprises... doomed to collapse and drag down millions of people.⁵²

⁴⁹ In *Film Theory Goes to the Movies: Cultural Analysis of Contemporary Film*. Eds. Jim Collins, Ava Preacher Collins, Hilary Radner (London, Routledge, 2012) 88.

⁵⁰ Ann Friedman, "The Unexpected Power of Google-Doc Activism." *The Cut*. October 23, 2017; Reina Gattuso, "Gossip as an act of resistance." *Feministing*. August 23, 2016; Dave McNarry, "Women in Film Launching Sexual Harassment Help Line, Legal Aid Services." *Variety*. November 10, 2017.

⁵¹ In Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* 64.

⁵² In Vincent Brook, *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2013) 108.

Such impressions and beliefs about Hollywood, Los Angeles, and California were already emergent among sharp-eyed social critics and observers by the 1920s and 1930s. The Hollywood as phantasmagoria novel had already emerged at that time with works like McCoy's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (discussed in the last chapter) and Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939). West's novel in particular captured Hollywood as the exact opposite of the manner in which it was perennially portrayed, or that in which it tried earnestly to portray itself: painting a picture of a place not only steeped in inhumanity, but in the bizarre and grotesque.⁵³ In novels like these (and their filmic adaptations), Hollywood is simply a vile place, and women have their specifically gendered, miserable paths within it. It is telling that both men who wrote the novels, as disaffected screenwriters, had up-close experience with the system that they were excoriating. Many of the details of Los Angeles as cultural milieu were taken from real life.

In some ways, *The Day of the Locust* is even grimmer than McCoy's extra-torturing world at the marathon dance (if that's possible). It raises the dreary Hollywood struggle of these times to the macabre, and then on to the fully fantastic and apocalyptic. In its own day, it was considered so deliberately shocking and in bad taste that it garnered scathing reviews; later critics like Richard Gehman have since pronounced it "the best book to come out of Hollywood".⁵⁴ The novel offers a true-to-life sketch of life in Los Angeles of the 1930s, centring on the lives of some aspiring Hollywood types in an artist working for the studios and a potential starlet. These main characters also interact with transplanted midwestern teetotalers, cowboys, former silent stars turned brothel madams, and aging vaudevillians.

West had an extremely keen eye for the social details of the milieu. As discussed in Chapter Two in terms of class and aesthetics, Los Angeles was already striking for its monstrosities of architectural style, all jumbled together and utterly lacking in taste. West's narrator Tod Hackett describes some cheap and overdone "houses [that] were comical, but he didn't laugh... Few things are sadder than the truly monstrous".⁵⁵ Tod watches the back lot of a studio as sets and scenery are discarded, landfill-style, in what he calls a "dream dump".⁵⁶ This is a plot point precisely evocative of the reality of a city and industry with virtually no regard for its own history, something that has come up repeatedly in primary sources; "history" has meant everything from sets to people. Louise Brooks outlined in her later-life critical work a culture in which the studio heads hated the past, only caring about money and the present. In "Gish and Garbo" (1958) for *Sight and Sound*, she wrote:

Old pictures were bad pictures. Pictures were better than ever. An actor was only as good as his last picture. These three articles of faith were laid down by the producers,

⁵³ Both novels were eventually made into films later (1969 and 1975, respectively) when Hollywood was finally in a far more edgy and self-critical mode.

⁵⁴ "Introduction", Richard Gehman, Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust* (New York: Time, 1965) xviii.

⁵⁵ Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust*. New York: Time, 1965) 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 81.

and business was conducted in a manner to prove them. As for the public, it was taught to sneer at old pictures.⁵⁷

This precise sociocultural marker of Los Angeles, its tendency to literally bulldoze its own history as valueless, has also been examined in the non-fiction historical work of Allison Trope, in *Stardust Monuments: The Saving and Selling of Hollywood* (2011).⁵⁸

The Hollywood, Los Angeles, and California dreams of the 1910s and 1920s as delineated in Chapters One and Two were marked by progressivism, optimism, and gender equality-- Hallett's "go west, young women!" moment. The 1930s instead presented, in terms of westward migration, a sort of Hollywoodised *Grapes of Wrath*. As David Thomson wrote, "[i]t is the vast, sad, mournful move west that characterizes the 1930s".⁵⁹ The California Dream had become shabby and fearful. As Gehman explained:

West used Hollywood as a microcosm. It was peculiarly fitted to his needs because, as other writers since have discovered, everything that is wrong with life in the United States is to be found there in rare purity.⁶⁰

