

**THE ACTORS STUDIO
AND HOLLYWOOD IN THE 1950s**

A HISTORY OF THEATRICAL REALISM

MARIO BEGUIRISTAIN

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IN THE 1950s
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Mario Beguiristain

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The Actors Studio and Hollywood in the 1950s

A History of Theatrical Realism

**For my parents,
Rosa and Rodolfo,
and in memory of my professor,
Arthur Knight**

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FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that I write this foreword to Dr. Beguiristain's work, which is now seeing the light in this well-deserved and long overdue edition. It also gives me a *fulfilling sense of closure*, as psychobabblers would say, having witnessed its genesis as a dissertation in the nineteen seventies while we were both USC film students. Now the circle is finally being closed with its publication.

This work makes many notable, useful and valuable contributions to film scholarship. It also has significant sociological value, being the definitive study of how the interaction between a specific group of film artists and then prevalent forces from American popular culture resulted in a particular film style that now belongs to history.

Armed with the same zeal that French critics Nino Frank and Jean-Pierre Chartier must have felt when they wrote their definitive essays on American *film noir*, or for that matter, with the sense of mission that must have overtaken Charles Darwin upon landing in the Galapagos; Dr. Beguiristain embarks upon this remarkable task scientifically—dividing his work into two areas: first, the establishment of a valid methodology to identify, study and categorically designate stylistic unified film movements, followed by the application of that same methodology to those American films of the fifties made under the influence of the Actors Studio and “The Method.”

The first part provides a valuable tool for future film historians who now can follow an established path to study stylistic film movements. The second part applies that methodology to the films in question, resulting in an entertaining, anecdotal study that reads like one of those Vanity Fair Annual Hollywood Issue articles, full of sinfully rich and alluringly juicy morsels of film history gossip.

It all makes for a fascinating read—whether in the quiet, darkened halls of a research library or while lounging in the sun at the beach. That’s something one can’t usually say about most scholarly works.

Peter Krikes, Ph.D.

Peter Krikes, Ph.D., received his doctorate in Communication-Cinema from the University of Southern California in 1979 with his dissertation *Paranoia in the Modern American Film*. He has served on the faculty of the film department at Loyola Marymount University and holds various screenwriting credits, among them *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986), *Back to the Beach* (1987), *Double Impact* (1991) and *Anna and the King* (1999).

PREFACE

It may come as a surprise to many, but unlike most college and university professors who are faced with the “publish or perish” dilemma, that was not my motivation in seeking publication of this work. Miami Dade College, where I am presently full-time faculty, emphasizes teaching over academic research; and publication is not required for awarding tenure or advancement.

My motivation (and I couldn’t resist the temptation to use that word in a book about the Actors Studio) came a few years ago when I began teaching Film History at the College. After covering German Expressionism, Italian Neo-Realism and the French New Wave in my classes, when I got to the group of films that are discussed here, I found that most historians acknowledged their existence but only in passing—maybe due to their dubious artistic merit when seen in light of now prevalent film criticism, but probably due to the non-existence of a commonly accepted term of reference for them. I found that the situation had not changed since I first attempted to identify, categorize and name those films in my doctoral dissertation over thirty years ago. Someone still had to do it, since those now neglected movies were once considered to be the best exponents of serious and artistic American cinema.

What I find fascinating about the dissertation—and I hope the reader will agree—is that, since I didn’t particularly “like” many of those films, I was able to remain detached and focus on the historical analysis and categorization of the films without championing their merits. Quality is always a subjective judgment that changes over time. Ideally, the historian’s work should be free of distortions imposed by value judgments. Thus, when I revisited it, I found that my writing on those films provided an insight into the interaction of a particular set of social,

political and economic conditions at that time and into how common personal attitudes and stances unavoidably find their way into the work of artists who move in the same circles. Maybe that's why it's called a "movement."

The continued lack of critical attention paid to these films seemed to indicate that the time might be right for their re-discovery. There was always the temptation of doing a big coffee table book with lots of photos of sweaty actors, scratching themselves in torn clothing. Taschen probably would have published it. But, should I betray the essential nature of the work? While reading the many long quoted passages in the text trying to decide what to edit, I found myself hearing a chorus of voices speaking with first hand knowledge of the subject, and I realized that my gathering and orchestrating of those voices had acquired an immeasurable historical value. They needed to stay in. So it is being published without any major editing—with its methodology, review of the literature, footnotes and other academic sections of the text intact.

Preserving the academic nature of this book allows it to be used in a way akin to what today is generally known as "googling." The information is always available for the reader, who has the option to skip some sections and approach it in any order desired. Above all, this is a reference text. That's why I have chosen The Edwin Mellen Press as its publisher and not Taschen. Mellen stood behind my decision to retain the work's academic integrity and its value as a research tool.

Now in my classes, when I get to the point of discussing these films, I use the term "Theatrical Realism." And with the publication of this book, I hope that others will also, and that the term will enter the lexicon of film history.

Mario Beguiristain, Ph.D.

Miami Beach, Florida

March 21, 2006

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Special thanks are due Professors Edward Kaufman, Arthur Knight, Joseph Casper, and Richard Toscan, members of the dissertation guidance committee at the University of Southern California; Lee Tsiantis of Films Incorporated, who arranged for the screening of several films; John Tilley of Libra Films, who provided a “home base” in New York City for the research; Becky Emery, who typed unwieldy manuscript into a first draft; Jessie Levine, who typed and edited the original dissertation; Helen Thorington, who retyped it into Microsoft Word thirty years later; Sandra Ferguson of Legwork Writers’ Research Service, who cleared the use of all the illustrations; Oscar Bustamante who contributed to the design of the cover; my colleagues at Miami Dade College: Barry Gordon, who edited the photo captions and Elio Arteaga, who gracefully taught me how to print the photographs; and to Mrs. Patricia Schultz, production editor at The Edwin Mellen Press.

Appreciation must also be extended to Joel Zuker, who helped me find a rare print of *A Face in the Crowd* for viewing at a time when the film was unavailable; Charles Silver at the Museum of Modern Art, who provided guidance through the library’s collection of films; David Garfield, without whose dissertation on the Actors Studio this study would not have been complete; the staff at the Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and

Sciences (especially Ms. Alice Mitchell who always knew how to find everything), the staffs of the libraries of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City, the University of Southern California, the University of California at Los Angeles, and New York University.

For agreeing to serve on the Mellen Press' peer review committee, I am grateful to Gary Prebula, Artistic Director of the Widescreen Film Festival and Lecturer at the California State University Long Beach film department; and Dana Keith, Founder and Director of the Miami Beach Film Society and Cinémathèque. And finally, to Dr. Peter Krikes, who provided a conducive environment in which to do the original writing many years ago and who now has amiably agreed to contribute the foreword to this edition of the work.

CHAPTER I

THE SEARCH FOR A FILM STYLE

INTRODUCTION

Though American pictures are often casually dismissed as “escapist entertainment,” the forms of that escape vary from era to era and have their own significance. Successive waves or cycles of films characteristic of any given period, charted against changes in the political and social climate of the country, reveal something of the temperament, the social attitudes of people themselves.

-- Arthur Knight¹

In recent years the increased interest in the serious study of the cinema has created a need for the development of systematic approaches to the vast body of motion pictures available for study. The film historian is continually faced with the task of organizing films into groups according to preestablished criteria in order to map the course of film history. It is by creating such “groups” that the scholar can derive inferences from his study and trace the developments in the evolution of the art.

¹ Arthur Knight, *The Liveliest Art—A Panoramic History of the Movies* (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1957), p. 237.

A quick glance at the history of film scholarship permits a view into the criteria used for the organization of the vast number of films that comprise the sum total of motion picture production. Films have been grouped according to elements they have in common, such as their country or origin, their period of production, the work of a specific film maker (director, writer, producer, actor, or even studio), their adherence to the established forms of a genre (the Western, Musical, Gangster, Horror film, etc.), and their belonging to a particular wave of film style (German Expressionism, Italian Neo-Realism, French New Wave, etc.).

The classification of films into the three latter groups goes hand in hand with the development of theories that substantiate the creation of each of these categories; thus the “auteur” theory supports the arrangement of films usually according to their director, and genre theory allows for an approach based on established dramatic forms. But when it comes to delineating criteria for the study of films grouped according to stylistics, the author is faced with the lack of a cohesive and widely accepted theory upon which to base his work. Tudor in *Theories of Film*, stated:

Excellent cases have been made focusing on the persistent structures running through one of a series of films. By and large, however, this interest has developed in relation to theme at the expense of style; needless to say there is no reason to think of this as a necessary conjunction, though style is undoubtedly more difficult to handle.²

In *Language and Cinema* semiologist Metz proposed the notion of the existence of “cinematic codes” which, although extremely diverse, can be disengaged from the body of each individual film and provide the basis for the organization of films into groups:

The plurality of cinematic codes is first a consequence of the plurality of films themselves. There exist a considerable number of films differing in their subject, intention, filming, technique, sociological

² Andrew Tudor, *Theories of Film* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), p. 160.

context, etc. Thus, classes of films are formed which are themselves numerous. What is called “American comedy from between the two wars” is one class of films, the “burlesque of the silent screen” another, the “Kammerspiel” yet another, and so forth. Each of these groups of films includes different codes of its own, and it is because the speaker senses or feels their presence that he spontaneously arranges several films into a single category.³

This study is an attempt to define a category of stylistically unified films within the American motion picture industry.

NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this work is to provide an analytical, critical, and historical framework for the study of certain dramatic American films, made in the fifties and early sixties, whose common elements warrant grouping them under the same category as part of a film style for which the term “Theatrical Realism” has been chosen. The emphasis here must be placed on style as the determining factor in the establishment of this category of films. Although, as was stated earlier, there is no established critical theory that clearly delineates the path to follow in a study of film stylistics, studies of this nature have a tradition and are commonly accepted as an integral part of film scholarship. In *Sociology of Film Art* Huaco wrote:

Film history reveals that there have been three and only three complete waves of film art which are stylistically homogeneous clusters. By “complete” I mean that the Phenomenon had a historically specific beginning, duration, and ending and that, as part of the unchangeable past, it can now be approached as a totality. These three waves have been as follows: the German expressionist film, from 1920-1931; the Soviet expressive-realist film, from 1925-1930; and the Italian neorealist film, from 1945-1955. We should also notice that there seem to be three more waves of film art currently in progress: the Japanese post-World-War-II film (Akira Kurosawa, Kenji Mizoguchi, Keisuke Kinoshita, Tadashi Imai, and Kin Ichikawa); the Polish post-World-War-II film (Aleksander

³ Christian Metz, *Language and Cinema*. Translated by Donna Jean Umu ker-Sebeok (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton and Company, 1974), p. 64.

Ford, Wanda Jakubowska, Andrzej Munk, Andrzej Wajda, and Jerzy Kawalerowicz); and the neoromantic French “nouvelle vague” film (Alain Resnais, Francois Truffaut, Marcel Camus, Jean Rouch, Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, and Chris Marker).⁴

Huaco, writing in 1965, may have felt that the postwar Japanese and Polish films, as well as the French New Wave, were stylistically homogeneous clusters still in the process of growth and, as such, should be studied only after there were officially declared dead (a task critics, so often compared to coroners, relish to perform); but where one must take issue with Huaco is in his assertion that “there have been three and only three complete waves” of stylistically homogeneous film art. Other stylistic groups have been recognized, defined and studied. These would include the French Poetic Realism of Renoir, Pagnol, Vigo, and Carné, which started in the thirties and reigned in France as the style supreme until the arrival of the New Wave in the late fifties; the Soviet Social-Realist film style which Stalin imposed on Russian film makers during his term of power and remained the accepted mode of filmic expression for decades; and the Surrealist Avant-Garde movement of the twenties in France, which included the work of Bunuel, Clair, Léger, Ray, and Dalí.

It is interesting to note that each of these stylistically homogeneous film waves was the result of the interaction of specific social, artistic, and economic structures present within a given society. Thus, film styles tend to be labeled according to their country of origin, period of development, and aesthetic philosophy.

This work is concerned with a specific manifestation of the aesthetic philosophy of Realism in the American cinema which came about as a direct result of an influx of artists deeply committed to realism from the theatre into film during the decade of the fifties. Therefore it was named, “Theatrical Realism,” to reflect the formative elements and attributes of the film style.

⁴ George A. Huaco, *The Sociology of Film Art* (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 1.

The study will unfold by analyzing and defining the style; its elements; and the artistic, economic, and socio-political factors that contributed to its manifestation. Separate chapters will be devoted to the historical interaction between Realism, Film, and Theatre, and the influence of the Actors Studio on the American film industry. The study will proceed with a historical and critical analysis of five representative films⁵ and contributors involved in their production. A complete listing of all Theatrical Realism films and personnel is included in Appendix A.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The fact that a large number of films with stylistic cohesiveness and common elements in conception and execution, which form a complete and definable body of work, have been neglected comes as no surprise when one realizes how little scholarly work has been devoted to charting stylistic movements in film history.

The bulk of the literature on film is composed mostly of studies centered on individual artists and their work. This is partly due to the proliferation and acceptance of the auteur theory in recent years, which has made of the director the pivotal figure in film criticism. However, the work of film historians published prior to the late fifties (before the formulation of the auteur theory) reflects a more wholistic approach to the cinema.

In *The Liveliest Art* (1957) Knight devoted two chapters of his book to the description of international and American “trends” in films. What Knight discussed as trends could be considered waves of film styles which have now become a part of history.⁶ Perhaps the last of these stylistic movements to have been defined and charted by critics and historians was the French New Wave

⁵ The films are *The Rose Tattoo*, *The Bachelor Party*, *Edge of the City*, *A Face in the Crowd* and *The Pawnbroker*.

⁶ Among the “trends” discussed by Knight were Italian Neo-Realism, German Propaganda, Russian Social Realism, and the postwar Japanese films.

(1957-1965), whose participants, ironically, were responsible for formulating the auteur theory.

Yet the flow of stylistic film waves has not halted, and many are now waiting to be recognized and studied. There is the British Kitchen Sink Drama of the early sixties (*The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *A Taste of Honey*, *Look Back in Anger*, etc.) which picks up the realistic tradition at the time of the passing of Theatrical Realism from the American screen. In the late sixties some examples include the American Psychedelic films (*The Trip*, *Easy Rider*, *The Magic Garden of Stanley Sweetheart*, *Maryjane*, *Gasss...*, etc.), and Swinging London films (*The Knack*, *Smashing Time*, *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush*, *Joanna*, *Help*, etc.). In the seventies a wave of stylized nostalgia hit the international cinema (*The Damned*, *Stavisky*, *The Conformist*, *Chinatown*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, *Amarcord*, *Farewell My Lovely*, etc.). These are all stylistic manifestations which should provide fertile areas for other scholars to research in the future.

A study of the films that comprise Theatrical Realism has long been overdue. At the time they were made, these films represented the most prestigious, serious and “artistic” efforts of the American film industry. These were the films that broke new grounds on the screen with their frank, adult, and honest handling of sensitive subjects. They won innumerable awards and established the careers of some of America’s most illustrious actors, directors, writers, and producers. Yet these films are almost forgotten today because they were directly dependent on a social and artistic climate which no longer exists and is regarded with contempt by today’s critical establishment. The basic tenets of the style are considered “anticinematic” because of the reliance on the adaptation of plays, novels, and television programs. Thus, the prevalent view of film history has delegated Theatrical Realism films to a virtual state of nonexistence, creating a significant gap in the history of the American cinema that this study shall attempt to fill.

TOWARD A DEFINITION OF STYLE

Before arriving at a definition of Theatrical Realism as a stylistically homogeneous film wave, a definition of the word “style” must be derived. Huaco, in his aforementioned study, evaded this question with an assumption and three examples when he wrote:

I assume what is generally granted by informed opinion, namely, that some film is art and that this mechanized offspring of industrial civilization has already exhibited in its brief history, coherent groups of stylistic phenomena comparable to styles in other visual arts—such, for example, as those we customarily designate by such labels as “Romanesque,” “Gothic,” and “Baroque.”⁷

Webster’s dictionary defines style as:

... a mode of expressing thought in language; especially such use of language as exhibits the spirit and personality of an artist; (a) distinctive or characteristic mode of presentation, construction, or execution in any art, employment, or product; especially fine art.⁸

Panofsky, the great art historian, contemporary of both Arnheim and Kracauer, developed the notion of “style” in his essay “Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures” along the lines of external organization of reality:

Excepting the very special case of the animated cartoon, the movies organize material things and persons into a composition that receives its style not so much by an interpretation in the artist’s mind as by the actual manipulation of physical objects and recording machinery. The medium of the movies is physical reality and the problem is to manipulate and shoot unstylized reality in such a way that the result has style.⁹

⁷ Huaco, p. 1.

⁸ *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. and C. Merriam Company, 1961), p. 842.

⁹ Erwin Panofsky, in Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 168-169.

Panofsky defined style operationally in terms of “manipulation,” “arrangement,” and “organization,” implying that it is the effect of the artist on reality. Tyler took a similar view when he stated that:

It is style alone which separates imitated human situations in art from human situations as they exist in the world. [These situations] become subjectivized because they have the particular identifying mark, true of all genuine art, of style.¹⁰

“Style” defines itself collectively through association and comparison. It is often said that an artist works “within a certain style,” has been influenced by “someone else’s style,” or forms part of “a stylistic group.” The concept of style has to do with the way an artist handles his material and with similarities in performance, mostly in intuitive aesthetic and behavioral choices which follow similar patterns, these patterns are perceived as style when they reoccur, as they often do, within one or several works by the same artist (personal style) or when they reoccur in the works of several artists of a specific culture (stylistic movement).

Style is a wholistic concept based on the myriad details that find their way into a work. These details may be of a thematic, personal, artistic, social, or cultural nature and since they are the direct result of specific choices, they reflect conscious or unconscious attitudes within the minds of the creators. One of the basic inferences that can be derived from this study is that artists of similar backgrounds, working within the same social system and holding comparable attitudes, not only influence each others’ work, but create works that exhibit a collective style and can be categorized as belonging to a school or movement.

¹⁰ Parker Tyler, *The Shadow of an Airplane Climbs the Empire State Building* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1973), p. 210.

DEFINITION OF THEATRICAL REALISM

The only precedent this writer found that followed a systematic approach in the area of defining specific film styles was Huaco's *The Sociology of Film Art*. In this book he analyzed three film movements and established the criteria for the definition of other film styles. He did this in two ways: first by setting up four specific conditions necessary for the development of a style, and then by listing the style's attributes. He defined the conditions as follows:

A film style must be describable and analyzable in a context comprised of professional personnel of common social characteristics; of a commonly shared technology; of a specific industrial and commercial organization; and of a public climate responsive to a given film style.¹¹

Theatrical Realism fulfills all four of the above prerequisites Huaco listed as fundamental conditions for the existence of a film style in the following way:

1. Professional personnel of common social characteristics:

In the course of the research for this work the writer selected the leading producers, directors, writers, actors, etc. who worked within the style and found more than "common social characteristics" in often overlapping histories of similar socio-cultural backgrounds, collaborations, politics, shared interests, and collective group image in the life and work of these individuals.

2. A commonly shared technology:

The American film industry in the fifties and early sixties had already reached a state of technical development comparable and almost equal to the one it enjoys today. The technical advances in recent years have been concentrated in the areas of refining equipment and working methods to cut production costs. The introduction of portable and compact equipment, as well as a systems approach, have had little impact

¹¹ Huaco, p. vi.

on the stylistic components of a film. By 1955 most of the technological choices available today to professional film artists were fully developed (such as monopack color, wide screen and anamorphic processes, stereophonic sound, location capabilities, vari-focal lenses, etc.). These technical developments were mostly bypassed by those who worked in the Theatrical Realism style in favor of the more sober, subtle, “artistic,” conservative, and economical “plain-old-square-black-and-white-frame with monophonic sound.”

This decision was based partly on aesthetic principles, but mostly was dictated by the relatively small budgets allocated to these films.

Another common factor shared by these films was that they were mostly produced outside the Hollywood studios. Four out of the five films chosen for detailed discussion in this work were shot in the same location,¹² using the same pool of technicians and facilities.

3. A specific industrial and commercial organization:

Theatrical Realism is a film style that evolved within the public structure of the commercial American cinema. These films were made as viable, profitable ventures utilizing professional methods of production, distribution, and exhibition. They were handled by the major production and distribution companies of Hollywood, and found enough financial and critical success to warrant a production schedule of over one hundred Theatrical Realism films within a five-year period.

4. A public climate responsive to the film style:

The public response to Theatrical Realism was more enthusiastic than could have been expected in a decade marked by complacent conformity. The overwhelming success of films such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1952), *On the Waterfront* (1954), and *Marty* (1955) clearly illustrates the popularity and wide acceptance of the style in fifties American culture. Theatrical Realism films are a true index of the

¹² New York City and its environs.

“serious thinking” that was prevalent in the society of the times, and they reflect the social, political, emotional, and personal concerns of a particularly wide portion of that movie audience. They were the vehicles for the popular rising young stars that defined the youth roles of the decade (Brando, Dean, Newman, etc.); they were considered the vanguard of artistic commercial film making by the intelligentsia; and the so-called adult themes and elements of violence, sex, and sensationalism that were commonly found in the films attracted the masses in search of excitement and teasing titillation.

After establishing these four conditions, Huaco arrived at the conclusion that the listing of a style’s attributes is the best way to define it:

The trouble here is that the uniqueness of a visual style cannot be apprehended by a verbal definition. The only alternative to presenting visual samples is to give lists of formal attributes which will permit the style of a given film to be identified as belonging to a particular historical sequence.¹³

In this work an attempt was made to do both, but before proceeding, we must justify the use of the nomenclature.

Tudor stated that just as the critic determines the criteria on which the classification is based, he also determines the name given to the resultant group of films.”¹⁴ The term Theatrical Realism was selected because it reflects the two main areas from where the style draws its attributes and, as Huaco stated, it is through these attributes that the style can be defined. The two words, “theatrical” and “realism” seem to be diametrically opposed in meaning, but in this case they are closely related.

“Theatrical” was used because:

¹³ Huaco, p. vi.

¹⁴ Tudor, *Theories of Film*, p 160.

1. Most of these films were adaptations of stage dramas or novels; and in the few cases where original screenplays were written, these were by playwrights or novelists.
2. The direction and the actors' performances were heavily influenced by "the Method" as developed and taught at the Actors Studio.
3. The elements of action, spectacle, and visual dynamism, so integral to films in general, were virtually nonexistent, and emphasis was placed on verbal and psychological conflicts more common to the stage drama.
4. Many, if not most, of the people who made these films came from a New York theatre or live television background.

"Realism" was used because:

1. The subject matter and its treatment were devoid of exoticism, glamour, fantasy, and overt stylization. In other words, they were "realistic."
2. All these films were contemporary dramas and melodramas dealing with social or personal issues.
3. The influence of Freudian psychology was common to all these films.
4. Locations were more prevalent than studio sets. The setting was explored in great detail and became an integral part of the work.
5. There was a thread of "left-wing" ideology running through these films indicative of a traditional direct relationship between the political left and realism in the arts.

The inclusion of a film in the discussion, or its appearance in the listing of Theatrical Realism films in Appendix A, means that the film exhibits most,

though not necessarily all, the formal attributes associated with Theatrical Realism.

METHODOLOGY

To arrive at a definition of a style or a school of cinema, one must view a large number of films, and certain specified films (not replaceable by others). One must above all know how to compare these films with others. In order to study a given trait of the cinema, it is necessary to view a rather large number of films of *all sorts* (but except for the most important ones, rather easily substitutable by others, on condition that the sample remains varied and representative). It is necessary, above all, to know how to deal with diverse extra-cinematic data: linguistic, semiotic, psychological, sociological, etc.¹⁵

The preceding passage, extracted from Metz' *Language and Cinema*, describes the methodological approach taken in this study.

The first step was to develop an intuitive awareness of the Theatrical Realism style and the films that were a part of it. As Metz stated in his work, the grouping of films into categories is primarily “based on intuitively perceived similarities.”¹⁶ He elaborated further:

When by “group of films” one understands a vast collective text which crosses over several inter-filmic boundaries, it is, by definition, that one supposes between these films a profound and global kinship, a certain homogeneity involving the general structures of each film, and to which there necessarily corresponds—although this may be in different degrees—a certain unity of impression, an air of family resemblance which influences the ensemble and may be directly observed—in brief, to a *resemblance* in the most ordinary sense of the word.¹⁷

Five motion pictures immediately came to mind as exhibiting the characteristics of the Theatrical Realism style: *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Marty*, *The Three Faces of Eve*, *The Man with the Golden Arm*, and *The Misfits*. All of

¹⁵ Metz, p. 82.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

these films were far from obscure and for many reasons had been in the limelight of public attention during their first commercial release. They seemed to be, therefore, representative of the style, and as such, a breakdown of their common components should yield the essence of Theatrical Realism. These films evoked the following elements through free association: the fifties, psychology, the South, realism, Elia Kazan, Tennessee Williams, the theatre, the Actors Studio, New York, Marlon Brando, Joanne Woodward, sex, sweating, scratching, sensationalism, drugs, censorship, Marilyn Monroe, Arthur Miller, kitchen dramas, Paddy Chayefsky, Delbert Mann, Daniel Mann, black and white, torn clothing, underwear, message pictures, seriousness, intensity, the Blacklist, Martin Ritt, Sidney Lumet and early television.

A compilation of film titles exhibiting some of these characteristics was assembled with their credits and production dates. Lists of directors, actors, writers, producers, composers, cameramen, etc. were drawn up and their filmographies were compiled, rejecting those films which did not fall within the intuitively perceived style. Of course, it became imperative to see the films to make this decision.

The parameter of the study began to emerge. The films were thematically organized into five basic categories: (1) the New York Film, (2) the Southern Drama, (3) the Social Message Film, (4) The Psychological Drama, and (5) Enlightened Americana.

Once this body of film works had been tentatively listed and organized, a search for the common stylistic elements were undertaken in order to identify, define, and name the film style. This led to the term “Theatrical Realism” and to the areas where intensive research was to take place:

1. Realism
2. Film and Theatre
3. The Fifties
4. The Actors Studio

5. The Blacklist
6. Television Drama
7. Psychological Drama
8. Independent Productions
9. The “New York Jewish Liberal” Syndrome
10. The “Art House” Syndrome

The literature dealing with these topics was examined carefully, and close attention was paid to the social and artistic factors involved in the creation of the film style.

Once the style was defined, it became imperative to trace its historical development. The socio-political as well as the artistic and economical roots of Theatrical Realism were examined, and its legacy to present American film making was determined. The boundaries of the style became clear—starting with Elia Kazan’s first Hollywood film, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945), and ending with Sidney Lumet’s *The Pawnbroker* (1964), but peaking somewhere between Delbert Mann’s film of Paddy Chayefsky’s *Marty* (1955) and Jack Garfein’s *Something Wild* (1962).

Interviews were arranged with the major personalities involved with Theatrical Realism and five films (different from the ones which originally came to mind) were selected for in-depth study: *The Rose Tattoo*, *Edge of the City*, *Bachelor Party*, *A Face in the Crowd*, and *The Pawnbroker*. A conscious effort was made in the selection of these films¹⁸ to allow for the discussion of Theatrical Realism in all its manifestations.

¹⁸ A detailed discussion of the criteria that led to the selection of these films may be found in the introduction of Chapter V.

CRITICAL APPROACH

The writer's critical approach to the study of this body of film derived elements from the sociological and the auteurist critical traditions, as well as genre theory. The sociological tradition was defined by Jarvie as follows:

It appears that ever since the cinema became a subject of minor intellectual interest, a tradition of film criticism which might be said to be "sociologically oriented" has existed. That is to say, attempts may have been made to relate films to what is known of the sociology and social psychology of the societies which produced them. It may seem a trifle odd to speak of societies "producing" things; all that is meant is that to some extent the attitudes, values and interests of their makers are conditioned by the social context in which they were raised and in which they work.¹⁹

Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* offered the following:

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has summed up the "auteur" theory as it is normally presented today:

One essential corollary of the theory as it has been developed is the discovery that the defining characteristics of an author's work are not necessarily those which are most readily apparent. The purpose of criticism thus becomes to uncover behind the superficial contrasts of subject and treatment a hard core of basic and often recondite motifs. The pattern formed by these motifs. . . is what gives an author's work its particular structure, both defining it internally and distinguishing one body of work from another.

It is this "structural approach": as Nowell-Smith calls it, which is indispensable for the critic.²⁰

Both of these approaches offered their advantages and disadvantages. To apply the auteur theory to Theatrical Realism would seem like heresy to the high priests of auteurism, who understandably ignore the work of Theatrical Realism

¹⁹ I. C. Jarvie, *Movies and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1970) p. 7.

²⁰ Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), p. 80.

directors. But there is much to be discussed in these films that calls for the structuralist auteur approach without the canonization of the director that is implicit in the use of the auteur theory.

One of the first issues to be resolved was the question of authorship. The auteur theory, with some exceptions, bestows authorship automatically upon the director of the film. The sociologically oriented critic takes a broader look at this question and considers the film to be a product of the society that produced it. Although Jarvie found it “a trifle odd to speak of societies as producing things” Kaminsky, in his book *American Film Genres*, stated:

For those who would argue that meaningful creation must be individual, I respond in two ways. First I say “Why?” I am opposed to arbitrary definitions of what creativity should be. If a society or a culture can produce, can create, its creations are worth examination and appreciation. After all, we do not talk about specific Egyptian artists, but about ancient Egyptian art.²¹

The question of authorship was particularly difficult to establish within the framework of the commercial cinema. A stylistic study such as this one is concerned with all the factors that interact during the production of a film and affect its resulting style. Therefore, it becomes imperative that the parameters used for establishing authorship or stylistic responsibility not be narrowed down to a single individual. Film is a collaborative art. Panofsky created, on this subject, a most rational metaphor:

It might be said that a film, called into being by a co-operative effort in which all contributions have the same degree of permanence, is the nearest modern equivalent of a medieval cathedral; the role of the producer corresponding, more or less, to that of the bishop or archbishop; that of the director to that of the architect; that of the scenario writers to that of the scholastic advisers establishing the iconographical program; and that of the actors, cameramen, cutters, sound men, make-up men, and the diverse technicians to that of those whose work provided the physical

²¹ Stuart Kaminsky, *American Film Genres* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1974), p. 14.

entity of the finished product, from the sculptors, glass painters, bronze casters, carpenters and skilled masons down to any one of the collaborators he will tell you, with perfect “bona fides,” that his is really the most important job—which is quite true to the extent that it is indispensable.²²

The question of authorship will be approached along these same lines when dealing with the films in this work. We maintain that *all* the artists involved in any film (from the lowest member on the crew to the producer, from the most insignificant player to the top-billed stars, the cinematographer, production designer, writer, and director) provide the elements that result in the particular style of a motion picture.

Factors that define a film style can be discovered through the process of comparison, but this process is not complete without the dimension that the sociological approach can impart to these factors. If the auteurist emphasis on the role of the director is inappropriate for this purpose, the sociological approach is unfortunately burdened with a tradition of critical judgments that are unacceptable for a study of this nature. Jarvie focused on this problem when he stated:

In the sociological critical approach the attitude held in common is that of treating films as though they were statements about, or reflections of, the society they portray; statements, that is, of an attitude or a point of view towards, criticism or evaluation of, what they portray.

To one used to the ways of the other arts this seems, at first glance, an odd approach. Films deal with people in society, certainly; but so do novels, plays and, often enough, poems. And, to be sure, a reviewer of novels will occasionally discuss, for instance, an author’s psychological or sociological insight in the course of a more technical discussion of whether the book is a good one or not. Much the same applies to drama. But to concentrate exclusively upon these aspects and, furthermore, to evaluate the work purely on such a basis would be unthinkable. . . . There is the coincidence (at least, I assume it is a coincidence) that many people who write about films are politically leftish and, faced with the undoubted commercialism of the cinema’s “bread-and-butter” output, they are continually on the defensive. My conjecture is that unconsciously they revere it as a propaganda medium and rationalize this into an artistic

²² Panofsky, *Film Theory and Criticism*, 9. 167.

appreciation. Sometimes film critics judge a film on social or moral grounds. We are all familiar with the kinds of words they use. In the hope that no-one will use them again, here is a selection. Words of approval: “aware of the real issues,” “committed,” “concerned,” “honest,” “real,” “serious,” “sincere,” “socially conscious,” “true,” “valid,” “vital.” Words of disapproval: “cynical,” “deceptive,” “empty,” “equivocal,” “escapist,” “evasive,” “false,” “frivolous,” “professional,” “shallow,” “slick,” “smooth,” “superficial.”²³

This school of criticism is, of course, closely related to Theatrical Realism, and most of the writing that supports it is burdened with those adjectives. As Jarvie elaborated further:

A second explanation for the prevalence of “sociologically oriented” criticism was offered during the first “commitment” debate, and this is where cinéastes, proselytizing for the cinema, were wont to meet the indifference and superiority of “old-fashioned” intellectuals by stressing not its value as entertainment, but its seriousness. The problem was a tough one. Assuming you must proselytize, the question is, how are you to convince people simply bored by what they consider frivolous popular entertainment? Answer: you try to prove the opposite: you try *to show how realistic, how concerned with serious issues, the cinema is* (at least potentially). You argue that the cinema is involved with life, that life should be taken seriously and that therefore the cinema should be taken seriously. The very assumption that the cinema needs such an intellectual justification is to insult the medium and reflects a basic lack of confidence in its intrinsic value and importance.²⁴

Therefore, most sociologically oriented critics discussing the work of Theatrical Realism artists find themselves confusing a system of moral values with a system of aesthetic values; demeaning, bypassing, and insulting the medium by focusing on the moral righteousness of the message. It is in reaction to this critical approach that the auteur theory was formulated in redemption of cinematic reality,²⁵ embracing the “frivolous” genres as more “valid” and

²³ Jarvie, pp. 8-9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁵ To paraphrase Siegfried Kracauer’s *Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

“cinematic” art than the socially conscious, message-wrought works which comprise Theatrical Realism.

One of the basic postulates from genre theory that is incorporated into this writer’s critical approach is the lack of qualitative judgment as criterion for determining whether to study a particular film or group of films. As Kaminsky stated in the introduction of his *American Film Genres*:

Genre theory must be systematic. It is not primarily a means of validating one’s likes and dislikes. It is not a club for aesthetic coercion; it is, or should be, a tool for understanding the works in view. Value judgment is a matter of aesthetics beyond (or apart from) basic genre study.²⁶

Since genre theory and stylistic studies are both concerned with the grouping of films into categories, it is important to make a clear distinction between them in order to avoid confusion. Kaminsky defined genre in terms of narrative forms and thematic elements that have both cultural and universal roots and share a number of motifs in common.²⁷ A stylistic movement, however, is quite a different manifestation. Although quite often one may find narrative and thematic similarities in films of a given style, this is not a determining factor in defining the movement. Unlike film genres, which are stable and established forms of a culture, styles have a specific duration, location, and aesthetic. A film genre such as the Western goes as far back as Porter’s *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) and continues to this day as an internationalized genre—the result of an expanding culture. On the other hand, a film style such as German Expressionism consists of a certain number of films produced under similar circumstances by a specific society within a given period of time As Tudor stated:

²⁶ Stuart M. Kaminsky, *American Film Genres* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1974), p. 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Genre is a conception existing in the culture of any particular group or society; it is not a way in which a critic classifies films for methodological purposes, but the much looser way in which an audience classifies its films.²⁸

In order to study the phenomenon of Theatrical Realism in its entirety an attempt was made to combine axioms from the auteur and genre theories, as well as sociologically oriented criticism, into a coherent critical vision that utilizes the strong points of these theories whenever applicable. Thus, a model for identifying and studying stylistic film movements is established.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Of course nothing has been written on Theatrical Realism, per se, since this is a new nomenclature for a group of films until now undefined, yet there is a wealth of material dealing with this type of film. Almost all of it is in the form of magazine and newspaper articles which were written at the time. The arrival of so-called "Method" actors and directors in Hollywood during the early fifties had an impact of such magnitude that it was fully documented in interviews, articles, and stories which ran from the local trade papers to the nation's glossy pictorial publications. The libraries at the University of Southern California, University of California at Los Angeles, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center contain voluminous files of clippings which provided fruitful grounds for research. Some of these articles are listed in the Bibliography.

In addition, copies of shooting scripts and production information were available through these libraries, as well as through the studios themselves. Several critics have written essays on the film style, these being the closest attempts to define Theatrical Realism. Worthy of mention are Richard MacCann's "The Problem Film in America," Manny Farber's "Hard-Sell Cinema," and Dwight Macdonald's two articles: "Good Bad Movies, Bad Good

²⁸ Tudor, *Theories of Film*, p. 145.

Movies and The Pawnbroker” and “Kazanistan, Ingeland, and Williams, Tenn.” These critical pieces deal with Theatrical Realism directly and reveal their authors’ awareness of the existence of the style.

Several film books dealing with the decade of the fifties were of particular interest in the way they approached the question at hand, notably, Richard MacCann’s *Hollywood in Transition*, Ezra Goodman’s *The Fifty Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*, and Charles Higham’s *Hollywood at Sunset*.

The two best works that survey this time were invaluable in terms of providing fertile grounds for research and supporting this writer’s theories. Gordon Gow’s *Hollywood in the Fifties* is insightful, concise, and covers the decade leaving no stone unturned. Four of its chapters deal directly with Theatrical Realism, acknowledging the prominence and influence of the style on the films of the decade. These chapters were entitled “Words and Images,” “Individuals or Misfits,” “Acting and Being,” and “Showbiz Neurosis.” Andrew Dowdy’s *The Films of the Fifties* is an amusing and highly readable work that focuses on the cultural “Gestalt” of that decade and provides the most lucid sociologically oriented history of the period’s films. Douglas Brode’s book of identical title, *The Films of the Fifties*, was published at the close of this writer’s research, and what was eagerly awaited as an instrumental work proved to be of little use since it consisted of an introductory essay giving a limited and superficial glimpse of the decade’s films and a compilation of film titles selected without apparent criteria.

In the research concerning the Actors Studio, Robert Hethmon’s *Strasberg at the Actors Studio* provided the groundwork for the chapter dealing with this subject. Hethmon’s book was complemented by David Garfield’s recently completed doctoral dissertation at New York University, “The History of the Actors Studio, 1947-1975.” This carefully documented and very interesting study helped this writer synthesize the contributions made by the Studio’s members to the film style. In the same area mention must be made to Harold Clurman’s books, *The Fervent Years* and *All People Are Famous*, as firsthand accounts of

the history of most of the principals connected with the “serious” New York stage. Robert Lewis’ *Method or Madness*, Constantin Stanislavsky’s *Creating a Role*, Michael Billington’s *The Modern Actor*, Toby Cole’s compilation *Acting: A Handbook of the Stanislavsky Method*, and Edward Dwight Easty’s *On Method Acting* were consulted often as references in defining the acting style of Theatrical Realism.

Of the works dealing with the sociology of film, George Huaco’s *The Sociology of Film Art* provided the model for the definition of Theatrical Realism. His work, unfortunately, is burdened with the “Art-House” mentality prevalent at the time of his writing, but his structural critical approach is among the most lucid to be found in this area. I. C. Jarvie’s *Movies and Society* became a close ally in establishing a comprehensive critical approach devoid of intellectual pretensions. This highly personal work of great scope became one of this writer’s “finds” in the process of research. Richard Dyer MacCann’s anthology, entitled *Film and Society*, provided several relevant articles and pointed toward other sources. Andrew Tudor’s *Image and Influence*, Paul Weiss’ *Cinematics*, and J. P. Mayer’s *Sociology of Film* were in the classical scholarly treatise style, yet provided limited but valuable assistance in this area.

In the area of film theory no particular work proved to be of exceptional value, but several should be mentioned as they provided quotable material. Peter Wollen’s *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* is at the forefront with its novel semiological approach and its discussion of the various critical theories, especially the auteur theory. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen’s anthology of readings, *Film Theory and Film Criticism*, offers a good cross-section of the best writings on the nature of the medium. The essays by Erwin Panofsky (“Style and Medium in the Motion Picture”), William Earle (“Revolt Against Realism in the Films”), Charles Barr (“CinemaScope: Before and After”), and Stanley Cavell (“Types; Cycles as Genres”) were of particular interest.

The classic “troika” of fictional film theory (Arnheim’s *Film as Art*, Bazin’s *What Is Cinema?* and Kracauer’s *Theory of Film*) appear now as merely

three tired old horses who laid the foundation for most of the theoretical work of today, but should be put out to pasture. As Jarvie stated:

A close reading of many of the critics of the twenties and thirties, especially Rotha, Arnheim, Grierson, reveals one recurring theme: we must persuade people to take the film seriously. One has the impression the average intellectual paid no more attention to films than he paid to the stack of polite detective thrillers he would demolish from time to time.²⁹

In the area dealing with Realism two works did prove invaluable. An exceptional article by Edouard L. de Laurot published in *Film Culture*, in 1955, entitled "Towards a Theory of Dynamic Realism," although rather vague and murky in its beginnings, slowly assumes Bretonian dimensions and becomes the closest thing to a Theatrical Realism manifesto to be found in print anywhere. John Gassner's *Form and Idea in Modern Theatre* deals with all the manifestations of Realism, not only in the theatre but in the other arts as well, and is the keystone work in defining and illustrating the realistic style. Roy Armes' carefully detailed study of Italian Neo-Realism, *Patterns of Realism*, not only deals with the question of realism but illustrates an alternate way of approaching the classification of a film style.

There are several relevant works dealing with the subject of Film and Theatre. Allardyce Nicoll's seminal book, *Film and Theatre*, takes an Arnheimish approach in comparing the two media, but proves insufficient due to its early publication date. An anthology of readings on this subject also proved instrumental: James Hurt's *Focus on Film and Theatre*, which compiles the best essays on the subject by some of the most illustrious critics of the world. Of particular interest were those by Susan Sontag and Peter Handke. A special issue of the *Tulane Drama Review* (Fall, 1966) concentrated on the subject of Film and Theatre comparisons and included some excellent essays. Robert McLaughlin's published dissertation in Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin,

²⁹ Jarvie, p. 12.

entitled *Broadway and Hollywood: A History of Economic Interaction*, is very enlightening and deals with the film/theatre question from a novel, interesting, pragmatic, and scientific point of view.

Also dealing with the question of adaptations were Nicholas Vardac's *Stage to Screen*, George Bluestone's *Novels into Film*, and Robert Richardson's *Literature and Film*, but these proved to be of marginal interest.

Because of the "theatrical" element in "Theatrical Realism" many books dealing directly with theatre were consulted. *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams* contains introductory essays by the author. The one dealing with *The Rose Tattoo* is quoted in the chapter dealing with the film. Jane Mathews' *The Federal Theatre 1935-1939—Plays, Relief and Politics* illuminated the period where the roots of Theatrical Realism took hold. Jon von Szeliski's *Tragedy and Fear* and David Sievers' *Freud on Broadway* both deal with the "neurotic theatre" substantiating the instrumental role played by the popularization of Freudian analysis. The survey work *American Drama in Social Context*, by Morris Freedman, was consulted occasionally. Lewis Funke and John E. Booth published a very quotable and enjoyable book of interviews, entitled *Actors Talk About Acting*, which contains the views of several Actors Studio luminaries.

The socio-political component of Theatrical Realism is well documented in the work of David Manning White in collaboration with Richard Averson, which takes the sociological critical approach with most of its shortcomings. Their book, *The Celluloid Weapon*, is close to being a survey of Theatrical Realism, listing and discussing the American message film from its inception to the present. Their other book, *Sight, Sound and Society*, is more ambitious in scope but less effective in actual contributions to the study of film and society. Leif Furhammar and Folke Isakson's *Politics and Film* is too broad a survey to find much of pertinent value in it, but the chapters dealing with McCarthyism were helpful.

There are many tomes dealing with the Blacklist and its effects on Hollywood. The definitive work is Eric Bentley's *Thirty Years of Treason*,

containing complete transcripts of the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings. Three books complement each other on this subject vis-à-vis the Broadway theatre: Malcolm Goldstein's *The Political Stage*, Gerald Rabkin's *Drama and Commitment*, and Jay Williams' *Stage Left*, but they were of marginal interest. Stefan Kanfer's *A Journal of the Plague Years*, Robert Vaughn's *Victim*, John Cogley's *Report on Blacklisting - Part I: The Movies*, and Herbert Biberman's *Salt of the Earth, The Story of a Film* were more germane to the present research.

A special mention must be made to Donald Bogle's *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks—An Interpretative History of Blacks in American Films*. Of the many books consulted on this subject this was the most helpful and insightful. The early days of television were closely connected to the development of Theatrical Realism. Paddy Chayefsky's *Television Plays* have been published in a handy volume and were of great value in providing the material for the evaluation of this writer's work within the Theatrical Realism style. *TV—The Big Picture*, by Stan Opatowsky, was written at the time of the “golden age” of television drama, and gave needed insight into the workings of that medium in its infancy.

Rebels: The Rebel Hero in Films, by Joe Morella and Edward Z. Epstein, is a pictorial that crystallizes the image of the Theatrical Realism male in American films. Concentrating on such Actors Studio alumni as Brando, Dean, Newman, Beatty, Clift, and McQueen, the book comes close to defining the essence of Theatrical Realism.

Michael Ciment's marathon interview book, *Kazan on Kazan*, is one of several available on the man who must be credited with creating Theatrical Realism. It is interesting to note that Kazan is the only one of the Theatrical Realism directors who has been the subject of a serious study up to this point. Ciment's book provided a wealth of material and must be considered one of the instrumental works consulted.

Among the many compilations of essays by film critics that were consulted (which included Pauline Kael, Manny Farber, Arthur Knight, Bosley Crowther, Stanley Kaufman, Hollis Alpert, Dwight Macdonald, and Judith Crist), mention must be made of Guillermo Cabrera Infante's volume, *Un Oficio del Siglo XX*, which contains his film criticism for the Cuban magazine *Carteles*. Cabrera Infante's perceptive look and incisive style of writing covered the period of this work with uncanny accuracy. His reviews of the films selected for critical discussion here have been quoted and translated by this writer.

Books dealing with film personalities are too numerous to list or even to mention in passing. Biographies of Marlon Brando, James Dean, Paul Newman, Marilyn Monroe, Sidney Poitier, and others were of particular relevance and were consulted frequently. The same applies to the works of, or about, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, William Inge, William Faulkner, and the other writers who provided the material for the Theatrical Realism style on the screen.

CHAPTER II

REALISM IN FILM AND THEATRE

HISTORICAL INTERACTION

The concept of Theatrical Realism as a film style is, by nature, grounded on the concepts of Realism, Film, and Theatre. In this chapter these terms will be defined and an attempt will be made to demonstrate how their interaction, throughout the history of the media, has resulted in this particular film style.

Armes defined Realism as “an attitude of mind, a desire to adhere strictly to the truth, a recognition that man is a social animal and a conviction that he is inseparable from his position in society.”³⁰ Huaco defined it by breaking it down into four distinct meanings:

1. Realism as the nonabstract; the material is presented in great detail,
2. Realism as the nondistorted; the material is presented as substantially the same as that which exists in the ordinary world of human experience.
3. Realism as depiction of “low life” or the activities of the “common man.”
4. Realism as the nonidealized.³¹

Gassner defined “Realism” by taking a round about way, first defining the concept of “naturalism” and then stating that the two concepts were, for him, one and the same:

³⁰ Roy Armes, *Patterns of Realism* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1971), p. 17.

³¹ George A. Huaco, *The Sociology of Film Art* (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 13.

Naturalism can be defined broadly or narrowly. I employed this rather ambiguous term as though it were generally interchangeable with “realism.” This has, indeed, been the case on the European continent, as Europeans will say “Naturalismus” as “naturalisme” when we would say “realism.”

As an intensive term, however, naturalism signifies not only a strict, often extreme, mode of realism, but a rather narrow dogma introduced into dramatic theory by Emile Zola in 1873, in his familiar and perhaps overrated preface to *THERESE RAQUIN*, ...

Zola’s program for the theatre called upon writers to concentrate on data arrived at objectively, and to adopt the hypothesis that man is primarily an animal whose emotions can be submitted to the same laboratory tests as “sugar and vitriol,” to use Taine’s expression. The strictly naturalistic view was mechanistic, physiological, and deterministic. The individual was to be exhibited as the product, puppet, and victim of the inexorable forces of heredity, instinct, and environment, for man was to be regarded as a wholly natural object subject to natural processes.