One of the book's central themes is that the promise of this westward resettling, the Hollywood California Dream, was both a particular iteration of the American Dream and a more specific lie. The vaudevillian in the story, the aging father of Faye Greener, the actress main character, is described as someone who "stank from hunger". When he dies, his daughter Faye goes "on the turf", euphemistically into the brothel run by Mrs. Jennings, the former silent star. Extras are happy to be horrifically injured on set, because a broken leg could pay out several hundred dollars.⁶¹ Homer Simpson, the transplanted midwestern teetotaler, looks Tod exactly like one of the "people who have come to California to die".⁶²

Another theme of the novel, how close authoritarianism and even mob violence were to the surface in Los Angeles, directly correlates to Powdermaker's anthropological findings to the same points-- as well as to the Bourdieusian concept of symbolic violence that is so apt to turn to real violence at any time.⁶³ It also correlates with later cultural historical work on Los Angeles and right-wing violence by previously-discussed scholars like Vincent Brook and Kathryn Olmstead.⁶⁴ Throughout the novel, Tod has a (correctly) foreboding sense that these many transplanted arrivals to

⁵⁷ Louise Brooks, "Gish and Garbo", *Sight and Sound* 28.1 (1958) 86.

⁵⁸ Allison Trope, *Stardust Monuments: The Saving and Selling of Hollywood* (Hanover, Dartmouth, 2011).

⁵⁹ Thomson, *The Whole Equation* 131.

⁶⁰ "Introduction", Richard Gehman, Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust*, xviii.

⁶¹ West, *The Day of the Locust* 84.

⁶² Ibid. 22.

⁶³ Powdermaker: *Hollywood, The Dream Factory*; Michael Burawoy, *Symbolic Violence: Conversations With Bourdieu*. (Durham, Duke, 2019).

⁶⁴ Vincent Brook, *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2013); Kathryn Olmstead, *Right Out of California: The 1930s and the Big Business Roots of Modern Conservatism* (New York, The New Press, 2015).

California are angry and unwell, and that violence is somehow in the air. In one scene, Tod, trying to write, calls them “the pick of America’s madmen. The scene continues with Tod scratching out his first attempt: “he changed ‘pick of America’s madmen’ to ‘cream’, and felt almost certain that the milk from which it had been skimmed was just as rich in violence”.⁶⁵

Ultimately, Tod is proven correct about the simmering violence of the mob in this strange city. The novel culminates with a fantastically brutal scene, in which the normally meek and gentle Homer experiences a kind of psychotic break and assaults a young child actor in the crowd outside a searchlight premiere. The crowd becomes a mob and kills him, and the streets descend into a full, mad riot-- all in the shadow of the red carpet. Speaking of the mob, West explains, “[t]he crowd was made up of the lower middle classes”,⁶⁶ people whose simmering rage at what they had been promised in California and what life was like there instead has suddenly boiled over:

Where else should they go but California, the land of sunshine and oranges? Once there, they discovered that sunshine isn’t enough... Every day of their lives they read the newspapers and went to the movies... They have been cheated and betrayed. They have slaved and saved for nothing.⁶⁷

The characters “realize that they’ve been tricked and burn with resentment”.⁶⁸ With this novel, West directly connected migration, labour, and class issues to the lie of the entire system: of Hollywood, Los Angeles, California, and the U.S.

West’s novel is one that gives the reader many pages of Bourdieusian symbolic violence, in the exposition of its dehumanised characters who then dehumanise one another on the lower rungs. This simmering interpersonal violence finally climaxes into a horrible episode of real violence. One is reminded of the Carey McWilliams quote from Chapter Three: “violence is what one somehow expects from the place”,⁶⁹ or the one from director Alexander Korda in Chapter Four in his discussion of the 1930s Los Angeles suicide epidemic: “who could be happy here?”.⁷⁰ Thus in this book West quite masterfully took the deconstruction of the California/Dream Factory myth to its natural apotheosis: Hollywood as phantasmagoria. While all of this paints a picture of an industrial and social milieu that was far, far from what it promised to virtually everyone who arrived to its confines, it is clear that for women, for the working classes, for people of colour, it was always going to be that much worse.

Miriam Bratu Hansen wrote in *Babel and Babylon* (1991) in part about this precise phantasmagoric sociocultural phenomena, which she called “the Babylon discourse”. To Hansen’s

⁶⁵ West, *The Day of the Locust* 66.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 130.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 131.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* xx.

⁶⁹ In Steven Ross, *Working Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America*. (Princeton, 1998, 112).

⁷⁰ Ehrhard Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism* (Berkeley, California, 2007).

theorisation, the trope of gothic Hollywood-- what appeared so commonly in both urban lore and filmic narrative itself— should really be more properly understood as a mirror to the deficiencies of the U.S as nation.⁷¹ Hansen famously situated the first discourses of Hollywood as Babylon, the Whore, a failure from its origins, as early as the 1920s.⁷² The concept derived from Griffith's "tower of Babel" argument on silent film, which Hansen adapted to instead refer to all the human tragedy in the system— addictions, suicides, other deaths. This is an incredibly intriguing and useful framework from which to build. It is also one that forms a strong parallel to what I referred to in Chapter Four as the harmful (and misogynist) "beautiful/glamorous/dead" mythos.⁷³ I would agree that Hansen's Babylon discourse holds up as a mirror to the whole nation and the faulty American Dream. Yet I would argue that it is even more attributable to the perversities and injustices of this particular industrial system of Hollywood filmmaking, and the sociocultural milieu it created in Los Angeles.

For far too long, neither historians nor many people in the system themselves particularly challenged the white male power hegemony of the system, or linked it to the abuses it enabled and the lives it destroyed. Hollywood insiders did not care, concerned with money and careerism, while mainstream historians were focused on other questions about "the genius of the system": questions that were quite uninterested in its treatment of filmic workers. In *Hollywood Cinema* (1995), Richard Maltby continued the ever-long obsession with the spectator when he wrote that "[t]o find the politics of the cinema we must examine the interaction between the movie and the viewer, in the space between the audience and the screen".⁷⁴ There is nothing inherently wrong with a spectator theory approach per se (except that it has been done for, quite literally, decades and decades). But it is incapable of concretely finding one "the politics of the cinema". To find the politics of the (American, Hollywood) cinema, the interaction between capitalist bosses and workers, between men and second-class status women, and between white supremacists and people of colour must instead be interrogated.

Consider the past and current legacies of the studio founder and executive class, whom I have so dissected throughout this project. In fact, these men were celebrated and in many cases continue to be, with numerous spaces and accolades in Los Angeles named after them to the present day. Such laudatory historicisation has been continuously enabled by, among other things, the extremely entrenched "separate the art from the artist" theory as applied to the Hollywood system. In this case, the old axiom would more accurately be read as "separate the predatory businessman from the filmic product he produced, made up of the images of the women upon whom he was preying".

⁷¹ Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Harvard, 1991).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ William Carr, *Hollywood Tragedy* (New York, Lancer, 1962); Anger, *Hollywood Babylon*; Austin, *Hollywood's Babylon Women*; Jackie Ganiy, *Tragic Hollywood: Beautiful, Glamorous, Dead* (Scotts Valley, CA, CreateSpace, 2013).

⁷⁴ Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995) 304.

I have utilised Raymond Chandler throughout this project as an insider writer who largely captured the milieu correctly, making astute observation as to the cultural details of the Hollywood milieu on class and illusion. To the below point, however, I would suggest Chandler finally got something wrong. In “Writers in Hollywood” (1945), Chandler wrote in criticising the base of the system:

For my thesis the personal qualities of a producer are rather beside the point. Some are able and humane men and some are low-grade individuals with the morals of a goat, the artistic integrity of a slot machine, and the manners of a floor-walker with delusions of grandeur.⁷⁵

One would be hard-pressed to find a woman in the system who would make this statement. A Patricia Douglas or an Eloise Spann would never make such an argument. Neither would a Rita Hayworth or a Marilyn Monroe. Positions such as this are a central part of the reason why, had Harvey Weinstein been born thirty years earlier, he would not now be in prison as a serial rapist but likely have an honorary award named after him like Zanuck, Mayer, and the like. Weinstein’s mistake was, simply, continuing to behave exactly like the all-powerful men of the studio era after the studio era was over.

An increasing number of feminist pieces have been written from the emergent converse perspective in the last several years, as to the continual harm done by the above axiom.⁷⁶ Demonstrating the ability and power of the actress as insider/observer to do parallel sophisticated scholarly work, and speaking to the ethos of historiographic justice recentred here, Louise Brooks wrote in later life that “the tragedy of film history” was that it was “built on lies”.⁷⁷ These would surely include the lies that many of the men who founded Hollywood were genius visionaries and not abusive criminals.