The strict application of these standards of naturalism to playwriting resulted in the presentation of environments and of more or less animal (that is, instinctive) behavior on the stage Pictures of degradation, disease and sexual license abounded in advanced theatrical circles after 1880. . . . Naturalism became a “cause-célèbre,” and its progress was punctuated by conflicts with censorship.

Naturalists required of the actor the utmost authenticity in speech, appearance, and movement, even encouraging him to turn his back to the audience when the action called for it they advocated dialect not for poetic effect, but for the sake of realism of the photograph, supplementary to their ideal realism in scenery, which constituted a realism of the camera For my argument, then, the term “naturalism” has no particular meaning not already embodied in the term “realism.”³²

The vogue for Realism and/or Naturalism in literature and drama coincided with the invention of the cinema. This historical coincidence created the notion that motion pictures were a “realistic” medium designed to further those precepts of Realism which were unattainable in the novel or on the stage. This, in turn, led to the first critical comparisons between these media. Vardac wrote:

³² John Gassner, *Directions in Modern Theatre and Drama* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 66-70.

In the arts of the theatre. . . . David Garrick stimulated the growth of a new realism in staging and acting. Garrick's new aesthetic departure, stated simply, was that of achieving a greater pictorial realism in staging. This intention is indicated by the many stagings made for him by P. J. de Louthembourg, by the withdrawal of his production into the proscenium picture frame, as well as by changes in lighting and in character interpretation. He was aiming at theatrical production pictorial, thus cinematic, in conception. Can the motion picture, then, be considered as the ultimate aesthetic expression of a cycle of realistic-pictorial theatrical production which had been a part of the rebirth of the objective spirit in the middle of the eighteenth century and which was to mature through the nineteenth century age of invention? The times rather than the men controlled the ultimate arrival of the motion picture, for at just the point beyond which stage realism would have broken down and in many instances did, the cinema came to meet the need for a greater pictorial realism. By coming at the very peak of the nineteenth century cycle of realism, it upset normal expectations in the theatre itself. For in accordance with the principle of organic change which is regularly found in theatrical art, one might have expected, in the early twentieth century, the rapid development of newer experimental forms with the consequent breakdown of both the realistic and the spectacular styles. Just at the time, however, that such a change might have been expected, the regular development of theatrical forms was checked and thwarted by the appearance of the motion picture.³³

Thus, the rivalry between the stage and the screen was begun on the basis of their individual approach to the concept of Realism. Gassner elaborated further:

Detailed realism was also doomed to be over-shadowed by the pictorial naturalism of motion pictures. There could be no doubt about this after 1915, the year in which D. W. Griffith released *THE BIRTH OF A NATION*. . . . it was patently hopeless for the theatre to expect to equal the capacity of the screen for conveying realistic detail—indeed, not merely visual detail, but emotional accent as well It was apparent, then, at the beginning of the new century, that realism of environment on the stage could not be mere pictorialism. Eventually even a Belasco was

³³ A. Nicholas Vardac, *Stage to Screen: Theatrical Method from Garrick to Griffith* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), pp. xvii-xviii, xxvi.

to find his match in a Cecil B. De Mille, and the film's canned scenery would soon over-shadow the theatre's settings.³⁴

A curious dichotomy in the theoretical approach to motion pictures and theatre began to take place, at the heart of which lay the concept of Realism. Those aestheticians whose backgrounds were in the theatre felt a sense of loss at the arrival of the motion picture, and were ready to issue a death certificate to the stage on the grounds that the screen was now more capable of fulfilling the mandate of Realism. Nicoll's book, *Film and Theatre*, reflects this way of thinking. On the other hand, serious film scholars, such as Kracauer, Bazin, and Arnheim, found in film "the redemption of reality," and built their case for the new medium on the same grounds that the theatre had been dismissed as a dead art form.

Bentley, in his essay "Realism and the Cinema," tackled this question and commented on Nicoll's work:

Just as the abstract painter argues that photography removed the need for the representational painting by doing the job much better; so, it is argued, cinematography removes the need for realist theatre. Some felt from the beginning that the motion picture would be the dramatic art of the twentieth century, and this opinion was not hard to support even in the days of the silent screen. Before the talkies were a decade old, even the kind of people who had earlier despised the screen began to see in it the successor to the living actor. In this belief, it is said Clifford Odets left Broadway for Hollywood, the drama was a thing of the past. A more subtle analysis of the relation of stage and screen was given by Allardyce Nicoll in his interesting and informative book *Film and Theatre*. He tries to find a place for both stage and screen by assigning to each its proper style. The style of the screen is realism, he says, the theatre should accordingly be non-realistic. The argument is worth quoting at length:

"If we seek for and desire a theatre which shall possess qualities likely to live over generations, unquestionably we must decide that the naturalistic play, made popular towards the close of the nineteenth century and still remaining in our midst, is not calculated to fulfill our highest wishes.

³⁴ Gassner, pp. 62-63.

“Of much greater importance, even, is the question of the position this naturalistic play occupies in its relations to the cinema. At the moment it still retains its popularity, but, we may ask, because of cinematic competition, is it not likely to fail gradually in its immediate appeal? The film has such a hold over the world of reality, can achieve expression so vitally in terms of ordinary life, that the realistic play must surely come to seem trivial, false, and inconsequential. The truth is, of course, that naturalism on the stage must always be limited and insincere. Thousands have gone to *The Children’s Hour* and come away fondly believing that what they have seen is life; they have not realized that here too the familiar stock figures, the type characterizations, of the theatre have been presented before them in modified forms. From this the drama cannot escape, little possibility is there of its delving deeply into the recesses of the individual spirit. That is the realm reserved for cinematic exploitation, and, as the film more and more explores this territory, does it not seem likely that theatre audiences will become weary of watching shows which, although professing to be ‘life-like,’ actually are inexorably bound by the restrictions of the stage? Pursuing this path, the theatre truly seems doomed to inevitable destruction. Whether in its attempt to reproduce reality and give the illusion of actual events or whether in its pretense toward depth and subtlety in character-drawing, the stage is aiming at things alien to its spirit, things which so much more easily may be accomplished in the film that their exploitation on the stage gives only an impression of vain effort.

“Is, then, the theatre, as some have opined, truly dying? Must it succumb to the rivalry of the cinema? The answer to that question depends on what the theatre does within the next ten or twenty years. If it pursues naturalism further, unquestionably little hope will remain.”

These are weighty sentences, but are they really unquestionable? One might question whether the drama has always been incapable of delving into those “recesses of the individual spirit,” whether the movie, even in the best hands, has in fact shown itself any more capable? But my prime interest is in Mr. Nicoll’s remarks about “naturalism.” A generation of movies has given to “naturalism” a popular success such as no dramatic style has ever had before. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, movie version, is, one might say, pure Zola.³⁵

Which brings up the subject of this work, since *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* is the film that marked the beginning of the Theatrical Realism style—a style which was a conscious attempt to reconcile the concepts of “Realism,” “Film,” and “Theatre”

³⁵ Eric Bentley, “Realism and the Cinema,” in *Focus on Film and Theatre*, compiled by James Hurt (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), pp. 51-53.

into a hybrid form of respectable high art. Two theoretical assumptions are operationalized here: (1) that Realism is “the style of the screen” and is morally and artistically superior to other film styles, and (2) that film is a direct descendent of the stage (and literature in general) and occupies a more advanced position along the same continuum of technical development.

How these two assumptions were sustained in the recording of film history and culminated in Theatrical Realism is the subject for the rest of this chapter. “Realism as the style of the screen” will be discussed first, then the relationship between film and theatre.

REALISM ON THE SCREEN

In 1936 Nicoll stated:

When the history of the stage since the beginning of the nineteenth century comes to be written . . . it will most certainly be deemed that the characteristic development of these hundred odd years is the growth of realism.³⁶

But, as has already been illustrated, this growth process was stunted and then taken over by the appearance of the motion picture; yet motion pictures, since the beginning, were not necessarily tied to the realist tradition.

Kraucauer discussed the initial split between the realist and formative tendencies in reference to the work of Lumière and Méliès:

If film grows out of photography, the realistic and formative tendencies must be operative in it also The two tendencies manifested themselves side by side immediately after the rise of the medium Their prototypes were Lumière, a strict realist, and Méliès, who gave free rein to his artistic imagination. The films they made embody, so to speak, thesis and antithesis in a Hegelian sense. Lumière’s films pictured everyday life after the manner of photographs. Georges Méliès took over where Lumière left off. His main contribution to the cinema lay in substituting staged illusion for the unstaged reality, and

³⁶ Allardyce Nicoll, *Film and Theatre* (New York: The Arno Press, 1972), p. 43.

contrived plots for everyday incidents The two pioneers were aware of the radical differences in their approach.³⁷

Then Kracauer proceeded to build up the case for the realist tradition:

Films may claim aesthetic validity if they build from their basic properties; like photographs, that is, they must record and reveal physical reality One might argue that too exclusive an emphasis on the medium's primary relation to physical reality tends to put film in a straight jacket. This objection finds support in the many existing films which are completely unconcerned about the representation of nature. Why, then, should these genres be called less "cinematic" than films concentrating on physical existence? The answer is of course that it is the latter alone which affords insight and enjoyment otherwise unattainable.

It is evident that the cinematic approach materializes in all films which follow the realistic tendency. This implies that even films almost devoid of creative aspirations, such as newsreels, scientific or educational films, artless documentaries, etc., are tenable propositions from an aesthetic point of view—presumably more so than films which for all their artistry pay little attention to the given outer world.

What is of the essence in films is the intervention of the film maker's formative energies as long as they benefit the medium's substantive concern with our visible world. Everything depends on the "right" balance between the realistic tendency and the formative tendency; and the two tendencies are well balanced if the latter does not try to overwhelm the former but eventually follows its lead.³⁸

Here Kracauer established the system of priorities inherent in all theories of realistic cinema, while Bazin held on to the same critical priorities when he stated:

Was it not from the outset their search for realism that characterized the Russian films of Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Dovjenko as revolutionary both in art and politics, in contrast to the expressionistic aestheticism of the German film and Hollywood's mawkish star worship?³⁹

³⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, "Theory of Film, in Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-20.

³⁹ André Bazin, *What Is Cinema II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 16.

.....
 Since the expressionist heresy came to an end, particularly after the arrival of sound, one may take it that the general trend of cinema has been toward realism. Let us agree, by and large, that film sought to give the spectator as perfect an illusion of reality as possible within the limits of the logical demands of cinematographic narrative and of the current limits of technique But realism in art can only be achieved in one way—through artifice.⁴⁰

Bazin's passing reference to German Expressionism as a "heresy" is in keeping with realist attitude, yet he acknowledged that Realism is an artificial construction, an illusion no more "real" than that of Expressionism or Surrealism. Where he diverged from Kracauer was in the notion that physical reality can be perceived on film. For Bazin, realism is "as perfect an illusion of reality as possible."

Jarvie summed up this critical attitude and brought out its most salient misconception when he wrote:

Thus we find an entire argument which runs: film is an art because it can capture reality; because reality should be taken seriously, film must be taken seriously. The more plausible argument: such and such a film is clearly a masterpiece of world art, therefore, the medium in which it was created should be taken seriously—this argument was distorted when attempts were made to say: such and such a film was a great work of art because it captured reality. Naturally, there were all kinds of other questions mixed up in this as well, for example, the confusion between truth and reality, etc.⁴¹

The same view was expressed by Wollen in a different manner:

For realist aesthetics, the cinema is the privileged form which is able to provide both appearance and essence, both the actual look of the real world and its truth. The real world is returned to the spectator purified by its traverse through the mind of the artist, the visionary who both sees and shows. Non-realist aesthetics, as is pointed out elsewhere in

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴¹ I. C. Jarvie, *Movies and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 195-196.

this book, are accused of reducing or dehydrating the richness of reality; by seeking to make the cinema into a conventional medium they are robbing it of its potential as an alternative world, better purer, truer, and so on. In fact, this aesthetic rests on a monstrous delusion: the idea that truth resides in the real world and can be picked out by a camera. Obviously, if this were the case, everybody would have access to the truth, since everybody lives their life in the real world. The realism claim rests on a sleight-of-hand: the identification of authentic experience with truth. Truth has no meaning unless it has explanatory force, unless it is knowledge, a product of thought.⁴²

In his argument against Nicoll's work, Bentley continued the rebuttal:

Mr. Nicoll makes the movie so completely natural that it is no longer art. He takes the "slice of life" theory too seriously. If we want life, we have it without making works of art at all. We need not pay our fifty cents for it; we necessarily pay in our hearts' blood. The theory of Zolaist naturalism has nearly always been astray here, through Zola himself was prepared to define art as "a part of life seen through a temperament" and the last three words are an important proviso. There is art only if the material of life is selected and intelligently arranged. It imposes form on the formless. And the understanding of art depends upon a prior understanding of this fact. Nothing, therefore, that we take for reality can we also take for art.⁴³

In the same manner Wollen attacked Bazin's infatuation with Realism, especially Italian Neo-Realism:

In Neo-realism Bazin recognized fidelity to nature, to things as they were. Fiction was reduced to a minimum. Acting, location, incident: all were as natural as possible. Of *Bicycle Thieves* Bazin wrote that it was the first example of pure cinema. No more actors, no more plot, no more mise en scene: the perfect aesthetic illusion of reality. In fact, no more cinema. Thus the film could obtain radical purity only through its own annihilation.⁴⁴

.....

⁴² Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972) pp. 165-166.

⁴³ Bentley, p. 56.

⁴⁴ Wollen, p. 131.

Realism is in fact, as it was historically, an outgrowth of Romanticism, typically Romantic in its distrust of or lack of interest in scientific knowledge.

Besides realism, the other main current in film theory has been the attempt to import into the cinema a traditional Romantic concept of the artist, the privileged individual with the faculty of imagination. . . . This idea of the imaginative artist makes it possible to go beyond the old distinction of script-writer and director which divorced composition from execution. One of the problems that had always faced film aesthetics was how to get around this awkward division, which made it impossible to see a film as the creation of a single subjectivity. Gradually, in the acknowledged “art” cinema first of all, the gap was bridged and the director was acknowledged to be the imaginative artist.⁴⁵

Jarvie commented on the subject of Realism and the role of the artist:

The demand for realism, moreover, has unfortunate consequences. For example, it leads to emphasis being placed upon sincerity or integrity in the creator. Being a state of the creator, it is, in a sense, irrelevant to the work of art; the creator’s intentions, for example, are by no means necessarily a way of appraising or even interpreting his work. Moreover, a camera and a tape recorder are as much selections of what they are recording as a pen or paint brush. And yet, despite all these obvious arguments the theory was: “Realism.”⁴⁶

.....

It may have been in response to these difficulties, that in the fifties yet another realist theory developed: films should be committed to reality. This, which seems to have obscure origins in Sartre’s obscure theory of engagement, evaluated films in terms of whether or not they were engaged. It seems to have been developed in reaction to the Cahiers du Cinema theory of the politiques des auteurs. The politiques decreed that any film of an auteur was more interesting than a worth effort by a nonentity. Thus, time was wasted on inanities like Howard Hawk’s HATARI and Nicholas Ray’s KING OF KINGS and THE SAVAGE NORTH, while anything by Wyler or Zinneman was “inutile de se déranger.”

The commitment theory went to the opposite extreme and measured films by their commitment. Curiously, no commitment critic would ever answer the obvious question: commitment to what? Yet, from the pantheon of commitment heroes, one could deduce that commitment

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 166.

⁴⁶ Jarvie, p. 197.

meant commitment to the poor, the oppressed, the simple, the peaceful, etc.⁴⁷

Sarris summed up this fallacy with an appropriate metaphor:

Unfortunately, the aesthetic of cinematic beauty has been hopelessly muddled in our time by trivial debates on equally trivial theories of realism. Beauty has been presented as the enemy of truth, and in the ensuing confusion, a French can-can dancer has become less truthful than a Bengali peasant.⁴⁸

The preceding montage of writings clearly illustrates the inherent problem in the approach to cinema from a realist tradition. This problem is magnified in Theatrical Realism when it is viewed within the context of the commercial American cinema. The Hollywood film has been universally acknowledged as the quintessential escapist entertainment medium; therefore, to find within its structure a group of films with realistic aspirations seems to be a self-defeating task, or at best, one which cannot be taken very seriously. Weinberg said that André Malraux had a “one word description of Hollywood’s rediscovery of realism: neon-realism.”⁴⁹

But American cinema has always had a tradition of Realism that can be traced from Porter’s *The Life of an American Fireman* (1902), and the work of Griffith and von Stroheim, up to the latest cinema vérité efforts of people such as Richard Leacock and the Maysles brothers.

Yet stark Realism, or naturalism, has always been evaded somewhat by the Hollywood studios. The worst social conditions could be depicted as long as the protagonists had a romantic outlook on life; there was despair, but there was always hope and a positive force present to encourage the protagonists to find a “better life.” The Griffith slum pictures (*The Musketeers of Pig Alley*, *The Mother and the Law*, *Broken Blossoms*, etc.) and most of the Chaplin films

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 198-199.

⁴⁸ Andrew Sarris, *Confessions of a Cultist* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 41.

⁴⁹ Herman Weinberg, *Saint Cinema—Writings on the Film 1929-1970* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1973), p. 149.

established this attitude of pathos toward the treatment of poverty and misfortune in the Hollywood films of the silent era.

With the coming of sound, several films began to explore the possibilities of “social realism.” Rouben Mamoulian’s *Applause* and *City Streets* stand as paradigms of what could have developed had the Hays Office not come into power with a strict production code. The gangster film was later to be held in check by the code, and pictures such as *Little Caesar* and *Scarface*, which established the genre, could not be emulated by their toned-down successors.

The decade of the thirties is best remembered by the social comedies of Frank Capra and Mitchell Leisen, although Warner Bros. put out several tough pictures, such as *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, *The Public Enemy*, and *Wild Boys of the Road*. Hollywood’s attitude toward the conflict between Realism and escapism during this period was best portrayed in Preston Sturges’ masterful *Sullivan’s Travels*, in which a successful comedy director gets a “conscience” attack and decides to make a meaningful realistic social drama. He undertakes an elaborate scheme to do his research for the film, only to find out that the best thing he could do for the masses would be to make them laugh and forget their worries.

In *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, Wollen wrote:

In the 1940s the Realist tradition reasserted itself, though divided between two different currents. The first of these was inaugurated by *Citizen Kane* and continued in the later films of Welles and of Wyler. Its characteristic feature was the use of deep focus. By this means, the spatial unity of scenes could be maintained, episodes could be presented in their physical entirety. The second current was that of Italian Neo-realism, whose cause Bazin espoused with especial fervour.⁵⁰

Yet there was a third current developing slowly. The American literature of the thirties was providing the groundwork for a new stylistic movement in

⁵⁰ Wollen, p. 131.

films. James M. Cain, William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, Ernest Hemingway, and John Steinbeck wrote in realistic or naturalistic styles, and their works were to be filmed within a decade.

In 1940 Twentieth Century-Fox released *The Grapes of Wrath*, and its unqualified success with the critics and audiences alike proved that experiments outside the Hollywood formula could be profitable. So the studio undertook a series of projects of social relevance dealing with labor conditions (*How Green Was My Valley*, 1941), alcoholism, (*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, 1945), anti-Semitism (*Gentleman's Agreement*, 1947) insanity (*The Snake Pit*, 1948), and racial discrimination (*Pinky*, 1949). These were all best selling novels before they became successful films. Three of them were directed by Elia Kazan, a young stage director who had made quite a reputation for himself before Zanuck brought him to Hollywood in 1945 to direct *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* which, as has already been stated, could be described as the first film in which the elements of Theatrical Realism appeared.

The groundwork for Theatrical Realism had been established by this cycle of films, which also coincided with the impact of Italian Neo-Realism and the creation of the "Art House" circuit in postwar America. Hollywood, in its elusive stride toward artistic respectability, focused on Realism and pointed its cameras not to the streets, as Italians had done, but to the stage, television, and literature, where it was to find plenty of properties drenched in Realism and respectability with box office potential.

FILM AND THEATRE

It may be argued that the cinema is a derivative art, but such an argument negates the stature the medium already has attained. The tradition of adapting material and transposing it to other media is as old as the history of the arts. The fact that most of the films to be dealt with in this study have their original sources in literature and the theatre does not make them subordinate to their sources. These films stand (or fall, as is often the case, unfortunately) on their own. They

are self-contained, freestanding works, and will be approached as such by this writer. Yet, a comparison between Film and Theatre is essential to this study.

Vardac claimed that:

In the early years, the film and the stage were hardly differentiated from one another; the cinema frequently borrowed from the theatre, while the theater, in an attempt to counter the new attraction, in its turn borrowed from the film.⁵¹

A brief history of this interaction was given by Hurt:

Far from destroying each other, film and theatre have continued to evolve and develop each in its own way, sometimes diverging, sometimes converging, but always exercising a powerful and mutual influence upon each other.⁵²

.....

As the above movies “liberated” themselves from the stage, however, the theatre itself was rapidly evolving, often in ways influenced by the movies. The presence of the movies was continually felt throughout the vigorous theatrical experimentation of the twenties. The theatre was seeking a new area of activity the movies could not usurp; it also frequently tried to explore ways of imitating and incorporating film techniques.⁵³

.....

Their relationship, however, was abruptly changed in 1926-1927 with the introduction of the sound film. The ultimate effect of this innovation was to complete the displacement of the theatre as a major purveyor of popular entertainment and to make the movies the dominant mass performance art for the next twenty years. Ironically, the initial effect, though, was to cancel out much of the film’s hard-won stylistic autonomy and to bring about a marked “re-theatricalization” of film. In 1928 and 1929, playwrights, stage directors, and stage actors were imported en masse to teach the movies how to talk. Their theatrical orientation, plus the new technical problems presented by fixed microphones and cameras, using cumbersome “blimps” or suddenly caged in soundproof booths, resulted in a string of static, photographed stage musicals and revues, “all-talking and all-singing” though they might have been. The history of film in the 1930s was the history of the recovery of

⁵¹ Vardac, *Stage to Screen*, p. xxvi.

⁵² James Hurt (compiler), *Focus on Film and Theatre* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 2.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

the technical mastery of the silent film, now applied to the sound film, through the work of the great directors of the period: Ernst Lubitsch, King Vidor, René Clair, Jean Renoir, Rouben Mamoulian, John Ford, and many others, in the United States and abroad.

The movies' prosperous twenty years between 1930 and 1950 came to an end through two forces: the post-war court rulings that broke up the American corporate chains of studio-owned movie theatres, and the coming of television. The movies' response to television's challenge for the mass audience was remarkably similar to that of the popular theatre of a half a century before, when the movies had been the challenger: it first tried to retain its audience through spectacle and gimmickry—3-D, Cinerama, CinemaScope, new color processes—but it finally accepted defeat, collaborating with the new medium, and at the same time, beginning to build new, minority audiences of its own.

The result of this revolution has been to place film in yet another relationship to theatre, both sociologically and artistically. Film has not been “re-theatricalized” as it was after the sound revolution of the twenties; on the contrary, it has tended to guard its integrity as film even more jealously. But economic and technological developments have forced it into a path more parallel to that of the theatre than ever before. Like the theatre, film has maintained its connections with popular entertainment, but like the theatre of the twenties, it has seen a sudden expansion and an increased importance in its minority audience. The result has, arguably, been a gain in some respects for film. For the first time in its history, serious ideas and feelings are as likely to find artistic expression in film as in the theatre. The makers of the theatre since 1950—Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, Osborne, Pinter—are equaled in stature and achievement by the makers of film—Bergman, Fellini, Antonioni, Truffaut, Godard, Kubrick. The richness, complexity, and subtlety of the best contemporary films perhaps results from the fact that serious film-makers, like serious dramatists, no longer have to please everybody but can find an appropriate minority audience for their work.

The theoretical interrelationships of film and theatre are as complex as their historical ones, and indeed the historical development of each art and their reciprocal influence have made theoretical comparisons difficult and short-lived.⁵⁴

As “difficult and short-lived” as these theoretical comparisons may be, Sontag's lucid and insightful treatise on the subject seems to be destined for posterity, not as the last word on Film and Theatre, but as a careful analysis of the nature of both forms:

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7

The history of cinema is often treated as the history of its emancipation from theatrical models. First of all from theatrical “frontality” (the unmoving camera reproducing the situation of the spectator of a play fixed in his seat), then from theatrical acting (gestures needlessly stylized, exaggerated—needlessly, because now the actor could be seen “close up”), then from theatrical furnishings (unnecessary “distancing” of the audience’s emotions, disregarding the opportunity to immerse the audience in reality). Movies are regarded as advancing the theatrical status to cinematic fluidity, from theatrical artificiality to cinematic naturalness and immediacy Cinema is a “medium” as well as an art, in the sense that it can encapsulate any of the performing arts and render it in a film transcription. (This “medium” or non-art aspect of film attained its routine incarnation with the advent of television. There, movies themselves became another performing art to be transcribed, miniaturized on the T.V. screen.) One can film a play or ballet or opera or sporting event in such a way that film becomes, relatively speaking, a transparency, and it seems correct to say that one is seeing the event filmed. But theatre is never a “medium.” Thus, because one can make a movie “of” a play but not a play “of” a movie, cinema had an early but, I should argue, fortuitous connection with the stage.⁵⁵

Sontag continued her discussion, addressing herself to the question of Realism and the sociological critical approach that had been discussed earlier:

Theatre deploys artifice while cinema is committed to reality, indeed to an ultimately physical reality which is “redeemed,” to use Siegfried Kracauer’s striking word, by the camera. The aesthetic judgment that follows this bit of intellectual map-making is that films shot in real-life settings are better (i.e., more cinematic) than those shot in a studio (where one can detect the difference). Obviously, if Flaherty and Italian neo-realism and the cinema verité of Vertov, Rouch, Marker, and Ruspoli are the preferred models, one would judge rather harshly the period of 100% studio-made films inaugurated around 1920 by *THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI* But there is no reason to insist on a single model for film. And it is helpful to notice that, for the most part, the apotheosis of realism, the prestige of “unstylized reality,” in cinema is actually a covert political-moral position. Films have been rather too often acclaimed as the democratic art, the art of mass society. Once one takes this description very seriously, one tends (like Panofsky and Kracauer) to

⁵⁵ Susan Sontag, “Film and Theatre,” *Tulane Drama Review*, 11:24-25, Fall, 1966.

want movies to continue to reflect their origins in a vulgar level of the arts, to remain loyal to their vast uneducated audience. Thus, a vaguely Marxist orientation jibes with a fundamental tenet of romanticism. Cinema, at once high art and popular art, is cast as the art of the authentic. Theatre, by contrast, means dressing up, pretense, lies. It smacks of aristocratic taste and the class society.⁵⁶

This interesting observation regarding the theatre as a status symbol was an integral factor in success of Theatrical Realism on the screen. Alpert made the same observation:

It was once tacitly assumed that theatergoers were a superior breed to filmgoers, that they were people of mature mentality, taste, discrimination, background, breeding, and that they possessed, above all, a feeling for theatre. As one young lady said to me as we passed through the lobby on our way to some bad seats to see a mediocre murder melodrama, “Isn’t there something exciting about just going to the theatre?” The excitement about going to the theatre is all too often due to feeling just a little superior because one has managed to get seats, because one has paid much too much for them, because it is the thing to do among certain circles, because the *Times* said it was good—and so on. More important, this kind of thing makes us aware that theatergoing is not a mark of distinction but a matter of mere “show,” expense-account entertainment (let the government take the tab), a form of vulgar display no better or worse than wearing a mink stole in eighty-degree weather in Miami in the winter.

On Broadway (which is becoming commonplace to call the “commercial theatre”) we notice how little of the “serious” is available. I still wait for Arthur Miller to do it again, I notice that Tennessee Williams staunchly pours it out (perhaps aware that movie producers are more anxious for the play than Broadway audiences).⁵⁷

This astute comment by Alpert regarding Williams brings to our discussion the relative values of the film versions of plays. Sontag felt that:

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 26

⁵⁷ Hollis Alpert, *The Dreams and the Dreamers: Adventures of a Professional Movie Goer* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), pp. 238-239.

The success of movie versions of plays is measured by the extent to which the script rearranges and displaces the action and deals less than respectfully with the spoken text—as do certain films of plays by Wilde and Shaw, the Olivier Shakespeare films (at least HENRY V), and Sjöberg's MISS JULIE. But the basic disapproval of films which betray their origins in plays remains.⁵⁸

Knight elaborated further:

The recognition that technique can impart a sense of film to even a theatre-based work is something that few aestheticians have been able to grasp or be willing to admit. They are all too prone to dismiss all adaptations as “canned plays” and by so doing deny to the medium a vast area of human experience.

In all fairness, it must be admitted that in most instances they are right. Plays are generally brought to the screen with literalness, an adherence to theatre staging, that transforms them in monstrosities. Movie audiences watch in a stupor as characters mouth their lines and make their gestures to a static, inflexible lens. Directors, more concerned with performance than with the camera, permit shots to run for minutes on end without change of position, relationships, or visual accents. The motion picture medium, robbed of its dynamics, degenerates into a mere reproduction of another art form—and a decidedly inferior reproduction of that.⁵⁹

Nicoll gave us a specific example by comparing the stage and screen versions of *The Petrified Forest*:

As a theatrical production this play was effective, moving, and essentially harmonized with the conventions applying to its method of expression; lifeless and uninteresting seemed the filming of fundamentally the same material. The reasons for this were many. First was the fact that the film attempted to defy the basic law which governs the two forms; the theatre rejoices in artistic limitation in space while the film demands movement and change of location. We admire Sherwood's skill in confining the whole of his action to the Black Mesa but we condemn the same confining process when we turn to see the same events enacted on

⁵⁸ Sontag, p. 28.

⁵⁹ Arthur Knight, “SR Goes to the Movies,” A review of *Raisin in the Sun*, *Saturday Review*, March 25, 1961, p. 34.

the screen. Secondly, since a film can rarely bear to admit anything in the way of theatricality in its settings, those obviously painted sets of desert and mountain confused and detracted from our appreciation of the narrative. A third reason may be sought for in the dialogue given to the characters. This dialogue, following the lines provided for the stage play, showed itself as far too rich and cumbersome for cinematic purposes; not only was there too much of it, but that which sounded exactly right when delivered on the boards of the theatre (because essentially in tune with theatrical conventions) seemed ridiculous, false, and absurd when associated with the screen pictures.⁶⁰

This critical comparison by Nicoll, written over forty years ago, contains all the elements, and is therefore representative, of myriad comparisons between plays and films based on the same thematic material.

It is futile to lay down basic postulates in order to determine criteria for the successful process of adaptation from stage to screen. Kaufman, in his "Notes on Theatre-and-Film," made the most valiant effort by pointing out the differences between the media, but a close look at specific examples yields as many exceptions as those that support the rules.⁶¹ The central question lies in the film's dual nature as "medium" and art, as Sontag pointed out. That dreaded term "canned theatre" loses its pejorative connotations if it is interpreted as "a film transcription of a performance" as opposed to a work of film art. Peter Brook's film of his production of *Marat/Sade* is an outstanding success because it works as a filmed play or "canned theatre," and as work of film art, not only preserving the production, but transcending it on the screen.

Unfortunately, this is seldom the case. Most film transcriptions hardly even attempt to transcend their basic nature and, therefore, should only be looked at as records of a performance and not as a performance itself. Ballet films pose the classical example. Rudolf Nureyev, dancing in *Don Quixote* in a medium shot, is only acceptable because the real thing is not available to the audience. If there were a choice, the live performance (or theatre) would win hands down.

⁶⁰ Nicoll, *Film and Theatre*, p. 36.

⁶¹ Stanley Kaufman, "Notes on Theatre-and-Film," in *Focus on Film and Theatre*, compiled by James Hurt (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 67.

The same holds true for such films⁶² as Richard Burton's *Hamlet* and the Actors Studio production of *The Three Sisters*. These projects were undertaken more in the spirit of preservation than of original production, so they cannot be considered other than a careful record of a performance.

Sometimes this critical distinction is blurred in the minds of the creators, and the results are equally murky. The series of productions undertaken in the mid-1970s by the American Film Theatre exemplify the old adage, "you can't have your cake and eat it too." These films varied from the atrocious to the moderately successful, and remain stuck in the no-man's land between the stage and the screen.⁶³

The Actors Studio production of *The Three Sisters* as preserved in a kinescope, or TV-to-film transfer, is of more interest as an illustration of the differences between film and theatre than as a production of the Chekhov play.

To focus on just one area, there is the double direction credit. Lee Strasberg directed the play on stage and one assumes that the direction has not been modified for taping. Paul Bogart, a very capable TV professional, presumably took command of the cameras and called the shots from the control booth, his task reduced to following the action and focusing the cameras where the audience's attention should be at the time. Strasberg staged for a proscenium, and Bogart set up his cameras along the proverbial fourth wall. This created an unconscious, uncomfortable feeling of impenetrability as the play progressed and the audience became aware of the existence of the fourth wall in the film, of being outside looking in; a feeling which the movies seldom evoke because of three-dimensional staging and the use of the "reverse shot." For instance, when Kim Stanley and Kevin McCarthy sit at a table in the foreground during the second act, they do not face each other as they would in a real spatial relationship, but rather,

⁶² The term "film" is used here although these performances were recorded on videotape electronically and then transferred to film. It is fitting that the term "record" is used in electronic media, since whenever it has been used on a tape-to-film basis it has been for the purposes of "recording" a performance.

⁶³ A more detailed discussion of the American Film Theatre may be found in the conclusions, in Chapter VII.

they face the fourth wall and talk in a manner that acknowledges the presence of an audience. The camera maintained them in a two-shot throughout the scene. The filmic approach would have intercut reverse close-ups of the actors facing each other, talking in a tone designed to carry their voices only across a table and not into the upper reaches of a theatre balcony.

Strasberg used the full width of the stage, which is always visible to a theater audience, and subdivided it into playing areas for different scenes, some of them occurring simultaneously. When a camera photographs action staged in this fashion, the boundaries of the motion picture frame become noticeable and confining. The only solution is the cut-away, done in this case in a technique similar to the “scanning” of CinemaScope films on television; the end result is that “something” is lost in order to show “something else,” with the audience becoming extremely aware of the incompatibility of the stage and the camera’s field of vision.

Ironically, this production of *The Three Sisters* seemed to be the watershed point of Strasberg’s career. As far back as 1934 Strasberg wanted the Group Theatre to do the play, but it was considered lacking in political action and social protest, and the production failed to realize.⁶⁴ In 1959 he received an offer to produce the play on the condition that Jennifer Jones would head the cast, but he turned it down, saying at the time that “Jennifer is not ready yet.”⁶⁵

Strasberg had always been obsessed with the idea of establishing a National Theatre Company. These plans had been thwarted repeatedly ever since the Group Theatre disbanded. He came close to realizing this when the Actors Studio Theatre was created as a result of his not being invited to join the Lincoln Center Repertory Company. One of the Actors Studio Theatre’s first productions was, of course, *The Three Sisters*, as staged by Strasberg. The Landau Company, foreshadowing its American Film Theatre venture a whole decade earlier, entered

⁶⁴ Paul Gray, “Stanislavski and America: A Critical Chronology,” *Tulane Drama Review*, 9:34, Winter, 1964.

⁶⁵ Gordon Rogoff, “Lee Strasberg: Burning Ice,” *Tulane Drama Review*, 9:146, Winter, 1964.

into an agreement with the Actors Studio Theatre to “film” this and all its forthcoming productions. Strasberg could barely contain his excitement when he said, “Most productions, once seen, are lost forever. It has long been our hope to create a permanent record of our production.”⁶⁶

But this work is not concerned with films that use the medium as a means of transcription and preservation of plays. Rather, it will deal with some motion picture adaptations of literature and drama specifically produced for the screen, ideally undistinguishable from any other movie in technical style and treatment. Therefore, unlike *The Three Sisters*, these films assume their own identity on the screen and are considered freestanding works. Alpert made this distinction very clear:

Opinion is unanimous that a stage play rendered into a film without a transference process—“photographing the play,” in other words—usually results in a thoroughly unsatisfactory movie. But at the heart of the writing of the play, or the composing of the film, lies an idea that eventually flowers into a particular form of expression. Stage plays have been successfully transplanted often enough to film to allow for the supposition that what is required is a discovery of the means of satisfactorily renewing and revitalizing the original work into secondary but perhaps more satisfactory form.

Arthur Miller’s *A View from the Bridge* was first presented on the stage, revised by the author and presented again, and eventually made into a movie. Were the play and the film the same thing? Was one “better” than the other? It seemed to me the movie suffered from the style chosen for it. The theatrical language of the play was not altered or revised sufficiently for a thorough absorption into a film equivalent. The actors’ styles were not blended and diffused into the film structure; worse of all, a “documentary” background became a disturbance rather than a help to the reality of the story. The failure, then, was the adaptor’s, and also the director’s. The creative tasks had not been met sufficiently. In the case of William Inge’s *Picnic*, a more satisfactory movie was the result, because many of the film medium’s resources were utilized to flesh out the play. The screenwriter, Daniel Taradash, used the Inge material according to his own notions of how it should sound and look as a movie, and in a sense became a co-creator. The original idea was enhanced by the marvelous Fourth of July picnic dreamed up for the movie, and realized by Joshua

⁶⁶ Press release from the Landau Company dated October 19, 1964.

Logan's direction and the photography of James Wong Howe. Certain changes in plot development occurred through fear of censorship, but it is doubtful that they would be necessary today.

It was assumed too early that because the plays adapted to the screen usually emerged as flat and static it was mandatory that movies be freed from theatrical influences. But this was true only in terms of techniques. A movie faithfully rendered from a play was rather like using a horse and buggy when a high-powered automobile was available.⁶⁷

Alpert went on to make his point, which was that Film and Theatre distinctions were "gobbledy gook"⁶⁸ since film "is not only a form of theatre but also—in almost all ways—by far, the best form."⁶⁹

The love for film, I would submit, is actually love for theater. While the theorists have analyzed the special appeal of movies, looked into its aesthetics, separated it from "live theatre," and have declared the film-viewing experience to be of a totally different order from the stage experience, first the rank and file, and now the culturally discriminating movie audience, declined to differentiate. People primarily look for a good show, and they are more likely to find it at the movies than at the theatre.⁷⁰

Is one ever moved to tears during a stage performance? Not often, because emotion in the theatre is diluted. But even a bad film can sometimes cause tears. Ironically, the mechanically produced image is stronger than the live enactment of a scene, a proof, then, of the superiority of the film for the conveyance of emotional effects. The film is wondrously able to break down the resistance of its audience, and because it can so easily move to tears and laughter does not this make it better theatre?⁷¹

Here Alpert expressed the second assumption of Theatrical Realism: that film is a direct descendant of the stage and occupies a more advanced position along the same continuum of technical development. This assumption is instrumental in the development of Theatrical Realism because it reinforces the following underlying

⁶⁷ Alpert, *Dreams and the Dreamers*, pp. 247-248.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

sylllogism: “Theatre is art, Film is better Theater, therefore, Film is better art.”
When this is coupled with the argument which runs, “Film is art because it can capture reality; and since reality should be taken seriously, Film should also be taken seriously;” the resulting fusion is a sure-fire formula for serious art on the screen. And this is basically what Theatrical Realism is all about.

CHAPTER III

THEATRICAL REALISM: THE GENESIS OF A FILM STYLE

[The] necessary conditions for the emergence and duration of film waves will be found among historically specific social resources, modes of social organization, political and legal norms, and the artistic traditions of the society in question.

-- George A. Huaco¹

In conformity with this statement, the stylistic components of the film style have been broken down into three categories: artistic, socio-political, and economic. Then we take an historical approach to the development of each component and proceed to demonstrate the interaction between them.

ARTISTIC ROOTS

Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre

It was difficult to determine where to start a chronology of influencing factors in this study. The continuous process of influence in the development of

¹ George A. Huaco, *The Sociology of Film Art* (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 19.

artistic styles does not offer clear-cut boundaries to the scholar. What started out as an inquiry into the influence of the Actors Studio in the Hollywood films of the fifties led to the influence of the Group Theatre on the Actors Studio, and this, in turn, led to the influence of the Moscow Art Theatre on the Group Theatre. How these three organizations could be perceived as existing in a linear continuum when viewed from the vantage point of Hollywood in the fifties became clear after their histories were explored carefully. But this study cannot presume to delve deeply into this area—only to shed light on the connecting elements that led to the film style.

Therefore, a line had to be drawn somewhere: In the beginning there was Constantin Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre—a man leading a revolutionary artistic organization in a revolutionary country.

But emphasis must be placed on the artistic revolution, since the Moscow Art Theatre had been in existence for twenty years before the Bolsheviks took over Russia and created the Soviet Union. The red patina that became one of the most attractive attributes of the Moscow Art Theatre to “progressive” theatre audiences across the world was acquired through forced coincidences and extreme duress, hardly figuring in the equation of its latter successes.

In December 1898, after a lackluster group of initial productions, Chekhov “allowed the Moscow Art Theatre to do his *Seagull*.”² The play had already been an incredible failure, but this new production became a sensation and firmly established the new company. Gray reported:

The *Seagull* became the emblem of the Moscow Art Theatre and heralded great reforms. Actors were not obsessed by their audiences and could turn their attentions to their characters, bringing psychological depths to the surface; ensemble play was stressed and the actor was asked to subordinate his ego, taking satisfaction from the group’s achievement. The theatre was dedicated to the search for “truth in art” under

² Paul Gray, “Stanislavski and America: A Critical Chronology,” *Tulane Drama Review*, 9:22, Winter, 1964.

Stanislavski's leadership. This dedication to truth, when coupled with subsequent events, led to the famed "inner technique."³

This emphasis on collectivism did go hand in hand with the concept of Marxist solidarity that was soon to come and must have played an instrumental role in the survival of the Moscow Art Theatre after the revolution.

By 1904 the Moscow Art Theatre found itself face to face with the eternal debate between the formative and realistic traditions:

Valery Bryusov, poet and leader of the symbolist movement in Russia, attacked Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre for taking the theatrical out of the theatre by obscuring the dramatic action under a cloud of trivial and pointless naturalistic detail. Bryusov asked the Moscow Art Theatre to stop copying life, because the art of the stage is essentially and by distinction unrealistic.⁴

There was a split with Meyerhold, one of the Moscow Art Theatre's leading actor/directors, who left the company to "experiment with more vivid theatrical forms than Stanislavski allowed."⁵

Doubtlessly influenced by revolt within his ranks, Stanislavski attempted a series of symbolist productions with little success and soon returned to a production schedule of realistic drama. The season of 1906 was representative of the work the Moscow Art Theatre did best. The plays were Gorki's *The Lower Depths*, Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor*, and two by Chekhov—*The Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*.

In the coming years Stanislavski began to formulate his "system."⁶ Influenced by yoga, Ribot's *Psychologie des Sentiments* (which introduced the concept of emotional memory), and improvisational techniques, Stanislavski

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The best and most accessible explanation of Stanislavski's system, in English, is found in Robert Lewis' *Method or Madness?* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1958). Lewis summed up all of Stanislavski's theories and presented them in their original and also as filtered through Clurman, Strasberg, Adler and others.

sought to codify a scientific approach to acting and the theatre in general. After some degree of controversy the “system” was adopted by the Moscow Art Theatre, and all its actors received their training within it. The Moscow Art Theatre became one of the world’s most celebrated companies and a legend in the theatre.

In 1923 the company toured the United States⁷ and left behind indelible impressions as well as a few defectors. One of these was Maria Ouspenskaya, an actress who joined Richard Boleslavski and Maria Germanova in establishing the American Laboratory Theatre, which became the center where Americans were introduced to the aesthetics and methodology of Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre.

The lab included three students who were destined to make significant contributions to the development of the Stanislavski System in America. Lee Strasberg was a former wig manufacturer, who had seen the Moscow Art Theatre when they played New York and who had soon after decided that if it were possible to create such an artistic experience on the stage he would make the theatre his career. Stella Adler, a member of a famous acting family known for its work in the Jewish theatre in New York, enrolled in the acting courses of Boleslavski and Ouspenskaya. Harold Clurman studied directing with Coleslavski. . . . One of the actors he directed there was Sanford Meisner.⁸

With the stock market crash of 1929 a period of sharp social consciousness began in America. An awareness of the class structure and economic system that led to the existing conditions made the young idealistic minds of the period focus their attention on the social experiment being carried out in the Soviet Union and wonder if it did not offer a more viable alternative. In talking to Ciment, Elia Kazan voiced this attitude:

⁷ It is interesting to note that the plays that were performed were the same as those of the 1906 season, with the exception of Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People*.

⁸ Gray, pp. 30-31.

There is no way for a man of your age to understand what that meant to us; we idealized the people of the USSR and what they did and it lasted forever. . . . I idolized the Russians; we read that goddamn paper they put out for American consumption and we believed the lies they told. We adored their theatre: Meyerhold, Vakhtangov, Stanislavski. We did imitations of their methods.”⁹

And, by imitating their methods, they created something new in their own right—a revolution in the American theatre.

The Group Theatre

We are beginning to wipe out the line that divides the practical from the ideal, and in so doing, we are fashioning an instrument of unimagined power for the establishment of a morally better world.

--Franklin Delano Roosevelt¹⁰

The whole idea of the Group Theatre was to get poetry out of the common things of life. That was fired up by the Depression of our reaction to it. We felt that the whole basis of society had to be changed. Then there was another element: the Stanislavski system made us see more in the lives of human beings, and it became our mission to reveal greater depths. Also, at that time, Freud had become popularized. All these trends came together in the Group Theatre: the political left, the introduction to Freud and Marx, the absolute, idealistic dedication and determination toward a new world.

--Elia Kazan¹¹

These were fervent years indeed! These were the years when the theatre was viewed as an instrument of social change that had to be rescued from the affluent bourgeoisie that debased it merely as a form of entertainment. And, ironically, this rescue became an easy mission due to these three factors: (1) the affluent bourgeoisie was already wiped out by the Depression: (2) with the addition of sound, the movies took over from the theatre its “prostituted entertainment” aspect, and (3) most artists and intellectuals who comprised “the

⁹ Michael Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), p. 16.

¹⁰ Harold Clurman, *The Fervent Years* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), frontispiece.

¹¹ Ciment, p. 26.

theatre” and its audience had become firmly committed to the cause of social change. Thus, the political stage appeared in America with the Group Theatre in the vanguard. “At the time there were rumors going around Broadway that the Group Theatre was a bunch of Communists living together and practicing free love,”¹² stated Lee Strasberg in an interview, but even if these rumors were partly founded in fact, the impact the Group had in American theatre went from notoriety and scandal into the stuff of which legends are made.

In 1929 Clurman was working as a reader for The Theatre Guild when this organization decided to set up a subsidiary group “to produce certain exceptional plays at special Sunday performances for subscribers”.¹³ This branch of the prestigious production unit was to focus its efforts on the avant-garde and experimental field. Clurman shared the supervision of this group with Cheryl Crawford and Herbert Biberman. In the coming twenty years Crawford would become a co-founder of the Actors Studio and one of Broadway’s most illustrious producers. Biberman would suffer the full force of McCarthyism and the blacklist, and, with the exception of the ill-fated films *Salt of the Earth* (1954) and *Slaves* (1969), his artistic career would be limited to selling refrigerators.

This group became known as the Guild Studio. For its first and only production Clurman suggested the Soviet play *Red Rust*:

Red Rust had an engaging quality of youthfulness. The production given it, under Herbert Biberman’s direction, was lusty and fresh. In casting it I had brought in as many of my friends from the Riverside Drive epoch as possible: Franchot Tone, Lee Strasberg (as actor), and a number of the Lab Theatre contingent. There was no organic connection between the production of *Red Rust* and the later Group Theatre. The choice of a Soviet play represented no ideological bias on anyone’s part. The play had novelty—it was the first play from the Soviet Union to reach these shores.¹⁴

¹² Joan Barthel, “the Master of the Method Plays a Role Himself,” *The New York Times*, February 2, 1975. As all newspaper sources were clippings, no page numbers were available; therefore, in the remainder of this study, no page numbers will appear in newspaper references.

¹³ Clurman, p. 25.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Although the Theatre Guild abandoned the Studio project, the seeds for an organization had already been planted in the minds of Clurman and Crawford. These two began to seek out actors and invite them to meetings that were held first in Clurman's hotel room, then in Crawford's apartment every Friday night at half past eleven, with hardly an interruption from week to week, until the Group Theatre became a functioning reality. Clurman described these meetings:

We would explain—that is, I would, for I did most of the talking at the time—that we proposed a new approach to the theatre, that we wished to get acquainted with all those actors who might come to share our approach, that we wanted to lay the foundations of a new theatre. As for practical matters, the manner of our functioning, we would take them up only after we had established a common ground of understanding through our meetings together. We had no plays, no money; the meetings were to be entirely “unofficial!”¹⁵

But the meetings soon became official, and some money and a play materialized. The Theatre Guild let them have *The House of Connelly*, by Paul Green, and a thousand dollars; Edna Ferber made a five hundred dollar contribution (on condition that the company would accept her niece, Janet Fox); and Cheryl Crawford raised the balance by running a theater symposium at the Guild.

In the summer of 1931 they all set out for Brookfield Center, Connecticut, to start their work:

For that is what we decided to do: to go away to some country place with twenty-eight actors and rehearse two plays till they were ready for production in New York. We would pay no salaries, but we would provide meals, living quarters, laundry expense. The three directors—that is what Cheryl Crawford, Lee Strasberg, and I now constituted ourselves—had chosen a company from among the people we had come in contact with during our winter meetings. A good many—indeed, a majority—remained with us for years, some to the very last days of our

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

functioning.¹⁶

The tie that bound us all together in the Group Theatre days was more binding than any of us had supposed and not unlike the spiritual unity that was central to our conception of the theatre. The Group Theatre was a home. The house collapsed, but the feeling for the home—in which was also, and necessarily, anger and frustration—never vanished altogether.¹⁷

This sense of community, this “group” identity, was probably the most significant legacy from this period. The combination of artistic and political ideology imbued these people with a very strong sense of unity, creating a common identity among them, as they went on to dominate the New York stage for the next half century. As Clurman said: “It is a unity of background, of feeling, of thought, of need, among a group of people that has formed itself consciously or unconsciously from the undifferentiated masses.”¹⁸

The Group Theatre dominated the thirties. There were the successes of *Waiting for Lefty*, *Awake and Sing*, and *Golden Boy*, all written by Clifford Odets, who became the Group’s leading playwright; but there were more than a share of failures. The Group Theatre’s existence remained a matter of daily struggle in the classical Marxist tradition, and some of its members would have it no other way.

The Group’s philosophy was exemplified by a scientific approach toward the theoretical question of theatre, art, and reality, almost congruent with that which Kracauer, Arnheim, and Bazin were evolving in the realm of the cinema at the same time. According to Clurman:

A technique of the theatre had to be founded on life values. The whole bent of our theatre, I reiterated time and again, would be to combine a study of theatre craft with a creative content which that craft was to express. To put it another way, our interest in the life of our times must lead us to the discovery of those methods that would most truly convey this life through theatre. . . . With few exceptions, what we saw in most

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁷ Harold Clurman, *All People Are Famous* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1974), p. 112.

¹⁸ Ibid., 99. 31, 40.

shows was “performance,” fabrication, artifice. Theatrical experience was, for the greater part, the antithesis of human experience; it bespoke a familiarity with the clichés of stage deportment rather than experience with direct roots in life. It seemed to us that without such true experience plays in the theatre were lacking in all creative justification. In short, the system was not an end in itself, but a means employed for the true interpretation of plays.¹⁹

This philosophy was, of course, reinforced by Stanislavski’s systematic approach to the theatre.

In 1934 Clurman, Stella Adler (Clurman’s wife and a leading actress/teacher in the Group), and Lee Strasberg went to Europe where they attended the productions at the Moscow Art Theatre and met Stanislavski in Paris. Clurman described this momentous occasion and how it affected the Group Theatre:

Stella Adler and I called on him. He spoke at once of what was uppermost in his thought: the theatre. Every afternoon he went out for a few hours to get the sun in the Bois de Boulogne. . . . Stanislavski asked us to accompany him to the Bois. Stella and I asked many questions. Stanislavski answered all of them cordially and carefully. He asked us to come again. We went to the Bois again and the next afternoon to take up where we had left off the previous day.

Stella Adler had been worried for three years over certain aspects of the Stanislavski system or method. She no longer found any joy in acting, she avowed; perhaps this was due to that cursed method. Stanislavski said immediately: “If the system does not help you, forget it. But perhaps you do not use it properly.” He offered to work with her on some scene that she had found difficult.

Day after day we returned. I was growing restless despite my deep enjoyment of these conversations. Stanislavski was not only a great man of the theatre but a fine human being, strong and simple, urbane and warm, thoughtful and relaxed. Yet I felt I had to get back to New York and the Group. Stella urged me to stay on. I left. She continued seeing Stanislavski daily for five weeks, during which time she worked with him on a scene from *Gentlewoman*

The outstanding artistic feature of the summer was the influence of Stella Adler’s report on her work with Stanislavski. To put it bluntly, she

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 129-130.

had discovered that our use of the Stanislavski system had been incorrect. An undue emphasis on the “exercises” of affective memory had warped our work with the actor. Strasberg’s first reaction to this declaration was the charge that Stanislavski had gone back on himself. Later, however, he decided to take advantage of the suggestions furnished by Stella’s report, and to use what he could of the “innovations” in Stanislavski’s method. Stella herself began to give classes that summer.²⁰

And in this manner began the propagation of the “Method” in America. The classes began to attract attention in theatre circles, and the controversy that was later to dominate the Actors Studio’s teaching of the “Method” began to take shape. Clurman wrote:

About our rehearsal method, and the famous Stanislavski or Moscow Art Theatre system from which it derived, a great mystery was made in those days, and much nonsense was written and spoken. The reason for this was that while we considered the system vital as a method of training, a way of organizing the study of parts, and above all as a means of achieving concrete results in the interpretation of plays, there was no way of demonstrating its values except to actors at rehearsals, rather than through lectures, commentaries, or critical debate.

The truth of the matter is that the system should never have been made a subject of conversation, a matter of publicity or Sunday articles, for it does not concern the audience or, for that matter, the critic. The system is not a theory, but a way of doing something with the actor

The aim of the system is to enable the actor to use himself more consciously as an instrument for the attainment of truth on the stage.²¹

Sitting in those classes was a young aspiring actor by the name of Elia Kazan. He had been building sets, running errands, and now was beginning to get a few small parts in some of the plays; but in his mind he knew he wanted to direct. An interesting story on this young man appeared in 1936 in the *New York Evening Post*:

An excessively ragged looking individual, wearing a badly torn shirt and a cap which sported a rabbit’s foot for good luck made an

²⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

²¹ Ibid.

explosive entrance into the Broadway Theatre. It was Elia Kazan, playing his first important role with the Group as an embittered, dynamic taxi driver in *Waiting for Lefty*.²²

This use of descriptive adjectives for young Kazan, such as ragged looking, torn shirt, explosive, embittered, dynamic, etc., was the first time a listing of attributes of the Theatrical Realism male actor appeared in the press. Kazan, in a sense, made his future actors in his own image. This description would be used decades later with reference to Marlon Brando, James Dean, Paul Newman, Warren Beatty, and others. The man carried the style within him, and he was not the only one. Martin Ritt, Nicholas Ray, Lee J. Cobb (then Lee Jacob), John Garfield (then Julius Garfinkel, or some other variant thereof²³), Franchot Tone, and Sidney Lumet (then a child prodigy) were actors in the Group Theatre and would be instrumental in the development of Theatrical Realism.

Soon, temptation in the form of Hollywood was knocking at the doors. Jack Wildberg, who worked for Walter Wanger, “thought it was a good idea to put the Group Theatre people under contract,”²⁴ and just about anyone with any stature with the Group at the time had their first brush with Hollywood. Tone, Garfield, and Cobb made the transition successfully. Clurman secured a deal to produce and direct at RKO, but he never felt comfortable in the industry and only directed a minor film, *Deadline at Dawn* (1946).

Strasberg “moved to Hollywood where he trained people for screen tests and was complimented by Darryl Zanuck because so many of the people he trained got studio contracts.”²⁵ Clifford Odets, unfortunately, went through the prescribed scenario for Hollywood writers: success, embitterment, and eventual defeat. Even Kazan got a screen test for the part that Allen Jenkins later played in *Dead End*, but, as he told Ciment, a deep feeling of resentment toward Hollywood

²² “Pint Size Elia Kazan Has His Chance at Last,” *New York Evening Post*, January 26, 1936.

²³ Through different stages in his career he used the names of Julius Garfinkel, Jules Garfinkel, Jules Garfield, and finally John Garfield.

²⁴ Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, p. 24.

²⁵ Barthel, “Master of the Method Plays.”

materialized and was reinforced in his first brush with the movie industry:

Before we knew it we were . . . valuable possessions for the motion picture studios. A lot of Group Theatre people . . . left for Hollywood. We looked down on them, we thought it was a defeat of idealism on their part, that they were traitors.²⁶

This negative impression of Hollywood became one of the instrumental factors that shaped Theatrical Realism. Clurman recalls that “Kazan returned to the East in disgust due to an inability to adjust his turbulence to the vacuous serenity of Southern California.”²⁷

By the mid thirties the Group had expanded and considered many simultaneous projects, including a magazine, a school, a group film project, and even a Group restaurant,²⁸ but with expansion came dissipation, imitation, and ultimately rebellion. In 1937 Clurman left New York and Strasberg resigned, claiming that “the membership had destroyed the leadership.”²⁹ By 1938 even the classes were discontinued because the instructors were on the road too often. Clurman returned and pulled the company together for its last production, Odets’ *Golden Boy*, which became one of the Group’s most popular successes, but by the time the show ended its run the Group Theatre was a dead organization. Kazan wrote a revealing epitaph:

[When] the Group Theatre collapsed it left a huge void in all our lives. To everybody that had been associated with it, everything else seemed inferior, diffuse, without purpose. We had been brought to life by a cause. When the cause disappeared, our lives suddenly seemed empty, and futile and rather meaningless. Everyone went his way³⁰

²⁶ Ciment, p. 19.

²⁷ Clurman, *The Fervent Years*, p. 191.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

²⁹ Gray “Stanislavski in America,” p. 39. It was at this time that the sub rosa rivalry between Strasberg and Kazan first surfaced.

³⁰ Ciment, p. 27.

Theatrical Realism On the Stage

An accommodation between the realistic and anti-realistic modes of theatre has long been apparent in playwriting and play production. Often it has been made as a matter of routine practice, and sometimes it has been the unique achievement of talented artists. Not only do we now accept the “coexistence” of different kinds of drama and stage production, but we observe with equanimity the erosion of distinctions once strongly insisted upon by the proponents of various theatrical movements.³¹

This erosion of distinctions between the classical forms of theatre was the salient characteristic of the modern theatre.

The works of Ibsen, Chekhov, and O’Neill were distinguished by their shift in concern from theatrical forms to the characters’ inner quality. The works of these three men laid the foundations for Theatrical Realism by blending the elements of theatrical stylization and “slice of life” realism in carefully measured proportions. Yet each of these authors contributed different elements to the formation of the style.

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Moscow Art Theatre productions of the works of Chekhov marked the beginning of a new tradition in the theatre. Chekhov’s contribution came in the form of his concern for “real-time” lassitude, and eventual psychological revelation of a existential conflict within his characters. *The Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *Uncle Vanya* are slow-motion strip-teases of the soul which reveal only deeper variations of internal conflicts without cathartic resolution. The early films of Michelangelo Antonioni (especially his trilogy of *L’Avventura*, *La Notte*, and *L’Eclisse*) are the closest cinematic equivalent to the unresolved existential “angst” of Chekhov.

Ibsen, working within the confines of Victorian drawing rooms, was able to place his conflicts within the broad parameters of social responsibility and role playing. The tensions within his characters come from the inability to reconcile the interior with the exterior, often leading to cathartic resolutions where the flesh

³¹ John Gassner, *Directions in Modern Theatre and Drama* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 133.

is sacrificed in favor of the spirit. *Hedda Gabler*, *A Doll's House*, *The Master Builder*, and *The Enemy of the People* illustrate social issues with the didactic approach implicit in the moral choices that must be made when facing a dilemma.

O'Neill brought in the element of tragic determinism by placing his characters in a world that deeply affects them but that they are unable to comprehend. His work echoes the Greek tragedies on which his plays were often based, giving it the aura of classical respectability that allowed him to wallow in the naturalism he found so attractive and repelling at the same time. *Desire Under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* illustrate this dichotomy in his work. It was not until *Long Day's Journey into Night*, published and produced posthumously, that he allowed himself the cathartic revelation that is only possible within an exclusively personal context.

These three new elements: existential "angst," conflict between the interior and exterior, and cathartic revelations are to be found fully integrated in the works of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, the two exponential writers of Theatrical Realism on the stage. The late forties and early fifties were to see the works of these two authors dominate the Broadway stage and establish the tone for Theatrical Realism.

An element of poetry, lyricism, and stylization suddenly came to the fore, and the works of Chekhov, Ibsen, and O'Neill, which contained these elements, were revived and greeted with acclamation from critics and audiences alike.

Gassner compared this new accent on stylization in opposition to the old "social-realistic" school of drama when discussing the 1952 New York Production *Desire Under the Elms*, staged by Harold Clurman and designed by Mordecai Gorelik.

Neither Clurman nor Gorelik had previously made consistent use of antirealistic stylization; they had been associated with Broadway's most developed realist producing enterprise, the Group Theatre, during the 1930's. Nevertheless, they did not hesitate to stage O'Neill's farm tragedy in a formally designed setting, essentially a screen with platforms, framed

by a cut-out drop of two elms forming an arch. Mr. Gorelik was the designer of such plays as Odets' *Awake and Sing!* and *Golden Boy*.³²

In the aftermath of the war, the fervent years mellowed into an affluent time that side-stepped social problems in favor of emotional problems as manifested within the individual. This new shift of emphasis moved the focus from the "group" to the individual, creating an assortment of roles for actors who would soon become stars.

Theatrical Realism struck a happy medium in the American theatre in the late forties. It was, above all, commercial theatre; having characters with whom the audience could identify and still watch in stupefaction. It was topical, contemporary, challenging, and "artistic." Also, it seemed to settle, in a peculiar compromise, the problems of stylization and realism. As Gassner commented:

One may wonder, indeed, why there has been (since 1940, let us say) a quarrel over stylization in dramatic art. Conflict between realism and theatricalization has become largely theoretical, if not indeed illusory. If realists still look askance at tub-thumping for theatricalized drama, it is only because they suspect that there is charlatanry, cultural decadence, or escapism in the opposite camp. They cling to some degree of literalness or actualism out of a resolve to defend the theatre as an instrument of the modern rationalistic and scientific mind of liberal spirit.³³

Bentley, doubtlessly in the realm of those with a scientific mind and liberal spirit, mourned the passing of the political theatre and condemned the coming of the new school:

Perhaps the creative forces in America are no longer running into political art. More prominent certainly, in our theatre than social drama is the "mood play." I am referring to the school of playwrights—the only American school of playwrights—which is headed by Tennessee Williams and includes Carson McCullers, William Inge and Jane Bowles. . . . The moral weakness of the social drama is that it scorns or neglects the self.

³² Ibid., p. 136.

³³ Ibid., p. 137.

Liberal idealism . . . springs from fear—even hatred—of the self. The new psychological drama, school of Williams, is equal and opposite. It springs from fear of the Other, of society, of the world, and from preoccupation with the self. Now, art that doesn't spring from the whole man but from one side of him tends, I think, not to become art at all but to remain neurotic and quasi-neurotic fantasy.³⁴

But the climate seemed to be right for neurotic fantasies in the Theatrical Realism style. Kazan's career as a theatre director in the forties was the best index in determining the popularity of the style on the stage. He said: "After [directing] *The Skin of Our Teeth* I was offered a lot of plays. And after *A Streetcar Named Desire* I was offered any play."³⁵ In describing his 1947 production of *Streetcar*, Gassner came close to defining Theatrical Realism:

The environment in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, for instance, was realized by Tennessee Williams atmospherically as well as realistically, and his observance of the rules or realistic credibility did not interfere at all with his penchant for poetic dialogue. He simply motivated "poetry" in the dismal surroundings and the sordid plot. A febrile and overcompensating poetic dialogue was "natural" to his Blanche Du Bois, daughter of the Southern gentry, ex-teacher, and pretender to vanished glories. Nor did the observance of the fourth wall convention prevent Elia Kazan the director of the Broadway stage production, from using tawdry, naturalistic exterior and interior scenes imaginatively without a change of setting. In the last scene, the blending of exterior and interior views and the distribution of the play's grimly naturalistic action over five areas constitutes an imaginative, theatrical employment of realism.³⁶

In 1949 Kazan directed Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Gassner described it in detail with reference to the mixture of classical styles, especially realism, expressionism, and theatricality.

We are even likely to encounter an amalgamation of two or more different styles of composition in the very same play; the result, far from disturbing us, usually gains our approbation. Arthur Miller's *Death of a*

³⁴ Eric Bentley, *The American Drama (1944-1954)* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1957), pp. 40-41.

³⁵ Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, p. 33.

³⁶ Gassner, p. 33.

Salesman contains scenes that belong to the most thoroughly realistic type of drama, but they alternate with recollected and hallucinated scenes that are more or less expressionistic in treatment. It is also to be noted that both the acting and stage design of the 1948 Broadway production directed by Elia Kazan and designed by Jo Mielziner showed this alternation of styles. Details of Willy's suburban home, such as the bedroom and the parlor, were rendered with an effect of cramped and unlovely realism; but the house itself was skeletonized and placed on a platform, and the stage space in front and at the sides of the structure was left scenically neutral. The same setting, altered only by the lighting, was sometimes realistic, sometimes stylized and formal, but always fluid enough to let reality and dream intermingle.

In the modern theatre, indeed, there has been so much blending of effects that the question of which part of a play is "real" and which is "unreal" is sometimes meaningless.³⁷

Blum noted, in his dissertation on method acting, that:

The Actors Studio and the "Method" fit comfortably into the theatrical milieu of the fifties. Psychological themes and characters dominated the mainstream of realistic drama, and the "Method" approach to acting was totally congruent with the naturalistic plays. As Brockett and Findlay noted:

"The dominant style in the American theatre from the late 1940s until about 1960 was a theatricalized realism compounded of acting which emphasized intense psychological truth and of visual elements which eliminated nonessentials but retained realistic outlines. It combined near-naturalism in performance with stylization in settings. This mode was popularized by the director Elia Kazan and the designer Jo Mielziner through such productions as *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Death of a Salesman* (1949).

Elia Kazan's directorial work was marked by extensive "Method" use, and *A Streetcar Named Desire* marked the absorption point of the "Method" into the mainstream of theatre and film. The theatrical production was staged in 1947, and Brooks Atkinson evaluated the play in these terms:

"Elia Kazan's direction was sensitive and scrupulous, and the confrontations and the climaxes were overwhelming. The tenderness and the brutality were woven into a single strand of panic and doom. Marlon Brando became a star on the basis of the sullen, brutish brother-in-law he played vividly; and Karl Malden's portrait of the homely drudge named Mitch began the illustrious part of his career. Jessica Tandy's desperate,

³⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

shrill terrified Blanche and Kim Hunter's contented sis were sharply imagined and acted, and the baleful moods rose and fell in the acting of a perfectly balanced cast. The audience was both moved and elated by the performance, and *A Streetcar Named Desire* received both the Pulitzer Prize and Critics Circle Award."³⁸

As the forties came to a close on Broadway, Theatrical Realism had been firmly established as the prevalent style for contemporary American theatre. It would not be too long before Hollywood would seize the opportunity and start importing actors and directors from New York and buying the film rights to the works of Miller, Williams, and others. Kazan was already commuting between coasts and had signed a contract with Twentieth Century-Fox. According to Kazan:

All during this time, although I was involved in the theatre successfully, my ambition was to become a film director. . . . I had four plays on the stage at the same time. It was a good period, but I kept thinking: 'I must get into films.' I was seeing more and more films and thinking and reading about them.³⁹

No doubt he must have, since in 1948 he would win the Best Director Academy Award for *Gentleman's Agreement*.

Message Movies

It is a depressing fact that Americans tend to confuse morality and art (to the detriment of both), and that, among the educated, morality tends to mean social consciousness. Not implicit social awareness . . . but explicit, machine-tooled, commercialized social consciousness The educated American is a social worker at heart.

--Pauline Kael⁴⁰

³⁸ Richard Arthur Blum, "The Method" from *Stanislavski to Hollywood: The Transition of Acting Theory in America from Stage to Screen (1900-1976)* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1976).

³⁹ Ciment, p. 28.

⁴⁰ Pauline Kael, *I Lost It at the Movies* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), pp. 39, 41.

This is an entertainment industry. If you have a message, send it by Western Union.

--Hollywood Proverb⁴¹

Ever since mass media made an appearance in history they have been considered instruments for attitude change and behavior modification. The cinema, until the arrival of television, was the most sophisticated and effective of the mass media in accomplishing these goals and, as such, remained in an undisputed primary position in the minds of those who needed to impress on the masses their ideas and beliefs.

Motion picture film has served the cause of propaganda in the most flexible of manners. From the direct to the subtle approach, the movies have proven their ability not only to create and shape public opinion, but to drive the masses to action in the course of making history.

In 1917 D. W. Griffith wrote: "The cinema camera is the agent of Democracy. It levels barriers between races and classes."⁴² Three years later, in the Soviet Union, Lenin declared that "the Cinema, for us, is the most important art."⁴³ The truth, of course, was that the cinema became, for anyone who could get their hands on it, a most powerful tool in achieving their ends.

The coupling of the medium's capacity for art and entertainment on one hand, and propaganda on the other, manifested itself in a most interesting fashion in the history of the American film.

The motion picture industry in the United States was born and developed as a commercial venture whose aim was to sell entertainment to the masses, not to educate or indoctrinate them. The first amendment of the Bill of Rights guarantees the independence of film producers from government interference, and

⁴¹ Richard Dyer MacCann (editor), *Film and Society* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), p. 51. Attributed to Samuel Goldwyn.

⁴² As quoted in David Manning White and Richard Averson, *The Celluloid Weapon* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1972), p. 165.

⁴³ Roger Manvell and Lewis Jacobs, *The International Encyclopedia of Film* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 426. According to the authors, these remarks were "apparently uttered to Lunacharski around 1920."

Hollywood has gone to great lengths to make sure that its product remains autonomous of government control.⁴⁴

The production output of the American film industry is characterized by its approach to each film as a marketable commodity designed to entertain and make money. Within this industrial system the ideological content of films is relevant only to the extent that it has box office attraction. This corollary results in the fact that only films reflecting existing social attitudes of wide enough proportions to deliver a substantial audience are made. Therefore, as a reflection of its public, the American commercial cinema, or “Hollywood,” could hardly be expected to be at the vanguard of social or political issues of any kind.

Dore Schary, who produced a good many “message pictures” at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (*The Next Voice You Hear, Go for Broke, It’s a Big Country*), has insisted that movies seldom lead opinion; they merely reflect public opinion and perhaps occasionally accelerate it. No motion picture ever started a trend of public opinion or thinking. Pictures merely dramatize these trends and keep them going.

By and large, his analysis is supported by the history of the sound film in America. With rare exception—the anti-lynching films, perhaps, and the race-relations films of the late 1940’s—Hollywood producers have been slow to call attention to public issues until those issues had already become familiar and obvious, or until a public attitude toward the issue was beginning to take form on one side or the other.⁴⁵

The film maker who “had something to say” had to say it in a popular and entertaining fashion before his film would be made by Hollywood. White and Averson stated:

Recognizing the necessity to first stir men’s hearts in order to change their attitudes, Hollywood message-film-makers have utilized the entertainment “story” film as a vehicle for expressing a social viewpoint. By couching their social comment within an emotion-involving dramatic

⁴⁴ The Production Code and the rating system are two visible examples of “self-regulation” in the hopes of avoiding official government interference. The blacklist of the fifties was a not-so-visible attempt at the same thing.

⁴⁵ MacCann, p. 54.

story, these film-makers have been instinctively aware that to “teach” and persuade mass audiences, a movie must first engage and hold their attention.⁴⁶

The same point was made by Martin Ritt in an article he wrote in 1964 and quoted here at length. Ritt is one of the main figures of Theatrical Realism, and his viewpoint on the history of “social films” as being a “two-way street” sheds light on an issue of the period.

The major misconception about social films seems to be one of political geography. It is assumed automatically that a social film will express a left-to-center viewpoint. . . . It is strange that the term “social film,” or more generally oriented art, should be considered the exclusive product and prerogative of liberal artists. It is strange because it is, at the same time, both logical and paradoxical. The logic stems from the fact that the tenor of our society today is liberal, and artists generally ride in advance of the contemporary social forces. It is paradoxical because the social art of the earlier part of this century, and of most of the centuries all the way back to Homer, has been primarily conservative. The Voltaires were the exception.

The first great social films were conservative. Edwin S. Porter made no liberal plea for rehabilitation of the culprit when he filmed *The Great Train Robbery*. The most obvious example, however, is the granddaddy of all movies, D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*. Griffith’s impassioned plea for sympathy for the Ku Klux Klan could hardly be termed a liberal point of view. And yet this was one of the greatest films of all time.

Another great and early shaper of the motion picture industry was Cecil B. DeMille, who was not a renowned liberal. Yet his films, from *The Squaw Man* to *The Ten Commandments*, were, in every sense of the word, social films. They undoubtedly left the impact of DeMille’s point of view on many members of his considerable audience.

However, the tidal wave of social thought since the third decade of the century has made the preponderance of social films liberal in sentiment.

It is interesting to note certain cycles in liberal social films. In the early 30s the liberal social films, certainly the most famous of the liberal social films, were anguished outcries: *The Crowd*, *Hallelujah*, *I Was a Fugitive From a Chain Gang*.

The golden age of comedy in the 1930s and the early 40s was

⁴⁶ White and Averson, p. 26.

largely the expression of pent-up social feelings by primarily liberal-thinking film-makers. It should be stressed, however, that the artistic and entertainment miracles of this period were more the result of their talent than of their social conscience. The same talent, regardless of the social prejudice, would have expressed itself in memorable art, but the same liberal social consciousness, paired with lesser talent, could not have produced films of such significance.

At the end of this period, the social films began to concentrate on World War II. This period saw more or less a unified point of view. Film-makers of every political conviction were working toward much the same goal, galvanizing the nation. Now, in the general (although not universal) prosperity of the 1960s, the tenor of much of the social content in motion pictures has come full circle from the anguished cry of the 30s. The social film-maker of our period leans more toward iconoclasm than toward crusading. . . . I think it is true of much of my work. *Hud* was not a story about an anti-hero, but rather an exploration of the kind of values we accept as heroic and which are in fact anti-heroic. The same may be very much true of *The Outrage*. This is based upon the same story as the Japanese film *Rashomon*, although it is treated from a distinctly American point of view, or if you wish to be more explicit, a liberal American point of view.

The first function of the social film is not to convert, to convince or proselytize. It is to entertain. The reason an audience pays to see a film is enjoyment, not enlightenment. Social impact is a secondary function of film-making which comes from the fact that film-makers are artists, and, as such, they recognize and present what they feel is the truth. But they are entertainers first, not instructors.

The social film is not necessarily the propaganda film. It is any film, entertainment or documentary, which makes a comment about something in our society. And does so with some artistry! No first-class work lacks social impact.

The implicit labeling of social films as films of liberal sentiment exclusively is erroneous. Films of this point of view are predominant among the social films of our day merely because this social point of view is more fashionable today, just as in the early 1900s it was more fashionable to be conservative.⁴⁷

Ritt made his point very well that not only liberals, but conservatives as well, made social films in Hollywood and that the labeling of social films as being of liberal sentiment was a popular misconception. Yet, as ill-founded as this

⁴⁷ Martin Ritt, "Social Films: Conservative vs. Liberal,": *Los Angeles Times Calendar*, October 11, 1964.

assumption may be, his statement that “the liberal viewpoint is more fashionable at the time” supports the contention that the message films⁴⁸ of the Theatrical Realism period, ipso facto, reflect the liberal viewpoint on social issues.

The question at hand is how do message films fit within the Theatrical Realism style. But first, “message films” must be defined. MacCann defined them as “films concerned with contemporary human situations as they are affected by sociological or technological changes.”⁴⁹ He claimed that these films “always seemed especially comfortable with realism and with the kind of photography which explores the dark alleys of human experience.”⁵⁰ White and Averson described them as films which “explore such social problems as racial and ethnic prejudice, drug addiction, alcoholism, labor inequities, penal inhumanity, crime and juvenile delinquency, corruption in politics and government, and that most cancerous of all social ills, war.”⁵¹

As Ritt had already demonstrated, the tradition of the message film in America is closely linked to its value as entertainment, and, as Schary stated, its ability to reflect public opinion and perhaps occasionally accelerate it. Therefore, it may be surmised that when these films are successful, they provide an accurate reflection of the film maker’s and audience’s social attitudes. As White and Averson stated:

Because message films deal with social issues when they are most nagging and topical, and because the view-points they espouse are dependent on acceptance by large “paying” audiences, they have represented an important index to social thought in America since the turn of the century.⁵²

During and immediately after the Second World War a social and artistic

⁴⁸ The term “message film” is used throughout this study to denote what Ritt calls “social films,” McCann calls “problem films,” and Kael calls “relevant films.” These terms are not used to denote propaganda films.

⁴⁹ MacCann, p. 52.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 51.

⁵¹ White and Averson, p. 27.

⁵² Ibid.

climate developed in the nation that began to produce a series of message films, which, in turn, provided the fertile groundwork in Hollywood for the transplanting of the Theatrical Realism style from the New York stage. MacCann wrote:

The most notable effect of World War II on Hollywood film-makers was their experience of making documentaries for the U.S. government or the armed services. John Huston, John Ford, William Wyler, George Stevens, Frank Capra, Garson Kanin, Robert Riskin, Darryl Zanuck, and many others were shaken by facts, touched by actual experience, and influenced by the documentary way of working.⁵³

The triumph over the “forces of evil” in World War II led to the quest for a perfect society in America that brought out into open the many social illnesses with which the country was afflicted. Biberman drew an accurate picture of the frame of mind prevalent at the time.

Blithely, following the war’s end, many of Hollywood’s film-makers, of assorted political points of view, had begun to walk the road toward the fruits of victory with the American audience. It was a widening avenue of increasingly realistic, more mature and complex subject matter; the emotional reaches of America’s postwar yearnings, democratic yearnings.

Out of the blood bath the world would emerge not merely rescued, but reborn. If its birth had been violent and punishing, it was decency that had triumphed. The new world, reasonably had to be more secure. The motion picture was the universal medium to expose this new world of victory to the peoples of the world. Making films was creating life.

We felt genuine pride in the industry when such films as *The Best Years of Our Lives* and *Crossfire* appeared. They were important steps toward making the newly won peace popularly secure. They gave us a sense of national and even global identity. That they were both enormously successful at the box office made the executives optimistic that pictures that held audiences in high esteem seemed to be held in high esteem by the audiences.⁵⁴

⁵³ MacCann, p. 55.

⁵⁴ Hebert Biberman, *Salt of the Earth—The Story of a Film* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1965), p. 8.

Bogle wrote about this attribute and its influence on films:

The nation had but recently recovered from a Depression that had unearthed social ills and injustices . . . [and] was reminded by vocal civil rights groups of the bigotry and racial discrimination still operating in America's industries and even in its armed forces. At this time many Americans underwent their first pangs of guilt. Many people experienced a "liberal" urge to right old wrongs. Often the old wrongs were corrected in a patronizing or condescending manner, but significant social changes did come about.

In films, the post war audience demanded recognizable problems and issues, particularly on racial matters. American movie-goers now wanted to be pounded over their heads with facts, with guts, with realism. And they were willing to accept controversy. Thus the tone of American movies underwent its first stage of radical changes.⁵⁵

It was due partly to this radical change and to his successful career as a Broadway director that Kazan came to work in Hollywood, and his films became critical and popular successes. He told Ciment:

In 1944 I began to get offers from the [Hollywood] companies, particularly Warners and Fox, both of whom did more contemporary, down-to-earth subjects. I was offered *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. . . I read it and saw in it material I knew something about, the streets of New York and the lives of the working class. . . .⁵⁶

And thus Theatrical Realism began in Hollywood within the tradition of the message films. For the next five years Kazan was to devote himself to making message pictures such as *Pinky* (racial discrimination), *Gentleman's Agreement* (anti-Semitism) and *Boomerang* (political corruption). With his production of *Streetcar Named Desire* for Charles K. Feldman, Theatrical Realism would break loose from the message film tradition and assume the full characteristics of an independent film style.

⁵⁵ Donald Bogel, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks--An Interpretative History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), p. 175.

⁵⁶ Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, p. 49.

A clear-cut distinction between message films and Theatrical Realism must now be made. The term “message films” denotes a category of films with common characteristics in the area of thematic content. “Theatrical Realism” denotes a film style independent of thematic content. In the fifties, as often was the case, most message films exhibited the stylistic elements of Theatrical Realism because that was the fashionable style for realistic films of the period. But there were some notable exceptions. The works of Stanley Kramer and Otto Preminger illustrate this point. Preminger said:

When people make these silly remarks about a message being sent by Western Union, they reveal their own foolishness and superficiality. An obvious message is not entertaining, it is bad and silly; but if we teach people while getting them to listen, and they go away with something to discuss with their friends, that is more entertaining than just laughing.⁵⁷

Kramer recalled:

After I got out of the Army I intended to write the Great American Novel, or a play or something. Then I met a man with fifty million dollars.⁵⁸

I set up my own production company in 1949 and set about making films that had something to say about the vital issues of contemporary life.⁵⁹

Both Kramer and Preminger are issue oriented directors whose works are directly related to themes posed as social or moral questions. They share in common the element of topicality. If we were to say that the stories they told came from newspaper headlines, we would then say that Kramer read the *New York Times* and Preminger the *Daily News*. Where one man strained toward respectability and source credibility, the other one cherished exploitation and

⁵⁷ GERAL PRATLEY, *The Cinema of Otto Preminger* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1971), p. 106.

⁵⁸ Paul Mayersberg, “Passage to Hollywood,” in *Sight, Sound and Society*, edited by David Manning White and Richard Averson (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1968), p. 174.

⁵⁹ Tony Thomas, *The Films of Marlon Brando* (London: The Tantivy Press, 1970), p. 30.

sensationalism. But at the core of both men's work may be found an obsession with the espousal of liberal causes with the naïve crusading spirit of a comic book hero.

On the surface Kramer is restrained and didactic, while Preminger is exuberant and moralizing. For example, Kramer's 1950 production of *The Men*, directed by Fred Zinnemann, is significant because it marks the screen debut of Marlon Brando and deals head-on with the problems of paraplegic veterans returning from the Korean War. The film's script, written by Carl Foreman, is full of didactic speeches delivered by Everett Sloane, who plays the doctor. There are no bones about it—this is education. All the facts are presented that are pertinent to the issue and the audience is placed in a dilemma, best defined by the old joke on liberals which ends with the line “yes, but how would you like your daughter to marry one of them?”⁶⁰

In spite of Brando's debut performance, this film does not exhibit the characteristic traits of Theatrical Realism. It belongs in the realm of the other forties message films of the Kramer/Foreman/Robson troika, such as *Home of the Brave* and *Champion*. In the case of Kramer's productions, Theatrical Realism was slowly assimilated or imitated as a style in future productions. Choosing his subjects carefully and dropping Robson as a director in favor of Laslo Benedek (for *Death of a Salesman* and *The Wild One*) and Fred Zinnemann (for *High Noon* and *Member of the Wedding*) helped to make of these Theatrical Realism films; but when Kramer finally assumed full directorial powers, his films remained in the old tradition of message films without exhibiting any elements of the style.

Preminger, on the other hand, was more receptive to stylistic influence. His films at Twentieth Century-Fox in the forties, as a contract director, bear the stamp of the studio's product. In the fifties, when he went independent and gained notoriety with *The Moon is Blue*,⁶¹ Preminger ran the gamut from frozen

⁶⁰ This was the same question that Kramer asked eighteen years later in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*.

⁶¹ The film was released without the Motion Picture Producers Association production code seal.

Black musical mastodons (*Carmen Jones*, *Porgy and Bess*) to red-hot sensational Theatrical Realism (*The Man with the Golden Arm*, *Anatomy of a Murder*). As a Theatrical Realism director, Preminger's "nostalgie de la boue"⁶² is an asset, whereas Kramer's lofty ideals become a handicap.

Preminger is a realist who brings objectivity to all his work. . . . [His] reality is the look of real places...He is on location and what he shows is the way the place is and, respectfully, as we look for beauty we must accept the fact that the world is an ugly place and Preminger isn't going to beautify it for us⁶³

Both Preminger and Kramer have a penchant for courtroom dramas⁶⁴ because they provide a civilized arena for a battle of principles between opposing forces, and the audience is easily aligned with the role of the protagonist. Their films are in the mold of Theatrical Realism when the subject and fashion call for it, but not because they are "of the style."

In the late sixties these two film makers released movies about the counterculture. Preminger's *Skidoo* and Kramer's *R.P.M.* were ill-fated attempts to cope with the youth revolution and brought out the fact that these film makers had lost their ability to relate to the issues of their day in an artistic and commercially profitable manner. Each generation has its own spokespersons.

By using the examples of Kramer and Preminger an attempt has been made to demonstrate how Theatrical Realism and message movies were independent of each other and yet walked hand in hand during the fifties. The works of other Hollywood film makers, such as Richard Brooks, Jules Dassin, Robert Rossen, Fred Zinnemann, Robert Wise, John Huston, George Stevens, Edward Dmytryk, Robert Mulligan and Joseph L. Mankiewicz, are also representative of this overlap of style and message and will be discussed in some detail in Chapter V.

⁶² French literary term meaning "desire for the gutter."

⁶³ Pratley, pp. 27-28.

⁶⁴ Preminger's *The Court Martial of Billy Mitchell*, *Anatomy of a Murder*, and *Advise and Consent*; Kramer's *The Caine Mutiny*, *Inherit the Wind*, and *Judgment at Nuremberg*.

It seems fitting to close this section on message movies by quoting Kael's reactions to Sidney Lumet's film *Twelve Angry Men*. This is a perfect example of the message movie executed in the best tradition of Theatrical Realism. Lumet is one of the leading directors often working in the style up to this day, and this film, which marked his feature film directing debut, is an illustrative case of the direct relationship between style and message in Theatrical Realism. Kael's remarks, as vicious as they may seem, are nevertheless accurate and to the point in describing the audience's relationship to the film and its message—a relationship that allowed Theatrical Realism to flourish in the American cinema:

Ask an educated American what he thought of *Twelve Angry Men* and more likely than not he will reply, “that movie made some good points” or “It got some important ideas across.” His assumption is that it carried these ideas, which also happen to be his ideas to the masses. . . .

The social psychology of *Twelve Angry Men* is perfectly attuned to the educated audience. The hero, Henry Fonda—the one against the eleven—is lean, intelligent, gentle but strong; this liberal, fair-minded architect is “their” hero. And the boy on trial is their dream of a victim: he is of some unspecified minority, he is a slum product who never had a chance, and, to clinch the case, his father didn't love him. It isn't often that professional people can see themselves on the screen as the hero—in this case the Lincolnesque architect of the future—and how they love it! They are so delighted to see a movie that demonstrates a proposition they have already accepted that they cite *Twelve Angry Men* and *The Defiant Ones* as evidence that American movies are really growing up.⁶⁵

Italian Neo-Realism

After the second World War I said, unconsciously, “The world has become much too real, things are too real, life is too real to go on faking, making believe that this was the way people lived. They don't look like Doris Day and Rock Hudson. . . .” At the same time, the material people were thinking of making was in tune with those thoughts, and what we expressed we gathered from Europe—from De Sica, Rossellini, Visconti's “La Terra Trema”. . . . The emotional attributes that reality makes if you

⁶⁵ Kael, *I Lost It at the Movies*, pp. 40-41.

let it, and how we took it one more step . . . because ours is really designed reality, with a goal and purpose in mind.

--Richard Sylbert⁶⁶

Richard Sylbert is one of the key figures of Theatrical Realism. As art director and production designer on over fifteen Theatrical Realism films⁶⁷ he is most responsible for creating the look and texture of the film style. Over the years he has worked in close association with Kazan, Ritt, Lumet, Frankenheimer, Rossen, and other directors whose common stylistics are, no doubt, partly based on Sylbert as a common denominator in their work.

During a 1976 interview, the former production designer then a vice-president in charge of production at Paramount, discussed at length two important components of the Theatrical Realism style: (1) the influence of the Italian Neo-Realist film makers, and (2) the fact that Theatrical Realism gives the impression of “reality” by means of theatrical artifice.

In the early fifties, while I was working at the Fox studios in New York, people would come in and look at my sets . . . [and they would say] that they had never seen stuff like that before . . . and you know where we got it from?—from Europe. But we did something [the Europeans] never did—we did it all in the studio—they did it in the streets. And yet we got the same surface quality.⁶⁸

This surface quality, which Americans experienced firsthand during their overseas assignments in the second World War, could be experienced all over again on the screens of the new small “art” theatres that began to crop up in all the major American cities in the early fifties. MacCann wrote about this influence:

Another more indirect influence in post-war Hollywood was the Italian film renaissance. Having begun with stories of the war by Roberto Rossellini in *Open City* and *Paisan*, the neorealist movement came to be identified particularly with the director Vittorio De Sica and his

⁶⁶ Personal interview in March, 1976.

⁶⁷ Richard Sylbert’s filmography appears in Appendix A.

⁶⁸ Personal interview in March 1976.

collaborating screenwriter Cesare Zavattini, who later spoke eloquently of the film-maker's mission "to excavate reality." The method must not be, he declared, a "dead formula" but an attempt "to work out the largest possible number of human moral, social, economic, poetic values from the bare documentary fact. . . . The true function of the cinema is not to tell fables. . . . I go out into the street—catch words, sentences, discussions. . . . I am interested in the drama of things we happen to encounter, not those we plan." In *Shoeshine*, *The Bicycle Thief*, and *Umberto D*, not only the events but the actors were often taken from life itself.

The echoes of these films went around the world, stirring respect among American directors. The Italian emphasis on poverty did not seem adaptable in this country. Yet some cross-fertilization of social concern, if not of style, became apparent.⁶⁹

Among those film makers MacCann mentioned as being directly influenced by Neo-Realism and the war-time documentary approach was Louis de Rochemont:

It was de Rochemont who symbolized the post-war awareness of documentary by moving from reenactments of news events in his *March of Time* short subjects to semi-documentary features. *The House on 92nd Street* was a spy thriller based on an FBI anti-Nazi case history. *Boomerang* was the fictionalized biography of a U.S. attorney general who had fought against corruption in politics.⁷⁰

Boomerang, produced in 1947, was Kazan's third feature film as a director. He talked about the making of the film:

I liked [de Rochemont], but all he did on this picture was send me the script. . . . I thought: 'Here is a picture on location, and here is a pretty good story and I really will be able to do this picture the way I think pictures should be made.' It was our neo-realism, exactly as the same time as *Paisan*, but of course in no way as good as *Paisan*.⁷¹

⁶⁹ MacCann, *Film and Society*, pp.55-56.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 55.

⁷¹ Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, p. 56. It is of interest to note de Rochemont would soon form a partnership with Stanley Kramer to produce "message movies" such as *Home of the Brave* (1949) and *Lost Boundaries* (1949). Could he have been the "man with fifty million dollars" to whom Kramer referred on page 76?

It is very important to properly gauge the impact of Italian Neo-Realism among all the levels of the international film community. Critics and aestheticians, such as Bazin, Arnheim, and Kracaur, found in this movement (as was discussed in Chapter II) the main arguments to support their views of the cinema as a major art form. Not since the coming of sound had a group of films emerged that restored the faith of intellectuals in the capabilities of the motion picture as a serious means of expression.

In *The Liveliest Art*, Knight wrote:

Within the next five years there appeared in Italy a cycle of films in every way as remarkable as the great Russian pictures of the late twenties. . . . What emerged was a film strikingly unlike anything that had been seen before. Technically, it was far from flawless. . . . Its roughness, its lack of finish, became a virtue. . . . Here was true realism--the raw life of a tragic era. "This is the way things are," said Rossellini. . . . [This] became the credo of the entire neo-realism movement."⁷²

Open City, *Paisan*, *The Bicycle Thief*, and *Ways of Love*, each of them works of Italian Neo-Realism, won the New York Film Critics' best picture award when Joseph Burstyn and Arthur Mayer imported them to America.⁷³ *Ways of Love* became a "cause-célèbre" when one of the segments in the three-part film by Rossellini, entitled *The Miracle*, ran into censorship problems.⁷⁴ And Burstyn took the case to the Supreme Court where he "won a resounding victory."⁷⁵

In 1949 Tennessee Williams arrived in Hollywood after spending some time vacationing in Italy. (Actually, he had been writing *The Rose Tattoo* in Sicily.) *The Glass Menagerie* and *Streetcar Named Desire* were outstanding successes on the stage and were set to go before the camera at Warner Bros. He

⁷² Arthur Knight, *The Liveliest Art—A Panoramic History of the Movies* (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1957), pp. 223-224.

⁷³ Ezra Goodman, *The Fifty Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), p. 423.

⁷⁴ For more on this case see Ernest Giglio, "The Decade of 'The Miracle,' 1952-1962: A Study in the Censorship of the American Motion Picture" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse University, 1964).

⁷⁵ Goodman, p. 423.

gave an interview at the time in which he said:

In foreign countries there has been a great appreciation and understanding of anybody working in creative fields. The conflict that we know in this country, our trying to break through, has not existed there.

In Italy I found a strong spirit that is born out of the war. Men like Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica have evidenced great power in pictures. It was a fascinating experience meeting them, and also stage and film director, Luciano [sic] Visconti. They typify a new age.⁷⁶

Visconti and Williams met during the shooting of *La Terra Trema* (1948).⁷⁷ Their association was built on mutual respect and similar predilections. Visconti had heralded the Neo-Realism movement with his film *Ossessione* (1942), and had already directed *The Glass Menagerie* on the Italian stage. His Italian production of *Streetcar Named Desire* was soon to follow. In the near future Williams would work with Visconti on the screenplay *Senso* (1953).⁷⁸ Visconti had become Williams' Italian Kazan.

Through him, Williams would meet one of his lifelong friends, Anna Magnani,⁷⁹ who was, unquestionably the woman who typified Italian Neo-Realism, and for whom he would write *The Rose Tattoo*. This play clearly illustrated the influence of Italian Neo-Realism on Williams and, subsequently, on Theatrical Realism in the United States.

In 1955, when Paddy Chayefsky's film of his teleplay *Marty* (directed by Delbert Mann) was released, it was described by critics as "a sort of American '*Vitelloni*,'" and there was little reason to doubt that a conscious effort was being made to emulate the Italians on this side of the Atlantic. Chayefsky wrote about this at the time:

⁷⁶ Edwin Schadlert, "Hit Author Sure of Film Success," *The Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 1949.

⁷⁷ Tennessee Williams, *Memoirs* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1975), p. 142.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁷⁹ For more on Magnani see Chapter V.

⁸⁰ Andrew Dowdy, *The Films of the Fifties* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1973), p. 218.

We do have directors as gifted as De Sica and our films compare very well with foreign films. The people who worked on *Marty* were as gifted in their work as anybody in Europe as far as I know.⁸¹

Writing in *Film Culture*, de Laurot said: “[*Marty*] is at best a ‘slice of life,’ a fairly adequate exercise in imitating the premises and practices of those among the Italian Neo-Realists whose art has been steadily on the decline towards naturalism.”⁸² When asked about this twenty years later by this writer, Chayefsky responded: “I like early De Sica, Rossellini, and Fellini, but this was after the fact. As far as influence is concerned, I felt that I was more realistic than naturalistic.”⁸³

And, of course, one would have to agree with him. Yet evidence pointed to the fact that Neo-Realism played a great role in Chayefsky’s early work. In his critique of *Bachelor Party*, Cabrera Infante summed up this influence when he discussed the realistic elements introduced to the American screen by the film:

The scandalous elements in the film are not colored by a sensationalist brush, but rather, a naturalist one—or one should say, a neo-naturalist one, since Chayefsky does not aim for a detailed depiction of the ugly side of mankind, but uses this as a means to arrive at the demonstration of his thesis—which brings up the subject of neo-realism, because without the existence of Italian neo-realism this *Bachelor Party* would never have been held.⁸⁴

The same could be said of Theatrical Realism in America. One wonders how many, if any, of the films that are discussed in this work would have been produced without the initial inspirational spark⁸⁵ provided by the Italians’ new

⁸¹ Paddy Chayefsky, “In Praise of Reappraised Picture-Makers,” *The New York Times*, January 8, 1956.

⁸² Edouard de Laurot, “All About Marty,” *Film Culture*, 1:20, Summer, 1955.

⁸³ Personal interview in January 1976.