Powdermaker closed *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* by explaining that the system’s mode of human relations must change if Hollywood is ever to produce anything of value. She was less concerned with the plights of the individual workers in the system than that such a dysfunctional system could not produce top-quality work, but the point it still apt:

...when power for the sake of dominating other human beings as if they were property ceases to be the major goal and is supplanted by a human form of collaboration in which the interests of the movies and the movie public are important- then only will the real gold in Hollywood replace the glamorized tinsel.⁷⁸

To conclude: ultimately, the promise of a new American class structure of aspirational celebrity did not succeed in Los Angeles. In part, this was because all of the unjust social systems (classism,

⁷⁵ Raymond Chandler, “Writers in Hollywood.” *Raymond Chandler: Later Novels and Other Writings*. New York: Penguin, 1995) 997.

⁷⁶ Todd VanDerWerff, “Hollywood Coddles Abusers Of All Types In the Name of Making ‘Great Art’.” *Vox*. October 27, 2017; Amanda Hess, “How the Myth of the Artistic Genius Excuses the Abuse of Women.” *New York Times*. November 10, 2017 Claire Dederer, “What Do We Do With the Art of Monstrous Men?”. *The Paris Review*. November 20, 2017.

⁷⁷ Amelie Hastie, *Cupboards of Curiosity: Women, Recollection, and Film History* (Durham, Duke, 2007).

⁷⁸ Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* 304.

corporate wealth versus the working-class, sociopathic capitalism, misogyny, racism) still existed within the city. They had been carried from continent to continent and from east to west, including by the men who created the movies. Hollywood was a place trying to sell itself as new, democratic, and unencumbered by old mores, because beauty and glamour were meant to bestow riches, fame, and success. But in fact Hollywood of the twentieth century was nothing if not a space encumbered and built by male supremacy, white supremacy, and capitalist exploitation, continuing in American traditions that extend far back before the abolition of slavery. In understanding the structures of Hollywood, the importance of looking honestly at the evils of the American system-- in gender, class, and race-- cannot be denied. In a country built and designed with the ownership of people at its core, the dehumanised trading of people continued to manifest itself through numerous historical realities, and continues to do so today.

The fact is, the overturning of a century-long, supremely wealthy, powerful, and successful regime in favour of something less sexist, racist, and predatory will not be done by historians. Most likely, the heavy lifting of this work must be done by people who work in the system themselves. The downfall of Weinstein in 2017, followed by the MeToo and Time's Up revolutions, are the most definitive proof of this. After my summer of fieldwork and oral history interviews in Los Angeles in 2014, I left thinking the city and industry largely operated with a pre-feminist mentality: that the women of Hollywood, in Marxist parlance, simply did not yet have a revolutionary consciousness. How much changed in just a few short years. The downfall of Weinstein did not begin with outsiders or even with celebrities, it began with precisely these women. MeToo was not started by feminist theorists, but by community anti-rape activist Tarana Burke— not even a Hollywood figure at all—and then amplified to a Hollywood movement by actress Alyssa Milano.⁷⁹ Outsiders in the form of writers, academics, and theorists can make suggestions— radical economic self-determination in the form of women and minority-owned production companies, mentorship initiatives that once and for all break the old white male to young white male pipeline that has formed each generations' power club of insiders.⁸⁰ Following the money, or suggesting a divestment-style strategy along the lines of gender and race as a way to revisit the possibilities of the 1910s, are not strategies out of line with the accounts of some of the studio era's most insightful women pioneers. But ultimately, it is up to women and non-white labourers of Hollywood to continue to advocate, fight back, speak the truth about abuses, and move the system forward. As feminist public intellectual Rebecca Solnit has implored, "let this flood of women's stories never cease".⁸¹

Returning to the beginning of this project and Chapters One and Two, in their focus on the

⁷⁹ Sandra E. Garcia. "The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags." *New York Times*. October 20, 2017. Web.

⁸⁰ Beatrice Verhoeven, "How To Kill the Culture of Sexual Harassment? Start By Putting More Women In Charge." *The Wrap*. October 12, 2017.

⁸¹ Rebecca Solnit, "Let This Flood of Women's Stories Never Cease." *Lit Hub*. November 14, 2017.

founding and underpinnings of Hollywood, a gender-equitable creative utopia can never be built over replication of the racist and sexist society from whence it came. Yet this is precisely how this particular business and city were in fact constructed. A system of insularity, nepotism, and criminality can never bring in the best talent, when the vast majority of people are excluded from the in-group. And a new region, city, state, culture, and industry cannot be built upon the suffering and abuse of both those who came before and many of its members, and end in positive outcome. Holding this position of Hollywood as a unique national industry that made beautiful dreams and exported them to the world, but built them on the suffering of others, I would close with the words of novelist Ursula Leguin: “[t]he dilemma of the American conscience can hardly be better stated”.⁸²

⁸² Robert Ferguson, *Inferno: An Anatomy of American Punishment*. (Cambridge, Harvard, 2014).

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