⁸⁴ Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Un oficio del siglo XX*, translated by Mario Beguiristain (Barcelona: Biblioteca Breve, 1975), p. 219.

⁸⁵ An interesting reversal of this inspirational spark occurred when Cesare Zavattini wrote “an original screenplay” lifting the story line from Chayefsky’s *The Catered Affair*. The film was produced in Cuba in 1961 and was entitled *Cuba Baila*. Zavattini remained active in the film industry until his death in 1989, still adhering to the Neo-Realist precepts he originally set down.

realistic treatment of film as art.

SOCIO-POLITICAL ROOTS

The Blacklist—A Generation on Trial

The sudden announcement in the late summer of 1947 that the House Committee on Un-American Activities was undertaking an investigation into the alleged “infiltration of subversive propaganda into motion pictures” was a shocking, bald notice of a fierce battle ahead for control of the medium. Films were apparently too influential to be permitted to remain an oasis of popular expression.

The larger part of Hollywood understood the threat and was alarmed. It began slowly to gird its loins.

--Herbert Biberman⁸⁶

The years between 1947 and 1954 saw the birth, growth, and institutionalization in Hollywood of one of the most despicable shivers of the cold war—the Blacklist.

There is no intention to go into great detail regarding all the ramifications, causes, and effects of this sad chapter in American history since this period has been well documented in carefully researched works and firsthand accounts⁸⁷ during recent years. The purpose here is to show how this infamous practice affected the lives and works of Theatrical Realism personalities who were among the main victims of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC).

“The story of some of the victims goes back a long way. Political awareness in our epoch began in the thirties,”⁸⁸ wrote Clurman, looking back on

His 1978 film, *The Children of Sanchez*, was produced and directed by Hal Bartlett, an old friend and associate of Stanley Kramer.

⁸⁶ Biberman, *Salt of the Earth*, pp. 8-9.

⁸⁷ Such as Eric Bentley’s *Thirty Years of Treason* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971); Howard Suber’s dissertation “The Anti-Communist Blacklist in the Hollywood Motion Picture Industry” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1968); Stefan Kanfer’s *A Journal of the Plague Years* (New York: Antheum Press, 1973); and Robert Vaughn’s *Victim* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

⁸⁸ Clurman, *All People Are Famous*, p. 155.

what he described as “a time of massacre in Hollywood.”⁸⁹ Looking still further back, in 1929, and the production of *Red Rust* by the Theatre Guild Studio,⁹⁰ Clurman recalled the opening night of the play:

Soviet sympathizers showed themselves for the first time on Broadway. Their existence in such numbers was a revelation to me. I remember being startled at the applause when the “Internationale” was sung before the curtain on opening night. The liberal intelligentsia, which had a goodly representation at that time on the large list of Guild subscribers, welcomed the play.⁹¹

Clurman explained the necessity for a commonly defined philosophy during the formation of the Group Theatre:

If man was to be the measure of all things in our theatre, if life was the starting-point, and an effect on life the aim of our effort, then one had to have a point of view in relation to it, one had to define an approach that might be common to all the members of the group.⁹²

This approach was defined by the social and political climate of the generation, which Clurman accurately described:

The desire for social action that seized some of our people. . . had a predominantly comic quality. Our neophyte radicals wanted to fix everything. Theirs was a veritable itch to unearth monstrous injustices they could be indignant about, to find causes they could espouse, to seek battles they could join.⁹³

The truth is that none of them had anything but the most rudimentary, naïve understanding of politics: They were all essentially apolitical no matter what they may have once argued, or clamored about—no matter what cards, documents, statements they may have signed. They were “yearners” seeking a home—a home in the theatre, a home in the world of thought and action, something that would call forth their most

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Cf. p. 84.

⁹¹ Clurman, *The Fervent Years*, p. 25.

⁹² Ibid., p. 31.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 131.

selfless efforts in behalf of some concrete cause. If what they chose to do momentarily was to join a party which spoke tenderly of the humble and ardently of human brotherhood, one can only say that while they were childishly deluded in this specific political instance, their motivation had health and virtue in it; a health which many of them—having lost some of the impulse and having no particular Group, artistic or social, to make use of what remained of the impulse—may never quite recover.⁹⁴

The link had been established from the beginning. A direct relationship between any of these positions along the political spectrum: liberal—progressive—leftist—socialist—communist, and Theatrical Realism undeniably existed; unearthing a subject for what would hopefully be another study that would attempt to establish positive correlations between political ideologies and stylistics in the arts. Unfortunately, such a task cannot be attempted here, but certain facts may be established that may seem to indicate that there is enough evidence to warrant the formulation of such a theory.⁹⁵

Kazan recalls that when he entered the Group in 1932, three-quarters of the Group membership were left-wing:

There was a committee within our little party cell; I was the leader of it in one sense . . . one of the things the Communist Party leader always wanted . . . was for us to take over the Group Theatre. I said it was an artistic organization and I backed up Clurman and Strasberg who were not Communists. I was tried by the Party and that was one of the reasons I became so embittered later. The trial was on the issue of my refusal to follow instructions that we should strike in the Group Theatre and insist that the membership have control of its organization.⁹⁶

This incident would become one of the most consequential events in Kazan's personal life and career when it would be closely scrutinized twenty

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 286.

⁹⁵ I. C. Jarvie, *Movies and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1970). Jarvie implied that such a relationship exists; so did Huaco when he stated that one of the prerequisites for "a stylistically unified wave of film art:" is personnel of "common social characteristics." By establishing a mutual sociopolitical background among Theatrical Realism, which is what is attempted here, it is expected to fulfill Huaco's prerequisite toward defining Theatrical Realism.

⁹⁶ Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, pp. 15, 22.

years later.

But the interval provided the right climate for the development of his career and the careers of other Theatrical Realism personalities. As has already been stated, the Depression made the left-wing point of view “topically interesting, lending it a degree of plausibility among respectable people.”⁹⁷ The war rallied all public sentiment behind a central cause and instilled a feeling of manifest destiny against all social and political ills in the nation and abroad, resulting in the postwar message/problem film cycle. There was a sense of purpose, direction, and momentum.

But the post-war world soon became a bad place for socially involved, radically oriented film-makers, and it is remarkable that some of these problem pictures were made after 1947. The new war, the cold one, had become the great political issue in America and was also directed inwards, against everything which could be seen as “un-American”—a label which was attached to most things which carried even a hint of social criticism. When the House Committee on Un-American Activities resumed its activities in 1947, one of the first places it bore down upon was Hollywood.

During the war, a number of people with leftist sympathies, mainly writers, had been brought into the film industry. They had very seldom made any noticeable personal impact on their films, but the reactionary groups behind the Republican Congressman and HUAC Chairman J. Parnell Thomas indicated that they had noticed disturbing radical tendencies in Hollywood pictures. The fact that cinematic villains were frequently represented as fat and rich was interpreted in the general tragicomic hysteria as a subversive attack on the very basis of American society. Any kind of social criticism, liberalism or radicalism was associated with communism—and the classification of communism as a conspiracy and not a political party was to be confirmed by the Supreme Court in 1951.⁹⁸

The Alger Hiss case became indicative of the retroactive guilt machinery that established “a malignant relationship between the New Deal and the

⁹⁷ Clurman, *All People Are Famous*, p. 155.

⁹⁸ Leif Furhammar and Folke Isakson, *Politics and Film*, translated by Kersti French (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), p. 70.

Communist Left,”⁹⁹ in which most of the present participants were caught. White and Averson summarized this situation:

In October 1947, many Hollywood writers, directors, and producers were called before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Nineteen of them were “unfriendly witnesses—they declined to answer the committee’s \$64 question of whether they were indeed card-carrying Communists. Among them were writers Albert Maltz, Dalton Trumbo, John Howard Lawson, Alvah Bessie, and Lester Cole; directors Edward Dmytryk and Herbert J. Biberman; and producer Adrian Scott—all of whom (along with two others) were subsequently convicted of contempt of Congress and sentenced to one-year jail terms, thus was born the discriminatory epithet, “The Hollywood Ten.”

To protest what many thought was an unfair image of the industry the Committee for the First Amendment was organized. Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, and John Huston led a contingent of 50 Hollywoodians to Washington, but their efforts probably had a more negative than antidotal effect simply because some of them were quickly intimidated by the HUAC.

Eventually the HUAC had reaped as much press coverage at Hollywood’s expense as it could and moved on to other fertile fields—until 1951, when it returned for a repeat performance. But the first hearings had already exacted a heavy toll in many sectors of Hollywood. What was most difficult to assess were the animosities among old acquaintances at studios and the endless feckless debate of whether so-and-so was or wasn’t a Commie. An atmosphere of fear pervaded the entire industry, especially at the managerial level.

Not every executive was daunted by the bad publicity which so many of their colleagues believed had turned American public opinion against Hollywood. At an industry-wide top-echelon meeting in New York’s Waldorf, Dore Schary, Samuel Goldwyn, Walter Wanger, and Eddie Mannix opposed the suggestion that all suspected communists be fired forthwith. “How can you fire people who haven’t been convicted of anything?” Schary asked. But such voices were in the minority. Back at the Hollywood studios many creative people were indeed discharged openly while others suffered unemployment for several years through the more insidious practice of blacklisting.

In 1951 the House Un-American Activities Committee, now with tough competition for newspaper headlines from the Joe McCarthy and Pat McCarran investigative committees, came back to Hollywood for a reprise performance. The events of the Korean War—actually the first

⁹⁹ Dowdy, *Films of the Fifties*, p. 20.

time that American soldiers faced communists in open conflict—as well as the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for wartime espionage on behalf of the Russians strengthened public support of such congressional probes. During the 1951 go-round the HUAC was not concerned so much with obviously pro-Russian films as *Mission to Moscow* as with any films which had the slightest contraband political element. In its annual report for 1951, the committee said, “We are less interested in a film that has Communist context, where a few hundred people will come and see it. We are more interested in an ordinary John-and-Mary picture where there is only a drop of progressive thought in it.” By the end of the hearings in 1952, a list of 324 names denounced as communists was made public.

The American Legion provided 56 additional suspects, and later 300 more names. The majority of these people were blacklisted and barred from employment at the studios.¹⁰⁰

An atmosphere of fear prevailed over the film industry. If the 1947 hearings produced “the Hollywood Ten,” the 1951 hearings produced “The Hollywood Hundreds,” as hearsay and mutual accusations sufficed to place a name on a list. “Anyone who had joined or loaned his name to a group judged retroactively as un-American had to confess his guilt and name his associates or be driven from the industry.”¹⁰¹

The blacklist became a small side industry for several organizations that provided producers “with information useful in determining the employability of talent. *Counterattack* and *Red Channels* were committed to driving ‘people with continuing records of pro-Communist activity’ from all aspects of show business.”¹⁰² Another organization, calling itself the Cinema Educational Guild, published pamphlets in which Myron C. Fagan attacked “ ‘Darryl Zanuch [sic] as that producer who was responsible for *Gentleman’s Agreement*, *Pinky*, and other films which so effectively advance Red ideology.’ ”¹⁰³

Kazan was, of course, called on to testify before the committee. On April 12, 1952, the following article appeared in the *Hollywood Citizen-News*:

¹⁰⁰ White and Averson, *Celluloid Weapon*, pp. 132-133.

¹⁰¹ Dowdy, p. 23.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 24.

Wrong Streetcar

KAZAN SAYS HE GOT BELLYFUL OF COMMUNISM

WASHINGTON, April 12. (UP)--Elia Kazan, prominent stage and movie director, left the Communist Party because "I had a taste of police state living and I did not like it."

Kazan, director of the movie hit *A Streetcar Named Desire*, told the House Un-American Activities Committee in a closed-door session Thursday that he belonged to the Communist Party for 18 months in the mid-1930s.

In the testimony released last night, Kazan said he joined the party because he thought it was serving a "good purpose" in fighting Hitler and helping "the poor people."

He said he quit in disgust after seeing that communism represented "totalitarian thought control" and did not have the interest of the "poor people at heart."

"I had a taste of police state living and I did not like it," he said, "instead of working honestly for the good of the American people, I found that I was being used to put power in the hands of people for whom, individually and as a group, I felt nothing but contempt.

Kazan had testified previously before the committee but had refused to name other Reds. He asked for a new hearing to make a full disclosure, saying he realized he "did wrong" in withholding the names because "communism thrives on secrecy."

He told the committee that actor-playwright-director Clifford Odets and seven other members of the now-defunct Group Theatre of New York are former communists.

Kazan said the communists attempted to capture the Group Theatre and make it a "communist mouth-piece." He said the "last straw" in his departure from the party was its demand that he "repent and apologize" for failing to help take over the Group Theatre as a front organization.

Those identified by Kazan as former members of the communist cell in the Group Theatre were the late J. Edward Bromberg, Morris Carnovsky, Lewis Leverett, Phoebe Brand (later Mrs. Morris Carnovsky), Tony Kraber, Ted Wellman (also known as Sid Benson), and Paula Miller.¹⁰⁴

The two appearances by Kazan in front of the committee, and the fact that the second one was at his own request, indicated that an inordinate amount of pressure must have been exerted on the man during the interval to have him return

¹⁰⁴ Paula Miller was Lee Strasberg's wife. It was at the Strasberg apartment that this "small party cell" met, tried, and expelled Kazan from the Communist Party in 1936. Lee Strasberg was not present as he was not a communist.

and cooperate fully. As Clurman stated:

Others co-operated with the committee: they named names, causing themselves a certain distress but causing others incalculable hardship. The informers were not motivated by any sense of guilt—after all, their political “errors” had been committed five, ten, or fifteen years before; they simply wanted to be allowed to go on working in Hollywood.¹⁰⁵

Kazan was merely following in the footsteps of Edward Dmytryk, one of the original “Hollywood Ten,” who was the first to name people in order to be able to continue working. As Biberman recalled, this created a pattern of absolution through accusations:

How invaluable Eddie had become for them, the key with which to open the flood gates. Now the committee could call hundreds in the expectation of scores of informers. What a Walpurgisnacht! Lying to themselves in private about their previous political concerns, the informers would then be able to recant them and their famous friends in public. Men like Eddie would not only review their own past from the point of view of the committee but would take it on themselves to condemn the lives of others, to open veins other than their own in order, an act which Shakespeare would not permit his blowhard clown Falstaff, even at the command of his beloved prince.

What was the axe that had split Eddie?

“I am going to work,” he had said. “In the studios.”

Work. Man’s clue to himself. God-damn it, Eddie wanted to work, to use his talents. That was the axe. The deepest promptings can become our most heinous betrayers when the axe man comes, his hands extended, ex-communication for work in one and capitulation in the other. What was Eddie to do? Retreat to a flower garden? Sell television sets? Become a bartender, a barber, as others would do? The need to work can penetrate beyond the needs of physical hunger from which, at most, one can only die.¹⁰⁶

Other Theatrical Realism figures also testified and gave names, among

¹⁰⁵ Clurman, *All People Are Famous*, p. 160.

¹⁰⁶ Biberman, p. 19.

them were Lee J. Cobb, Budd Schulberg, Sterling Hayden, and Clifford Odets.¹⁰⁷

Three years after Kazan's testimony Ed Sullivan devoted one column to his valiant attitude in defiance of the communist conspiracy:

Ed Sullivan

FROM THE GREAT WHITE WAY A MEDAL IS PRESENTED ELIA KAZAN

NEW YORK—Elia Kazan's spectacular series of successes, this season—*On the Waterfront*, *East of Eden*, *Tea and Sympathy* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*—have been four giant blows in freeing the movies and Broadway Theatre of communist influences. Kazan loosed the commie grip on entertainment by demonstrating that denunciation of the party didn't lead to personal disaster in the movies or in the theatre. He punctured the legend.

Three years ago, Kazan, appearing before the House Committee on Un-American Activities denounced the Communist Party and revealed that he had joined it in the summer of 1934 and got out of it in 1936 because: "First hand experience of party dictatorship and thought control left me with an abiding hatred of both. It left me with an abiding hatred of communist philosophy and methods and the conviction that these must be resisted always. It also left me with the passionate conviction that we must never let the communists get away with the pretense that they stand for the very things which they kill in their own country."

In that fierce denunciation of the commies, Kazan invited their hatred and his own disaster.

The youngsters of the theatre, blacklisted for years by the threat that unless they joined the commies their careers in entertainment would be wrecked, watched carefully.

Far from being destroyed, Kazan went on to his greatest triumphs. In another field, that of ballet, Jerome Robbins denounced the commies. Recently, his production of *Peter Pan* on TV played to the greatest single audience in history.

The youngsters of the theatre learned that the commies could not back up their threats.

In his *On the Waterfront*, no one has pointed out that Kazan actually dramatized his own denunciation of the commies. Marlon Brando, in turning against the dictators of the waterfront, at the urging of the priest and the girl with whom he was in love, actually was re-enacting the role which Kazan played in real life before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Kazan named names and dates just as Brando did.

¹⁰⁷ Furhammar and Isakson, p. 72.

So this season should be forever remembered as a blue ribbon event in the movies and in the legitimate theatre, a shining experience for those of us who in earlier years fought the commie invasion of the theatre to the best of our ability. Howard Fast, one of the commie literary figures, on several occasions told commie rallies not to read my column—that I was “an enemy of the people.”

My information in those days came from Horace McMahon and other members of the Lambs Club. They gave me names and dates which I used in the column to break up the commie combine of directors, writers, and casting agents. The commies ridiculed this information as naïve rantings. I wonder what they think of it now.

Said Kazan, on April 9, 1952, when he was naming names:

“I have come to the conclusion that I did wrong to withhold these names before because secrecy serves the communists, and is exactly what they want. The American people need the facts and all the facts about all aspects of communism in order to deal with it wisely and effectively. It is my obligation as a citizen to tell everything that I know.”

“Liberals must speak out. I think it is useful that certain of us had these kind of experiences with the communists, for if we had not, we should not know them as well today. Today, when all the world faces war, and they scream peace, we know how much their professions are worth. We know tomorrow they will have a new slogan.”¹⁰⁸

White and Averson summed up the situation when they stated: “Evidently Kazan’s willing cooperation with the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1952 had enabled him to continue to make hard-hitting social films without being blacklisted.”¹⁰⁹

Had Kazan not requested that second appearance, his professional career in films would have come to an abrupt end.

Martin Ritt was one of the victims of hearsay and guild by association. In an interview with this writer Ritt explained:

David Susskind was able to get me to direct *Edge of the City* for practically nothing [\$10,000] because I was blacklisted in the picture business.

It was guilt by association, I knew certain people and there were

¹⁰⁸ *Hollywood Citizens-News*, March 31, 1955.

¹⁰⁹ White and Averson, p. 170.

certain things I did and didn't do. . . . I wasn't called to testify, I wasn't subpoenaed or anything, but they blacklisted me anyway. I did not work in films for over five years. I knew I was blacklisted. No one would touch me under any circumstances.¹¹⁰

David Susskind was the first producer who dared to "touch him." That was in 1956 for *Edge of the City*, five years after Ritt had been blacklisted. Sidney Meyers, the film's editor, had also been on the list. Susskind's production record was distinguished by his quiet battle against the list and exerted to clear their names. His comments on the hiring of Ritt follow:

There was great difficulty in obtaining the right to use Marty Ritt. He was blacklisted, he was in *Red Channels*, the movie industry was shivering about the blacklist, and it took a lot of persuading. Finally, in one of those secret meetings they have somewhere, Metro said, "O.K. if you must; go ahead and use him." He agreed to do it for short money. But it was a hell of an agreement.¹¹¹

As a television producer Susskind fought the practice of blacklisting in a most interesting way. This is his own account of how this was achieved:

It was a general practice for an agency to subscribe to a service which, for a fee, would check the "Americanism" record of the actor, technician, director or writer. This fee ranged from \$10 to \$25. Even if a person was checked and found to be satisfactory, he had to be rechecked if a producer wanted to use him the next week. Nobody got a clearance that lasted indefinitely. And each clearance involved another service charge.

My method of stretching the list was to say, "None of these people can play these parts." Then I offered new names for clearance. I came to a quick loathing of everybody on the "white" list and I found myself avoiding its use whenever possible. I insisted that I could not be held responsible for the artistic result of a program where the use of no-talent actors was a must. I began to submit names of non-list actors and other people in remarkable profusion—so remarkable that agency personnel began to scream. "Do you realize it's costing us a fortune to clear the people that you submit?" If one leading woman was required, I gave the names of nine leading women. I thought that perhaps I could break the

¹¹⁰ Personal interview in June, 1973.

¹¹¹ Personal interview in February 1976.

system financially, and I used to turn in twelve names, fourteen names, eight names, nine names. “But this is nonsensical,” one account executive shouted. “You’re not going to use nine women to play that part.”

“No,” I would reply. “But I can’t quite make up my mind among these nine.”

When it was all over, I suspect I had expanded that list a thousandfold.¹¹²

In 1961 Susskind put an end to this practice. An item which appeared in *Saturday Review* read as follows:

PROFESSIONAL BLACKLISTING of actors and actresses on television was given another blow by David Susskind, who received an award from National Educational Television for his announcement that he would not submit the names of performers for clearance from self-appointed watchdogs.

The award was well deserved. Susskind, along with WNTA’s program manager Tedd Cott, has helped bring a significant measure of maturity to live TV with his “Play of the Week,” and both have been instrumental in fighting bigotry.¹¹³

Sidney Lumet also had his brush with the blacklist. *The New York Times* reported:

Harvey Matusow admitted that he had fabricated a blacklist of radio and television personalities for an advertising agency. . . . He falsely accused Sidney Lumet, a television producer [sic]. He recanted this, however, in a letter to the sponsor of Mr. Lumet’s show. He added that many of the persons whom he had branded as “Reds” were not known to him.¹¹⁴

McCarthyism and the HUAC hearings had a devastating effect on Theatrical Realism. The nucleus of people with similar characteristics who created the style and whose associations dated back to the thirties was shattered with all the power the atomic age could unleash. To this day there is bitter

¹¹² David Susskind, “David and the Goliaths,” *Show Business Illustrated*, January 23, 1962, p. 56.

¹¹³ *Saturday Review*, February 25, 1961.

¹¹⁴ Edward Ranzal, “Matusow Admits Faking Blacklist” *The New York Times*, February 16, 1955.

resentment among those who testified and those who kept silent.¹¹⁵ And many careers were cut off at their inception. Those who were allowed to continue working (either because they had cooperated or because they had “clean” records) had to proceed with extreme caution.

Political content became allegorical at its most direct. Bentley wrote, on Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*:

The Crucible is a play in which Mr. Miller complains that the accuser is always considered holy, the accused guilty. We think of McCarthyism; and we think of it again when we find that Mr. Miller’s story is about a witch hunt. . . . If one were to ask: what fantasy would give most perfect expression to a Communist’s feelings of innocence in the face of McCarthyism? One couldn’t do better than reply Mr. Miller’s story. Mr. Miller has missed the essence of our political situation. He has thereby missed a more interesting dramatic situation. But he has hit upon a wish-fulfilling fantasy that, conceivably, has a stronger appeal than either; and with it he has soothed the bad conscience of a generation.¹¹⁶

It is interesting to note that the film rights for this play were bought by a French company and the film was produced, in 1958, outside the United States with a French director (Raymond Rouleau) and cast (Simone Signoret, Yves Montand), and a script by Jean Paul Sartre.

But by far the best and most direct allegory on HUAC hearings was produced by Columbia Studios in 1956. The film was written and directed by Daniel Taradash and was entitled *Storm Center*. In it a librarian, played by Bette Davis, refuses to give in to pressure from “civic groups” to remove a book (*The Communist Dream*) from the library’s shelves. Her ordeal was an obvious parallel to the situation suffered by those on the Hollywood blacklists. Being in the tradition of the message movies, the film, when viewed today, is of more interest as a socio-political document than as a work of cinematic merit.

¹¹⁵ In a personal interview, January 1976, Robert Alan Arthur claimed that Ritt would not talk to Kazan because of his behavior at the HUAC hearings. This same factor placed great strain on Kazan’s relationships with Arthur Miller, Lee Strasberg, and Harold Clurman.

¹¹⁶ Eric Bentley, *The Theatre of Commitment and Other Essays on Drama in Our Society* (New York: Atheneum Press, 1967), pp. 36-37.

There is a curious paradox here, inasmuch as the socio-political content of Theatrical Realism films was not totally wiped out by McCarthyism and the blacklist. One must surmise that the challenge to limit an artist's freedom was one of the sparks that kept the movement going and gaining strength. McCarthyism, instead of totally muzzling the voices of Theatrical Realism personalities, provided the incentive for a series of socially concerned films which took a hard and critical look at American society and its values. The adage that it is in the face of adversity that the finest qualities of a people shine through seems to have held true in this case.

In 1976 Ritt directed and co-produced with Walter Bernstein, a long-time associate and writer, their own chronicle on the plague years.¹¹⁷ The film was *The Front*, and when the credits flashed on the screen at the end of the film the names of the cast and film makers were footnoted with the dates when their names were placed on the infamous list. They had now come full circle. Being blacklisted in the fifties became something like wearing a red badge of courage in the seventies.

Freudianism

The most significant fact in the history of the modern American drama is its overwhelming indebtedness to the concepts of behavior developed and systematized by the psychoanalytic movement, and most particularly by the genius of its founder, Sigmund Freud.

--David Sievers¹¹⁸

With this statement Sievers concluded his carefully researched study entitled *Freud on Broadway*. He might have been overstating his case, but it is an undeniable fact that Freudian psychology is a major contributing element in modern American drama, on both stage and screen.

The theories of Sigmund Freud were formulated at a time when they were

¹¹⁷ To paraphrase Stefan Kanfer's title of his work on the blacklist period.

¹¹⁸ David A Sievers, *Freud on Broadway—A History of Psychoanalysis and the American Drama* (New York: Hermitage House, 1955), p. 454.

most needed by dramatists who were shifting the focus of their work from plot to characterization. Freud opened new territories within the human mind which were explored and exploited for dramatic purposes.

In 1959 Colin Wilson wrote something which still holds true to this day, that “the chief necessity of our age is to dare to be inner-directed.”¹¹⁹ This statement applies to all of the twentieth century, from Sigmund Freud to Timothy Leary, defining the challenge of “self-awareness” and “new-consciousness” so much in vogue these days.

John Von Szeliski wrote about what he felt was the unsuccessful coupling of tragic drama and the pessimistic point of view that derives from personal involvement:

Contemporary man takes himself very seriously, and contemporary playwrights seem to take themselves even more seriously. Many playwrights attempting tragedy in our time have gone so far in this attitude as to be dangerously defensive about their vision of the tragic. . . . Those wanting to create tragedy either have started out inherently ingrown about their thematic aims, or else have grown so in attempting to communicate material with which they have deep personal involvement. . . .

Personalized pessimism brings the writer too close to his work. Why does this weaken the ability to “see” tragically? For one thing, the ingrown attitude of pessimistic tragedy reduces the perspective necessary to perceive the contrast basic to ideal tragic vision. For another, a relatively large incidence of autobiographical or semiautobiographical stories tends to give modern tragic drama a skewed and embittered point of view that is too lacking in control and universality to be artfully tragic.

Psychology is more obviously a central influence. There is a vast proof of man’s psychological helplessness and irresponsibility, and many authors base a story of a man’s general limitedness on Freudianism and other popular sources of psychological theory. Oversimplifications of such material are particularly useful to the pessimist.¹²⁰

Von Szeliski’s thesis, in the classical scholarly tradition, attacks modern

¹¹⁹ Colin Wilson, *The Stature of Man*, p. 170, as quoted in John von Szeliski, *Tragedy and Fear--Why Modern Tragic Drama fails* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), p. 59.

¹²⁰ John von Szeliski, *Tragedy and Fear--Why Modern Tragic Drama Fails* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), pp. 34, 57-58.

American tragic drama as “crucial failure,”¹²¹ claiming that “pessimism and tragedy do not mix and that is the prime error committed in twentieth-century writing.”¹²²

Sievers offered a rebuttal when he wrote:

If, as some scholars insist, *Death of a Salesman* and *Streetcar Named Desire* fail to meet all of Aristotle’s requirements for tragedy, then it is clear we must define a new genre of playwriting to identify the modern drama. It might be termed a form of theatre in which the author leads his audience to participate emotionally in the hero’s conflict with his own unconscious drives. Whether the result is tragic or comic, the essential ingredient is that the audience should achieve a state of awareness, which implies both an intellectual perception of wholeness (which the hero may or may not have reached) and an emotional release of repressed fears, wishes or anxieties which parallel those of the characters on stage.¹²³

Whatever term is eventually chosen for this “new genre of playwriting,” it must acknowledge the deep influence of Freudian psychology on the drama. In tracing the development of this factor in the history of American theatre Sievers’ chronology is perfectly congruent with the historical chronology of the Theatrical Realism style, establishing a direct relationship between the style and the Freudian influence.

By 1921, Eugene O’Neill, Susan Glaspell, and Theodore Dreiser were pointing the way toward a serious psychological drama based upon an understanding of character rather than upon the old contrivance with plot. . . . O’Neill gave the American drama its first body of serious psychological work, and the vogue he established for experimental techniques, neurotic protagonists and sexual symbols had a considerable influence upon the other playwrights of his era. O’Neill anticipated Tennessee Williams in the discovery that tragedy lies in the discrepancy between the ego-ideal and the real. . . . If O’Neill could use Freudianism to give the drama dignity and serious art-form—and moreover make it pay at the box office—then this clearly was the direction for the drama to

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 3.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Sievers, p. 453.

move Among the socio-political writers of the thirties, Clifford Odets was one of the few to avoid the pitfalls of ideological writing by breathing life into his characters and perceiving with rare analytic feeling the unconscious responses of individuals under social pressure. . . .

By the forties, the drama had shown its ability to probe deeply into the life of the child, the adolescent, the soldier, the psychotic, the criminal, and the homosexual. In a war-time world with few remaining standards, maladjustment could for the first time be viewed with a new penetration into cause-and-effect. The theatre became once again a place for psychological illumination. . . . In the forties and fifties, two new figures of outstanding importance have emerged—Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, the former expressing the music of unconscious yearning and the latter penetrating the father-son relationship with unmatched brilliance. By the mid-fifties, it must be clear to the most worldly of dramatic critics that the United States need no longer apologize for its drama and look enviously to the British, French or Italian. Quicker to assimilate Freudian psychology than many European countries (a condition which caused Freud himself no little alarm), the United States has been able to integrate it into its literature and arts, its educational structure and its social agencies during the years when it was relatively free from the burdens of two post-war reconstructions. This integration is as yet far from complete, but the history of American culture since 1900 is an overwhelming testimony to the influence of the new psychology. . . .

American playwrights as a group are conscious of a great indebtedness to Freud, as well as of a great danger which he has created for them by making psychological perception too easy, too tempting a substitute for original understanding of themselves and their dramatic characters.¹²⁴

The cinema was slower in assimilating Freudianism. As part of the mass entertainment media, a subject must develop enough interest within popular culture before it can be exploited profitably. One of the earliest treatments of the subject in American commercial cinema was found in Sam Wood's 1941 production of the best seller *King's Row*, which approached the science of psychology as a new frontier to be explored with courage and caution.

A lighter tone was used in 1944 when Mitchell Leisen made the film version of Kurt Weill's musical *Lady in the Dark*, which exposed Ginger Rogers' subconscious as a monumental, lavish wedding cake that could only be described

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 449, 452.

as “kitsch.” A year later Alfred Hitchcock consolidated the genre with *Spellbound*, a suspense murder mystery in which Michael Chekhov played a Freud-inspired character who taught the audience everything it could possibly want to know about psychology.

A fascination with psychology overtook the country. The vulgarization of Freud was in full swing. The analyst followed the two-car garage as the most prized status symbol. Everyone found a complex that had developed in childhood and needed to be taken care of; Freudianism became a fad and the psychological drama became an established genre with such films as *The Snake Pit*, *Pride of the Marines*, *The Wrong Man*, *The Cobweb*, *The Three Faces of Eve*, *The Goddess*, *The Big Knife*, *Don't Bother to Knock*, *Fear Strikes Out*, *Shock Treatment*, *Lilith*, *Psycho*, and, of course *Freud* to name just a few.

Ezra Goodman, a journalist who covered the Hollywood scene for *Time* magazine in the fifties, gave an accurate picture of the climate at the time with regard to the sudden popularity of psychiatry:

In the past, most everyone in Hollywood was happy and cheerful in print. Today the reverse is true. It is fashionable to be miserable. I suspect the trend will change again one of these days as readers and editors become sated with all this amateur psychiatry. At *Time* the emphasis on two-bit psychiatry was particularly pronounced because most of the personnel at the magazine had been or were in analysis and were preoccupied with the subject. . . . At one time the magazine seriously considered adding a new department entitled “Psychiatry.” The section was put through a test run but was finally tabled. . . . [It] was customary procedure at *Time* to engage the services of a psychoanalyst, particularly with show-business cover stories, to read the research and come up with a few quick conclusions about [the personality]. At one time I seriously suggested to the editors that they put a psychiatrist as a full-time member of the Hollywood Staff. . . . *Time* was not only running out of Hollywood subjects, but out of psychoanalysts to psychoanalyze them.¹²⁵

In the summer of 1956 the *Saturday Evening Post* published a photograph with a caption that read: “Actors Studio Alumni: Elia Kazan (now president of

¹²⁵ Goodman, *Fifty Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*, pp. 247-248.

the organization), Marlon Brando, Julie Harris and the late James Dean. Almost all members have been psychoanalyzed: both Kazan and Brando were on the couch for seven years”¹²⁶

As has already been discussed, one of Stanislavski’s main influences in the development of his acting system was the concept of emotional memory which closely followed some of the elements of Freudian theory. When “the system” became “the method” as taught by Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio, the tie with Freudianism became stronger. Novick reported:

It has been the lifework of Lee Strasberg, among others, to consummate a marriage between Stanislavski and Freud. Under Mr. Strasberg’s influence, actor-training and rehearsal have encroached more and more on the domain of psychoanalysis. Actor and analyst now have similar goals: to find and understand the real self, to free the psyche from unnecessary restraints. They work with similar materials: memory and fantasy. And the cardinal rule—constantly violated—is the same in both cases: drop your defenses, open yourself, dare to be vulnerable.¹²⁷

The Method actor soon became a symbol of the popularity of Freudian psychology. Blum wrote:

In essence, the Stanislavski system in America served as a catalyst for the development of a new acting style which capitalized strictly upon inner technique and exploited the contemporary interest in psychoanalysis. That style exacted a personal intimacy in acting which was wholly congruent with the characters and themes of mid-twentieth century drama and cinema.¹²⁸

Sievers coined the term “motivationism” to describe the style of the period:

If realism answers “what,” motivationism must answer “why.” The playwright’s chief task remains to understand and illuminate for his audiences the behavior of his fellow man. His task today is infinitely most

¹²⁶ *Saturday Evening Post*, June 17, 1956, p. 37.

¹²⁷ Julius Novick, “Theatre Uptown,” *The Village Voice*, May 2, 1968, p. 42.

¹²⁸ Blum, “The ‘Method’ from Stanislavski to Hollywood,” p. 117.

possible of realization because of the reunion of the dramatist and the psychologist.¹²⁹

This reunion between the dramatist and the psychologist was not well received by everyone. Von Szeliski deplored it, and so did de Laurot when he wrote:

Another affliction of the avant-garde cinema—which might be referred to as *infantile* psychologism—is responsible for films in which pale simulacra of men—schizophrenics, mental cripples, impotent wrecks of humanity torn out of the context of their life, lead somnambulically their frustrated existence against the sinister background of a disintegrating universe. What their authors apparently forget is that the difference between psychoanalysis and art is one between clinic and drama.¹³⁰

Sievers answered these criticisms and summed up this issue when he wrote:

There can be no doubt that we live in a neurotic era: the sensitive playwright who is aware of his time must observe the pressures and defense-mechanisms of a fearful atomic age. And yet the cry is now commonly heard in some quarters to spare us “these neurotic plays” and get back to wholesome drama. But Freudianism can hardly be made to bear this guilt. . . the great dramatic heroes and heroines of classical drama have all in a sense been “neurotic.” The difference is that today there is available to both audiences and authors a vocabulary and a system, a set of symbols and a wealth of clinical data. This has made playwriting at once easier and more difficult.¹³¹

New York vs. Hollywood

The mystique of the Independent Film movement in America has always nurtured itself on a hatred of Hollywood movies. Indeed, if Hollywood had never existed, we would have had to devise another code name for vulgarity, mediocrity, and the sweet corruptions of capitalism.

¹²⁹ Sievers, p. 454.

¹³⁰ Edouard de Laurot, “Towards a Theory of Dynamic Realism,” *Film Culture*, 1:7, January 1955.

¹³¹ Sievers, pp. 400-401.

Intellectuals mention Hollywood, . . . only for its pejorative implications. But Hollywood is more than a state of mind; it is also a geographical absurdity to the cultural elite of the East Coast. Consequently, . . . the illusion persists in some quarters that everything shot east of the Rockies is Art and everything west is Kitsch.

--Andrew Sarris¹³²

New York's aggressive intelligence has dominated culture in this country, but since the films moved to California we have been outsiders in the creation of the most powerful art form of the century. For the past sixty years Hollywood has decided what the movies were going to be like in this country; we were the city slickers and they knew "what America wanted." For the most part the flocks of New Yorkers who went "out there" played a losing game but, all the native chutzpa wasn't about to go completely for naught; we succeeded in creating a nebulous thing called a "New York sensibility."

We've always talked sharper, dressed sloppier, been more socially and morally conscious, and known more about Europe than Hollywood did, all of which was probably our downfall. The "New York sensibility," it's safe to say, is Groucho remarking, "You can't pull the wool over my eye," not a Three Stooges S&M session. It's Ben Hecht writing a screenplay on a train, not Cecil B. DeMille dictating by his swimming pool. It's dirty black-and-white documentaries, not glossy Technicolor spectacles. It's editors working out of rented lofts, not in big and faceless studios. It's Al Pacino trying to find his motivation, not Cary Grant trying to charm his way through a part. It's Robert DeNiro raging in Little Italy, not Warren Beatty chasing down Julie Christie on a motorcycle. And, of course, it's selling yourself out to Hollywood—how can you sell out if you're already there?¹³³

Theatrical Realism as a film style was very much a part of the "New York sensibility" which Jacobson defined in the well written article quoted above that traces the relationship between the two cities, or the two world views (as he contended), with regard to the motion picture industry.

It can be stated categorically that most of the major figures of Theatrical Realism were New Yorkers and that the style was a direct expression of the city's artistic climate and "sensibilities."

¹³² Andrew Sarris, "Illusions and Independents," *Saturday Review*, December 24, 1966, p. 23.

¹³³ Mark Jacobson, "New York, You Oughta Be in Pictures," *New York*, December 29, 1975/January 5, 1976, pp. 9, 34-36.

One of the elements that shaped this “sensibility” was a deep rooted rivalry between the talents at work at opposite ends of the country. Ever since the Patents War of 1910, when Thomas Edison “drove the independents out of town,”¹³⁴ New York felt robbed of a potential film industry and wanted it back. There were repeated attempts to establish full-time production, but these were half-hearted capricious ventures such as Paramount’s Astoria Studios which were built “so that Gloria Swanson could be close to her New York home.”¹³⁵

Gotham would not become a major production center, but would function as the main supplier of raw material to the factories on the West Coast. These traditional symbiotic roles between the two cities were defined as early as the silent days when Griffith left New York for southern California.

As the motion picture medium gained stature, a feeling of resentment against Hollywood began to permeate those in New York intellectual circles. With the coming of sound, and the vast talent raids carried out by the movie studios on the Broadway stage, the concept of “going Hollywood and selling out” was firmly established. “Smelling easy money, the literati, including most members of the Algonquin Round Table, came out to Hollywood to hurl their wisecracks into the face of the American Dream.”¹³⁶ They came West on a train packed with vaudeville comedians, former Follies chorus girls, promising actors and new ingénues. These were followed, in turn, by “The Mercury Theatre,” members of the “Group Theatre,” and other intellectuals, “armed with Stanislavski, who sallied forth to save the masses from themselves.”¹³⁷

At best, it was a love/hate relationship which fully manifested itself in the mid-fifties when Theatrical Realism was in full swing. It was at this time, which coincided with the “Golden Age” of television, that a concerted effort was made to establish full-time production in New York.

The following article appeared in *The New York World Telegram* in

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

August 1956:

The movie industry, which followed the sun from the East to California 43 years ago, is being lured back to New York by a core of film makers who think they can make better pictures here.

To compete with television they believe motion pictures must inject realism, and they think the best way to do that is to get away from stereotyped Hollywood productions and use fresh talent and fresh approaches to film making.

Elia Kazan, who heads the movement to make New York a major motion picture producing center, cites the success of such pictures as *On the Waterfront* and *Marty* as examples of realism as a box office attraction.

He believes his new picture *A Face in the Crowd* will provide final proof that New York movies go better at the box office than Hollywood films.

The new picture is the first of its scope to be produced entirely in New York. It will use 61 sets and be filmed in the old Biograph studio, where such stars as Lionel Barrymore and Mary Pickford worked before they went to Hollywood. The studio has been rejuvenated for Kazan's new picture.

Kazan is relying mostly on television talent, which he claims is more plentiful, harder working, more imaginative and more anxious to get ahead than Hollywood talent.

He says he will shave production costs in half by using fewer facilities than is usual in a Hollywood film.

"The difference is that young talent around New York is full of energy and ideas," he said.

Richard Sylbert, Kazan's art director, says the most talented people in television want to make movies, but not movies a la Hollywood.

"They want to be original, and they think they will get an audience if they give it something good," he said.

Producers like Kazan have spent \$15 million in the last three years to make movies in New York. They figure many times that amount will be spent in the next few years now that studios, money and talent are available for New York movies.

But they admit there will always be a Hollywood. New York producers say they aren't interested in turning out Hollywood-type extravaganzas or Cinderella movies.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Patrick Carry, "Movie Makers Return to New York Reality," *New York World Telegram*, August 31, 1956.

Kazan went on to give more interviews in which he called Hollywood a “waxed fruit land,” which he explained in the following manner:

I want to make movies here because Hollywood is a land of wax fruit. A Hollywood producer once told me: ‘Out here we make pictures about nice people for nice people.’

Let’s face it, there are a lot of people in this world who aren’t attractive, noble or romantic. Hollywood doesn’t care to recognize that fact. That’s why many foreign movies have electrified American audiences. They showed people you might meet in your own neighborhood. They were flesh-and-blood characters. The success of *Marty* proved that moviegoers are interested in people like themselves.¹³⁹

Kazan’s dreams to establish a “Hollywood on the Hudson”¹⁴⁰ were shared by Sidney Lumet, who found it impossible to leave New York for Hollywood. The following article appeared in August 1960:

Sidney Lumet has become known as the man Hollywood cannot snare. It is interesting to note that all four of this dynamic director’s pictures have been made in New York studios and on location nearby. He recently expressed no desire whatsoever to work in Hollywood—he considers the New York studios are more than adequate for the type of picture that he has been making. He explains that although the sound stages are larger and much more elaborate in Hollywood, exactly the same results can be obtained in New York with only slightly more trouble. “and there are more than enough good movie people in and around New York—from cameramen to cutters and musicians—who match, or sometimes outstrip, the West Coast people. There’s nothing that’s done in Hollywood that can’t be done in New York.” He declares firmly. . . .

For his most recent film (his first without a New York background), *The Fugitive Kind*, a film adaptation of Tennessee Williams’ *Orpheus Descending*, Lumet used a small town on the Hudson River which he touched up slightly to give it the appearance of a Southern town. He is doubtful if he could have achieved better results with any of his films if he had gone to Hollywood.¹⁴¹

Seidenbaum reported the following:

¹³⁹ Justin Gilbert’s column, “*The Daily Mirror*, November 27, 1956.

¹⁴⁰ Kazan as reported in *Daily Variety*, May 29, 1957.

¹⁴¹ “Sidney Lumet: Not for Hollywood,” *Films and Filming*, August 1960.

The one time Lumet left New York to make a major studio film, he burst—quite literally—a blood vessel. . . .

“I had a terrible fight with the studio and the producer about the cut, so miserable that in the process I ruptured a blood vessel in my eye.”

“I remain a city rat. I can’t stand outdoor living. Birds terrify me. I have to have concrete around me. When I go to the country, I don’t sleep for three or four nights.”¹⁴²

“I shouldn’t say I don’t like California, but it’s true. California facilities for making movies are beyond any that we have in New York. But all my life I’ve avoided the professional places. I don’t hang out at Sardi’s or Downey’s. Hollywood is such a one-professional place, it’s depressing.”¹⁴³

Robert Alan Aurthur, who scripted *Edge of the City*, made the following comments in 1959 after spending some time in Hollywood: “I was miserable because all my friends are here in New York. Hollywood’s no place for a writer, at least not for me. [There] you have nothing to say . . . you are simply a high class mechanic.”¹⁴⁴

When Daniel Mann was offered a contract by Hal Wallis he told the press he would gladly accept it:

But I only want to make one picture a year, the right to story approval, mutual approval on the cast and some say on the cutting. I don’t want to be another piece of property to be hung up on a hook in Hollywood. They have the greatest concentration of talent in the world out there but, in my opinion, it’s not properly used. Besides, I want to live in New York, I like it here.¹⁴⁵

Martin Ritt was much more cautious with his comments early in his career, when a reporter asked him:

Was Hollywood all that he expected—pro and con?

“Pretty much,” he said after a moment. “The conflict you hear about—the traditional conflict of the real creators and the money-

¹⁴² Art Seidenbaum, “Lumet Explains a Translation,” *The Los Angeles Tribune*, April 7, 1957.

¹⁴³ Don Ross, “A Happy Director of *Twelve Angry Men*,” *New York Herald Tribune*, April 7, 1957.

¹⁴⁴ *New York Herald Tribune*, September 27, 1959.

¹⁴⁵ Louis Shaeffer, “Curtain Time,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, March 20, 1951.

handlers—is particularly true. But it makes a director work harder than, say, here on Broadway, where the traditional rehearsals for a play are such a tremendous help. Hollywood is a commercial place; but so is any successful business.”¹⁴⁶

The trick here is to find a way not to compromise yourself too much,” he said. “I expected Hollywood to be a place where you’d have a fight all the time to get what you want to do. It is such a place. But there are very few pieces of property that are not compromises to begin with.”¹⁴⁷

Ritt became the most Hollywoodized of the group of Theatrical Realism directors. He signed two long-term contracts, first with Fox and later with Paramount. He stayed on the West Coast.

Yet Kazan’s dream almost came true in the late fifties. His New York based productions, alongside of those of Paddy Chayefsky’s created a considerable amount of film activity in the Big Apple. The following quotes came from an article in *The New York Times*:

Whatever the East Coast production scene may have lacked in the way of big name glamour is being provided, at least for the moment, by the presence here of Fredric March and Kim Novak for the shooting of Paddy Chayefsky’s *Middle of the Night*. The appearance of two such luminous Hollywood figures in an unostentatious New York production marks still another forward twist in the fortunes of local filmmaking.

The big-time casting for the financially modest Eastern venture also may shed some new light on the still unanswered question of how to anticipate the success or failure of a local film enterprise at the box office. On this point, confusion is the keynote, since many of the more estimable New York productions of recent years failed to make money commensurate with their critical success.

TEST CASE

Since no moderate-budget New York production to date has possessed stars of the March-Novak rank, *Middle of the Night* may offer an example by contrast in the way of determining whether such high-salaried stars can insure profits for a movie of this type, or, on the contrary, simply price it out of its particular market.

The New York technicians, who have accumulated the esprit de

¹⁴⁶ Howard Thompson, “Ritt for the Record on Direction,” *The New York Times*, June 1, 1958.

¹⁴⁷ “Joe Hyams in Hollywood,” *New York Herald Tribune*, April 1, 1958

corps of a repertory company by working on a number of films together, clearly relished the chance to apply their technical talents to performers who may attract a wider audience to their efforts.¹⁴⁸

In 1961 David Susskind announced that he “harbors hope of establishing a fulltime production company to base and shoot in New York.”¹⁴⁹ But his plans, in spite of a four picture deal with Columbia which included such Theatrical Realism gems as *Raisin in the Sun*, *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, and *All the Way Home*, never came to fruition.

As the mid-sixties approached and Theatrical Realism became a style in decline, the dreams of “Hollywood on the Hudson” vanished into thin air, but the relationship between New York and California remained unchanged. To this day the schism based on mutual resentment is as wide as it ever was, and the flow of talent (Scorcese, De Niro, Pacino, etc.) continues toward the west. Yet, Lumet remained among his cherished concrete making *Dog Day Afternoon*, and *Network* (with Paddy Chayefsky); Kazan came west after a long hibernation to shoot *The Last Tycoon*, but returned to New York to cut the film; and Martin Ritt finally made the ultimate New York liberal film, *The Front*. “Plus que ça change, plus que ça reste le même.”

The Postwar Cultural Slump Complex

The victory of World War II placed the United States in the unchallenged position of world leadership. This rather sudden international prominence resulted in an auto-critical view of American cultural values which often paled by comparison with the older cultures of the nations on the European continent.

All of a sudden Americans felt that “their culture was second-rate”¹⁵⁰ and became very conscious of their image abroad and their lack of a rich tradition in

¹⁴⁸ Richard W. Nason, “Star-Filled Day in the ‘Middle of the Night,’” *The New York Times*, January 19, 1959.

¹⁴⁹ “Susskind Divulges Theatre Pix Dream,” *Daily Variety*, July 12, 1961.

¹⁵⁰ Joseph A. Casper, Classroom lectures, Cinema Department, University of Southern California, June 1975.

the arts.

This syndrome, which has been labeled here “The Postwar Cultural Slump Complex,” was a minor factor in the development of Theatrical Realism, but did play a fundamental role since Theatrical Realism, with its pretensions of high art, tried to remedy this situation. More often than not the films that mirrored this syndrome did little to rectify it. Films such as *Three Coins in the Fountain*, *Boy on a Dolphin*, *A Certain Smile*, *Count Your Blessings*, *Summertime*, *Rome Adventure*, and *A Light in the Piazza* showed American tourists traipsing through picturesque surroundings in Europe searching for culture, adventure, and romance in “glorious Technicolor, breathtaking CinemaScope and stereophonic sound.”¹⁵¹ These “confections” were in total opposition to the Theatrical Realism films, whose seriousness was their most prominent feature. The emulation of Italian Neo-Realism as discussed earlier in this chapter, and the fact that “by the mid-fifties the United States need no longer apologize for its drama,”¹⁵² fueled the intentions of American filmmakers whose major aim was the creation of serious film art which reflected their society. But things could go too far.

An interesting and representative case of this syndrome occurred when Clare Boothe Luce, who was ambassador to Italy in the mid-fifties protested...

...the inclusion in the Venice Film Festival of *Blackboard Jungle* as an official American entry. The film was withdrawn and MGM production chief Dore Schary declared the action “flagrant political censorship.” *Time* replied that culturally distorted novels and movies “more than Communist propaganda” were “responsible for the repulsive picture of U.S. life” in foreign countries.¹⁵³

As this case illustrates, the preoccupation with America’s image was a dominant concern of the fifties. Theatrical Realism was not an attempt to project a positive image, full of propaganda values, but rather a realistic one, with lasting artistic values of which the nation could be truly proud.

¹⁵¹ Lyrics by Cole Porter from the song “Stereophonic Sound” featured in the film *Silk Stockings*.

¹⁵² Sievers, *Freud on Broadway*, p. 452.

¹⁵³ Dowdy, *Films of the Fifties*, p. 142.

ECONOMIC ROOTS

The Decline of the Studios and Rise Of Independence

This rapid decline has been caused by many factors. The most important, of course, was the rise of television as the first serious competitor of the movies. Its emergence and Hollywood's decline parallel each other throughout the 1950's and it has been amply proven and unanimously accepted that the new medium played a major role in the sharp reduction in the movie business. There are, however, other economic factors which contributed to Hollywood's plight. Since 1938, frequent court battles over charges of antitrust violations had been waged between the industry and the federal government. Finally, in 1948, a Supreme Court decision ordered divorcement of motion picture theatres from film production companies. This meant that all big production-exhibition companies, including Paramount, RKO, 20th Century-Fox, Warner Bros. and MGM were forced to give up a major profit source and undergo total economic reorganization just at the time when television was gaining its first real strength. This weakened the economic base of the industry, leaving producers, during the early 1950's, in a serious financial dilemma when they should have been mustering all their strength and solidarity to face the new competition.

--Robert McLaughlin¹⁵⁴

The Supreme Court Consent Decree, the rise of television, the charges on top level management within the studios, and the end of the long-term player contracts were factors which came together in the late forties and early fifties to change the economic structure of the American motion picture industry.

In this section of this chapter these factors will be discussed as they relate to the rise of the Theatrical Realism style.

One of the main repercussions of the Consent Decree was the virtual elimination of the old program pictures,¹⁵⁵ the second feature or "B-movies" that were produced with a minimal budget on the studio assembly line and were guaranteed play dates and profits through the practice of block booking or force feeding to theatre chains owned by the studio. This meant that from now on each

¹⁵⁴ Robert McLaughlin, *Broadway and Hollywood: A History of Economic Interaction* (New York: The Arno Press, 1974), pp. 182-183.

¹⁵⁵ Dowdy, p. 174.

new film had to be sold on its own merits and had to pull an audience away from the TV sets at home. McLaughlin wrote:

By 1953, Hollywood realized that television was rapidly taking over the market for less sophisticated, assembly line entertainment, and that a shift in emphasis was needed. That year saw the beginnings of an industry-wide reorientation toward the “big picture.” Quality and lavishness were stressed in an attempt to lure the public back to the movies by offering entertainment that television could not begin to compete with. (This new focus on product can also be seen as a natural result of the production-exhibition split ordered by the courts. Without the guaranteed showings for any film produced, the studios had to begin concentrating on what they considered quality movies.) In 1954, Dore Schary, then vice president in charge of production at MGM, stated that the public would come back to the movie theatres, “but only for good pictures . . . we won’t have the easy audience anymore. We’ll have to make our pictures more carefully, we can’t take any chances.” Jack L. Warner summed up this change in emphasis in 1955: “The motion picture industry has entered the Cadillac Age . . . nothing is exorbitant if it is the right thing.”¹⁵⁶

As quality and lavishness were stressed in these new “Cadillacs” that Hollywood attempted to produce, an interesting polarization began to take place which seemed to prove that these elements were mutually exclusive. On the one hand there was lavishness: CinemaScope, stereophonic sound, and epic religious dramas so lacking in quality that they came to be known as “spears and sandals specials.”¹⁵⁷ On the other hand there was the “quality movie,” usually a message movie or one based on a work of literature of unquestionable value. It was this latter film that assumed the characteristics of Theatrical Realism.

Theatrical Realism was also supported as a viable commercial film style by a new group of producers who were just beginning to gain some control in Hollywood.

By the mid-fifties some of the pioneer movie moguls had stepped down as

¹⁵⁶ McLaughlin, pp. 184-185.

¹⁵⁷ Generic term employed by Arthur Mayer in his lectures at University of Southern California. In more vulgar trade jargon the same films are known as “tits and togas.”

heads of production and were replaced, in several major studios, by producers who had more of a cultural background, most of them former writers. The case of Dore Schary, who was head of production at RKO and later at Metro, is a typical example of the trend toward the intellectualization of the studios.

When Schary held a press conference, in August of 1948, to discuss his appointment as head of production at Metro, he made the following statement:

I will make daring and controversial pictures for MGM. They haven't been making any lately. We will make respectable films for a respectable world . . . in which intolerance, hate and venality are dispensed with. They say we don't produce adult pictures. What are adult pictures—adultery? We have no use for such subjects. I don't think art is four-letter words written on bathroom walls.¹⁵⁸

Schary, along with John Houseman, produced most of the Theatrical Realism films that came out of MGM. At Fox there was, of course, Darryl F. Zanuck, who started the whole movement back in the forties. He was joined by Nunnally Johnson, Jerry Wald, and Buddy Adler, who was later to become head of production. Stanley Kramer and Carl Foreman were at Columbia as a writer/producer team, and United Artists repeatedly used the services of Harold Hecht and Mark Hellinger as producers. Other free lancers included Louis de Rochemont, Sam Spiegel, and Walter Wanger, whose films opened with a logo depicting the “Walter Wanger Eagle of Quality.”

Gore Vidal, using the poison pen (or maybe one should say the queenly quill) of his sacred monster creation, *Myra Breckenridge*, lamented in his novel *Myron* the change of management at Metro and the rise of the “socially conscious literate mogul”:

I shall personally take charge of all MGM production during the coming crucial weeks, supporting the beleaguered Dream Merchant Louis B. Mayer against the interloper Dore Schary, whose sponsorship of *The Boy with the Green Hair* (1948) marked the beginning of the end of the golden age of movies. . . . Block-booking is high on my agenda because

¹⁵⁸ Charles Higham, *Hollywood at Sunset* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1972), p. 58.

the studios must own their own theatres again; so to hell with the Sherman Anti-Trust Act!¹⁵⁹

Alas for Myra, she could not change the course of history, and soon films like her favorite spears and sandals programmer, *Siren of Babylon* (1948),¹⁶⁰ would be usurped by the message-wrought *Battleground* (1949) which Schary brought from RKO to MGM where it would gross “over seven million and stimulate a new cycle of war pictures.”¹⁶¹

Knight wrote about another effect of the Supreme Court decision on the demise of the studios:

In another miscalculation, no sooner had the Consent Decree become a fact than the studios began to drop the contracts of their expensive talent, including their stars. The reasoning was simple. When they still owned theatres, it was important—and profitable—to turn out a picture a week. A contract star, director or writer might work on three or four, possibly more of these in a single year, and thus earn his impressive salary. Once the divorcement of the studios from their theatres had taken place, however, the entire rationale behind these princely sums disappeared—or so it seemed. Since they were no longer in the theatre business, the studios had no economic stake in maintaining their picture-a-week production pace, and began to cut back dramatically on the number of films they turned out each year. Rather than have their costly talent sitting idle much of the time with their \$5,000 or \$10,000 a week contracts, it seemed wiser to the studio heads simply to let them go and hire them back on a picture to picture basis.

Suddenly, top stars, noted directors and long-established writers found themselves in the ranks of the unemployed. But not for long. Guided by knowledgeable agents and lawyers with a keen eye for the tax advantages, they formed themselves into corporations. (Hecht-Lancaster, the firm formed by agent Harold Hecht and Burt Lancaster, was among the first of these, and helped to set the pattern.) Now when the studios wanted to engage a star or a director, they had to deal not with an individual, but with a corporate entity. And for a star of major magnitude, they were soon paying more for a single picture than they had been paying

¹⁵⁹ Gore Vidal, *Myron* (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 42.

¹⁶⁰ Fictitious film title created by Gore Vidal in his novel *Myron*.

¹⁶¹ Dowdy, p. 175.

him all year long on a contract basis—often plus a percentage of the picture's profits. Productions costs began to soar.¹⁶²

When these stars found themselves liberated from the long-term contracts which allowed the studios to dictate in which films they would appear, they took their freedom in stride and set out to find the kind of roles they always thought were worthy of them and had been unable to play due to type-casting at the studio. These were usually heavy dramatic roles in prestige pictures done in the Theatrical Realism style.

Burt Lancaster, Kirk Douglas, Susan Hayward, Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland, among many others, felt compelled to discard their images and seek new dramatic roles. Even Fred Astaire turned off the music, hung up the top hat and tails, donned a dirty T-shirt and sat in squalor by a kitchen sink. Audiences were expected to leave the theatre saying, "Gee whiz . . . I didn't know Fred Astaire could act! He had it in him all along those years when he was wasted in frivolous little musicals." The case in point of this syndrome is the transformation of Marilyn Monroe into Mrs. Arthur Miller, discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

Closely related to this manifestation was the rise of independent producing companies which, as Knight stated, were often comprised of a tandem of talent and agent.

With the antitrust and contract suits being lost by the studios, the door was widely opened to independent producers. Many of these were stars who formed their own companies after their seven years' servitude was over at the big factories. Others were writers or directors in partnerships with their agents. Most went to United Artists for financing and distribution.

United Artists made no films of its own. It distributed the work of independent producers for whom, usually, it also arranged financing. With no studio overhead and no expensive contract list, UA could bring pictures in at prices well below most competition. *Fortune* estimated that

¹⁶² Arthur Knight, *The Warner Bros. Golden Anniversary Book* (New York: Film and Venture Corporation/A Dell Special, 1973), pp. 21-22.

the three-hundred-thousand-dollar budget for *The Moon Is Blue* would have doubled at a major studio. As power shifted from the harried studios to independent talent, UA developed a tradition of providing “creative autonomy,” as well as a large piece of the action, for such production companies as The Associates and Aldrich, Hecht-Hill-Lancaster, Joseph L. Mankiewicz’ Figaro Inc., Gregory Peck’s Melville Productions, John Wayne’s Batjac Productions, Frank Sinatra’s Kent Productions, Hope Enterprises, and many others. Top stars could demand between 30 and 75 percent of the net profit from packages they produced to be distributed by United Artists.¹⁶³

United Artists’ policy of creative freedom and no front office interference in their low budget pictures provided the fertile ground from which many worthwhile projects were able to become finished films. The relationship between United Artists and Hecht-Hill-Lancaster was exemplary of this sort of arrangement, whereby the companies would tend to produce films in pairs—one being “commercial,” *Trapeze* (1956) and the other “artistic,” *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957).

It was ironical that as the studio system declined and the economic conditions in Hollywood worsened, a favorable climate developed for Theatrical Realism as a film style.

Adaptations of Presold Material

Original screenplays, written specifically for cinema, were rare in Hollywood during the fifties. There had always been a disposition to play safe by adapting material that had been popular already in the form of a novel or a stage play, and amid the growing financial anxiety it was natural for this tendency to become even more prevalent.

--Gordon Gow¹⁶⁴

Jerry Wald once polled forty-three hundred librarians to find out what he should buy for films. . . . The librarians told the producer of *Peyton Place* that sex ranked last among the interest of readers. . . . He purchased D. H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*, Budd Schulberg’s *The*

¹⁶³ Dowdy, p. 186.

¹⁶⁴ Gordon Gow, *Hollywood in the Fifties* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1971), p. 37.

Harder They Fall, and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*.¹⁶⁵

When Irving Rapper began work on *The Glass Menagerie*, a studio official told him he didn't see the project as "a great movie." More probably it would be a "prestige piece." On occasion Hollywood was willing to pay for the imported luxury of prestige, and in the fifties the highly sexed, poetically ambiguous plays of Tennessee Williams combined the new race for adult entertainment with the somewhat older sport of bounty hunting along the Great White Way. If Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* was worth \$150,000 then *A Streetcar named Desire* was worth more than twice as much.

--Andrew Dowdy¹⁶⁶

Theatrical Realism as a film style became well entrenched in the commercial American cinema of the fifties due, to a large extent, to its respectable pedigree from literature and the theatre.

As was stated earlier in this chapter, the economic situation in Hollywood in the fifties was dismal. This called for a reduction of all the risks that went into the making of a motion picture, and since *all* elements involved potential risks, the production heads at the studios would get hold of anything that hinted of security in terms of acceptance at the box office. This was usually referred to as "the property," which came to mean "the book," "the play," "the story," but seldom, if ever, "the original screenplay." The emphasis was placed on presold material.

Although Theatrical Realism films, when taken as a whole, could be considered commercial failures,¹⁶⁷ the economic climate of the film industry at the time was highly supportive of such projects. McLaughlin wrote:

By 1956, a sense of urgency seemed to prevail, according to one observer: "Today Hollywood is in a hurry. The good story that will bring back into theatres the millions who have slipped away to the TV set must be found, filmed and brought forth before more millions slip away." Because of the greater loan security involved, bankers made it clear they

¹⁶⁵ Dowdy, p. 204.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 207-208.

¹⁶⁷ Richard Sylbert, in a personal interview in March 1976.

preferred to back only pictures made from successful novels or plays and producers were often unable to get financing for new films unless they obliged. The attitude became one of extreme caution; producers began looking for guarantees of box office success. In the words of one executive, all of Hollywood was searching for “something presold, preread, predigested.” The more exposure a story had, the more valuable it became. This new orientation resulted in a sharp reduction of films based on original screenplays. The Writers Guild of America reported that between 1938 and 1952 nearly 65 percent of all hit movies had been original stories, but that from 1953 to 1956 this figure dropped to 28 percent. Producers simply were not interested in original untested material.

The theatre, of course, has been a choice source of film material since the teens, but with this new focus on pretested properties, Hollywood interest in Broadway shows intensified. Since the mid-fifties, nearly every new play receiving good notices has been able to land a respectable screen sale.¹⁶⁸

The other factor that opened the gates to the series of adaptation of the fifties was the element of prestige, pretension, and “art” that is commonly associated with the rendering of great literature and drama on the screen. McLaughlin commented:

Film producers are generally convinced that a stage success carries with it enough prestige to interest movie-goers in a film version. This is an old belief, dating back to the beginning of feature films, but it was still strongly held throughout the 1960’s. The Theatre has always had an artistic aura about it in that Hollywood, until very recently, has been unable to match or challenge.¹⁶⁹

Dowdy made the same point with regard to literature, when he stated:

Literary classics not only were “pre-sold,” they were also investments in a process of osmosis by which plain old movies could be elevated to the level of cinema. And so some of the great bombs of the fifties resulted from an effort to torment the secret of Art out of an older and supposedly superior medium.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ McLaughlin, *Broadway and Hollywood*, p. 239.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 240-241.

¹⁷⁰ Dowdy, p. 211.

The bad economic climate and the pursuit of artistic pretensions by adapting material from the stage turned many American films into what Sontag called “transcriptions,”¹⁷¹ as film producers thought they had found a way of minimizing risks by acquiring presold properties.

Theatrical Realism seemingly offered a viable solution to the commercial cinema. It contained elements of sex, sensationalism, and controversy along with lofty pretensions to high art and social significance. Theatrical Realism films were not expensive to produce when compared with the “spear and sandal” epics that characterized the CinemaScope era and stood at the other end of the spectrum of film production.

The major expense involved in budgeting a Theatrical Realism film was the acquisition of the “property” and the above-the-line¹⁷² salaries which were always negotiable and comparatively low if the talent still had contractual obligations to fulfill.

The rise in Theatrical Realism productions came about by the perfect mixture of the artistic, social, and economic factors discussed in this chapter. These worked in conjunction to create a climate in the American film industry that allowed and encouraged the development of the new film style.

¹⁷¹ See Chapter II, page 44.

¹⁷² Meaning creative talent, such as writer, director, producer and actors.

CHAPTER IV

THE ACTORS STUDIO AND HOLLYWOOD

We are paying the price for something that takes place very rarely in the arts and that has never taken place in the theatre. Never before has a method of actor's work become almost a burning issue People in general are discussing the work of the Actors Studio. Till now, only sports or movies have elicited this kind of interest.

--Lee Strasberg (1956)¹

Strasberg was right. Only sports or movies had elicited such interest before. And as he spoke those words to his class at the Actors Studio, his wife Paula found herself confronting a contingent from the press outside a hotel suite in Phoenix, Arizona. The reporters were pressing her for confirmation of the rumors that Marilyn Monroe (movies) who had recently divorced Joe DiMaggio (sports) was marrying Arthur Miller (theater). *Bus Stop* was in the middle of shooting and Paula Strasberg, as Monroe's drama coach, was in the middle of the nation's hottest story.

The Actors Studio was big news in 1956. Everyone in show business had something to say about it. Turbulent notoriety surrounded it, as it became the topic for cocktail party chatter and Sunday supplement cover articles. But how did an acting workshop become such a ubiquitous institution?

¹ Robert H. Hethmon (editor), *Strasberg at the Actors Studio* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), p. 37.

FORMATION

On October 1, 1947, the following item appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune*:

If Broadway's younger actors and actresses are the losers without Equity-Library Theatre, a number of them will benefit by the establishment of the Studio Workshop by Cheryl Crawford, Elia Kazan and Robert Lewis. This project is designed to provide free acting lessons for two groups of actors, those with experience and newcomers showing promise. The lessons will begin on Sunday and will be held for the time being at the Princess Theatre.

Mr. Kazan, with the assistance of Martin Ritt, will teach the newcomers, while Mr. Lewis will hold classes for the more experienced performers. He has selected ten girls and thirty-four men to attend the first class. From time to time some of them will be weeded out and others added.

Among those who will turn out for Mr. Lewis on Sunday are many well known Broadway figures. They include Tom Ewell, David Wayne, E. G. Marshall, Karl Malden, Eli Wallach, Kevin McCarthy, Sidney Lumet, Anne Jackson, Maurine [sic] Stapleton, William Hensen, John Forsythe, Elizabeth Ross, Jerome Robbins, Montgomery Clift, Marlon Brando, Herbert Berghof, John Becher and Philip Bourneuf.²

This is the earliest mention of the Actors Studio in the press. At the time the organization had not yet found its name,³ but most of its principals had already gathered to define its character.

Echoing her formation of the Guild Studio in 1929 in conjunction with Clurman and Biberman, Cheryl Crawford recalled how the idea for the Actors Studio...

...first arose in 1947 during a luncheon she had with Mr. Kazan, shortly after each had had an enormous Broadway success—Miss Crawford producing *Brigadoon* and Mr. Kazan directing *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

² Bert McCord, "News of the Theatre," *New York Herald Tribune*, October 1, 1947. The list of participants has been abridged.

³ The organization was incorporated by the State of New York in January of 1948 as "The Actors' Studio Inc." The apostrophe on the workshop's name was eventually dropped.

“We wanted to do something for the theatre,” Miss Crawford said. “We wanted to have a place where actors could meet and explore their talents, somewhat in line with what we did at the Group Theatre—but not as a producing organization.”

“In the tradition of the Group Theatre, the actor was to be the center of the thing,” Mr. Kazan said.⁴

Two points brought up here are of interest: first, that it was not going to be a producing organization, and second, that it would be centered around the actor. Throughout the history of the Studio these two precepts were often the focus of controversy as the Studio eventually attempted its own productions and opened playwriting and directing units, all of these ventures meeting with little success. As Ritt commented:

It is interesting to note that the Group Theatre produced many directors and writers, but not that many actors; while the Actors Studio trained some really great performers who went to films later on, but hardly any directors.⁵

This was completely by design since the goals established by Crawford and Kazan, as a producer/director team, were to train a pool of actors that they could use, not to create a new “Theatre.” In his dissertation on the Actors Studio, David Garfield described some of Kazan’s motivations in creating the Studio:

[Kazan] had come to realize that if he was to serve his own creativity to the utmost on future projects, he himself would have to turn out a whole generation of actors. He decided to establish a “farm,” where he could cultivate a new crop of actors trained in the techniques he had learned in the Group.

But in addition, Kazan wanted to invigorate the young American actor with a new sense of dignity and respect for his profession—to get him, as he put it, “out of that goddamn Walgreen drugstore.” By creating a place where the actor could meet with his fellows to develop his craft and deal with his artistic problems in a serious and sympathetic

⁴ Mel Gussow, “Actors Studio Thrives at 25 . . . er 26,” *The New York Times*, December 6, 1973, p. 60.

⁵ Personal interview in June, 1973.

atmosphere, he wanted to give the actor a kind of artistic homeland. In later years, he would frequently say of the Studio that it came to represent for the actor what Israel represents for the Jew.⁶

The link to the Group Theatre underlined the conspicuous absence of two of its major figures in the new organization—Harold Clurman and Lee Strasberg. The former never became a part of the Studio; the later would come in several months later, virtually take over, and become the Studio’s prime teacher and motivating force.

Garfield observed:

Harold Clurman claims it was he who first suggested the idea for a studio to Kazan. During their association on the production of *All My Sons*, he proposed establishing a paying school which would have a regular contingent of ten to twelve scholarship students. Kazan liked the idea, Clurman says, but then proceeded to develop a plan without him. Clurman feels Kazan forgot all about him because he felt a certain intellectual and emotional rivalry with his former teacher (their producing partnership would not last beyond *Truckline Café* - 1947). Kazan’s decision not to include him in his plans for the workshop hurt Clurman’s feelings somewhat and Clurman told him so.⁷

Kevin McCarthy, a founding member of the Actors Studio, claimed that Kazan told him at the time that “the one man they must keep out of the Studio at all costs was Lee Strasberg.”⁸ Whether this was out of the same “intellectual and emotional rivalry” existing between Clurman and Kazan, or whether it was an expression of an even deeper rooted animosity, is not publicly known. The fact remains that the lives of these two men were closely intertwined throughout their professional careers, and although one may occasionally have glimpsed some

⁶ David Garfield. “The History of the Actors Studio 1947-1975” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1975), pp. 62-63.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁸ Gordon Rogoff, “Lee Strasberg, Burning Ice,” *Tulane Drama Review*, 9:136, 1964.

evidence⁹ that indicated the relationship between them was at best strained, on the surface they were close associates with the same artistic goals.

Within the first year of the creation of the Actors Studio four out of the five main directors¹⁰ of the Theatrical Realism film style became closely associated with it. Kazan, of course, was a co-founder and teacher; Martin Ritt, as Kazan's alternate teacher, was thoroughly familiar with Kazan's procedures and would often take over for him if he had to miss a class for professional reasons;¹¹ Sidney Lumet, who had been a child actor in the Group Theatre, now as a founding member enrolled in Robert Lewis' advanced class; and Daniel Mann taught there until 1951 when he left to follow his directorial ambitions after his successful production of *Come Back Little Sheba*.¹² The void he left was filled by Lee Strasberg, who was given the...

...title of "Artistic Director of the Actors Studio," and initiated the course of work that was to make the still relatively unknown workshop a cynosure of the American theatrical landscape during the decade of the fifties and an object of national and international interest and controversy to this day.¹³

LEE STRASBERG'S INVOLVEMENT

Lee Strasberg is one of the few artists among American theatre directors. He is the director of introverted feeling, of strong emotion curbed by ascetic control, sentiment of great intensity muted by delicacy, pride, fear, shame. The effect he produces is a classic hush, tense and tragic, a constant conflict so held in check that a kind of beautiful sparseness results. Though plastically restricted, his work through the

⁹ During the formation of the Lincoln Center Repertory Company some of the artistic differences and power plays between Kazan and Strasberg came to light. This is discussed more fully at the end of this chapter.

¹⁰ Delbert Mann, in a personal interview in May, 1973 stated: "I never attended the Actors Studio. A few years ago I went as an observer to a series of lectures that Strasberg gave here in Hollywood, but that was after I had made all those films."

¹¹ Garfield, p. 79.

¹² Ibid., p. 108.

¹³ Ibid.

balance of its various tensions often becomes aesthetically impressive, despite its crushed low key and occasional wild transitions to shrill hysteria. Above everything, the feeling in Strasberg's production is very stagy. Its roots are clearly in the intimate experience of a complex psychology, an acute awareness of human contradiction and suffering, a distinguished though perhaps a too specialized sensibility.

--Harold Clurman¹⁴

When Clurman made the preceding comments in 1945 he was referring to the mercurial director of the Group Theatre days, a man whose career seemed to exist in the past. Rogoff told us that the interval between the Group and the Studio was one of the hardest times for Lee Strasberg:

What can be surmised about Strasberg in the forties is that times were fundamentally hard and possibly more cruel to him than to any of his former friends in the group. In 1947, Cheryl Crawford was producing *Brigadoon* successfully on Broadway, directed by still another Group colleague, Robert Lewis. The Strasberg family had just returned to New York in distressed financial shape. There were no offers from producers, there were no huge private acting classes, and the Actors Studio was only an idea in the minds of Lewis, Crawford, and Kazan Miss Crawford . . . felt moved enough to put Strasberg on the *Brigadoon* payroll as an acting coach, though, as she put it, he wasn't really needed.¹⁵

The first years of the Studio saw a succession of interim teachers which included Kazan, Ritt, Lewis, Mann, Joshua Logan, David Alexander, and Strasberg. As Garfield reported:

In the fall of 1951, the Studio directors decided it was time to put an end to the coming and going of various interim teachers and to consolidate all the acting classes under a single instructor. For three years there had been not only the periodic substitution of teachers, with their contrasting approaches to acting and training, but a constant shifting of units between teachers and of members from unit to unit. The result was a loss of continuity in the work with individual actors. The ostensible virtues of the diversity of teaching talent had degenerated into the very

¹⁴ Harold Clurman, *The Fervent Years* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), p. 56.

¹⁵ Rogoff, pp. 136-137.

real drawback of unfocused and uncommitted work by directors whose primary interests were outside the Studio. The time had come to give the organization a greater uniformity of purpose and direction. The man chosen to bring order and a new seriousness to the work at the Studio was Lee Strasberg.¹⁶

Thus, Strasberg began a third stage in his career. He had been an actor and director who had always done some teaching and coaching as a sideline. Now he was to dedicate himself exclusively to teaching and training a new generation of actors at the Studio:

His arrival at the Studio in the early fifties was really a new beginning for both. Several life members suffered sudden death. There were denunciations—particularly of Daniel Mann’s brief regime—banishments, and promises. Strasberg was announcing in his private, authoritarian way that the revolution was on. Seriousness was in, dilettantes were out. Talent was to be cultivated under hothouse conditions, the chosen few to consider themselves delicate plants finally receiving constant care and attention. To be overturned was everything in American theatre that contributed to the destructive usage and abuse of the American actor. No more polite acting, no more physical crutches, no more vocal tricks. Nothing, indeed, alien to the actor himself was to be developed, and everything human, alive—therefore personal—was to be encouraged. Beauty in theatre was to be found not so much in the artifice and design of art, least of all in the artificial frippery of so much boulevard, West End, and Broadway theatre, but rather in the work of art that is man himself. The key philosophical figuration was a type of humanism, proposed first as an antidote, but developed in time into something with wider pretensions: an all-purpose, dramatic, theatrical aesthetic.¹⁷

This new aesthetic became the backbone of Theatrical Realism on stage and in films. It was centered around the teachings of Strasberg as derived from the Stanislavski system and his experiences with the Group Theatre. It all came together under the handy label of “The Method.”

¹⁶ Garfield, p. 107.

¹⁷ Rogoff, p. 139.

THE METHOD AND THE CONTROVERSY

Stanislavski's cardinal principle was the development of the actor as a character in the production. In Stanislavski's view the director's main function was to enable the actor to live the character. "Growing" the character, partly by external observation but largely by evoking his own sensory memory and his memory of emotions felt by himself, was and remains the main work of the Stanislavskian actor. And Stanislavskian principles are properly described as "inner realism," for they are an outgrowth of the realistic movement in the theatre.¹⁸

"Strasberg has tried quite genuinely to develop a specifically American adaptation of Stanislavski's system, a way of making Stanislavski work for what he took to be a uniquely American character."¹⁹ In Strasberg's own words, the Stanislavski system "tries to show the actor the path to be followed; he goes about finding what only he can find, and what, even when he has found it, cannot be repeated, but must be found the next time again."²⁰

Actors Studio members do not like to talk about the method. Especially *The Method*, as it is (or was) often referred to in outside circles. There is no method, they claim; it is a matter of the actor's individual approach. But audiences *did* see a new way of acting. New techniques of introspection and intensity were evident in the performers who spent their afternoons at the Studio, which, when coupled with the right material and direction, emerged as a new theatrical style—a style that had already begun to seep into the movies.

Shelley Winters described an incident that occurred in one of Strasberg's classes which comes very close to describing what "method acting" is and how it is achieved:

One of the most interesting things I ever saw at the Studio—it didn't happen to me. I saw an actress get up and say to Lee, 'I have

¹⁸ John Gassner, *Directions in Modern Theatre and Drama* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 94.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

²⁰ Hethmon, *Strasberg at the Actors Studio*, p. 41.

become phony. I used to be a good actress.’ This is a terrible admission for a girl to make. She said ‘What has happened to me? I just know I’m not an actress any more. How can I fix it?’ ‘Well,’ he said, ‘I wouldn’t have said this to you.’ (Despite everything that you hear about Lee, he’s very kind. He’s only tough with people who can take it and who are successful. I’ve never seen him clobber somebody who isn’t strong enough to take it. In my own early days at the Studio, he was very kind to me. Now he’ll get very tough if I’m lazy or I won’t work, and he’ll criticize me in the areas where I need it very sharply and question me if I’ve achieved it.) and he said to her, ‘I wouldn’t have said that to you but since you bring it up and you’re aware of it’ She said, ‘Why am I false?’ He said, ‘Well, during the course of years I think somehow you have made up a personality for yourself.’ She said, ‘Yes, why do I carry these mannerisms and behavior into my work?’ and he said, ‘Well, in a way, you’re inseparable. I’ll do an exercise with you called ‘Effective Memory.’ Stanislavski speaks of it.’ And he said, ‘Now sit down on the chair and you think of the most powerful thing that ever happened to you in your life. Don’t tell us what it is. Just describe the sensory memories of that time.’ And the class was very quiet—we’d never seen this done before. And she was quiet for a while and then she said, ‘Well, the night air is very cool. I can feel my dress on my skin, I can smell the flowers. The lights on the road—the car lights. . . .’ And she was describing sensory impressions. And we became terrified. I don’t know what happened to her, but she communicated absolute terror. We were sweating. We were shaking. And he stopped her. And he said, ‘that is where you find the truth in yourself. When you prepare a role. You don’t do it so much with an intellectual decision of how you’re going to play this scene or that scene. You have to find a parallel experience in the role that I mean, if you’ve got to kill somebody, but you’ve wanted to kill, you’ve hated. There are many ways of getting at this kind of truth for yourself—not the director’s truth, not the playwright’s truth, but your truth. That’s one way of checking yourself!’²¹

The appearance of the first “method-trained” actors on stage could hardly go by unnoticed. Bentley wrote about this encounter with the new form of American acting:

Because we have no national theatre and no network of repertory theatres, we offer our young actors far too little either of variety or continuity. Still, certain remedial measures have been taken. The creation

²¹ Lewis Funke and John E. Booth, *Actors Talk About Acting* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 155.

of the Group theatre was one such measure—back in the Thirties. It was followed by the creation of the Actors' Studio in the Forties. In these organizations, a new generation of American actors has been trained, and a new type of American actor has evolved. The easiest way of telling the layman about the new acting is to inform him that he has seen it in *Death of a Salesman* or *A Streetcar Named Desire*. It is a deliberate American alternative to the elocutionary "acting style" that we import from England. It seizes on the nervous excitement of American life—healthy or unhealthy—and communicates it. It makes older fashioned acting seem stilted, slow and emptily declamatory. I never felt this so sharply as when seeing *Tea and Sympathy* as directed by the head of the Studio, Elia Kazan, the night after a Margaret Webster production (*The Strong Are Lonely*). It was like finding myself on an express train after sitting yawning in the waiting room. On the other hand, reviewing plays which are acted by members of the Studio, I have had frequent occasion to note the narrow scope of the newer acting. It almost seems limited to the portrayal of violent and neurasthenic types.²²

Alpert noted how "The Method" was particularly suited for the screen:

The "method" system of acting, espoused by Lee Strasberg and others, as a stage technique, has ironically often been advantageous in films, that is, if controlled by a firm director. The actor's ability to concentrate, developed through successful absorption of the method, is an aid to achieving the requisite emotion under the conditions of the "short take," and repetition through successive takes. Uncontrolled, it comes out as a mannerism again, as in some of the more recent performances of Marlon Brando.²³

The same point was elaborated further by Blum, who stated:

In fact, the 'Method' is better suited for cinema than the original system. It provides a stronger technique for inner realism in close-up acting, sensitizing the actor to inner conflicts and drives, and allowing expression of subconscious realism on screen. Subtle reactions can be poignant on screen, whereas the same naturalism may be lost in the distance of theatre. In addition, the idea of merging character and the self, epitomized by the type-casting theory, enhances the credibility and

²² Eric Bentley, *The Theatre of Commitment and Other Essays on Drama in Our Society* (New York: Athenem Press, 1967), pp. 29-30.

²³ Hollis Alpert, *The Dreams and the Dreamers: Adventures of a Professional Movie Goer* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1962), pp. 249-250.

naturalism of the performance on screen. The stress on psychoanalytic truth also allows a consistency in character to develop in each scene, whether or not the scene is shot in context. The ‘Method’ is simply better suited to the magnified image of the motion picture screen, and to the discontinuous nature of the acting environment in cinema.²⁴

“The Method” soon became not only a system for an actor to use in preparing a performance, but a way of directing, staging, writing, and even set designing. For many it came to denote the style which is identified as Theatrical Realism in this book. Production designer Richard Sylbert talked about being the first “method art director”:

In 1953 I got involved in the Studio just like an actor would . . . my friends were at the Studio . . . Ben Gazzarra, Newman, Cassavetes, my brother, that wonderful director of operas, Frank Corsaro, (who was there teaching) . . . We went there, we hung around at Downey’s and talked to each other about . . . “methods,” so that I always describe myself as the first method art director because I would approach my work just like an actor. Find out what you are after—a goal. You think the way an actor does, you do the same homework, make the same choices: who lives here in this house? How long have they lived here? Who lived here before? They never did those things in this town [Hollywood] . . . They did it all from files and stock without any sense of emotion Even John Ford with Dick Day who did the best work still had this Hollywood varnish.²⁵

The close association of “the Method” and Theatrical Realism often led to the discussion of the former in terms of a “style,” something which irritated Strasberg as Garfield reported:

Style, for Strasberg, is an expression of content, the play’s content. It is not an acting technique nor a special way of performing, but a “heightened reality” achieved through finding the subject for a play that will allow the actors to respond as they must.

Any suggestion of style as externally imposed form is anathema to Strasberg. The essential thing for him is “the human being and his living

²⁴ Richard Arthur Blum, “The ‘Method’ from Stanislavski to Hollywood: The Transition of Acting Theory in American from Stage to Screen (1900-1976)” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1976), p. 117.

²⁵ Personal interview in March 1976.

presence,” whose reality is the same in all plays from all times. In his analogy, the actor-in-all-his-reality is like a violin on which one can play different music—French, German, or English (historical or modern)—using the same instrument and the same technique. That is why Strasberg rejects the idea that there is a Method style or that the Method is useful only for contemporary realistic plays:

“I try to tell the people that method acting has nothing to do with method production. The Stanislavski Method is a technique, not a style. It provides tools, not rules. It gives you standards to judge performances by, it enables you to talk to the actors in objective terms and not just say, ‘You are great.’ ‘You stank.’ The method of production, the style of performance, comes from the author and the director, not the [Actors] Studio.”²⁶

Yet, in an article he wrote for *The New York Times* in 1959, Strasberg described the actor Joseph Schildkraut as “a somewhat exaggerated forerunner of what would today be labeled the Actors Studio style.”²⁷ Although he may have confused the terminology at one point in time, one can understand Strasberg’s insistence that “the Method” is independent of stylistic forms, since he must have realized that the survival of “The Method” depended on its flexibility to be used with works whose style is other than Theatrical Realism.

Although William Shakespeare was by far the most frequent source of material for the work of the Actors Unit, many of the Studio’s critics contended that the work done at the Studio was only suited for contemporary drama. Jack Garfein, a disciple of Strasberg and former head of the Actors Studio West, felt that:

Since the actor is taught by Strasberg to draw upon his own experiences and recapture them on stage every night, this can be an asset when the role is that of a character who goes through a situation parallel to one that the actor has experienced himself. But when an actor must play a totally alien character, he may find that his own past experiences are the wrong source from which to build the character he is playing.²⁸

²⁶ Garfield, “History of the Actors Studio,” pp. 269-270.

²⁷ Lee Strasberg, “Renaissance?” *The New York Times*, July 20, 1959, Section 2, p. 1.

²⁸ Personal interview in May 1972.

He cited examples from Brando's career, especially his roles as the Nazi in *The Young Lions* and Antony in *Julius Caesar*, to illustrate his point, underlining one of the basic characteristics of Theatrical Realism—method acting is effective only in contemporary dramas even if, as Strasberg claimed, it is applicable to other types of works—which remains a moot point.

THE IMAGE OF THE METHOD ACTOR

The false legend of the Studio goes something like this: a group of grimy actors in torn T-shirts meet a vibrant group of actresses who overperspire and none of them get their lines out, so they do exercises in which they try to recall something unpleasant in their childhood to make their acting even more earthy, incoherent and, as they think, more real. The men were all dedicated misogynists at least and violent homosexuals at most; the women, oversexed, if bitter. Their frank and perverse eroticism had become a fashion, and they had a disconcerting habit of making a fortune in their movies, or ruining a generation that would otherwise have been quite sweet, and on the whole this was mysteriously, but not altogether surprisingly, bound up with the sick fantasies of Tennessee Williams.²⁹

The establishment of “Method Acting” gave way to the creation of stereotypes which brought about a strong critical reaction from the film and theatre community, a reaction which placed the Studio in the spotlight of controversy by 1956.

An example of this kind of controversial “cause célèbre” treatment given to the Studio by the press was found in a series of columns written by Dick Williams during January, 1957. A feud started when Williams first printed Tony Curtis' opinion:

You ask me about the Studio and I tell you I think it's disgraceful and I'm not ashamed to say it. I think the system is dishonest. When I was back in New York shooting *The Sweet Smell of Success* we had a lot of actors who were doing bits in the picture who were from the Studio.

²⁹ Ian Dallas, “Strasberg's Studio,” *Weekend Telegraph*, April 9, 1965, pp. 50-51.

They were all an involved, introspective lot. Mackendrick Well, he watched these people from the Actors Studio and then he turned to me and in that wonderful, clipped Scottish accent of his, he asked, ‘Tony, what are they doing? I’m damned if I know.’

“We watched these nuts. It’s a kind of acting that lacks anything. They claim they play the part after the author’s intent, but they’re really just reveling in their own kind of filth. They think in order to be a success like Brando you’ve got to be rude, slovenly and walk around in dirty clothes. They are all copycats. Their idea is to walk up to a man and say, ‘You know, I think you are a lousy actor.’ How dare anyone say that to another performer without knowing anything about him? But this is what the school is in New York.”³⁰

Evidently Curtis seemed to have had some problems with his fellow actors in the picture. It is interesting to note that Curtis referred to himself as a “performer” rather than an “actor.” Perhaps modesty kept him from saying “star.” But the fact is that he probably gave the best “performance” of his career in that film; and after reading the reviews that praised “his new departure from routine casting into high-caliber drama” he never openly attacked the Actors Studio again, but rather seemed to become one of its most covert converts.

Curtis’ attack in the Williams column was offset in an interview with Anthony Franciosa, who was then a “new boy in town” fresh from the stage version of *A Hatful of Rain* and about to start shooting on MGM’s *This Could Be The Night*. Franciosa made the usual comments:

The Actors Studio is possibly the most important training ground young actors have had in this country for the past fifty years. It is not a mystical, arty organization of T-shirted, inarticulate, unbathed youngsters desperately to be different, as so many Hollywoodites would seem to make it out to be. It is an intensely practical, above all, a hard-working organization.³¹

A couple of weeks later, in the same column, Eli Wallach attacked Curtis’ views as silly and “wide of the mark.” He proceeded to explain:

³⁰ Dick Williams, column, *Los Angeles Mirror-News*, January 3, 1957.

³¹ *Ibid.*

There is no method, take 10 teachers of acting and you have 10 methods. Actors through the years have evolved their own methods. Mumbling, scratching and slovenly dress are not the stamp of the Studio actor. Incidentally, Marlon Brando, Karl Malden, Kim Hunter, Jo Van Fleet and Eva Marie Saint all were impeccably dressed when they picked up their Oscars.”³²

Garfield wrote, in his dissertation:

The image of the Studio actor as scratcher/mumbler, a destroyer of beauty, and an unprofessional upstart was a gross distortion. The offensive incidents to Studio members were always among the more delectable morsels of theatre gossip. But in relation to the actualities of Studio practice and the attitudes of its individual members, it is apparent that the objectionable elements were blown out of proportion and unfairly taken for the norm.³³

This notion of the Studio actor as inarticulate, self-absorbed, and intractable was to a large extent related to the influence of Marlon Brando and James Dean. In the public mind, these were the quintessential Method actors—intense, instinctive, rebellious. Their unique portrayals of the tough yet somehow sensitive loner struck a sympathetic chord in the sensibilities of young actors, who came to interpret the mannerisms of their characterizations in such films as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *On the Waterfront*, *East of Eden*, and *Rebel Without a Cause* as the essentials of a new, gutty, “truthful” acting style.³⁴

[Strasberg] is constantly cautioning young Studio actors against the sort of naturalistic slouch that became part of the Brando-Dean image. That kind of casualness, he warns, is not to be equated with being real on stage. Such naturalness “is only the pose of reality.”³⁵

Strasberg’s comments should have been carefully considered by a young actor named Steven McHattie, who played the role of James Dean in a TV movie biography of the dead Theatrical Realism star. This production, made twenty years after Dean’s death, represents all the clichés about Dean, the Method, and the Studio neatly rolled into one package.

³² Dick Williams’ column, *Los Angeles Mirror-News*, January 31, 1957.

³³ Garfield, p. 224.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

At one point early in the film *McHattie* emerges from a southern California swimming pool and flatly announces that he is “going to New York to study the Method at the Actors Studio with Elia Kazan,” all said in one breath. The problem there lies not so much in the ludicrous expository dialogue of the script, but in the direction and performance of *McHattie*, which should be preserved as the best example of grotesque exaggerations of Method mannerisms on film. As such it is of great value not only to students of the Method, but to critical historians who may be trying to distill the elements of a style, for *McHattie* imitated the style of Dean’s three characterizations on screen without introducing any extraneous variables of his own or his interpretation of Dean’s off-screen real character. Seldom has a performance been so mimically perfect on the surface. *McHattie* employed all the external manifestations of exercises such as sensory and emotional memory without going through the process of the exercise. The effect is like watching a catalogue of poses, expressions, twitches, and mannerisms that have been carefully catalogued and filed away in a drawer labeled “Method Acting” and suddenly are put on exhibition.

But even back in the early fifties, as soon as the stereotype of the “anxious, itchy, dirty young man in a T-shirt” was established, it was widely copied and became devalued. Strasberg himself commented on this matter:

Columnists are beginning to say that you can’t get in anywhere except if you are a member of the Actors Studio. We know from bitter experience that the opposite is all too true, that while there are areas where what the Studio stands for is highly appreciated, there are many places where you have to be careful you don’t mention that you are a member of the Actors Studio, because if you do, you are not even considered.³⁶

Simon, in his essay “Spotlight on the Non-Woman,” tackled the female stereotype of the Actors Studio in the following manner:

³⁶ Hethmon, *Strasberg at the Actors Studio*, p. 37.

The original creation and proto-typical nonfemale of Broadway is the Actors Studio actress, very possibly the most discouraging, because it's the most influential of the phenomena under discussion. This is the female counterpart of Marlon Brando, Paul Newman and Ben Gazzara. But while these actors attempt to heighten their manliness, however misguidedly or even suspiciously, the Actors Studio actresses have systematically diminished and uprooted their womanliness. Though there are a good many egregious representatives of the type, such as Barbara Baxley, Shelley Winters, Joanne Woodward and Maureen Stapleton, the prototype would be a composite of Julie Harris, Geraldine Page and Kim Stanley. In all cases the strategy is in some way to sidestep attractive womanhood.

Thus Julie Harris refuses to grow up. Though old enough to portray youngish mothers, Miss Harris still plays adolescents or retarded young women with all their childish characteristics painstakingly preserved.

Geraldine Page, on the other hand, has turned woman into one big flutter. She is the perennial Tennessee Williams heroine—an epicene figure, the self-portrait of the author as a not so young woman.

Kim Stanley is to William Inge what Miss Page is to Williams—the typical heroine of another playwright who does not appreciate women as women.

It is disheartening to see how many younger actresses are ready to take over where the reigning trio leaves off—if it ever does. Barbara Cook, Sandy Dennis, Zohra Lampert, Shirley Knight, Elizabeth Ashley, Piper Laurie, Joan Hackett, Kathleen Widdoes, Ellen Holly, and many others are standing by.³⁷

But as misunderstood as it may have been, the image of the Method Actor profoundly affected Hollywood in the fifties. This can best be illustrated in a noticeable change of attitude among established motion picture personalities toward acting; in the selection of roles and the projection of their persona. The actor's public image consists of three basic elements: "appearance," "talent," and "attitudes." The Studio's undeniable notoriety exerted its influence on all three of these areas, creating, as they then said, "a new breed of actor" and forcing the older established "stars" into a reassessment not only of their work, but of their public persona. Up to that point Hollywood actors were under a strict cast system. At the top were the stars, followed by the featured players, character

³⁷ John Simon, *Private Screenings* (New York: Medallion Books, 1971), pp. 336-337.

actors, and so on. The attributes of each stratum were different; for instance, the public image of the stars was always tightly controlled by the studio. Stars had to appear not only at their best, but also at their most consistent. Dietrich should look like Dietrich regardless of her part; after all that's what the public was paying its money for, to see the star they already know, and to see her at her best. Cosmetic photography developed into an art that seems to be long lost today. Their "talent" was nurtured with private acting classes and a selection of roles that always fell within the established acting range, hence the so-called "star vehicles." Their "attitudes" were to be nonexistent in significant political and social matters. Superficiality became the trademark of the studio biographies; star interviews always being constructed around frivolities which did the job that most interested the studio—that of preserving the myth of the glamorous star as a beautiful, carefree, complacent deity.

Members of lower strata were not under such strict controls. A character actor's appearance was usually far from glamorous and became a valuable asset in the creation of a role. The talents of character actors, even when they were typecast, could often catapult them into the ranks of stardom (as in Bogart's case) and their social or political attitudes were of little concern as long as they were on time for the morning's shooting call; after all, no newspaper or magazine would care to do a piece on William Demarest's thoughts on "social issues."

But in the early fifties this cast system began to crumble because the studio system, which controlled their actors' "persona," had weakened due to the competition from television and the Supreme Court Consent Decree.

Soon the actor became a free agent, and his projection of a persona became his own responsibility. At the same time, the HUAC hearings were going on and the whole issue of actor's political attitudes burst on the scene like an inopportune "Jack in the Box." All of a sudden there were people who had, up to that point, only talked publicly about their cars, dogs, and jewelry, making dangerous pronouncements and accusations, and appearing in contempt of Congress. Everyone had to take sides and be clearly defined, and it was no longer

just a case of posing for a “Buy War Bonds” poster—it was a question of consciously projecting an attitude which up to that point the studios, in their roles of guardian angels, had done their best to prevent. So a few heads rolled. Columbia Pictures lost their investment in Larry Parks, who was one of their most promising stars, just to name one of the many whose careers came to an end through blacklisting, fear, and guilt through association.

Into this landscape comes the Actors Studio actor. He seizes the opportunity but is full of conflicts. He will not be a party to the preservation of the old cast system—after all, “a part is as big as you make it”—but he wants to be a star so badly that he signs up with a studio and is willing to go through the obsolete but still functioning star build-up process. He wants to be a star, but at the same time he repudiates all that stars stand for. He wants to express his attitudes, but the McCarthy-HUAC memories are too recent, and the sight of so many severed heads sobers him up. He wants to feel free to use his appearance as he sees fit: to change it when a role calls for it, to appear “unglamorous” in jeans and T-shirts, and to let a cigarette dangle from among a three-day stubble growth. He uses this as a way of projecting that sex appeal he knows is all too important to get on the road to stardom.

He wants to play good parts, parts that are no longer “good guy” parts. Parts that are contemporary, relevant; that do not belong in an established genre. He searches for a unique role.

So he changes the whole system. He changes the definition of “star.” A “star” now becomes first and above all an “actor.” He changes the concept of sex appeal from clean-up glamour to the earthiness of unkempt animal magnetism. His attitude is that of a rebel and he shatters the traditional Hollywood genres by playing antiheroes in films of unusual content. What he is doing is creating a new style of stardom—the Theatrical Realism star.

STARS AT THE ACTORS STUDIO

The March 16, 1956, cover of *Collier's* featured a picture of Marlon Brando scratching his neck in a sheepishly mischievous pose with the legend "Stars Are Born at the Actors Studio." Inside, there were photos of past, present, and future celebrities ranging from Helen Hayes to Marilyn Monroe in various states of engrossed concentration, listening to Lee Strasberg.

One would believe from the articles that all those famous faces were avid disciples of Strasberg, but nothing could be further from the truth. Most of them were "observers." The Actors Studio was run in a very peculiar fashion. Membership in the Studio was considered an honor and could be attained only by passing several auditions. If the actor showed promise and/or was very proficient at his craft, he was invited to join. There were no further obligations, dues, or attendance requirements from the members. All memberships were for life. This, in fact, meant that any young actor could just show up once and pass his auditions, never have anything further to do with the Actors Studio, and still be considered a member in good standing for the rest of his life. So it followed then that membership in the Studio did not mean that a person had done a lot of study or learned the craft there. All it meant was that the actor auditioned and was invited to join, since his work was considered to be of a standard worthy of the Studio.

The original purpose behind the creation of the Studio was to provide a forum where the actor could continue training without the pressures of performing for a paying audience in the cut-throat world of Broadway.

The meetings were held in a remodeled church on the West Side and consisted mainly of one or two scenes enacted by members, followed by a long discussion and critique by Strasberg. To help the reader understand how the Studio functioned for the average member, I quote here at length a Shelley Winters interview with Funke and Booth:

“After I signed at Universal and did *A Place in the Sun*, I was doing kind of jazzy gangster pictures—I always had the illusion that I did the same picture twenty times, just changing my costume. I said the same lines—just different scenery and costumes. But I came back to New York, and the Actors Studio was sort of just starting. I was here accidentally and I went to a performance of *Sundown Beach*, which Julie Harris was in.”

Interviewer: “Kazan directed?”

“Yes. And I was so excited when I saw it. I had casually known Kazan around New York when I was sort of a kid, and I asked him—I had heard that they had started this studio—and I asked him if I could come. He said, ‘Well, you can be an observer, but you really live in Hollywood; you have a contract.’ So I said I’ll come whenever I’m in New York. You know, it wasn’t like now that it takes five hours—I made about twenty trips this year—but then it was a big deal, you know, very expensive. But I was here for a week or so doing interviews and publicity and stuff, and I managed to go to about four or five sessions and I did a scene from *The Children’s Hour*. Kazan had set a very interesting problem, I remember—*Hedda Gabler*, with various suggestions, different themes, the same play with different themes. Kazan set it for three directors (Marlon Brando directed one of them) and it was like . . . up to that point I never really believed I was an actress. It didn’t matter what they said to me about *A Place in the Sun*. I thought it was a fluke, that it was the publicity jazz and the blonde hair and bosom. And up to that point I thought it was an accident. I still had several years off the contract to finish. But from then on, I came here as soon as I could. Every time I got through with a picture I’d be here. As soon as I could, I would come and live at a hotel and I’d go to the Studio. Then, as soon as my seven years were up, I started to look for a play to do. But I—I only got into the Studio the year after *A Hatful of Rain*. I was an observer for six years.³⁸

Shelley Winters is representative of many actors who abandoned Hollywood in the fifties and set up residence in New York to attend the Actors Studio and act in the legitimate theatre. Another lady who scored highly on Broadway after walking out on Hollywood was Anne Bancroft, who had made many “B” pictures before she played Gittel Mosca on stage in *Two for the Seesaw* under the direction of Arthur Penn. Bancroft became an active member of the Studio, spending two afternoons a week with Lee Strasberg during the theatrical runs of *Seesaw* and, later, *The Miracle Worker*. Jane Fonda, Warren Beatty,

³⁸ Funke and Booth, *Actors Talk about Acting*, p. 146.

Anthony Perkins, Dorothy McGuire, Montgomery Clift, and, of course, Marilyn Monroe were among the many who went to the Studio after they had established screen careers. Of course, in the early days of the Studio there were no Hollywood celebrities around. It was not until the mid-fifties that the work of its members was broadly seen and acclaimed, first on television and later in films.

Garfield wrote about the pilgrimage of Hollywood celebrities to the Actors Studio:

As the Studio's reputation in theatrical and film circles grew, it began to draw interested onlookers, curious to see what all the excitement was about. The "guest" actors who came to observe and work at the Studio, included such figures as Shelley Winters, June Havoc, Dane Clark, Dorothy McGuire, Hurd Hatfield, Anthony Quinn, Yul Brynner, and Zero Mostel, were followed by many other Hollywood "stars" who made it part of any trip to New York to see what was going on at the Studio.³⁹

As fame gave way to notoriety and controversy the original concept of providing a private arena for the training of professional actors seemed to be at odds with what appeared to be one of the best public relations campaigns in show business history designed to turn the Actors Studio into a household word:

Columnists did their share to keep the public abreast of the latest goings-on at the Studio. Celebrity "drop-ins" . . . by such personages as Grace Kelly, Joan Crawford, Jerry Lewis, Helen Hayes, or Laurence Olivier, were good copy. A notoriety of sorts began to develop around the workshop as many of these visitors offered their opinions about what they had seen and heard there. Often these guests (and sometimes the members themselves) would tell anecdotes about the Studio, offer evaluations of the workshop, or conduct spirited defenses of attacks on it. All this was picked up by others who had never been to the Studio and repeated and enlarged upon with varying degrees of awareness of the facts.⁴⁰

³⁹ Garfield, "History of the Actors Studio," p. 141.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

Finally, “it got to the point where the members began to object to the ‘too much casual dropping in’ of observers a la Rock Hudson, Eva Gabor, etc., etc.”⁴¹ and the Studio adopted an official policy of banning reporters and discouraging all articles and interviews. It had always been Studio policy to keep its doors closed to agents, casting directors, producers, or any individuals in an immediate position to give actors work.⁴² This was done in an effort to create a non-competitive development of the actors’ craft, not their careers.

When Mrs. Samuel Goldwyn, who had given the Studio a substantial donation, wanted to attend the acting sessions and “see the people” Strasberg asked “What for?” She told him, “Well, we’re casting now. It’ll be good for the people.” He told her, “You can sit outside in the hall and watch the people. But I’m sorry, I cannot let you into the place. I cannot let the people get the feeling that they’re being watched for casting. I cannot permit this kind of thing in any way to contaminate our work.”⁴³

But even if the Studio officially began to shun publicity, there was little that could be done to stop the endless stream of articles that fueled the controversy. Bolton, a columnist for the *Morning Telegraph* wrote:

There seems to be a minor but thus far unreported civil war . . . between the adherents of the Actors Studio and the old line producers and players of New York’s legitimate theatre. . . . Most of the producers of record will tell you out loud that never again will they hire a player who believes in the “method.”

Recently a young and rising “method” actor was engaged for one of the largest TV shows. At one point in the rehearsals the director said: “at this point you turn right, hesitate a moment, then go to the window and look out.” “What is my motivation?” the young actor demanded in a surly voice. “Your paycheck!” snapped the director. Very little trouble was had with the boy after that. Also, recently a leading man on Broadway said to members of his cast: “It was just wonderful being in ----- [sic] because we never gave the same performance twice.” He failed to explain that this had had a violent result in the continuity and pace of his play and that

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 141.

⁴² Ibid., p. 142.

⁴³ Ibid.

audiences often wondered what in Heaven was going on up there on the stage.

* * *

It is the belief of directors and producers who have had experience with “method” players that their chief possession is selfishness and that they do not care what their maverick decisions have an affect on fellow players.

The “method” players on the male side may be discerned by their uniform; soiled dungarees, tight T-shirts, worn with a tendency to scratch. On the female side; unwashed faces, moccasins, worn with a tendency to scratch. If you don’t scratch you aren’t “method.”⁴⁴

The high point of this controversy was undoubtedly reached with what one must assume was an announcement made in jest of a new organization called AFWASG, which appeared in Hyams’ column:

An informal group of film stars calling themselves AFWASG—Actors Fed Up With Actors Studio Graduates—has asked us to write an open letter to the Actors Studio in New York protesting “unfair practices” of said graduates when appearing in films with AFWASGs.

The film actors contend that playing scenes with Actors Studio graduates is impossible. “Actors Studio people never give anything of themselves in a scene,” a famous comedy star said, “they just play the scene as if they’re the only ones in it and it’s impossible for another actor to get a reaction he can play to. They force you to play to them.”

A film personality who has consistently been one of the top box-office stars said it was impossible to rehearse with Actors Studio people. “They don’t stick to the lines,” he complained. “They say anything that comes to mind leaving you to try and find your cues by guesswork.”

Just Mumbles

An actor who is now in a film with a prominent Studio graduate said it was impossible to rehearse with him because “during rehearsals he gives nothing—just mumbles. He doesn’t even attempt to project. But during the performance he blasts and throws every one else off.”

A young film star asked us to be sure and include her complaint that Actors Studio people take themselves too seriously as actors. She

⁴⁴ Whitney Bolton, “An Important Split in Ranks of Drama Folk,” *New York Morning Telegraph*, July 12, 1955.

said that acting is fun—not a religious crusade—she’s tired of “serious introverts who think so highly of their talents that they knock you over reaching for the salt rather than using words to ask for it.”

A complaint registered with us by three well-known film players concerns the methods used by some Studio people to get “in the mood” of the scene. “They do push-ups, walk around the set in circles, pound tables, and pull the wings off flies,” we were told. “They do everything but communicate with other players.”

The Classic Story

A classic story about Actors Studio people—and one that is told gleefully wherever members of AFWASG meet—concerns the young actor who recently completed a war film.

Between takes the technical adviser of the film, a man with five years of front-line experience, told the other actors stories about his experiences. He said, “There’s a remarkable feeling of camaraderie at the front. You know that the man next to you might be the one who can save your life in a few moments or he might be dead. I have never felt such a wonderful spirit.”

The young actor, who was listening intently, got up from the group and shrugged. “huh,” he said, “that’s how all of us at the Studio feel.”⁴⁵

This case underlined the rivalry between New York and Hollywood which, when coupled by the sensation created by members of the Studio in motion pictures, brought out in many Hollywoodians their deepest prejudices. Aside from the many verbal attacks there were accusations of favoritism of Actors Studio members. It was no secret that directors such as Kazan, Lumet, and Ritt preferred working with actors whose style was similar to their own. If one examines the casts of films these directors made in the late fifties one will find evidence that, if there were no such thing as an Actors Studio clique, there were great bonds of affinity between its members. These bonds were so strong that when an actor broke them, or ignored them, he came under fire from his colleagues. Jack Garfein commented with some bitterness on the career of Steve McQueen...

⁴⁵ Joe Hyams, “Film Stars Call Studio Grads ‘Unfair’” *New York Herald Tribune*, August 3, 1956.

...who was helped by all of us on his way up, but when he reached a certain status he forgot about how he got there, cut himself off and concentrated on doing stupid action pictures because that's where the money was. On the other hand, Ben Gazzara is a man who could have done that at one point in his life, but he kept his integrity and couldn't work for such a long time that his career was destroyed. He ended up on TV when he lost his hopes.⁴⁶

Even in the 1970's there were many advantages for those who hung around the Studio. In a recent interview Elia Kazan described how he cast Steve Railsback in one of the lead roles in *The Visitors*:

I heard about him at the Actors Studio. He was not a member yet, he was a young man trying to get into it. He'd never played professionally in either the movies or the theater. But he was described to me and his description sounded like what I wanted.⁴⁷

In press releases for the film Railsback was compared with Brando, Dean, and Beatty, which made Kazan look as if he were a factory that brought out, every couple of years, a new model of the "tortured angry young man." Unfortunately it is not known if Railsback would have fit the bill since *The Visitors* had a very limited run in New York and never was released throughout the United States.

The epitome of the Actors Studio's period of notoriety was personified in Marilyn Monroe's association with the organization. A great deal of mockery and sneering was displayed as some saw the relationship as Strasberg's challenge for the ultimate vindication of "The Method." If he could make Marilyn Monroe act, then the Method could work miracles. Yet Monroe was no stranger to the Method. In 1947 she had taken lessons at the Actors Lab in Hollywood under Morris Carnovsky and had "first encountered the fundamental ideas of Stanislavski, though the experience had no visible effects of her talents at the time."⁴⁸ In 1951 she took lessons from Michael Chekhov, who considered her

⁴⁶ Personal interview in May 1972.

⁴⁷ Elia Kazan in *Andy Warhol's Interview*, October 1972, p. 17.

⁴⁸ Garfield, p. 172.

“an actress of unusual sensitivity,”⁴⁹ and in 1954, while attending a dinner party in New York, she met Cheryl Crawford, who took an interest in her acting aspirations and suggested the Actors Studio and a meeting with Strasberg.⁵⁰

Kazan, who had known the actress in California, also recommended that she study with Strasberg and arranged for them to get together. Before long, she began private lessons in Strasberg’s home.

After this preliminary “kid-gloves” treatment to reassure her, Miss Monroe began to attend Strasberg’s private classes at the Malin Studios and to observe at the Studio. She soon presented her first piece of work in the private classes: Molly Bloom’s monologue from James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Encouraged by her progress, she subsequently worked on Brieux’s *Damaged Goods* with Delos V. Smith, Jr., on Lorna from *Golden Boy* with Phillip Roth, on Holly Golightly from *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* with Michael Pollard, and on Blanche from *A Streetcar Named Desire* with John Strasberg.

At the Studio, Miss Monroe was shy and diffident. . . . Afterwards [she] would go to Strasberg’s private classes and usually sit through two of them. Earnest in her desire to learn and grow as an artist, Miss Monroe would sit quietly among the Studio members and eagerly absorb the work going on. In Strasberg’s words, “She had a luminous quality—a combination of wistfulness, radiance, yearning—that set her apart and yet made everyone wish to be part of it. . . .” Photographs of her at the Studio are startling confirmation of that description. Sitting there, with no special makeup and no special lighting, she stands out from the group as if a nimbus shone about her.

When she gained a certain confidence through her work in the private classes, Strasberg asked her to prepare a scene for the Studio itself. . . . Strasberg asked Maureen Stapleton to work with her, [and] the two actresses . . . finally settled on Eugene O’Neill’s *Anna Christie*.

Miss Monroe worked diligently in the role of Anna Christie. Over the next several weeks, she studied the play with the help of her husband, Arthur Miller. They analyzed it together and even acted out sections, with Miller taking the part of Old Chris. She had fears about remembering the lines, never having had to learn so many at one time as a movie star. Miss Stapleton suggested the old device of writing out the lines in long hand. The closer they came to the performance, the more she would forget, so Miss Stapleton recommended leaving the script on the table during the scene. If worse came to worse, she would have it there to consult. Miss Monroe said, “If I do that now, I’ll do it the rest of my life.” When they

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid.

finally performed the scene, she was word perfect; it was the first time they had gone through the entire piece without a single mistake.

Miss Monroe took a special interest in the physical production of the scene. She knew a great deal about lighting and sets and was very careful about how they were arranged. She brought empty bottles and all sort of props from her apartment for the scene. The performance date was cancelled again and again because of last-minute nerves, but finally set in February of 1956. The actresses wrote other people's names in the Studio scene book so that the session at which they performed would not turn into a circus, but it was crowded anyway. Before they went in they eased their nerves with coffee laced with Jack Daniels. The scene played smoothly, with Miss Stapleton easing a painfully nervous Miss Monroe through her tentative moments. The Studio was genuinely impressed with the actress's sensitivity. Afterwards, Strasberg was very gentle with her, praising her courage and making the effort of appearing in public before such a highly critical audience for the first time. In his recollection, Miss Monroe stole the scene from the highly talented Miss Stapleton by virtue of the delicate tremulousness of her acting.

The scene from *Anna Christie* was the only work Miss Monroe ever did at the Studio, but her involvement with and support of both the workshop and Strasberg were to continue to grow.⁵¹

By the time Monroe reported for work on *Bus Stop* there was talk of Strasberg's Svengali-like influence on the sex symbol who would not make any moves without her mentor's advice. But when the film was released, in 1956, everyone took notice of the profound changes in Monroe's performance. Gow wrote:

A glamour girl had been transmuted—an actress was at hand. [Monroe gave] the performance of her career, superior by far to anything else in the two dozen movies she made during the fifties, her interpretation of Cherie, a floozy with ideals above her immediate station . . . was quaint, touching, forlorn, sadly funny to just the right degree, and so genuinely felt as to rank among the best performances of the decade.⁵²

Having received notices such as these, Monroe consolidated her plans toward being considered a serious actress when she created her own production

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 173-16.

⁵² Gordon Gow, *Hollywood in the Fifties* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1971), p. 146.

company and went to London, as the Mecca of stiff-upper-lip culture, to film *The Prince and the Showgirl* (1957) with Laurence Olivier as director and co-star, taking along Paula Strasberg as her private acting coach. Mrs. Strasberg's presence during the production led to increased friction between Monroe and Olivier and generated a good deal of publicity about the Method and the Studio, which was hardly welcomed this time. Alpert wrote that, during the shooting:

[Olivier] had to contend with Paula as well as Miss Monroe's temperament when he directed her. . . . [He] conceived an intense hatred of Paula, and was contemptuous of the hand-wringing-exercises she had Marilyn do before each of her takes. Paula was not in the least shy of the actor and director, and told him once that his performance was too artificial.

Strasberg was equally critical of Olivier. "He never let Marilyn Monroe find her performance." she complained, after the film opened to less-than-glowing reviews. "He gave her orders and expected her to obey. He played the Regent too coldly in the early scenes, and this made a romantic atmosphere unconvincing later. Larry's conception of a good performance is an artificial performance. That's exactly what we thought wouldn't come over on the screen."⁵³

The relationship with the Strasbergs continued throughout Monroe's career and was probably the most evident in that "roman-a-clef" of Theatrical Realism *The Misfits* (1961), into which Arthur Miller "smuggled high-toned coded trivia of movies within movies"⁵⁴ and created a tailor-made role for his actress/wife.

In late 1959 a projected television version of Somerset Maugham's *Rain* was announced, with Monroe in the role of Sadie Thompson under Strasberg's direction. Strasberg had often compared her to Jeanne Eagels, and now the opportunity had finally come to realize the reincarnation. Unfortunately, NBC

⁵³ Hollis Albert, "Autocrat of the Sweat Shirt School," *Esquire*, October 1961, p. 183.

⁵⁴ Andrew Dowdy, *The Films of the Fifties* (New York: William Morrow and company, 1973), p. 199.

would not go along with Strasberg as sole director and the project was never realized.⁵⁵

The Strasbergs' association with Monroe received its most severe criticism not from the journalists, who played around with the new stereotype of the dumb blonde bent on an intellectual binge, but from insiders at the Studio who questioned the motives of the Strasbergs. Alpert reported:

Miss Monroe had made many dubious about her ultimate ability. And it is because Strasberg has almost literally adopted her, as well as championed her, that some former Studio members have become disenchanted. One gifted young director claims that a change in the Studio atmosphere resulted when Marilyn Monroe came in, wafting what he feels is phony Hollywood glamour. "Some girls who used to wear slacks and baggy sweaters," said this director, "now attend dressed like Jacqueline Kennedy, their hair done up in the latest Italian styles."⁵⁶

Monroe's attempts to place herself at the center of the New York intelligentsia of the late fifties were fully realized with her marriage to Arthur Miller, probably the most symbolic union in the history of the American performing arts. The sociological overtones of this marriage (which Miller only slightly discussed in *After the Fall*) boggle the mind of any serious student of the period, since it represented (among many other things) America's yearning for the cultural respectability that resulted in Theatrical Realism.

Marilyn Monroe never became an official member of the Actors Studio, although she did do an audition scene. This may have been due, in part, to pressure within the organization and the old New York vs. Hollywood syndrome, or probably because Strasberg felt that Marilyn needed a goal and with constant attention and preparation she could eventually present another scene. Others saw things differently, Marilyn was being exploited only for publicity purposes. Nunnally Johnson commented that Monroe "was an asset to the Strasbergs and

⁵⁵ Garfield, p. 176.

⁵⁶ Alpert, p. 184.

that whole New York crowd. They're like most people in show business; they're not above showmanship."⁵⁷

Whether the Actors Studio/Monroe connection was merely good showmanship on the part of the Strasbergs is a considerable hypothesis, but a highly doubtful one. What can be categorically stated is that on the part of Monroe she truly believed in the contributions the Strasbergs made to her growth as an actress and proved to be eternally thankful. After delivering the eulogy at her funeral, Strasberg found that Marilyn Monroe had given him the largest bequest in her will (sixty thousand dollars) and all her personal belongings, which he auctioned at an Actors Studio benefit, except for her white piano, which he kept.

Gow wrote that Marilyn Monroe:

Signified a demarcation between the old Hollywood and the new American cinema, in which "Star" would no longer be either a guarantee of financial returns or a token of esteem. Already many a celebrity of the movies had let it be known that actor or actress was a preferable term, implying talent, whereas "Star" can mean nothing more than magnetism. Marilyn Monroe . . . let us know that, even for a "Star," the dividing line between acting and being could disappear.⁵⁸

ACTORS STUDIO PRODUCTIONS

The original intent in the creation of the Actors Studio was to provide a training ground for actors away from the pressures of the commercial theatre. Although Kazan claimed that the Studio never had goals of becoming a producing entity, such as the Group Theatre had been in the thirties, the organization repeatedly dabbled in all areas of production, from plays and films to television programs.

⁵⁷ Ezra Goodman, *The Fifty Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), p. 233.

⁵⁸ Gow, p. 147.

It is not difficult to surmise why this paradox lies at the heart of the Studio when one considers the fact that when the organization was created, its co-founders (Kazan and Crawford) were already successfully established in the commercial theatre. They did not need to open an avenue into Broadway; this they already had. What they needed was to maintain a flow of raw material through this avenue in the form of actors and writers—talent which they could use in their own productions. But the Studio, like all organizations composed of highly motivated individuals, gathered its own momentum (especially after Strasberg came on the scene) and was eager to establish its own group identity and have its work seen and acclaimed. A conflict of interests arose between those who meant to keep the Studio as an actor's workshop and those who saw in it the potential for the creation of a National Theatre. Kazan led in supporting the former proposition, while Strasberg championed the latter. This conflict reached its moment of truth when, in 1961 Lincoln Center made overtures to the Studio regarding the creation of its repertory company. As Gussow reported in the *New York Times*:

One crucial argument with the Studio is whether to go public. It was a major disappointment to Mr. Strasberg when Mr. Kazan agreed in 1961 to be co-director of the first Lincoln Center Theatre and decided not to take the Studio with him as the resident company. To show its production possibilities, in 1963 the Studio staged a season of six plays on Broadway, with mixed artistic results and a financial loss of around \$450,000.

Mr. Kazan is among those who believe that the Studio should remain a studio, but Mr. Strasberg still hopes that the Studio will also become the foundation for a national theatre. Sitting in his office, he remembers the famous stars who have studied with him and he sees the continuing parade of eager new actors.

"I feel that the actors' work should be shared," he said, "and I want it only on the top level. We're the only organization that could do the kind of theatre that people dream about."⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Gussow, "Actors Studio Thrives at 25 . . . er 26," p. 60.

The production record of the Actors Studio's first year of existence is indicative that the organization at the time was indeed geared toward "sharing the actors' work" with the general public. On September 7, 1948, the first play prepared by the Actors Studio was presented for public approval at the Belasco Theatre. It was Bessie Breuer's *Sundown Beach*, directed by Kazan and featuring a cast which included Nehemiah Persoff, Martin Balsam, Steve Hill, Julie Harris, Kathleen McGuire, Alex Nicol, and Cloris Leachman. The play received poor notices and closed in a matter of days, leaving a feeling of uncertainty among Studio members. Kazan, ever so busy, had another of his productions opening within a month, this one totally independent from the Studio,⁶⁰ yet in the interval, on Sunday, September 27, 1948, the first hour long program of the Actors Studio television series was presented on the ABC network.

The idea for a television show was suggested to Kazan by Dorothy Willard, who persuaded him that a series emanating from the creative forces in the Studio and bearing the imprimatur of the workshop would be an excellent means of support for the organization. The Studio was to receive ten percent of the gross monies paid for the dramatic series

The first Actors Studio television program was a Tennessee Williams one-act play, *Portrait of a Madonna*, starring Jessica Tandy and directed by Hume Cronyn. A foreshadowing of his then current hit, *Streetcar*, it had originally been done at the Actors' Lab in Hollywood in 1946. In that production, Miss Tandy had played the central character, Miss Lucretia Collins, a figure resembling Blanche Dubois in certain respects. In fact, she was first considered for the part of Blanche when Kazan heard reports of her performance in the earlier role. Her television performance, warmly applauded by the critics, got the Studio's series off to an auspicious start.

The Actors Studio television series, a pioneering experiment in national "coaxial-cable" broadcasting, produced fifty-six shows that consistently received excellent reviews. Mostly adaptations of short stories, each program was rehearsed by the Studio members at the workshop for two weeks before being broadcast live

Most of the shows were directed for the Studio by David Pressman, Martin Ritt, and Daniel Mann. ABC assigned Ralph Warren and then Alex Segal to do the television directing. When the series was switched to CBS in its second year, Yul Brynner, then a staff director

⁶⁰ *Love Life*, by Alan Jay Lerner, opened on October 7, 1948, at the 46th Street Theatre.

there, handled several of the programs. CBS had picked up the show after it finished its splendid first season by winning the Peabody Award

Actors Studio TV came to an end in March 1950. In the spring of the following year, an attempt was made to revive it under the sponsorship of Elliott Roosevelt and the playwright Richard Harrity. The new program, which was to be produced under the personal supervision of Cheryl Crawford, was to feature original scripts written especially for the series by, among others, Clifford Odets, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and Joseph L. Mankiewicz (who had won an Oscar that year for *All About Eve*). The project never got off the ground. With the conclusion of its brief adventure into television production, the Studio ended the only period of sustained financial stability it was to know in its entire quarter-century history.⁶¹

The success of the short lived television series is extremely significant because it created an ensemble of acting, writing, and directing personnel which included most of the major figures of Theatrical Realism. In a way it defined the stylistic movement and established Kazan's position as Theatrical Realism's father figure (supposedly all the programs were created under his supervision)⁶² and became a major factor that brought Lee Strasberg's involvement with the Studio.⁶³

The second year of the Studio's existence saw the actual formulation of its policy in matters regarding production. As Garfield wrote:

Kazan called a meeting at the beginning of the second year to explain fully what he had in mind for the Studio. Though he understood that many of the actors really did not want just to take classes, he made it clear they were not going to be turned into a company. The Studio was going to remain a workshop, a talent pool, and a place where actors could come and do whatever they want. There was an implication that individual projects might occasionally evolve into a production, but the Studio was not going to have a company; it was not going to become a theatre. Needless to say, many of the actors were deeply disappointed.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Garfield, pp. 101-104.

⁶² "Top Legit, Film Talent for the New Actors Studio T.V.," *Variety*, May 9, 1951, p. 2.

⁶³ According to Garfield (p. 101), the earliest documents associating Lee Strasberg's name with the Actors Studio were the notes from a production meeting of the television series dated August 12, 1948.

⁶⁴ Garfield, pp. 104-105.

But the Actors Studio continued to be involved in theatrical productions in the coming years in a manner which Kazan and its members found to be most beneficial. The Studio became a proving ground for new actors and new materials, as works in progress were presented and developed within its safe confines. Once these productions were considered to be ready for public presentation and financial backing had been secured, they opened on Broadway without any official connection to the Studio. Three notable cases of successful stage productions that found their inception at the Studio were Tennessee Williams' *The Rose Tattoo*, Calder Willingham's *End as a Man*, and Michael Gazzo's *A Hatful of Rain*; all of which were filmed in the mid-fifties.

Garfield stated that *The Rose Tattoo* was "a project that started with actors working among themselves and then came to fruition under director Daniel Mann."⁶⁵ The play was produced in 1950 on Broadway by Cheryl Crawford and featured Maureen Stapleton and Eli Wallach, who first came to the attention of Williams and Crawford in their Studio work.

Calder Willingham's *End as a Man* dealt with a Southern military academy and the brutality inherent in a system that condoned sadism. The play was directed by Jack Garfein who, at the time, was one of Strasberg's most promising protégés. In the beginning the production was an obscure effort presented off Broadway.

There were no players of "solid reputation" in *End as a Man* when it began its run In fact, only one of the actors was known at all. This was Frank M. Thomas, a veteran of early television and of numerous westerns. As Stuart Little remarks, "When the play opened on September 19, 1953, Thomas was the only actor anyone had ever heard of. Today, he is the only obscure name in the cast." For in that company of what one critic called "one of the most fascinating displays of unknown talent I have ever seen" were Pat Hingle, Anthony Franciosa, Albert Salmi, Arthur Storch, William Smithers, Paul Richards, Mark Richman, and most notably, Ben Gazzara.

The overall reaction to *End as a Man* was distinctly favorable though many reviewers noted structural flaws in the play's second act.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

The response to the acting was unqualified praise. The production made a star of Gazzara, whose portrayal of the calculatingly sadistic Jocko De Paris received special notice. The critical acclaim, however, was as much for the ensemble work of the actors as for individual performances.

Gazzara began receiving offers from Hollywood, a number of them channeled through Strasberg, but turned them down in favor of continuing his work at the Studio. At the time, he explained his decision as a case of self-interest rather than as a grand gesture toward the Studio. “When I work with Strasberg here, I receive a more permanent value. I’ll be better off becoming a real good actor for the rest of my life than zooming around in Technicolor as long as my profile holds up.” (Kazan, shortly thereafter, cast him as Brick in the stage production of Williams’ *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.) Several years later, he made his film debut in *The Strange One*, the motion picture version of *End as a Man*, also directed by Garfein. Six of the nine other Studio members of the original off-Broadway cast were also used in the movie, which was billed as “the first picture filmed entirely by a cast and technicians from the Actors Studio, New York.”

Gazzara, Franciosa, and Richards, three of the actors who appeared in *End as a Man*, also participated in what is perhaps the single most famous project in the Studio’s history, *A Hatful of Rain*. An electrifying instance of what the Studio was capable of, this production more than any other, dramatized the virtues of the close cooperation that playwright, director, and actors achieved in the Studio work process, and provided grounds for the expectation of outstanding things to come.

The conception and development of Michael V. Gazzo’s drama have long been misrepresented in accounts and articles about the Method and the Studio that touch on his play. Almost from its inception, the play was supposed to have been improvised into existence. Gazzo simply having set down the words of actors ad-libbing situations he set up for them In rightfully asserting his sole authorship, [Gazzo] was unfortunately giving the impression that improvisation played no role whatsoever in the work on the play. This, also, was not the case; improvisations were used. They were not used to create the play, but they were used to help bring it to life.⁶⁶

A Hatful of Rain was directed on stage by Frank Corsaro and featured Shelley Winters in her first big “Method” stage performance along with Anthony Franciosa and Henry Silva, who later recreated their performances in Fred Zinnemann’s film (Eva Marie Saint played the Shelley Winters role on the screen).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-153.

The Studio continued along the same lines until the end of the fifties, concentrating on the development of works-in-progress and experimental projects never intended for public presentation but which occasionally evolved into commercial productions. These included a short film directed by Paul Newman based on Anton Chekhov's dramatic monologue "On the Harmfulness of Tobacco,"⁶⁷ a full length play version of Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* by Fred Sadoff, a partial dramatization of Steinback's *East of Eden* (which eventually became a film by Kazan), and a large segment of Brecht's *Mother Courage*.

In 1961 Kazan was invited by Robert Whitehead to head the forthcoming Lincoln Center Theatre and "the expectation was that he could somehow effectuate the absorption of the Studio into the operation."⁶⁸ This never came to pass for a series of reasons, which are not clear even to this date. "Kazan says there was a feeling among the powers at the Center that the Studio was 'a cliquish thing.'"⁶⁹ and, forced to make a choice, he resigned from the position in the Board of Directors of the Studio, in May, 1962, to fully devote himself to the Lincoln Center Repertory Theatre.⁷⁰ Alpert provided a reason for the split with Strasberg:

Why was Strasberg, the world's best known teacher of acting, passed over? The answer probably can be found among the professional producers and directors who work regularly on Broadway. "Among our professional theatre elements," a noted Broadway director said, "there is distinct resentment to Studio work that many of us think has become a little sick. The Method actor, with his self-absorption and identifying symptoms, does not always compensate for these annoyances with an accompanying talent."⁷¹

⁶⁷ This film actually played a brief engagement in New York. Newman commented on it: "I did that as an exercise for myself, really. I did it mostly to see whether I could handle a camera and direct actors. It didn't turn out as successfully as I would have liked it to, although it got a very good review in *The New York Times*."

⁶⁸ Garfield, "History of the Actors Studio," p. 301.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Sally Hammond and Norman Poirer, "Actors Studio 'Divorce': Will Kazan Get the Kids?" *New York Post*, May 29, 1962.

⁷¹ Alpert, "Autocrat of the Sweat Short School," p. 184.

Another comment that may have been influential in keeping the Studio out of Lincoln Center came from the mouth of Vivian Beaumont, who “made statements at the board meeting to the effect that she hoped the theatre she was supporting would not house such sordid American playwrights as Tennessee Williams, among others.”⁷²

With Kazan’s resignation from the Studio a “talent raid [was] foreseen”⁷³ on Studio actors, as he set out to form a thirty-five member company. Kazan told the press at the time that he “hoped to sign many Studio people.”⁷⁴ When Shelley Winters was asked if she...

...thought Studio actors would join the Lincoln group, she said Kazan had already invited four or five people. “They said they would if it didn’t interfere with their Studio work. Our first loyalties and obligations are to Lee Strasberg and I speak for everyone to a man,” she said. Strasberg, and Cheryl Crawford are now the guiding genius in the Studio.⁷⁵

The Studio, feeling that it had received a slap in the face, retaliated by forming a production company of its own. Garfield described how this came about:

At the final session of the 1961-1962 season on June 12th, Rip Torn read to the assembled members the statement which the Members Committee had released to the press the day before. It announced the election of himself and Miss [Geraldine] Page to the Studio’s Board of Directors; the establishment of the Actors Studio Theatre as a legal fact, with Strasberg as its artistic director, Miss Crawford as its executive producer, and Roger L. Stevens as its general administrator; the formation of a Production Board for the Theatre to include Edward Albee, Anne Bancroft, Frank Corsaro, Paul Newman, Arthur Penn, Fred Stewart, and Michael Wager, and the selection of the Theatre’s initial productions for

⁷² Garfield, p. 300.

⁷³ “Elia Kazan Resigns from Post at Actors Studio,” *New York World Telegraph*, May 28, 1962.

⁷⁴ Hammond and Poirer, “Actors Studio ‘Divorce’: Will Kazan Get the Kids?”

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

the premier season of 1962-1963; June Havoc's *Marathon '33* and Edward Albee's first three-act play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?*⁷⁶

Thus, the Actors Studio embarked on a great adventure. Dreams of expansion and even more fame were contemplated. Ironically enough, when this expansion took place the vogue for Theatrical Realism was already dying among the stage and screen people, yet the Actors Studio tried to expand in two directions, both of which failed. The first was the creation of the Actors Studio Theatre, and the second was the founding of the Actors Studio West.

The first offering of the Actors Studio Theatre was neither Albee's nor Havoc's play, but a production of Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*, which opened at the Hudson Theatre in the spring of 1963 with Betty Field, Jane Fonda, Geraldine Page, Ben Gazzara, Pat Hingle, Geoffrey Horne, Richard Thomas, and Franchot Tone in the cast.

The 1964 season offered three more productions,⁷⁷ and saw an announcement of a deal between the Studio Theatre and the Ely Landau Company to film twelve of its productions for television and theatrical distribution.⁷⁸ The first and only production that was filmed under this agreement was Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*,⁷⁹ which went to the London stage after receiving a very mixed reaction at home. In London the production was panned and became one of the greatest fiascos in recent theatre history. The Studio Theatre soon dispersed after it had suffered catastrophes both at home and abroad.

The Actors Studio West was founded in 1966 under the direction of Jack Garfein. The event was covered widely in the local press as a landmark—why not? With a star-studded list of patrons and the remodeled mansion of Will

⁷⁶ Garfield, p. 319.

⁷⁷ The productions were *Baby Want a Kiss* by James Costigan, with Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, and Costigan in the cast, directed by Frank Corsaro; *Blues for Mr. Charlie* by James Baldwin, directed by Burgess Meredith; and *The Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov, directed by Lee Strasberg, with Geraldine Page, Kim Stanley, and Shirley Knight (Sandy Dennis in London).

⁷⁸ "Ely Landau, Actors Studio in 2-Ply Tie," *Daily Variety*, October 20, 1964.

⁷⁹ For a detailed discussion of this production see Chapter II, Film and Theatre, 48-50.

Rogers as its headquarters, the new Studio branch seemed to have been destined to succeed.

Earlier, in 1959, Sanford Meisner headed out West to teach private acting classes at the request of Richard Boone, and this was viewed as an attempt of the New Yorkers to expand their influence in Hollywood. Hal Humphrey wrote an article with the headline, “Can Hollywood Survive the Method?”⁸⁰ That question had already been answered by 1966 when the Actors Studio West came into being. It was a categorical “yes.” Hollywood had already survived and recovered from the “Method” and Theatrical Realism had died as a dramatic style, mainly because Broadway had taken another turn, and the style’s successful dramatists were no longer writing or being produced.

The Actors Studio West was soon involved in controversy—not the polemical aesthetic debate that catapulted its parent organization into fame, but internal disagreements as to which direction the organization should take. The Studio became involved in producing several plays at the University of California at Los Angeles, and this venture proved to be a critical and financial failure. There were widespread accusations that the Studio was caught up in the “success syndrome” and was only concerned with big name actors and playwrights, shunning the work of its less known members.⁸¹ If this was indeed true, then the Studio had come to negate its “raison d’être,” since it was no longer a place where the actor could grow and train away from the pressures of the commercial theatre.

Though both the New York and Hollywood Studios are still in existence today they hold no “magic glow” in the eyes of producers or Hollywood hopefuls, as was the case in the late fifties. Their dreams of expanding were cut short by their close identification with a dramatic style that had fallen out of fashion.

⁸⁰ Hal Humphrey, “Can Hollywood Survive the Method?” *Los Angeles Mirror-News*, August 11, 1959, p. B-2.

⁸¹ Harvey Perr, Article in the Calendar Section, *The Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 1968.

KAZAN, STRASBERG, AND THE ACTORS STUDIO DRIFT APART

The release of *Splendor in the Grass* in 1961 signaled the end of an era in the work of Elia Kazan. This was the last film he produced in the Theatrical Realism style, with his career taking a turn toward a more personal and yet grandiose style; his later work becoming ornate projections of his introspection. In the next fifteen years he would make only four films,⁸² all vastly different from each other in style and content. The bulk of his time would be devoted to writing four novels: *America America*, *The Arrangement* (both of which he would produce and direct for the screen), *The Assassins*, and *The Understudy*. His association with the Actors Studio would remain undefined somewhere in the area of “titular head emeritus,” occasionally contributing his presence at official function, openings, and celebrations.⁸³

Strasberg has maintained his position and prestige although the Studio slowly began to lose, in the sixties, the great influence it had had in the fifties.

While the Studio’s presence as an active force on the American theatre scene went into an eclipse and its influence seemed to wane in the period after the Actors Studio Theatre, there was ample proof of the abiding interest in and vitality of Strasberg’s teaching. International curiosity about the Studio hardly abated as foreign observers continued to visit and attend classes. Scores of actors still sought entry into the workshop, among those admitted to membership were outstanding talents (such as Al Pacino and Dustin Hoffman), who would soon achieve prominence in their field.⁸⁴

In 1970 Strasberg announced the establishment of the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute, with branches in New York and Los Angeles. This private

⁸² For more on these films (*America America*, *The Arrangement*, *The Visitors*, and *The Last Tycoon*) see Chapter V.

⁸³ Such as the Actors Studio 25th Anniversary celebration and Strasberg’s seventy-fifth birthday party.

⁸⁴ Garfield, p. 383.

acting school, in no way related to the Studio, was created, in Strasberg's own words...

...as a logical extension of my work at the workshop and will in no way affect my activity at the Actors Studio except for the better, in the sense that I will be less concerned whether I get paid or not (for my work at the Studio).⁸⁵

In 1974 Lee Strasberg made his acting debut on the screen in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather, Part II*, playing an organized crime patriarch loosely based on Mayer Lansky. In an interview given at the time Strasberg commented: "all the Godfathers are from the Actors Studio. DeNiro was brought in by Shelley Winters, Marlon and Al, and now me . . . it's all incidental, but there it is."⁸⁶

Strasberg was nominated for an Academy Award as best supporting actor for his performance in the film, and a new career as a screen actor began for him as offers for other roles started to come in.

In January 1976 this writer visited the Studio and attended Strasberg's last session for that season. The old remodeled church on 44th Street seemed to be as neglected as some of the other abandoned buildings in the Hell's Kitchen section of Manhattan where it is located. Yet the building came to life on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from eleven to one, as people walked briskly from the Eighth Avenue subway or were driven, in their Rolls Royces, toward the building. "Members of the Studio . . . go to Strasberg as some people go to Sunday morning mass."⁸⁷ The sessions always start on time and no one is admitted once Strasberg settles down into his black canvas director's chair (with "Lee" written on the back strap in plain white letters) and that old tape recorder, the same one that Jack Garfein and Carroll Baker presented to the Studio as a gift in 1956,⁸⁸ is readied to pick up, with its carefully positioned vintage microphone on a stand, the words of the

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 385-386.

⁸⁶ Joan Barthel, "the Master of the Method Plays a Role Himself," *The New York Times*, February 2, 1975.

⁸⁷ Rogoff, "Lee Strasberg: Burning Ice," p. 137.

⁸⁸ Personal interview with Jack Garfein in May, 1972.

“autocrat of the sweat shirt school.”⁸⁹ One has the feeling that this is the same ritual that has been performed for over twenty-seven years.

Sixty or seventy people, seated on risers in a U-shaped pattern around the performing area, quiet down as the lights are lowered and an actress walks up to Strasberg and hands him a folded piece of paper with her name and what she is going to do written on it. Strasberg unfolds the paper, reads it, and announces to the group: “This is a private moment to be followed by a song.” The actress goes to a couch and sprawls on it for several minutes, occasionally writhing and examining her toe nails in disgust. She is becoming impatient. Suddenly she darts across the stage to a telephone and calls her answering service. No messages for her. Impatience turns to anger, she starts to scream “Fuck it! Fuck it! Fuck it!” on and on, then runs to the couch and punches the cushions, repeating the same litany, which quiets her down in a tearful state from which a song softly emanates. She is singing a Kurt Weill cabaret/torch song with an obviously trained and well modulated voice. Once the song is over and a short pause has signified the end of the exercise, Strasberg asks the actress to repeat the song, telling her “this time don’t worry so much about suffering and pick up the tempo. Say the words and forget about hitting the right notes. All the great singers put the emphasis on the words and not on the tones. Try it once more.”

Still unsatisfied after the second try, Strasberg decides to concentrate on the actress’ misplaced tempo. He asks her to beat out the rhythm of the song and move her body to it. He then gets up and does a little dance to demonstrate to her what he means. This brings down the house and causes the actress to wonder about her choice of a private moment for the song’s warm-up. She does the song a third time, and afterwards Strasberg tells her to work on it some more and present it at a later date.

A second scene is presented. This is the wife’s arrival at the house from Harold Pinter’s *The Homecoming*. It is a powerful scene, extremely well

⁸⁹ Hollis Alpert’s phrase which served as the title of his long piece on Strasberg published in *Esquire*, October 1961.

executed. Strasberg has a few words of praise, stands up and moves center stage to address the members present:

As you well know, this is my last session with you for a while, since I'm leaving for Europe to make a film⁹⁰ and then will be out in California.

Unfortunately, I'm not able to spend as much literal time here with you at the sessions All change is fraught with a feeling of losing something and this has caused people to feel . . . a danger that this convenient, comfortable, and reliable world of the Tuesday/Thursday meetings is coming to an end. But this is all part of the process of life. I find that I'm now getting involved in many projects which is a pleasant surprise, and now I want bigger parts and more money, but I still do it for the pleasure. I've dedicated my life to an approach to the actor's problem, to bring logic and process to the work. I discovered this and spent my life trying to leave the world with the process that actors live through which causes the outside world to think of them as temperamental. It's true that for a long time actors have just memorized their lines and learned where to move or where to "put my hands when I kiss her." And there still remains an attitude within the profession that the only way to learn to act is to get up there and do it. In acting, the artist and the material are human. The energy the actor responds to is all the things he is as a human being, which become heightened during the acting process. I have dedicated my life to this, and my change in schedule does not involve any changes in my commitment to this thing.

I don't like to make announcements until things are happening, but all I can say at this time is that the Board of Directors is in better shape and it could well be that soon there will be major activity in the Actors Studio. Due to the state of the theatre today an organization must fulfill the challenge. The Actors Studio is the oldest organization in the theatre in America. New people are always coming in and the old people still help, and we will cement the reservoir of the talent at the Actors Studio which the theatre today needs.

We hope that in a short while there will be evidence of these new developments.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Strasberg is referring to *The Cassandra Crossing*, a Carlo Ponti production.

⁹¹ From notes taken by this writer as Strasberg spoke at the Actors Studio on January 16, 1976.

CHAPTER V

FIVE REPRESENTATIVE THEATRICAL REALISM FILMS

INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapters the formative factors and components of the film style labeled Theatrical Realism have been discussed. This chapter will discuss in specific terms how these elements were operationalized in five motion pictures which were selected as representative of the style. These films are *The Rose Tattoo*, *The Bachelor Party*, *Edge of the City*, *A Face in the Crowd*, and *The Pawnbroker*.

Before proceeding, a word is in order regarding the criteria for the selection of these films. Upon first examination of the titles selected it may seem as if an odd choice had been made. These films may appear to be relatively minor works of questionable standing within the large context of American film history. None of them have become staples of the revival circuit and are seldom, if ever, shown except for the rare instances when they appear at odd hours on the television screen.¹ Yet all of these films, with the probable exception of *Edge of the City*, were considered major films at the time of their release; they received full-fledged publicity campaigns, a great deal of critical attention, and, in several

¹ With the exception of *Edge of the City*, all these films were available on home video in 2006.

instances, Academy Awards.² The fact that these films have not been considered “classics” is an asset in the undertaking of a sociologically oriented study since it brings out the variable of changing critical standards and popular taste that determines the lifespan of a film style.

Also, in keeping with the auteurist principle that the keys to an artist’s work and his style may be found in his minor works and failures, it was decided not to select the films that would first come to mind at the mention of a director’s name. Yet it was imperative that each director whose career was completely dependent on the Theatrical Realism style be represented by a film of caliber, executed at a time when the director was in complete control of his work. Therefore, the logical choice of Kazan’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which is the keystone of the style, was bypassed in favor of *A Face in the Crowd*, a film which at first glance seems to be devoid of most of the Theatrical Realism stylistics that Kazan introduced to the screen but, under careful analysis, yields a far richer lode of insight into the man’s work and is a better film.

Following the same line of thought, *The Bachelor Party* was selected over *Marty* to represent the work of the Delbert Mann/Paddy Chayefsky team that brought Theatrical Realism to films from television as Kazan and Williams had done from the theatre. The unexpected popular and critical success of *Marty* gave Mann and Chayefsky the opportunity to make a far more ambitious film the second time around, and though it did not meet with the same success as *Marty* it remains a favorite of the team.³

The selection of *The Rose Tattoo* was equally due to the presence of Tennessee Williams and Daniel Mann, and the absence of Kazan. For Daniel Mann the film represented the culmination of his association with Burt Lancaster and Hal Wallis at Paramount, which had started with *Come Back Little Sheba*

² Academy Award winners include Anna Magnani and James Wong Howe for *The Rose Tattoo*. Nominees include Carolyn Jones for *The Bachelor Party* and Rod Steiger for *The Pawnbroker*.

³ Delbert Mann interview in June, 1972.

(1952). For Williams *The Rose Tattoo* represented his total entrenchment as one of the crucial figures of the fifties in American films. The formidable success of *Streetcar* three years before had given him the artistic and economic power to write his own ticket in Hollywood, and *The Rose Tattoo* was the first film of his plays to have been filmed under those conditions.

Edge of the City would have merited consideration for inclusion in this study only on the basis that when it was released it was inevitably compared to Kazan's *On the Waterfront*, another landmark of Theatrical Realism. But the film also marked the directorial debut of the up-to-then-blacklisted Martin Ritt, and the crossover of David Susskind and Robert Alan Aurthur from the world of live television into films. *Edge of the City* also deals with the issue of racial discrimination and is representative of the New York liberal's attitude toward the question of racial prejudice and urban plight.

The Pawnbroker, a "sleeper" in the classic sense, was produced right after the vogue for Theatrical Realism had subsided and is illustrative of Sidney Lumet's staying power as one of the most able craftsmen of the style. Equally influenced by French New Wave techniques, the film presents a fatalist portrait of New York City and its inhabitants which contrasted sharply with the optimistic vision of utopian social justice that characterized similar films up to that time. Lumet could have been represented equally by his debut film *Twelve Angry Men* or his southern *grand guignol* of Tennessee Williams' *The Fugitive Kind*, which are excellent examples of Theatrical Realism, but instead *The Pawnbroker* was chosen because of its unorthodox production and distribution history and because it shows the transition away from Theatrical Realism.

Another factor that affected the selection of the films was the conscious avoidance of any picture which featured very well known Theatrical Realism actors in the cast. The films of Marlon Brando, James Dean, Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Carroll Baker, etc. were not considered because they would have shifted the focus of the study from the film to the actor's role, and there

already has been a good amount of material published on these people and their films.

The films were also chosen to represent the three basic thematic areas of Theatrical Realism: (1) emotional/sexual (Williams and Kazan), (2) socio-cultural (Mann and Chayefsky), and (3) sociopolitical (Ritt and Arthur); and the five basic categories of films: (1) The New York Film (*Bachelor Party*), (2) the Southern Drama (*The Rose Tattoo*), (3) the Social Message Film (*The Edge of the City*), (4) the Psychological Drama (*The Pawnbroker*), and (5) Enlightened Americana (*A Face in the Crowd*).

Needless to say, all the films were screened several times and were studied on “stop and go” viewing machines by courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art in their complete, original versions. The synopsis accompanying each film was taken from the *Monthly Film Bulletin* published by the British Film Institute. The listings of credits appear as they did in the trade papers *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*.

THE ROSE TATTOO

Cast and Credits

(Drama-VistaVision)

Paramount Release of a Hal Wallis production. Director, Daniel Mann; screenplay, Tennessee Williams; adapted from the Williams play by Hal Kanter; produced on the New York stage by Cheryl Crawford; camera, James Wong Howe; art direction, Hal Pereira, Tambi Larsen; editorial supervision, Warren Low; sound, Harold Lewis, Gene Garvin; score, Alex North; song, Adolfo Genise, Gaetano Lama.

Cast: Stars, Burt Lancaster, Anna Magnani; co-stars, Marisa Pavan, Ben Cooper. Features Virginia Grey, Jo Van Fleet, Sandro Giglio with Mimi Aguglia, Florence Sundstrom.

Previewed at Paramount Studio, October 24, 1955. Running time: 116 minutes.⁴

⁴ Credits as listed in *Daily Variety* November 1, 1955.

Synopsis

Serafina, a handsome Sicilian woman living in the Italian quarter of a flyblown Gulf Coast town, is married to a truck-driver who represents her sexual ideal. She has elevated this sexual satisfaction into the myth of a perfect marriage, and is blithely unaware that her husband is unfaithful and a crook. She also likes the rose tattoo on his chest, which gives her a passion for anything rose-colored or scented. After his death she shuts herself off completely from the world, becomes slovenly and impossible, objects to her daughter's engagement to an innocent, simple sailor and insists that all men are revolting. When she is told that her revered husband was unfaithful, she becomes hysterical and tries (unsuccessfully) to pry the secrets of the confessional out of the local priest. It is in this rebellious mood that she is confronted by another brawny truck-driver, Alvaro, clownish, oafish but engaging, who reminds her of her dead husband—even more so when he has a rose tattooed on his chest. He finally batters down her resistance; and, reconciled both to her daughter's sailor and to rosy bliss with Alvaro, Serafina is herself again.

Discussion

During one of the screenings of *The Rose Tattoo* that a friend of this writer graciously arranged, he turned to this writer upon noticing that the word “virgin” in the original Williams play had been changed to “innocent” and asked why this was so, since Otto Preminger had already used the same word two years earlier in *The Moon Is Blue*.

Well, the truth was that Preminger never really had gotten away with it since he did not get the Production Code Seal on the film; yet closer to the truth was the fact that Hal Wallis was not Preminger and Paramount, in 1955, was not United Artists in 1953, and these people, being among the most entrenched in Hollywood, were not going to challenge the Code, especially when the stakes involved were as high as an “A” class production of a Tennessee Williams play. A compromise had to be found and “innocent” was it.

But Williams' plays were notorious for their so-called salacious content. Hardly a work of this playwright could be adapted for the American screen without going through several deletions and substitutions. Compromises with the Production Code office were of necessity, and as virtually all the works of

Williams reached the screen one could say, from a historical perspective, that each case provided an opportunity for film makers to nibble away at the Code.

In 1958 Pryor wrote:

One might go so far as to say that a Williams cycle is in the making. In any event, for a writer who a few years ago was regarded as a problem by Hollywood, Mr. Williams has exerted quite a forceful influence on movie mores as well as movie finances. Three out of his five plays filmed since 1950 were blockbusters; one was a failure and the other still is a question mark.

The winners, counting *Cat*, were *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Warner Bros.), and *The Rose Tattoo* (Wallis-Paramount). The first Williams film, *The Glass Menagerie* (Warners) long since was written off as a loss. The same studio has not made the final tally yet on *Baby Doll*, but figures it has a chance to break even. Thus, Mr. Williams has a whopping .600 batting average.

Perhaps more significant than this remarkable commercial achievement, however, is the influence Williams' writing has had on the thinking of Hollywood. *A Streetcar Named Desire* paved the way when it hurdled Production Code obstacles in 1952 for a new trend on picture subject matter—the analytical probing of characters with dark, deep-rooted emotional disturbances, violent urges and hatreds. At least there is little doubt in the minds of some moviemakers and observers of the Hollywood scene that the desire to imitate and exploit the Williams touch made it easier for pictures such as John Steinback's *East of Eden*, Robert Anderson's *Tea and Sympathy*, William Faulkner's *The Long Hot Summer*, *The Sound and the Fury* (not yet released), Erskine Caldwell's *God's Little Acre* and even *The Brothers Karamazov*.⁵

Without a doubt, each Williams play that reached the screen made it easier for other films of similar nature to go into production, yet each film had to negotiate for its own compromise.

During the preproduction stages of *The Rose Tattoo* the following item appeared in the *New York Times*:

⁵ Thomas N. Pryor, "Hollywood Vista," *The New York Times*, November 30, 1958.

Hurdle Cleared

Hal Wallis, who was forced by the Production Code office to take “hell” and “damn” out of the Korean war documentary, *Cease Fire!* has succeeded in winning the industry censors’ approval to film the Tennessee Williams play, *The Rose Tattoo*. At first, there was a total ban against it on moral and religious grounds, Mr. Wallis reported.

The producer was confident, however, that the objections could be overcome. Mr. Williams agreed it would be possible to temper the play’s sex aspects and avoid complications with the Roman Catholic Church by making a clear distinction between the religious belief and superstitions of the Sicilian widow who is the central character.

Mr. Williams collaborated with Hal Kanter in writing the screen adaptation. In three weeks of concentrated work carried out in a New York hotel room and the playwright’s home, the script was completed and accepted by the Production Code office.⁶

The Rose Tattoo is not a very good film, but it is an extremely good representation of Theatrical Realism in which all the elements that comprise the style may be found.

The first element, if one must start at the top (and assuming that producers are at the top), is Hal B. Wallis—a man whose name and output is synonymous with Hollywood.⁷ “Synonymous with Hollywood” is used because Wallis’ work is indescribable as an “oeuvre.” It runs the gamut of all genres and all levels of quality, from the mechanical predictability of an Elvis Presley vehicle to the prestigious pretension of a *Beckett* or *Anne of a Thousand Days*. *The Hollywood Reporter* once described Wallis as:

. . . no mere specialist in westerns or exploitation films or any other single category of subjects, but as adept at high-powered drama and biography as he is at outdoor action stories and musicals. From *Zola*, *Yankee Doodle Dandy* and the many other top films he made years ago at Warners, to *Rose Tattoo*, *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, the Elvis Presley pictures, and all the other hits he has been turning out at Paramount, Wallis has just about run the gamut of themes, piling up 32 Oscars, 121 nominations and two Thalberg Awards in the process.⁸

⁶ “Hurdle Cleared,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1954.

⁷ Hal Wallis’ name, with its interplay of the letters H, L, and W, and its nine spaces, becomes nearly an acronym for, and the definitive personification of, “Hollywood.”

⁸ Don Carle Gillette, “Tradeview,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 22, 1965.

Wallis makes pictures. He is the closest thing to Sears and Roebuck to be found in the film business. When a film is a hit, Wallis makes one just like it so that he can capitalize on it. Often he is astute enough to hire the creators of the original film, to find a property of similar value, to cast the same actors, and to project the same product-image, resulting in a film which is such a perfect echo that it becomes indistinguishable from the original. Therefore, Hal Wallis is the epitome of the “jump on the bandwagon” producer. If he does not follow trends he makes them happen by producing films in series when they can be expected to be financially successful. When he signs a Daniel Mann or an Anna Magnani he deals with them in the same manner as with an Elvis Presley or a Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis; he commits them for a multiple film deal, knowing that the secret in turning a profit is not so much in having the “talent” in a hit picture, but to have the talent signed for the next couple of films *after* a hit picture.⁹ This is not impetuous, impulsive film production but a carefully thought out method that tends to minimize risks in that most riskful profession of film production. So it follows that when Wallis undertakes any production, it is after careful consideration has yielded that it is a sound financial investment, as safe as any other mainstream Hollywood product can be, since his films are always well calculated risks. His output over the years can serve as an index to American popular taste in films.

The year 1955 marked the complete acceptance by the Hollywood film industry of Theatrical Realism, and Wallis’ decision to film *The Rose Tatto* as an “A” picture¹⁰ and evidence that Theatrical Realism was not only prestigious from a critical point of view, but also financially successful. *On the Waterfront* had just won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1954. In 1952 *A Streetcar*

⁹ Magnani worked again for Wallis in *Wild Is the Wind*.

¹⁰ When Wallis brought to the screen his first Theatrical Realism film, *Come Back, Little Sheba* in 1952, the budget and production values of the picture were cautiously kept to a minimum, as befitting a tentative step in a new direction.

Named Desire had received several Oscars, and *The Rose Tattoo* would lose out to *Marty* for the 1955 Best Picture Oscar.

A Tennessee Williams play, with Anna Magnani and Burt Lancaster, must have seemed like a magic formula. Williams had the sort of image by 1955 that served as a multifaceted magnet in attracting patrons to the box office. First of all he was considered in the company of the finest living American playwrights by intellectual and critical circles; for them, his work was serious, meaningful, and modern. On a second level he was the new “naughty boy of Broadway,” and as such was irresistible to anyone who felt the need to be up to date in the latest cocktail chatter. And finally, for the rest of the audience, he had that forbidden fruit appeal that made media sin in the fifties such a vicarious thrill. This is what made of Williams one of the most often filmed dramatists.

The following item appeared in a trade paper:

FILMS REACHING MORE ADULT LEVEL, SAYS HAL WALLIS

Forced by TV to find superior entertainment, the motion picture theatre today is bringing amusement to the American mass public equal to—and often better than—the shows Broadway brings to the few, producer Hal Wallis said yesterday.

“To maintain recent box office gains, however, Hollywood will have to continue supplying this superior entertainment without let-up” Wallis stated. “It’s no accident that the box office improved. Hollywood had to make attractions far better than people could get for nothing in their homes. In doing so, it raised the standards of motion pictures until film houses in every hamlet of the nation have become a Broadway stage.”

The independent producer, who releases through Paramount, cited the current upbeat in filming Broadway plays and published novels as evidence of the new adult stature of mass film entertainment. His *Come Back, Little Sheba* set box office records and won an Oscar for Shirley Booth. Its success led to his VistaVision filming of Tennessee Williams’ *The Rose Tattoo*, co-starring Burt Lancaster and Anna Magnani; his \$350,000 purchase of *The Rainmaker*, Williams’ *Summer and Smoke*, and the drama, *A Stone for Danny Fisher*.¹¹

¹¹ *The Hollywood Reporter*, February 3, 1955.

Theatrical Realism was able to survive as a commercially viable film style in Hollywood mostly because the elements of sex and violence were predominant and, as such, were highly marketable under the guise of “art.” Words like “sizzling,” “passionate,” “perverse,” “lusty,” “frank,” “brutal,” etc., emblazoned the “admits” of many Theatrical Realism films, especially those based on the works of Williams. Controversy is always good publicity, and when the controversy is based on the moral content of a film (“moral” being simply a euphemism for “sexual”), the picture could well be exploited along those lines.

Elia Kazan’s film of Tennessee Williams’ *Baby Doll* was one of those sensational cases in which the audience was intensely teased by the advertising campaign and the notoriety that the film generated. Kazan said that, after the film received a “C” rating from the Legion of Decency, he..

. . . convinced Warner Bros. that the notoriety would help the picture. Furthermore, I had the idea of putting a big sign on Broadway, right over where my office is now, Carroll Baker lying in the crib with her thumb in her mouth! It was like defying the Legion of Decency, it was a great pleasure to do it.”¹²

But *The Rose Tattoo* was a mild play by Tennessee Williams standards and it suffered little change due to censorship.¹³ In this work the tortured guilt of Williams’ characters is overcome by the hopeful optimism to be found in love. He had written the play after spending some time in Italy, mostly in his favorite Sicilian town of Taormina. One can surmise that this voyage came about because of his love for Frank Merlo, a young man of Sicilian origin who became Williams lover of fourteen years and accompanied him on his journey.¹⁴ The play is

¹² Micael Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan* (New York: The Viking press, 1974), p. 80.

¹³ The noticeable changes were “innocent” substituted for “virgin,” the incident in which a prophylactic falls out of Alvaro’s pocket was cut, and Alvaro, just drinking, passes out and sleeps on the floor just outside Serafina’s room, instead of making love to her.

¹⁴ Tennessee Williams, *Memoires* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1975), p. 162.

dedicated to him and is, in fact, a sensual valentine to the Sicilian people, whose passionate emotionalism Williams must have found irresistible.

But, in retrospect, *The Rose Tattoo* becomes America's homage to Italian Neo-Realism. The roots of the play lie in the film scripts of Cesare Zavattini and the theatre of Eduardo De Filippo, which were the mainstream of Italian dramaturgy at the time. While in Italy, Williams came in direct contact with Italian Neo-Realism and admired many of the style's elements, especially the earthiness of character and milieu, but mostly it was a question of texture. Williams probably did not feel totally at ease in writing a play set in Italy, in Italian, for Italians, so he used as the locale a colony of Italian fishermen in an American Gulf port somewhere near New Orleans. But this was a transparent device, since Williams came closer than any other American in immersing himself in an alien culture and producing a work almost indigenous to that culture. As a reviewer of the film observed:

The Rose Tattoo is written, acted, directed and photographed in the fashion of the postwar neo-Italian films of realism [sic] . . . the drama has been transposed to an Italo-American settlement near New Orleans. Nevertheless, it is so Italianized in style and feeling that you almost expect to see the screen break out with the English subtitles.¹⁵

Yet, *The Rose Tattoo* is not Neo-Realism; in fact, it is the best operationalized definition of Theatrical Realism that this writer can offer because unlike *Open City*, where Magnani cried in the streets as the real German tanks loomed around the corner and Rossellini kept making the film not knowing if it was ever to be finished, much less shown, *The Rose Tattoo* conjures up Brechtian harmonies of a well paid Magnani acting her heart out on a Paramount sound stage flanked by Burt Lancaster making a fool of himself. What little realism permeated the scene was due to her superior theatrical presence and her determination to play the material honestly, even if it was being misunderstood by those around her. It is no wonder that she picked up an Oscar for it.

¹⁵ *Cue*, December 17, 1955.

The presence of Anna Magnani solidified the link to the postwar Italian school. Sometimes an actor or actress can be representative of a whole section of film history. Magnani is to Neo-Realism what Jeanne Moreau is to the French New Wave—its face.

Writing an article entitled “Anna Magnani, Tigress of the Tiber,” Williams described how he met her and got her to appear in the film:

My early encounters with Anna had been tentative. I had written *The Rose Tattoo* expressly for her, starting it the day after I saw, in Rome, her incomparable performances in Rossellini’s double bill, *Amore*. We met at that performance. I think it was at least a year later, maybe two years later—summers in Italy have a trick of running together!—before I did succeed in having a real meeting with her. I told her that I had written this play for her. She replied that she could not play on the American stage since she couldn’t speak English, but that if she learned the language in time, she would make a film of the story, that is, if she liked it.

I had to read the play aloud to Anna while the daughter of Anna’s lawyer sat by my side and translated it, sentence by sentence, into Italian. I want you to know that this operation lasted from 1 till 6 p.m. and that everybody but Anna Magnani was in a state of collapse when it was over.

It was at least another two years before Anna made up her mind to do a film of *Rose Tattoo*. Meanwhile I had held up the film-sale till some one was willing to purchase it as a package deal of two items, the play and Magnani. Hal B. Wallis was willing to do so.¹⁶

Magnani’s arrival in Hollywood is of double interest. Not only had she come to act in the film version of a play that was written for her, in her style and language,¹⁷ but she had come as an ambassador of Italian Neo-Realism, a serious, respectable counterpart of the Italian sex-pots such as Loren and Lollobrigida, who had also recently made the crossing. It was as if Hollywood had decided to give equal time to a good actress in an effort to make up for the then underdeveloped talents of other physically overdeveloped imports.

¹⁶ Tennessee Williams, “Anna Magnani, Tigress of the Tiber: *New York Herald Tribune*, December 11, 1955.

¹⁷ *The Rose Tattoo* contains many dialogue passages in unadulterated Italian or Sicilian dialect.

Before her arrival, Magnani had developed an important following among critics and “art-house” audiences. The news that she was going to work in Hollywood must have elicited a lot of interest among these circles. Hollywood Columnist Ruth Waterbury got a little carried away with her enthusiasm when she wrote:

Shout it from the housetops! Tell it on the drums! A great new star has come to the American screen, a woman of fire, passion and tenderness.

Anna Magnani blazed into Los Angeles last night by way of a dazzling premiere of *The Rose Tattoo*. Her addition to Hollywood’s acting ranks will benefit the film capital for years to come.

Long the undisputed acting queen of the Italian screen, this extraordinary woman—with too much figure, too little hair-do, more than a few birthdays—turns in a performance of such incandescent power in *The Rose Tattoo* that she demotes almost any other actress you can think of into a childish amateur.¹⁸

Hazel Flynn described Magnani’s performance as follows:

Anna, of course, did not attend the Hollywood school of acting (for which we can thank heaven or we should never have this great performance). Hers is the school of harsh realism. Her characters are drawn from observation and an inner spring of genius in presenting them. When the script calls for her to look disheveled she doesn’t just leave off make-up and perhaps pull down a few wisps of hair as the make-up men who even like to glamorize the disheveled are wont to advise. Anna goes the whole ugly way. As a result, in *The Rose Tattoo* she really looks like a woman whom the untimely death of a beloved husband has driven almost insane with grief. And as she gradually leaves off her worship of what is gone, and her interest in both the present and future is aroused, she changes in appearance until at the end, in the full flower of a new love, she is beautiful.

All this utterly fascinates an audience for two hours “Magnani the magnificent” has indeed set a new high mark for all other screen actresses to try to equal.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ruth Waterbury, “Anna Magnani Dazzles in *Rose Tattoo*,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, December 15, 1955, Section II, p. 11.

¹⁹ Hazel Flynn, “Magnani Magnificent in Hal Wallis’ *Rose Tattoo*,” *Hollywood Citizen-News*, December 14, 1955.

The *Christian Science Monitor's* reception of the film and its star was cautious, to say the least:

The presence of Anna Magnani in the cast is not the only similarity between *The Rose Tattoo* and certain European pictures. It has a drab, naturalistic setting. It deals with love in terms of sensual longings. It combines a fidelity to details of human behavior with general assumptions that are debasing to humanity.

Whether the whole picture can be justified—except as an excuse for bringing Miss Magnani to America—is . . . debatable.²⁰

Williams wrote about what he considered to be one of her major virtues, which he noticed during the shooting of the film:

The glory of Magnani is her incomparable sense of truth in a script and in her performance of it.

Magnani has a peculiarly delicate stomach as an artist. She cannot digest, she gags and vomits up, whatever in a script strikes her as being untrue. Magnani cannot be used for the expression of anything but what she feels is basically true. She is almost a lie-detector.

Now every one knows that there is no movie script ever written, unless it was the script of *Marty*, that doesn't contain some elements that would be indigestible to an artist with this kind of taste. *Rose Tattoo* was somewhat mutilated by the demands of censorship. Magnani knew all about these demands, she understood them and accepted them sadly, just as we all do who work in that circumscribed medium whose very latitude imposes a cheating restriction. She moved down the script, as it was shot on location in Key West and on the sound-stage at Paramount, like a human lie-detector, and wherever she came upon one of these bits where censorship had made it impossible to say or do the true thing, she visibly gagged.²¹

The presence of Magnani in the film makes one very aware of the conflict between actual documentation and manipulation that lies at the crux of Theatrical Realism. One of the basic tenets of the style is a well meaning intention to

²⁰ "The *Rose Tattoo* on Screen," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 7, 1956.

²¹ Williams, "Anna Magnani, Tigress of the Tiber."

honestly portray and document reality along with the responsibility to provide some moral uplift and remain within the established boundaries of censorship; but these intentions are always ruined by the need to manipulate the realistic elements in order to provide the desired effect, which has come to be known as the “meaning” or “message” of the work.

Moving on, we encounter the well-meaning presence of Burt Lancaster, Hollywood Star. Sarris, in his review of the film, said that the main flaw was...

...Burt Lancaster's unskilled performance as Serafina's idiot lover. It is painful to report on Lancaster's deficiencies; no actor in Hollywood has higher notions of acting. In 1948 Lancaster took a pay cut to appear in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*; he was just adequate. He took another pay cut in 1952 for William Inge's *Come Back Little Sheba*, in which he was badly miscast. Now, with *The Rose Tattoo* of Tennessee Williams Lancaster has acted in works by America's three leading dramatists. It is about time that he realized he is all wrong for these difficult roles. Yet, much more talented actors could use some of Lancaster's aspirations.²²

But Lancaster was not discouraged by notices such as this, although on one occasion he complained to Sid Skolsky that “critics keep telling me I pick the roles I'm least suited to play.”²³ He seemed determined to prove to the world that if he was a star it was because he was first of all an actor. He continued to appear in “serious” films, most of which he produced in partnership with Harold Hecht and (later) James Hill.²⁴ Their production company maintained a schizoid and surprisingly profitable production schedule during the fifties, making its share of colorful action “he-man” pictures along with serious films in which Lancaster demonstrated his aspirations to “act.”²⁵

²² Andrew Sarris, *Confessions of a Cultist* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 19.

²³ Sidney Skolsky's column, *Hollywood Citizen-News*, August 20, 1959.

²⁴ James Hill's name was added to “Hecht-Lancaster” when he became a full partner in the company in 1956.

²⁵ Some of the “serious” H-H-L fifties films starring Lancaster were *Sweet Smell of Success*, *Separate Tables*, *The Devil's Disciple*, and *Elmer Gantry* for which Lancaster received his Academy Award. In the sixties he continued in this trend with *The Young Savages*, *Birdman of Alcatraz*, *A Child Is Waiting*, *The Swimmer*, etc. Lancaster developed his own Italian Neo-Realism connection with Luchino Visconti when he starred in *The Leopard* and *Conversation Piece*. For more on H-H-L productions see pages 196-199.

Lancaster has often referred to himself as “the athlete who wandered into the library,”²⁶ and has complained about the fact that “because he was born in New York’s East Side people who don’t know him expect him to be a ‘dis-dees-dos’ lowbrow [when] actually he’s never so happy as when listening to Bach or Beethoven.”²⁷ All of these lofty pronouncements and his pursuit of “serious art films” point to the existence of a “cultural slump complex” of great magnitude, which made Lancaster a prime candidate for Theatrical Realism.

He had been a circus acrobat before coming to the movies right after the war, and although Alexander noted that “numerous Hollywood natives believe that without Hecht’s initial guidance the unschooled acrobat might have remained nothing more than an airborne “Esther Williams,”²⁸ Lancaster claimed that he had “something of a background” when he first went into theatre and films:

I was very fortunate because at that time there was a professional group in New York called the American Laboratory Theatre. Its director was Richard Boleslawski. And part of the training they underwent was to send their people to various settlement houses and have them teach and direct amateur performances.²⁹

Thus Lancaster had been directly exposed, at an early age, to one of the highest exponents of the Moscow Art Theatre and the Stanislavski system! As Gow stated:

Lancaster typifies the development in the fifties from an emphasis on the personality star to a wary but steadily increasing appreciation of the actor. His is a heightened case, perhaps; but it throws light upon this period of transition.³⁰

²⁶ Sidney Skolsky’s column, *Hollywood Citizen-News*, July 13, 1950.

²⁷ Ruth Waterbury’s column, *Los Angeles Examiner*, August 24, 1952.

²⁸ Shane Alexander, “Will the Real Burt Please Stand Up?” *Life*, September 6, 1963, p. 43.

²⁹ Gordon Gow, *Hollywood in the Fifties* (New York: A S. Barnes and Company, 1971), p. 141.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

The “heightened case” manifested itself as far back as 1948 when Lancaster went after the role of the righteous son of the war profiteer in the film version of Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons*. Lancaster, who had signed a long-term exclusive contract with Wallis, explained at the time how he got the part: “Mr. Wallis didn’t think the role was suited for me and I had to fight to get it, finally paying Wallis \$50,000 for the privilege of working for another producer.”³¹

By 1952 Lancaster had fully established the pattern of polarity in the selection of roles that later characterized his production company. In that year he was starring in *The Crimson Pirate*, *Come Back Little Sheba*, and *South Sea Woman*; and had signed for *From Here to Eternity* at Columbia. The multifaceted career of this man as an actor is compounded with his role as producer. Harold Hecht once said that “Burt was ashamed of being an actor. He did it grudgingly.”³² However, he did seem to enjoy his work as one of the trail blazers in the new trend toward independent productions, and even went into directing with his film *The Kentuckian* (1954).

As a producer alone, Lancaster would have been guaranteed a niche as one of the influential personalities of Theatrical Realism (his work in that capacity is discussed in detail in this chapter’s section on *The Bachelor Party*), but as an actor he came to represent, along with Marilyn Monroe, the Hollywood yearning for intellectual respectability that made of Theatrical Realism the prestige style for the American films of the fifties.

Lancaster’s presence in *The Rose Tattoo* may be attributed to his contract with Wallis, the prior successful relationship with Daniel Mann in *Little Sheba*, and the fact that he had already established his histrionic abilities playing Miller and Inge and felt ready to tackle Williams. Unfortunately he was not. At least not for this part. Williams described the character of Alvaro as:

. . . twenty-five years old, dark and very good looking. He is one of those Mediterranean types that resemble glossy young bulls. He is

³¹ Thomas M. Pryor, “Leap to Stardom,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 1948.

³² Alexander, p. 45.

short in stature, has a massively sculptural torso and bluish-black curls. His face and manner are clownish; he has a charming awkwardness. There is a startling improvised air about him. He frequently seems surprised at his own speeches and actions as though he had not at all anticipated them.³³

This is far from the image of the man of granite that Lancaster projects--cold, firm, calculating. He is at his best in *The Sweet Smell of Success*, where passive sadism and morbid self-aggrandizement are combined to produce the monstrous columnist he portrayed; or in *The Birdman of Alcatraz*, where stoicism, masochism, and perseverance give us the complex portrait of a gentle man who is also an avowed criminal. But even in 1955 he was not the comic actor or graceful performer that was required for the role. In his “charming awkward” moments he seems to be trying to imitate Jerry Lewis, Paramount’s top funny man of the day, as when he chases and captures a runaway billy goat in mock matador style. In times such as these it is downright embarrassing to see him running about a backyard doing one of the least inspired bits of physical comedy the camera has ever recorded. Jerry Lewis would have been a preferable, and at least an equally capable, casting choice.

Lancaster is also incapable of handling the language of the play, which oscillates between Sicilian dialect (used for verbal emotional high points) and heavily accented English (used for narrative thrust). His English with a fake Sicilian accent is not as bad as his Sicilian with a real English accent, but in either case Lancaster is equally uncomfortable struggling with his lines. This completely destroys the “improvisational air about him” that Williams so carefully described. Magnani must have suffered trying to maintain her performance level as she listened to Lancaster murdering her own language.

³³ Tennessee Williams, *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams* (New York: New Directions Books, 1971), p. 348.

In his review of the film Sarris observed that “if Mann and Williams had thrown all their cards on a comic interpretation of the theme, possibly going so far as to burlesque the commedia dell’arte in decadent New Orleans, *The Rose Tattoo* might have been salvaged.”³⁴ This raises the question of comedy and Theatrical Realism. The stylistics of Theatrical Realism are such that they clash with the elements needed for comedy to fully succeed. That is why there are very few, if any, Theatrical Realism comedies. *The Rose Tattoo*, *Bus Stop*, and *Period of Adjustment* are the only films which may be considered comedies within the Theatrical Realism style, and as such they would be heavily qualified as “human” comedies, “touching” comedies, “heartwarming” comedies, or “pathetic” comedies. At one point in the production of *The Rose Tattoo* Sarris’ wishes for a commedia dell’arte must have been carefully considered, since the screenplay credits Hal Kanter for the adaptation of Williams’ play. Kanter is one of those unsung men who distilled the essence of situation comedies in the early days of American television.

He has probably created more comedy—as screenwriter, TV-series creator, script doctor, director, producer and entertainer (emcee, toastmaster) than anybody else still at large in the business. His association with Bob Hope dates back 23 years, when he wrote the movie *Road to Bali*. More recently he served a hitch as executive producer of *All in the Family*.³⁵

Kanter is also a very dependable gag man and, as such, often contributes most of the chit-chat that is sandwiched between presentations at the Annual Academy Awards. His contribution to the film is at best unperceived—a little “opening-up,” a little more action, location changes, and toning down for Code compliance. But if the man had been given free rein, he probably could have made *The Rose Tattoo* into a “commedia della situazione.” This, as has been noted, might have been a welcome change from the literate faithfulness of the

³⁴ Sarris, *Confessions of a Cultist*, p. 20.

³⁵ *TV Guide*, February 28, 1976, p. 30..

original that so often ruins most Theatrical Realism films, or it may have been a disaster.

One wonders if the talents of Milos Forman, whose *Loves of a Blonde* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* are very close in spirit to Theatrical Realism, had been available at that time for the film versions of *The Rose Tattoo* and *Bus Stop*, if these films would have fully succeeded in blending Theatrical Realism with comedy. But if a foreign director had been used it would undoubtedly have been Vittorio De Sica.³⁶

The logical choice was, of course, Daniel Mann, who had directed the play on Broadway and was under contract with Wallis. Mann took the assignment much too literally. This film came at a point of crystallization in his career. Born Daniel Chugarman, in Brooklyn, he was brought up "in a cultural home," as his father proudly pointed out. "There was always a piano, and records, and a 10,000-volume library, and various artists coming in. Much conversation. Our home was a miniature salon."³⁷

He began in show business as a musician, organizing his own band when he was 15 or thereabouts and playing at social affairs in Brooklyn, then hotels on the borscht circuit, then cruise ships on the Havana run, "It was always a novelty band, did more clowning than straight music," he said, "and I used to think up comedy routines and drill the boys."³⁸

At the age of twenty-two Mann won a one-year scholarship to the Neighborhood Playhouse, where he realized that...

. . . acting can be creative, not just interpretative. Those of us who were serious about the theatre maintained a discipline that excluded

³⁶ An item in *The New York Times*, dated August 10, 1952, read, in part: "Mr. Williams, now in Italy, not only has conferred with Anna Magnani and Vittorio De Sica regarding their participation in the project as star and director, but has announced, in a recent letter, that both are 'willing and in several months should be available.'"

³⁷ Richard Gehman, "Staged by Daniel Mann," *Theatre Arts*, 35:96, November, 1951.

³⁸ Louis Sheaffer, "Curtain Time," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, March 20, 1951.

everything but theatre. We used to gather at one another's home, after school, to rehearse, act scenes, discuss our work. Betty Garrett and Richard Conte were among the serious students."³⁹

After spending a couple of years with little theatre groups in New York and Canada, and playing the part of a clown with a German accent in *Pins and Needles*, Mann went to Hollywood and was soon drafted when the war broke out. He served two years in the infantry in Burma, and once refused to go to rest camp so that he could put on a show for the G.I.'s.⁴⁰ He returned to Hollywood after the war, directed several plays for the Las Palmas Theatre, worked as dialogue director at Columbia, and taught at the Actors Lab. After his marriage, he decided to return to New York where he began teaching at the American Theatre Wing and got involved with Kazan, the Actors Studio, and its television series.

Ever so slowly and patiently, Mann had been building a reputation as an imaginative, sensitive director. The video shows he did attract considerable attention among professionals, and it was not long before the word began to get around that here was a directorial talent the like of which had not appeared for some time.⁴¹

At this time Mann became "Kazan's protégé"⁴² and directed the City Center and the London productions of *A Streetcar Named Desire* as well as its cast replacements on Broadway.⁴³ The Theatre Guild offered him Inge's *Come Back Little, Sheba* with Shirley Booth and Sidney Blackmer (in the role Lancaster played on film). After this, Mann was on his way as a "hot" Broadway director. His stage credits included *The Rose Tattoo*, *Paint Your Wagon* (both for Cheryl Crawford), *The Immoralist* (with James Dean as the Arab Boy), and *A Loss of Roses*.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Gehman, "Staged by Daniel Mann."

⁴² "Sheba Brings Out New Young Director," *Compass New York*, February 12, 1950.

⁴³ Gehman, "Staged by Daniel Mann."

Hal Wallis signed Mann to a contract and brought him to Hollywood to direct *Sheba*, and his career as a film director began with two Shirley Booth vehicles⁴⁴ in the Theatrical Realism style.

Daniel Mann is one of the five directors that comprise the “hard core” of the Theatrical Realism group. He is the most malleable of the group, with works ranging from the “strained seriousness” of *Sheba* to the “glossy vulgarity” of *Butterfield 8*. Mann’s presence is subordinate to his subject matter. He is there to serve the film to the best of his abilities, and the personal touch in his work manifests itself in his choice of a project. Mann finds his style in his subject matter. His filmography is full of shouts and echoes—one good and successful film followed by several similar and inferior ones until the process starts again with a radically different film that proves to be successful. His debut with a Theatrical Realism film carried him throughout the fifties with seven films in the same style.⁴⁵ With the end of Theatrical Realism, Mann turned to sophisticated comedy (*Who’s Been Sleeping in My Bed*, 1963), Bondian adventure (*Our Man Flint*, 1965), and matinee/horror (*Willard*, 1971).

Mann’s films are invariably popular because they are fashionably topical and reflect the audience’s temporary demand for that type of film. As a consequence his films date badly, as if produced with an expiration date. The fact that his first film (*Sheba*) was a critical success is more an indicator of 1952 tastes, values, and critical standards than of the arrival of a new talent. Today, a film like *Sheba* would have been negatively criticized for its stage bound technique and its canned-theatre look. Yet it exerts a compelling fascination because the décor, acting, and direction are so theatrical and formal, so oblivious to what the cinema had already achieved and was capable of achieving. Its innocent disregard for the medium’s potential represents the best example of the

⁴⁴ The other film was *About Mrs. Leslie* (1954). Shirley Booth was also contracted by Wallis and was again directed by Mann in *Hot Spell* (1957).

⁴⁵ Mann’s Theatrical Realism films are *Come Back*, *Little Sheba*, *About Mrs. Leslie*, *The Rose Tattoo*, *Hot Spell*, *The Last Angry Man*, *I’ll Cry Tomorrow*, and *Butterfield 8*.

cinema's subjugation to the theatre and its dramatic tradition. Art derivative on purpose.

When Mann started to work in films he carried the proscenium in with him.⁴⁶ He stayed too far away from the physical and too close psychologically. This worked very well with accomplished actors such as Magnani, Susan Hayward (*I'll Cry Tomorrow*), Shirley Booth (*Sheba, About Mrs. Leslie, Hot Spell*), Paul Muni, (*The Last Angry Man*), and Elizabeth Taylor (*Butterfield 8*). All of these received Oscars or nominations under his direction. But less talented or skilled performers fared disastrously, casting grave doubts on whether Mann's reputation as an actor's director is based on sound judgment.

In *The Rose Tattoo* there is a scene in which Anna Magnani, after being told to her face that her dead husband had been unfaithful, goes into a church in order to "get a sign from Our Lady, to tell me the lie is a lie." She is confronted by a priest who chastises her for leading a recluse life and not taking care of herself. She, in turn, wants to know if her husband had ever said anything to the priest during confession which would substantiate the rumor she needed stamped as a lie. The scene is photographed from two reverse set-ups (on Serafina and on Father De Leo). Both shots are waist size. There are no close-ups, no movement within the frame or change of spatial relationships. The two actors are left standing inside the frame to fend for themselves. The priest is burdened with a lot of exposition at the beginning of the scene and Sandro Giglio, the actor who plays him, delivers all his lines as flatly as if he were reading them from cue cards just off-frame. On the other hand, Magnani's over involvement with the scene jars with Giglio's lackadaisical delivery. It is not so much the obvious vast difference of talent between the performers, but the apparent lack of control and direction that make the scene a resounding failure both as film and theatre.

If Mann's direction seems at times inexistent or undetectable, there are

⁴⁶ Maybe he was a bit apprehensive about using the vistaVision format, which had just been introduced by Paramount and promised to be so monumental that it would do away with the close-up—this being the current misconception in respect to all the new wide screen formats.

times when it is evident and can also seem dead wrong. The subplot of the film involves Serafina's daughter, Rosa, and a sailor whom she meets at a school dance. The seed of first love germinates between them in what Williams obviously conceived as a contrast to the patchwork compromised relationship with Alvaro for which Serafina finally settles in the end (she says of Alvaro: "My husband's body and with the head of a clown"). In the play these scenes of young love border on cloy romanticism; in the film they go beyond the valley of perennial corn, mostly because Marisa Pavan and Ben Cooper, who play the young lovers, are unable to find a way of making their mutual attraction believable. Without passion or sexual desire in their eyes, the banalities that Williams has put in their mouths come out sounding even worse than they are, although Williams made an appropriate choice writing clichéd dialogue for these kids since they are supposed to be experiencing that first crush that perpetuates clichés by infusing them with real meaning. Unfortunately, there is no such infusion here. Mann is responsible for letting Pavan get away with thinking that all she has to do is feign tenderness and look Italian, which are easy things for her. The character of Rosa is written as a young Serafina, lusty and sensual, a ripe fruit waiting to be devoured by the man she's picked—a sailor who represents romance, adventure, and freedom. But Pavan does not project any of this, partly because she cannot create the illusion of love, but mostly because she is supposed to be the aggressive partner and the film has toned down her character to such an extent that what one is left with is silly puppy love, rather than the intended passionate encounter of two adolescents in heat. And Code restrictions cannot be blamed for this lack of passion which could have been conveyed with a furtive glance and a quiver in the voice. Rosa's lust for the sailor simply does not exist in the film.

The reversal of traditional sexual roles is not uncommon in Williams' work, which is full of strong neurotic women in desperate need of a male; yet

Williams' construction of the sailor's character fails because, though it is assumed that he is writing it from the point of view of Rosa, he goes overboard in making the sailor ("with tight fitting white pants") into a personal sex object with the mind of Voltaire's *Candide* and the body of Michelangelo's David. As played in the film by Ben Cooper the role becomes the seminal icon for the future work of gay caricaturist Tom of Finland. One expects him to be perfectly content to get back and get it on with his mates aboard the ship. It is hard to believe that in 1955 a heterosexual sailor, no matter how young and naïve, would be the party most interested in preserving his own virginity in a relationship with a Sicilian Catholic girl. One even fears that Rosa will eventually meet a fate similar to that of Blanche Dubois after discovering the truth about her young poet lover. Nevertheless, this could work if given the kind of direction that would bring out the conflict between sexual passion and prevalent morality in such an absurd situation. Instead, Mann creates no subterfuge and lets his girl and her sailor pose and say sweet nothings not only to each other, but to the audience as well.

Even where Williams wrote into his play beautiful visual imagery, those elements are lost in the film. In his interesting book *The Cinematic Imagination*, Murray discussed the influence of film techniques in Williams' plays and his emphasis on visual elements:

A survey of Williams' plays after *The Glass Menagerie* reveals the cinematic imagination at work in a significant number of them. In his introduction to *Summer and Smoke* (1948), the playwright says: "Everything possible should be done to give an unbroken fluid quality to the sequence of the scenes." Williams has frequently insisted on "fluid" movement for his stage images. Speaking of *Camino Real* (1953), he points out that Elia Kazan "was attracted to this work mainly . . . for its freedom and mobility of form . . . its continual flow." With his experience of directing in Hollywood, Kazan has helped to accentuate the filmic qualities of Williams' plays. In his treatment of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, for example, in one scene Kazan employed a hollow spotlight to follow the action and focus on the key character in a way that resembled a screen close-up.

Williams has also been inclined to use what might be called filmic metaphors in his plays. Consider Scene One in *Summer and Smoke*, where

the holiday rockets, explode at intervals while Alma Winemiller and John Buchanan talk below in the park The sexual significance of the rockets seems evident, however, there is a certain awkwardness about the scene (the too obvious orgasmic symbolism is not at issue here), and one feels that the device properly belongs to a visual medium, that the bursting rockets ought to be seen. For in how many movies have we not been exposed to like filmic equivalents for physical and emotional states? Without belaboring the point, it should also be noted how Williams uses music in plays like *The Glass Menagerie* or *A Streetcar Named Desire*, where specific themes or motifs are faded in and out with movie-like precision.

Williams attempts to escape from a narrow stage realism through a theatrical technique inspired by the movies.⁴⁷

The play of *The Rose Tattoo* contains several instances of cinematic imagination, which surprisingly never showed up in the film version or were badly executed. A case in point comes at the end of the play when Magnani sends a brilliant red satin shirt to Lancaster that is passed along by her neighbors, from hand to hand, described by Williams as “moving like a banner in a zigzag course through the pampas grass to the very top of the embankment, like a streak of flame shooting up a dry hill.” Although the choice of black and white film takes away much from the image, Mann could at least have focused the attention on the action; instead, he fails to seize the image and lets the shirt be passed on in a long shot, not as the symbol beckoning for passion that it is, but as an ordinary object that simply needs to be delivered.

The Rose Tattoo was Mann’s third film as a director and he used well the talents of James Wong Howe (whose reputation as one of the best of Hollywood’s black and white cameramen led him into many Theatrical Realism films)⁴⁸ and

⁴⁷ Edward Murray, *The Cinematic Imagination--Writers and the Motion Pictures* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 52-55.

⁴⁸ Wong Howe’s Theatrical Realism films are: (black and white) *Come Back, Little Sheba, The Rose Tattoo, The Sweet Smell of Success, The Last Angry Man, The Story on Page One, Hud, Seconds, This Property Is Condemned*; (color) *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter and The Last of the Mobile Hot Shots*.

Alex North (whose scores at the time included *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *Viva Zapata*).

Wong Howe said, during the shooting of the film, that he was “striving for the tragic, comic, dramatic ‘foreign flavor’ of the play”⁴⁹ in his cinematography. North, who along with Leonard Rosenman and Kenyon Hopkins scored many of the Theatrical Realism films,⁵⁰ supplied an inspired tragicomic and sensual score. Both received Academy Award nominations, and Wong Howe won.

The Rose Tattoo as a film is close to being a failure. Nevertheless, it is a most interesting film, since in it we see the entrenchment of Theatrical Realism in the mainstream of Hollywood film production. There is one scene at the end of the film, a very good scene, in which all the elements of the style combine to conjure up the essence of Theatrical Realism. The scene develops in three stages: perverse eroticism, violent outburst, and cathartic reconciliation. Burt Lancaster, after spending the night sleeping outside Magnani’s bedroom, wakes up and finds Marisa Pavan asleep on the couch. He is fascinated by her beauty. He is half undressed and probably still drunk. If he appeared to be a harmless fool up to this point in the film, now he assumes the menacing characteristics of a voyeur about to become a rapist. His sexual arousal at the sight of Pavan asleep on the couch, “clad only in a sheer white slip,” is underlined by Alex North’s use of the saxophone in the sound track.⁵¹ In an image that foreshadows *Baby Doll* (1956), an enormous amount of tension is created. Lancaster gets closer to her, close enough to wake her with his breath. She begins to scream hysterically, waking

⁴⁹ Gladys Johnson, “Key West, Playwright gets into ‘Tattoo’ Act,” *The New York Times*, December 5, 1954.

⁵⁰ North’s Theatrical Realism films are: Documentaries for the Group Theatre Project—*Heart of Spain* and *People of the Cumberland* (directed by Kazan); Features—*Death of a Salesman*, *Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Rose Tattoo*, *Hot Spell*, *The Long Hot Summer*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *The Misfits*, *Sanctuary*, *All Fall Down*, and *The Children’s Hour*. He has scored films for four out of five “hard core” Theatrical Realism directors, Kazan, Ritt, Lumet, and Daniel Mann.

⁵¹ The saxophone’s uncanny ability to underscore erotic and/or sordid sequences in films is one of those mysteries in the order of that of the chicken and the egg. One can interpret its coloration with prior associations of sax and sex in mind, but did Adolphe Sax build rauchiness into his instrument in 1840 when he invented it, or did it suddenly acquire its association with sex through the collective subconscious?

Magnani, who storms out of her room in “her torn and disordered nightgown” and flails a broom at Lancaster, who claims his innocence and makes a quick getaway. This violent eruption is both shocking and humorous, and with earth-shaking consequences. Pavan, in her finest moment in the film, seizes the situation by chastising her mother for blatantly enjoying the carnal pleasures that she is denied. Magnani capitulates, realizing that her daughter has definitely matured sexually and she might as well lose her virginity with the man she loves rather than be taken by force, chance, or social convention. It is all here: the implied possibility of aberrant sexuality, the volatile violence, the screaming and swearing, the physicality of action, the torn clothing and the underwear, the lower class setting, the brass bed and the floral (roses!) wallpaper, the saxophone music, the low key black and white photography, and a realistic set that really looks real. It is Theatrical Realism, and as far as Hollywood and its audience knew, at the time, it was the real thing.

THE BACHELOR PARTY

Cast and Credits

(Hecht, Hill and Lancaster, United Artists, March, 1957)

Charlie Samson	Don Murray
Walter	E. G. Marshall
Eddie	Jack Warden
Arnold	Phillip Abbott
Kenneth	Larry Blyden
Helen Samson	Patricia Smith
The Existentialist	Carolyn Jones
Julie	Nancy Marchand
Hostess	Karen Norris
Girl on Stoop	Barbara Ames
Stripteaser	Norma Arden Campbell

Producer, Harold Hecht; director, Delbert Mann; story and screenplay, Paddy Chayefsky; director of photography, Joseph La Sella, ASC; art director, Edward Haworth; costumes, Mary Grant; music, Paul Madeira; orchestra conductor, C. Bakaleinikoff; associate producer, Paddy

Chayefsky; editor, William B. Murphy; assistant directors, Richard Mayberry and Edward Denault; make-up, Robert Schifter; set decoration, Edward Boyd; sound recording, John Kean and Paul Wolfe; wardrobe, Eric Seelig.

Synopsis

Charlie Samson, a young bookkeeper depressed at learning that his wife is going to have a baby they can hardly afford, reluctantly joins a party thrown by his office colleagues Walter, Eddie, and Kenneth, for Arnold, who is about to be married. As the party progresses, constantly prodded into fresh life by Eddie, the only bachelor, each of the others becomes absorbed with his individual problems. Arnold, frightened of his sexual inexperience, is uncertain whether to marry at all. Walter is so tied by domestic and financial affairs that he cannot follow his doctor's advice to leave New York. Kenneth's past promiscuity has ruined his marriage. Meanwhile, at home, Charlie's sister warns Helen, his wife, of the consequences of bachelor parties, and tells her of her own husband's relations with other women. Eddie tries to prompt Arnold into going with a prostitute; but at the last moment Arnold cannot go through with it. First Kenneth and then Walter leave the party; but Eddie drags the others to a party in Greenwich Village. Charlie meets a pathetic nymphomaniac and arranges to meet her later; meanwhile, however, the tipsy Arnold has telephoned his fiancée and told her the marriage is off. Charlie takes him home, realizing that Eddie's continued pleas to keep the party going reflect the emptiness of his bachelor life. He reassures Arnold of the value of marriage and hurries back to Helen.

Discussion

One of the most important formative factors of the Theatrical Realism style was television. Its effect was multifaceted, from economic rival competition to the development of new talent.⁵² It was in this latter capacity that television became influential in establishing a body of work and a whole school of writers,

⁵² For a more detailed discussion of this subject see pages 115-116.

directors, producers, and actors in the early and mid-fifties, that has come to be known generically as “The Golden Age of Television.” The most salient feature of this group was their geographical origin. In its infancy television was a New York-based medium, and its creators were very much a part of the New York sensibility described in Chapter III.⁵³ It was not until the late fifties that television production shifted to the West Coast and became assimilated, virtually indistinguishable from the “Hollywood” industry.

The creators of original television drama were an integral part of the social and artistic world of New York intellectuals that gave rise to the Theatrical Realism style. Their style differed from that of the people whose background was in the theatre by the fact that they were creating programs for millions of viewers across the nation as opposed to the Broadway crowd whose elite audience had accepted the new style and unprecedented subject matters on stage. Yet, the similarities among the two groups were uncanny and, in retrospect, one marvels at the forthrightness of the major works of television’s “Golden Era” which had no cause to envy the stage productions at their time. With the demand for pre-sold properties on the rise in Hollywood, television became, in the mid-fifties, a supplier of properties almost on the same level as Broadway, but this had not always been the case. To most movie producers the word “television” was an anathema, until a phenomenon called *Marty* came along and proved there was gold to be made from the flickering tube.

“*Marty* precipitated wholesale raiding on TV stories by the Hollywood studios”⁵⁴ and brought to prominence the team composed of writer Paddy Chayefsky and director Delbert Mann, whose films⁵⁵ comprise one of the most stylistically unified series of works in the American cinema. It comes as no

⁵³ See pages 106-113.

⁵⁴ Dave Kaufman, “On All Channels,” *Variety*, September 7, 1956.

⁵⁵ *Marty*, *The Bachelor Party*, *Middle of the Night*.

surprise that the producer who started this trend was none other than Harold Hecht. As Chayefsky recalled:

Harold Hecht was in New York and approached me to see if I wanted to write a picture based on a Dorothy Parker story called *Big Blonde*. I read it and I thought it was imitation Chekhov and not very good and would not make a good movie. Then I told him I had done a television show that I thought would make a good movie. I showed it to him, he said “fine,” and since it cost them practically nothing, they went ahead with it. I did that for practically nothing. I don’t know why they put up the money, but I can tell you that nobody lost money on that picture and I got less than a television salary . . . of course, I had a percentage. It was after the success of *Marty* that they were interested in anything else.⁵⁶

Chayefsky’s comment “I don’t know why they put up the money” was in reference to the much publicized rumor that Harold Hecht had decided to produce *Marty* as a tax write-off.

When the old-time Hollywood natives heard that Hecht was going to make a movie about a lovelorn butcher, they concluded that Hecht-Lancaster must have become so rich that, for tax reasons, it desperately needed a surefire, guaranteed flop. This venture had a hopelessly noncommercial smell, but how much could he lose? The picture was budgeted at only \$343,000.⁵⁷

The rumor had been supported by, among others, Ernest Borgnine, who had signed a long-term contract with Hecht-Lancaster (H-L) when he was a supporting character actor specializing in “heavies” (such as “Fatso” in *From Here to Eternity*). After *Marty* Borgnine found himself a star holding an Oscar, on the one hand, and on the other an exclusive contract for twelve pictures with H-L at a small salary. Borgnine sued and the case was not settled for two years.⁵⁸ In the interval their relationship naturally grew strained. As Hecht recalled:

⁵⁶ Paddy Chayefsky interview in January, 1976.

⁵⁷ Shana Alexander, “Will the Real Burt Please Stand Up?” *Life*, September 6, 1963, p. 43.

⁵⁸ Hedda Hopper, “Hecht-Hill-Lancaster Suit Settled by Borgnine,” *The Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 1957.

Borgnine got funny ideas about wanting to do big pictures after *Marty's* success, and I couldn't persuade him to do an American version of Marcel Pagnol's *The Baker's Wife*, which would have been great for Ernie.⁵⁹

Chayefsky may have been involved in instigating this unrealized project, as he claimed to have been "very influenced" by the French Poetic Realism of Pagnol "In fact, I couldn't understand why American films couldn't do the same thing . . . why couldn't we write about the people the way Pagnol did."⁶⁰

Hecht and Chayefsky, along with most of the New York intellectuals of the period, were profoundly affected by the Art House circuit and the postwar cultural slump complex. They sought to emulate the foreign "art" films of the period. Months before *Marty* vindicated them by making a lot of money, winning the Grand Prize at Cannes and a load of Academy Awards, Hecht wrote, as a guest columnist in a paper:

Must all movies be designed to appeal to fifty million customers? Both as businessmen and as individuals who are excited by the challenge of attempting to broaden the horizon of screen entertainment, Burt Lancaster and I have done our share of soul-searching. To be blunt about it, we don't see any point in possibly becoming heroes to the hard core of avant-garde cinema sophisticates and going broke in the process. With that point clearly stated, I venture to say it may be desirable and profitable for all of us engaged in the production of movies to occasionally reverse our thinking and not worry about reaching out for an audience of fifty million.

It is very easy to get trapped into "playing it safe" because picture production, no matter how modest the project, has come to be a big financial gamble. However, somewhere in between Hollywood's so-called "blockbuster" entertainments and the quickie-type melodramas and Westerns, there lies what should be a fertile field for dramatic communication and possibly even some experimentation. In this shadow land dwells a so-called Lost Audience. Producers have learned from bitter

⁵⁹ Sam Leaner, "Hecht Turns to Outdoors in *the Way West* film," *The Herald-News*, May 22, 1967.

⁶⁰ Chayefsky interview.

experience that this public knows how to find the neighborhood theatre when it shows a picture of distinguished quality, and that it comprises the basic market for foreign films in this country.

These are the intelligent, discriminating moviegoers—those who seek intellectual stimulation as well as genuine emotional satisfaction in entertainment. We Hollywood producers can and should give more attention to meeting the entertainment demands of this audience because I don't honestly think it is quite as far removed from the mass audience as we imagine.⁶¹

Marty proved to H-L and the rest of the industry that American “art” films could be made profitably, that an audience for small sensitive films existed and was receptive if “quality” films were made available to it. Alexander noted:

As a tax dodge, *Marty* was disastrous. It grossed \$5 million. It also won four Oscars as the best written, best directed, best acted and best picture of 1955.” Now H-L was not only rich, it was a high-class outfit; it had made an art film. A small insight into the viewpoints of the two partners is that Hecht thereafter called *Marty* an “ott film” and Lancaster with equal accuracy called it a “freak.”

By 1956 H-L operations were in high gear. Their last five pictures (four Lancaster swashbucklers plus *Marty*) had cost only \$7,343,000 and grossed \$42 million. United Artists, which bankrolled them, was itself surviving chiefly on its H-L revenues.⁶²

“The success of *Marty*” was one of the key phrases of the fifties. It appeared over and over, with almost the same frequency as “the challenge of television” and “the decline of the studio system” in the literature devoted to the film industry of the period.

The original television show had been very successful. Delbert Mann recalled:

We received a lot of complimentary mail. This was in the days of live television and there were no cables then for simultaneous broadcasting to the nation, so the show was seen only over a few relay

⁶¹ Harold Hecht, “Hollywood,” *New York Morning Telegraph*, October 28, 1955.

⁶² Alexander, p. 43.

stations outside New York. Then a kinescope was made and televised elsewhere and the response was very good indeed.⁶³

The program was part of a series produced by Fred Coe entitled “The Philco-Goodyear Playhouse” and starred Rod Steiger in the title role,⁶⁴ which according to press releases, had been patterned by Chayefsky after his friend Martin Ritt, “who had once been a butcher in the Bronx.”⁶⁵ But to most observers the teleplay was “painfully autobiographical of the writer who used to barrel his 5-foot-6 frame with a candy and creampuff habit.”⁶⁶

Born Sidney Chayefsky in the Bronx, he picked up the nickname “Paddy” during World War II when he attempted to “get out of K.P. duty to attend a Catholic Holy Day mass.”⁶⁷ During the stint in the army he wrote a musical entitled *No T.O. for Love* in which he played a feature role and toured the European capitals, coming to the attention of some of the United States theatres’ leading figures working in Europe. He was then assigned to work on a documentary film which was being produced by Garson Kanin.

After the war Kanin optioned one of his plays, but it never was produced. He then came to the attention of Molly Kazan, who went over his work with him and gave him support in the initial steps of a writer’s career. Her husband, Elia, optioned Chayefsky’s second play, but it also remained unproduced.

Chayefsky had written some adaptations for the Theatre Guild of the Air and one or two TV scripts when he arrived at the Philco-Goodyear

⁶³ Delbert Mann interview in March 1976.

⁶⁴ Steiger did not get the role in the movie because he refused to sign the long-term exclusive contract offered by Hecht-Lancaster. Ernest Borgnine, who was already working for H-L in *Vera Cruz*, was offered the role after Mann and Chayefsky went to meet him at the film’s location and approved of him (Mann interview).

⁶⁵ Biography of Martin Ritt distributed to the press by Embassy Pictures in 1960 (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Library—“Martin Ritt” folder). Delbert Mann denied knowledge of this in an interview with the writer, although he “was aware that the rumor existed at the time.”

⁶⁶ Helen Dudar, “Paddy Chayefsky: A Post Portrait,” *New York Post*, January 4, 1960.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

program. In [David] Susskind's consistently acid recollections, "he came to us as a post-war convulsion—along with juvenile delinquency and a higher divorce rate."

Television and Chayefsky were a fortuitous event for one another. If he was not the first to recognize its invitation to intimacy, he was the first and perhaps the best of those who learned to exploit its suitability for the small scale, the non-heroic and the commonplace.

Chayefsky: "In television you can dig into the most humble, ordinary relationships: the relationship of bourgeois children to their mother, the middle-class husband to his wife, of white-collar father to his secretary—in short, the relationships of the people."⁶⁸

Chayefsky's main concern was for the traditional socio-cultural values of marriage, family, integrity, success, and honor. Unlike Williams or Miller, who wrote about exceptional characters or circumstances with a degree of poetic stylization in the language, Chayefsky developed his art along the lines of a social miniaturist with a keen ear for reproducing the everyday language of the common man.

The transference of his TV plays to the movies opened Chayefsky's work to a wider audience and to wider critical attention; in a very short time, the praise for his use of ordinary characters in everyday situations turned into an accusation.

As Chayefsky perceived the criticism—and it can't be said he has understood it fully—the trouble was that his dialogue had the literal sound of transcriptions of conversations overheard on the Jerome Avenue local and his plays were essentially small things about small people, that is, in a minor vein.⁶⁹

His teleplay of *Middle of the Night*, which later became a film, was first adapted for the Broadway stage with Edward G. Robinson and Gena Rowlands, directed by Joshua Logan. At that time the following notice appeared in *The New Yorker*:

Television writers, it seems to me, have one important advantage over other writers when they transfer their talents to the legitimate theatre:

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

their former trade, which I still can't bring myself to regard as other than fearsome, has taught them to be high-fidelity recorders of common American speech. This can be a monotonous and even a faintly numbing accomplishment—in Paddy Chayefsky's *Middle of the Night*, for instance, the effect was often that of an absolutely unedited transcript of conversations that could securely have been of much interest to the participants themselves—but the idiom is obviously correct, the sentiments are clearly those that would naturally arise in the people expressing them, and the jokes are exactly those they might be expected to make. This kind of super-stenographic reporting, whatever suffering it may entail for the audience, is not a feat to be dismissed lightly. Television writers, however, also appear to work under certain handicaps. One is that, having learned to write about a kind of life that will be comprehensible in a million living rooms, they seem to be largely incapable of doing something else. Their plays for the stage, that is, continue to present only characters dear and familiar to television audiences—with whom, in fact, these audiences can readily identify themselves or else to whom they can feel agreeably superior. So far, the effect of this preoccupation with the semi-literate hasn't been especially bothersome in the theatre, but as more and more writers advance from the screen to the platform (and don't think they won't), it can easily turn into a major affliction. It is quite possible that the day will come when, with the exception of an occasional revival, we will seldom hear an even remotely graceful sentence spoken by any actor in the land. This is not a prospect that I contemplate with rejoicing. Another drawback is that the televised artist, by the nature of his medium, is pretty much confined to telling fairly short and simple anecdotes. He is usually skillful at this pastime, but a play, both in length and in content, is something else, and up to now there has been no evidence that he can handle the more complicated form, the samples we have seen being expanded episodes at best.⁷⁰

Chayefsky is not the kind of man who would take this kind of criticism without putting up a fight. A week later he answered his critics in an article for *The New York Times*, part of which is quoted here:

I have sometimes been accused of writing little plays about little people. What my critics pretend to mean, I think, is that my plays are

⁷⁰ *The New Yorker*, November 24, 1956. This was a clipping and neither author nor page numbers were indicated.

literal and earthbound, and that my characters never achieve any stature beyond immediate recognition.

I think this is all nonsense, of course, because I take myself most seriously as a writer. I set my marks a great deal higher than mere stenographic reporting. I try to reach the depths of my characters, and I try to achieve certain heights of emotion. In my very vain moments I pride myself on attaining lyricism. These are my particular vanities, and I certainly don't insist that everyone agree with me, but I like to take issue with the phrases 'little play' and 'little people.'

There is a current reaction against the very realistic drama that has dominated the American theatre since the Nineteen Thirties, a kind of drama that has become almost obsessive in television during the last few years. People, including myself, have grown tired of mumbling actors and stories revolving around such pivotal points as whether the hero will get a five dollar raise

Nevertheless, I think much of the current success of such plays is due to a justified reaction against what is sometimes called 'the ash can school of writing' that is, grubby drama about grubby people

Even Arthur Miller, who certainly cannot be considered a limited playwright, was caught in the trap. His *A View from the Bridge*, while occasionally pretentious, was a powerful drama of primitive emotion, but the characters spoke a modern and inarticulate idiom and the play was not granted the stature of a true tragedy.

Nobody called *A View from the Bridge* a little play because Arthur Miller has achieved the status of being one of the finest American dramatists, if not the finest. If, however, Mr. Miller had achieved his prominence in television, even his *Death of a Salesman* might have been called a little play. I am afraid that what some critics really mean by 'little play' is that the play had its origins in television. It is a sort of poignant arrogance among some theatre people to suppose that any other dramatic medium is only a stepping stone to Broadway, a sort of minor league, a training school for the nobler demands of the stage. I could not escape the feeling, after reading some of the reviews of my play, *Middle of the Night*, that I was being looked at as a nouveau riche who had elbowed his way into an aristocrat's home and, while the gentry were by noblesse oblige dutifully courteous, they could not help raising an eyebrow at my choice of necktie.

There are many flaws in my writing of *Middle of the Night*, some of them basic, but it is certainly not a little play. It deals with, even if perhaps inadequately, some of the basic precepts of life: What is love? What is happiness? What is fulfillment?

As a writer I hope some day to write bold, inventive theatre pieces, not necessarily limited by realism, but at this moment I am a realistic writer. I tried in *Middle of the Night* to write about love and happiness and

fulfillment in particularly mundane terms, because I believe they are mundane things, as real as the audience or electric blue bulbs, palpable to the touch, recognizable to the senses. . . . I am, however, frankly demanding to be relieved of the epithet of ‘stenographic writer’ or ‘slice-of-life writer’ and that my writing be recognized as more than an ability to put down recognizable idiom.

I have just finished the first draft of a film called *Bachelor Party*. The hero is a man wandering for a night in search of some identity, of some truth and value to his life. His terms of reference are limited by a white-collar job and a two-room apartment in Stuyvesant Town, and he searches for meaning within his family and friends, just as everyone in the audience has to search for his. He speaks in common idiom and the circumstances of his evening are common circumstances. But is he any the less a searcher than Peer Gynt?

I hope the audience will accept *Bachelor Party* as an amusing, occasionally intense, and even insightful film, but I will be damned if I think it is a little film because I do not come out on a bare stage and announce my intentions in pentameter or by abstruse vivification of the language. Truth is truth, and it is not made into poetry by artificial pungency. Life is life. It breathes for itself, and it contains the exaltation of true lyricism just in its being.⁷¹

Yet in his first produced original screenplay, *The Goddess*, Chayefsky seemed to have paid attention to his critics and tried to remedy the situation by writing his own version of poetic dialogue. The result was disastrous—a manipulative stilted, expository style—as if elements of Tennessee Williams had been superimposed on Clifford Odets territory. The film should have been Chayefsky’s apotheosis, and the author himself announced that it would be “a major work of art,”⁷² formed his own production company, hired the cast and crew, and had the film shot in New York even though it was a Hollywood story. The resulting film is a perfect illustration of two of the most formative elements of Theatrical Realism: the New York vs. Hollywood syndrome, and the vulgarization of Freudian psychology.

⁷¹ Paddy Chayefsky, “Not So Little,” *The New York Times*, December 6, 1956.

⁷² *Time*, July 7, 1958.

The movie, which could be described as Chayefsky's version of Odet's *The Big Knife*, was one of the most violently anti-Hollywood films ever made, and it was obviously drenched in dime store psychoanalysis. As one critic pointed out, "reading the script provokes a sensation that sections were written with occasional reference to a popular guidebook entitled *Neurosis—How to Make the Most of It*."⁷³ And Chayefsky himself now acknowledges the "the Freudianism really hurt the picture."⁷⁴ To portray the anti-heroine of his story, a composite of facts, myths, and legends surrounding a Marilyn Monroe-like movie star, Chayefsky chose Kim Stanley, an Actors Studio luminary, who had played the role of Cherie in the Broadway production of *Bus Stop*. His comments on "method" actors and Kim Stanley (who was making her film debut) point out the similarities in Chayefsky's and the Studio's approach to the question of acting:

Most young actors today are what is known as "method" actors. The method is a school of acting that is so broad that it defeats definition, but it generally involves a depth of understanding of the role that approaches psychoanalysis. It is based on the Moscow Art Theatre, and it is certainly the finest approach to acting that I know of. Method actors are after the inner truth of their roles, that is to say, the deeper motivations of the character—so that the actual lines of dialogue represent far more than what they say. . . . Kim Stanley, one of the most gifted actresses I have ever worked with, seems to work on a purely analytical level. She discusses her role with all the familiar jargon of psychoanalysis. She is, I think, the only actress who can take these academic terms and reduce them to surface effects that the audience will understand. Most psychoanalytical actors can discuss their roles, but cannot produce the delicate edges of reality they have just discussed.⁷⁵

Chayefsky and Delbert Mann never were officially connected with the Actors Studio,⁷⁶ but their work was directly influenced by its presence. As Mann recalled:

⁷³ Dudar, "Paddy Chayefsky."

⁷⁴ Chayefsky interview.

⁷⁵ Paddy Chayefsky, *Television Plays* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), pp. 265, 267

⁷⁶ Chayefsky went to the Actors Studio as an observer "a couple of times" (Chayefsky interview).

I would say that the Actors Studio was very influential because most of the New York actors went there. In television . . . we had developed a sense of “repertory company” and many of the actors with whom we worked were members of the Studio. I am sure this affected the whole climate at the time.⁷⁷

Throughout Chayefsky’s career the influence of the Studio and its techniques were clearly visible, even in his recent films, *Hospital* and *Network*, which opened a new stylistic direction for the author. If his early teleplays and films were written in what some called the “tape recording style” of language, and in *The Goddess* he used bargain basement Williams, his last two films are characterized by what Kerr described as “the art of the tirade.”⁷⁸ Chayefsky’s new voice is agitated, meaningful, informed, topical, full of black humor, and coming from a post existential despair. In *Network* Chayefsky found a way of making these “tirades” work extremely well, not by integrating them into a character’s speech (as he had done for the George C. Scott character in *Hospital*), but by isolating them in the character of Howard Beale (admirably played by the late Peter Finch), a raving lunatic whose function is to face America and tell it like it is.

Chayefsky’s film work is characterized by his close involvement in all aspects of production. The only exception is *The Catered Affair*, which M-G-M bought outright during the post-*Marty* raids, and was made with care by Hollywood’s best Theatrical Realism imitator, Richard Brooks. Chayefsky commented on the film:

I didn’t work with Richard Brooks. I was broke and sold that outright, but I’ll never do it again. I had nothing to do with it. It was done all wrong. Gore Vidal, who wrote the script, was a good friend of mine, but he is the last man in the world to do a story about the lower middle class Irish in the East Bronx. Bette Davis was too grand for the part. This

⁷⁷ Delbert Mann interview.

⁷⁸ Walter Kerr, “I Hate Paddy Chayefsky,” *The New York Times*, April 2, 1972.

was a miniature and should have been done as a small portrait. I read the script but never saw the movie.⁷⁹

As soon as he went to work in television Chayefsky developed “an attitude of mother-bear protectiveness about his work,”⁸⁰ which has only been reinforced with the passing of time. Early in his career he had had an unfortunate experience in dealing with Hollywood producers,⁸¹ and he came to relish the high pressure world of live television which called for his involvement in the production up to the last minute of the broadcast.

In the early days of television, Chayefsky was always to be found sitting in on rehearsals of his plays, prepared at least to do his own pruning and rewriting, at a time when, another writer recalls, “most of us felt we couldn’t afford to take the time off and stayed home by the typewriter trying to pay for next month’s rent He got a relatively small sum for *Marty*, an enormously profitable low-budget film, but he did receive a house and car in Hollywood during the shooting and a camera-side seat where he could guard the integrity of his intentions.⁸²

According to Chayefsky:

My experience as a writer of *Marty* was not a typical one. I had a great deal more to do with the production of the picture than the writer usually has. I was consulted on every aspect of the picture, even those not relevant to the actual screen play.

But the fact is Harold Hecht, the producer, was not obligated to consult me about anything really. There was nothing in our contract that restrained him from throwing me off the picture and hiring another writer. Our horns were locked frequently over script problems and matter of casting and where the picture should be shot and who was to compose the score, but these problems were handled as in any other dramatic production—by dispute and compromise.

⁷⁹ Chayefsky interview.

⁸⁰ Dubar, “Paddy Chayefsky.”

⁸¹ Chayefsky had written an original screenplay entitled *The Great American Diplomat* which, after going through many hands and different changes was made by 20th Century-Fox under the title of *As Young as You Feel* (1951) with Monty Woolley, Thelma Ritter, David Wayne, and Marilyn Monroe.

⁸² Dudar, “Paddy Chayefsky.”

Mr. Hecht's contribution to *Marty* went far beyond the management of the budget, nor did he try to subvert the craft values of the film to satisfy the traditional concepts of what makes a picture successful. Actually, Mr. Hecht turned out to be a sensitive and talented man with as sharp an eye for the "art" values of the film as most writers I know.⁸³

In 1972 Chayefsky referred to himself as...

...a playwright who had no theatre, so I went into films; and if I wanted to be a writer—a film writer, I had to be in everything (as a playwright does in the theatre). That's the only way you can make films as a writer, because film isn't essentially a writer's art, it's a director's art."⁸⁴

Chayefsky had secured an unprecedented position of power for a writer in the film industry. This was, of course, due to the fact that the first film made of his work became a critical and commercial landmark in the history of the American film.

Chayefsky's relationship with Delbert Mann was based on a mutual understanding of the writer's role as envisioned by Chayefsky. In the introduction to the published teleplay of *The Bachelor Party* he described how this relationship could be realized on an optimum plane:

Directors come to their work with their own highly personalized beliefs and emotions. A director whose mother abandoned him when he was four years old is going to have a definite attitude on how to treat the role of a mother in a given script. The homosexual director cannot have an accurate understanding of either the relationship between two men or that between a young man and a young woman. A director may be very impressed by the stark, bare-stage sort of drama of the 1930s, and he may impose this attitude on the most conventional comedy. The writer must protect his script against these violations.

⁸³ Paddy Chayefsky, "In Praise of Reappraised Picture-Makers," *The New York Times*, January 8, 1956.

⁸⁴ McCandlish Phillips, "Focusing on Chayefsky: Make it 'Picture Maker'" *The New York Times*, January 3, 1972.

When I say protect his script, I do not mean like a wounded mother tiger. If there is anything more trying than the arrogant director, it is the defensive playwright. A writer must come to rehearsal leaving any paternalistic feelings he may have for his script behind him. He must watch each scene as it matures between the actors, searching for moments of untruth or boredom. He must cut with ruthless incisiveness, regardless of how well-turned the phrase or dialogue may be. If the director says he cannot make sense out of a scene, the playwright must rewrite the scene. If the actors do not understand a given moment, he must rewrite the moment. The writer should have no concern for his words; he should only be interested in the final playing. Therefore, when a writer protects his script, he is protecting not his lines but an interpretation, tone, or approach that he considers best for the show. This will take him into the province of the director; but the director should also be approaching the show with the single purpose of making it the best possible one, and he should accept the writer's suggestions. It is impossible to produce a good show that offers any satisfaction to the writer unless he has a working relationship with his director. I do not write literature; I write drama, and drama depends entirely on how it is played, and the only man who can make a script play well is the director.⁸⁵

Delbert Mann made Paddy Chayefsky's scripts play very well indeed, and he did not seem to mind having the writer looking over his shoulder during the process. A product of the Yale Drama School where he studied on the G.I. bill, Mann had been involved in theatre activity since his high school days. After college he did two seasons of summer stock at Wellesley, and became a director for the Town Theatre in Columbia, South Carolina. Leaving the south for New York he found work as an assistant director at NBC's Television Playhouse.⁸⁶ As Mann recalled:

This was a dramatic series produced by Fred Coe. At first he was producing and directing all the shows, but doing one full hour of drama each week proved to be too taxing for him, so eventually he brought in several directors to help out. That's how I got to direct on that show. Coe selected the scripts, worked with the writers, did most of the casting and

⁸⁵ Chayefsky, *Television Plays*, pp. 262-263.

⁸⁶ The series name was later changed to Philco-Goodyear Playhouse.

then either directed it himself or assigned it to one of the other directors. Arthur Penn was directing there with me then.⁸⁷

Beginning in 1949 Mann directed a play every other week for Philco-Goodyear Playhouse. Later he slowed down to one out of three.⁸⁸ It was during this period that he met Chayefsky and started their team relationship with the teleplay of *Printer's Measure*, and then *Marty*, *The Mother*, *The Bachelor Party*, and *Middle of the Night*. Looking back on those days Mann recalled:

There was a necessity for us in television, to be inventive, to experiment, to try outrageous things and fail, but come back and try again.

What we came up with were dramas with a strong sense of reality, intimate studies of real people and their problems, staged without pretense or flamboyance.

Somehow, in our thrashing around and experimenting, trying to find what had impact on a small screen, the thing that was most successful and gave live TV its distinct sense of style and feeling was drama that embodied the essence of realism, intimate drama having high emotional impact. Some have called it *kitchen drama*.⁸⁹

Chayefsky commented on Delbert Mann as a director:

Delbert Mann's finest gift as a director lies in his ability to see the whole show in its proper shape. This is a rare quality in a director.

. . . Delbert also has a keen understanding of normal bourgeois life. He is an amiable middle-class fellow himself, who looks rather like a young associate professor of sociology. He does not strike the pose usually associated with the creative director. Nor does he try to impress the actors by giving them lessons. Most actors actually are not aware they are being directed by Delbert until the fourth or fifth day of rehearsal. He lets them alone—assuming they are professional people—unless, of course, they violate his basic line of reasoning or unless they want to discuss their parts. Delbert also has the secure ability to accept my meddling without defending his prestige. If he likes my ideas, he uses

⁸⁷ Delbert Mann interview.

⁸⁸ Rod Nordell, "Marty Mann at Harvard," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 27, 1956.

⁸⁹ Joseph C. Waugh, "Golden Age Had Its Mann," *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 18, 1963.

them; if he doesn't like them, he says so. Generally, I would say that Delbert is much more interested in what the audience thinks of the show than in what it thinks of him. He is a rare fellow, and I owe him more that I care to acknowledge.⁹⁰

Unlike most Theatrical Realism figures who have a history of left wing politics,⁹¹ special crusading, intense psychoanalysis, and a cultural slump complex, Delbert Mann's placid "normality" strikes a dramatic contrast. He never had any brushes with the HUAC or the Blacklist and, in fact, directed the 1955 television production of the anticommunist drama *Darkness at Noon* for NBC's "Producer's Showcase," starring "the friendly witness" Lee J. Cobb. His social crusading has been limited to exploring, in Knight's words, "the greater range of human emotion that the movie camera can encompass,"⁹² and the only time he consulted a psychiatrist was when he was "seeking expert judgment on the relationship of violence between the characters played by Burt Lancaster and Rita Hayworth in *Separate Tables*."⁹³ As his wife wrote in a magazine:

Over a handshake, one meets a proper niceness, a restrained distance which is the traditional protector of a deep sensitivity too often slashed if left completely vulnerable. You might say he is 4F—firm, fair, fearless and a family man.⁹⁴

Delbert Mann is a pillar of the community, a man deeply involved in his church and his children's school, who "regrets the current emphasis on sex and violence in the film industry,"⁹⁵ yet in 1957 he directed a controversial and trail-

⁹⁰ Chayefsky, *Television Plays*, p. 264.

⁹¹ It is of interest to note here that Harold Hecht testified before the HUAC on March 23, 1953, and admitted to "being a former communist." Burt Lancaster had figured prominently as a sponsor and organizer of film personalities in a campaign for the abolition of HUAC in 1947 (Harold Rushmore, "Film Figures Seek Abolition of Red Probers," *Los Angeles Examiner*, December 30, 1947).

⁹² Arthur Knight, "S.R. Goes to the Movies," *Saturday Review*, March 13, 1965.

⁹³ Richard Dyer MacCann, "Director Compares Two Media," *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 15, 1958.

⁹⁴ Ann Mann, "What is a Mann?" *Action*, July-August, 1967, p. 32.

⁹⁵ Press Conference, Los Angeles International Film Exposition, April, 1976.

blazing adult film that had more than its share of sensationalism and censorship problems. The picture was *The Bachelor Party*.

The Bachelor Party proves the axiom that it is the picture made immediately after a huge success that tells the most about the film makers. With their confidence and bourses reinforced, H-L doubled the budget of *Marty* for their second production of another Chayefsky teleplay, which the author proceeded to expand to feature film length. In a recent interview Chayefsky claimed that he “begged Hecht and Lancaster not to make *Bachelor Party* after the success of *Marty*. It was too close in tone and we should not repeat ourselves . . . we should do a completely different kind of picture, but they insisted on it.”⁹⁶ These remarks by Chayefsky may be colored by the passage of time and the fact that *Bachelor Party* was a box office disappointment for all the parties involved. Nonetheless, Hecht, Mann, and Don Murray considered this their favorite film, though Chayefsky felt that he “never licked that script and was writing on the set up to the last minute.”⁹⁷ His comments during the shooting of the film were quite different—he could hardly contain his enthusiasm for the film and the film making process when he told a reporter on the set:

This is the part I like the best about a picture, I wouldn't miss it for the world. I'm really useless here but . . . you know, I can't think of another business where you can have so much fun. You know what I mean? Can you think of another business where you can make so much money and have so much fun doing it?

Delbert is going to have much more of a chance to use the camera in this picture . . . in *Marty* the situation called for the camera to just sit in front of the scene, here he'll be able to move it around . . . it's a bigger picture in theme . . . it asks a pretty basic question . . . what's life all about? Delbert will have more scope . . . he'll really have a chance to be more 'arty' with it.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Chayefsky interview.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ John Allen, “The *Marty* Outfit in Harness Again,” *New York Herald Tribune*, September 2, 1956.

Indeed “Delbert” was more “arty” with it, but still in keeping with his restrained objectivity and unobtrusive style. What did not exactly come through was the “pretty basic question of what’s life all about?” Still, one must admit that the film’s philosophical inferences are quite rich. Even today *The Bachelor Party’s* thematic undertones are as powerful as they were in 1957, and this says a lot about a film whose functional mechanism depends completely on a now vanishing moral code. And because it is so dependent on the moral climate of the period, the film transcends the level of narrative drama and becomes, with the passing of time, a social document of the Eisenhower era.

Chayefsky described his purpose in writing the original teleplay:

I wanted to show the emptiness of an evening about town, and emptiness is one of the most difficult of all qualities to dramatize. What Delbert Mann did was to balance each scene delicately so that the emptiness became heavier and heavier. . . . We decided the line that the first act indicated was the leading character’s desire to go to bed with a woman other than his wife. It is impossible to write such blatant adultery in a television script and even more impossible to write an honest motivation for it. It was up to the director and the actor to convey this basic thought to the audience. . . . How, for example, does a fine actor convey with no breach of taste and with literal reality the hungry, restless, amorphous desire to sleep with another woman when he won’t even admit this desire to himself?⁹⁹

When he expanded the teleplay for the film version Chayefsky slightly shifted the focus from the main character’s predicament to the whole group of office workers, each one of which faced a cathartic revelation about his role in life and his relationship to others and himself. Shot at night in the streets of New York, the film resembles Fellini’s *I Vitelloni* and *La Dolce Vita* with its episodic structure centered around a group of men in search of thrills that may obliterate, if only for one night, the painful reality of their existence.

The Bachelor Party is foreshadowed in the second scene of *Marty* in which Angie keeps asking the homely butcher, “Well, what do you feel like doing

⁹⁹ Chayefsky, *Television Plays*, p. 263.

tonight?” and Marty keeps answering “I don’t know. What do you feel like doing tonight?” As a logical extension of this Saturday night emptiness, *The Bachelor Party* picks up the same theme and develops it through all its variations.

The social constant among the characters is their class and occupation. Low rung white-collar workers, middle class bookkeepers in a large Manhattan firm, who have just recently been assimilated into the “nine to five” routine of the masses that comprise “the backbone of the country,” they are at the time of their lives when their dreams of the future should be coming true and, like most Chayefsky characters, they sense the incongruity between their dreams and their reality. They are in the process of accepting, rather than finding, their place in the sun. Throughout the script is the theme of bright promise caught in a sea of mediocrity. As Walter, the member of the group most advanced in age, though not in status, who has found out about his illness and impending death, explains: “I was a bright kid! Everybody thought I was going to be the first Catholic to be president! Where did it all go?!”

The echo of these words rings in the protagonist’s (Charlie) mind. He has just found out that his wife is pregnant and his job is threatened by the impending arrival of an IBM machine. As it is, the quality of his life leaves much to be desired—days at the office, nights at school, a cramped apartment in Stuyvesant Town housing project, and now, with a baby on the way, he can see nothing but obstacles in his advancement, and what’s worse, he realizes that in his future there is no such thing as advancement, only escalations of present situations.

The film opens with an early morning establishing shot of the housing project. The lighthearted script of the main titles and the fake Gershwin music of Bakaleinikoff deceptively create expectations of a fun and frivolous entertainment that never materializes on the screen, thereby setting up the audience in the appropriate frame of mind to experience the coming “Walpurgisnacht” by surprise. But as soon as one is inside the apartment, and the alarm clock rings its

piercing bell, one realizes this is a world of routine existence about to be shattered. The first scene is representative of the direction and production values of the film. Delbert Mann is building up the film in long takes, which emphasize the real time element. His camera approaches the scene as it is about to begin, records it by moving unobtrusively to the best possible angles, and retreats to fade out once the action is over. Mann is still working with basic television techniques in shooting the interiors. On location the direction picks up tempo and style by being less objective in its coverage of action, but while he is in the obviously artificial interior sets, the staging acquires a theatrical quality that works against the desired effect.

Once inside the office, where the protagonists are assembled, the ensemble playing begins and the film is underway. Delbert Mann's background in television resulted in his carrying on to film the practice of extensive pre-rehearsals¹⁰⁰ and his company of actors excels in their ensemble playing. As Don Murray¹⁰¹ noted:

The Bachelor Party is like a jazz orchestra, where each instrument has its solo measures while all the others maintain a rich and constant support. . . . I believe the main reasons for this success were: the flexible genius of the author; the communicative and perceptive nature of the director; and the willingness and ability of the actors to give themselves unselfishly of each other and to the play.¹⁰²

The first scene of the party is a good example of the ensemble in top form. Seated at a restaurant table, the group is eating and getting drunk while reminiscing about "the good old days." If the scene had been shot in extreme

¹⁰⁰ Martin Ritt, who also started directing television, also insists on extensive pre-rehearsals before shooting any film (Ritt interview in June, 1972). Mann observed that "oddly, whenever I've rehearsed my cast in advance of shooting in this way, Academy nominations have resulted for some of my players. It happened on *Marty*, *The Bachelor Party*, *Separate Tables*, and also on *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*" (Hazel Flynn, "Mann Likes Plenty of the Pre-Rehearsal," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, January 29, 1964).

¹⁰¹ Don Murray's presence in the film strengthens the Theatrical Realism style. Murray's career was typical of the Theatrical Realism star. He started on stage playing the role of the sailor in *The Rose Tattoo* and went on to star in *Bus Stop*, *Hatful of Rain*, *Advise and Consent* and other Theatrical Realism films.

¹⁰² Irish Film Society Programme, October 18, 1958.

close-ups, and had been allowed to go uncontrolled, it would have looked like a stunning predecessor of the films recently directed by John Cassavetes, especially *Husbands*, which owes a lot, if unconsciously, to *The Bachelor Party*.

The film is imbued with the “good old boys” feeling of the fifties that it should appropriately have. The men had gone from high school to the European war as a logical extension—a football cheer becoming a battle cry. Their “Machismo” is slowly becoming obsolete. The women are seen only as temptation (flirting office girls, a stripper, a hooker in a subway), or dutiful commitment (the wives).

The Bachelor Party is a prime example of the “daring frankness” that characterized Theatrical Realism. The word “pregnant” was used for the first time in television¹⁰³ when the show aired on NBC, and when the teleplay was expanded a series of scenes were added by Chayefsky which had been unprecedented in American commercial films. First of these was a scene in which the “guys” watch “stag movies” and comment on the action with appropriate candor; a scene in which the bridegroom confesses his virginity at a strip joint, while the stripper teases him and the audience by coming in and out of the frame in the background; a scene in which abortion is discussed and considered (though never mentioned); a scene in which the men pick up a prostitute as a gift for the groom who is unable to carry out the sexual performance; a scene in which nymphomania and homosexuality are shown implicitly within the context of a Greenwich Village party of vacuous intellectuals; and finally, the scene in which the protagonist decides to commit adultery with a mysterious woman who is only known as “the existentialist.”

The Bachelor Party received the Production Code Seal of Approval, but was cut in different markets and banned entirely in many countries.¹⁰⁴ Ironically,

¹⁰³ Chayefsky interview.

¹⁰⁴ Ireland, among others.

the advertising campaign was not approved by the Code office because of its salacious content, but United Artists used the ads in defiance anyway.¹⁰⁵

As a dramatist Chayefsky always enjoys taking more risks than may be deemed necessary. By letting his “everyman” characters experience the absurd of Camus’ *Sisphyus* he creates a moral tale of grass roots existentialism that may have been too hard to digest for the general audience. As Helen Dudar observed: “Every now and then, the viewer is seized by an uneasy sensation that the author sometimes feels the common people really are common.”¹⁰⁶

Commenting on the film’s ending, Chayefsky said:

To me, success is a home, a wife, and children. A lot of people have this success without knowing it.¹⁰⁷ It is a happy ending—an affirmation of life. People have to find the value of life in their home or maybe in their work.¹⁰⁸

Although Charlie and Helen embrace and reaffirm their love for each other in the end, this “happy ending” is more an expression of the moment, more an act of repentance and forgiveness, than one of the protagonist’s acceptance of his condition. Seen in this light, the film becomes Chayefsky’s courageous and existential questioning of the meaning of life—a daring subject matter for those complacent times—truly adult entertainment.

EDGE OF THE CITY

Cast and Credits

Axel North (Nordmann)
Tommy Tyler
Charles Malik
Ellen Wilson
Lucy Tyler

John Cassavetes
Sidney Poitier
Jack Warden
Kathleen Maguire
Ruby Dee

¹⁰⁵ “Wolf Stuff in Ad copy for *Bachelor Party* Blows Up New United Artists Code Fuss,” *Variety*, April 10, 1957.

¹⁰⁶ Dudar, “Paddy Chayefsky.”

¹⁰⁷ Ed Wallace column in *New York World Telegram*, October 9, 1954.

¹⁰⁸ Chayefsky interview.

Mr. Nordmann	Robert Simon
Mrs. Nordmann	Ruth White
Davis	William A. Lee
Brother	Val Avery
Detective	John Kellogg
Wallace	David Clark
Lucy's Mother	Estelle Helmsley
Old Stevedore	Charles Jordan
Night Boss	Ralph Bell

Director, Marin Ritt; producer, David Susskind; story and screenplay, Robert Alan Aurthur; music, Leonard Roseman; director of photography, Joseph Brun; art director, Richard Sylbert; associate director, Don Kranze; editor, Sidney Meyers; sound, James Gleason; costumes, Anna Hill Johnstone; script supervisor, Marie Kenney; make-up, Herman Buckman; casting, Ethel Winant; production coordinator, Renee Valente; associate producer, Jim diGanci; executive assistant to producer, Michael Abbott.

Synopsis

Axel North, an army deserter, drifts into the railway yards of the New York waterfront in search of work. He was responsible for his brother's death in a motor accident, and his feelings of guilt are heightened by his hatred of his father. He is taken on and assigned to a gang led by Charlie Malik, a minor union racketeer who takes his own cut from the men's pay. Axel is befriended by Tommy Tyler, a Negro who himself suffers from Malik's obsessive race prejudices. Tommy protects Axel at work, and in the evening takes him home to meet his wife and their friend Ellen Wilson, a social worker. In this atmosphere of easy going friendship Axel begins to find a new self-confidence. But Tommy allows himself to be drawn into a fight with Malik and is killed. Axel's first instinct is to evade responsibility by running away, since he knows that Malik can expose him as a deserter. His courage is stiffened, however, when he realizes the contempt that Ellen and Tommy's wife feel for his weakness. Going down to the docks, he beats up Malik in a brutal fight and then takes him in to the police.

Discussion

It is fitting that three out of the five films selected for analysis in this book are inextricably linked to television. Two of these (*The Bachelor Party* and *Edge of the City*) had their origins as television dramas, while the other film (*A Face in the Crowd*) concerns the phenomenon of the new medium's powerful influence on America.

Edge of the City was the last program broadcast as part of Fred Coe's Philco Playhouse series¹⁰⁹ under the original title of *A Man Is Ten Feet Tall*.¹¹⁰ The teleplay was directed by Robert Mulligan and starred Sidney Poitier and Don Murray. Robert Alan Aurthur recalled that his teleplay "probably wouldn't have been done" had the program not been the last of the series because...

. . . we had had many problems with the advertising agency in the past in matters of content. But this, being the last one, didn't get much attention, went through and got approved. Also, they didn't know one of the leading characters was black because I didn't write it in the script.¹¹¹

Aurthur traced the development of his drama to one evening when, after seeing Sidney Poitier in *The Blackboard Jungle*, he was "so entranced by his performance" in that film and in the prior *No Way Out*, that he lamented "how dreadful" it was that there was no real opportunity for this man to work.

Sidney reminded me of a man I used to know. I had worked as a stevedore before the war and he was one of the first black men to work on the docks. We became good friends and I went to work under him. . . . On one occasion he actually took up a fight for me. He didn't get killed, of course, but was badly beat up.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Personal interview with Robert Alan Aurthur in January 1976.

¹¹⁰ This title was also used during the production of the film and for its release in the United Kingdom. In an article for *Show Business Illustrated* (February, 1962), David Susskind wrote that M-G-M "ridiculously retitled [the film] *Edge of the City* to prevent the public from divining its television origin."

¹¹¹ Aurthur interview.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

This memorable incident, brought back by the presence of Poitier on screen, became the basis for *A Man Is Ten Feet Tall*. In writing the teleplay Aurthur's main concern became that of trying "to show a relationship, a friendship between a white man and a black man which was perfectly normal—that such a thing was not only possible, but desirable."¹¹³ As a television drama the work was well received, although there were the inevitable rumblings about an organized boycott of Philco products in the South which strained relations even more between the sponsor, the advertising agency, and Coe's production outfit. One of the members of the latter group was David Susskind, a former MCA agent, who, at the time, was an employee of Talent Associates, the management firm that handled Robert Alan Aurthur, Fred Coe, Delbert Mann, Marc Daniels, and most of the "live-TV drama" people in New York. Susskind became a producer first in television and then in films as a result of this estrangement between the advertising agency and Coe. As he recalled:

My new career as a producer began . . . in an odd way. Fred Coe was a splendid producer but he engaged in a continual battle with the advertising agency that handled the Philco Playhouse. Coe did good work, but he also tended to do brooding, downbeat stories, with an emphasis on psychiatric explanation for the key problems of the scripts—"He never really loved his father. His father never really loved him. He was given too little attention as a child." The advertising agency and the Philco Corporation were beginning to get very restless and were giving Fred a rough time on material. Fred fought as hard as he could, but his main gambit was to send me out to fight. I was supposed to go over and say that "that" was the way it was going to be. He dealt on the creative level with the writers and the actors and the directors, and I toiled with the client and the advertising agency.

Then Fred sent for me one day and said "I'll tell you what I have in mind. I've got the plot of all time to teach those guys a lesson. . . . I am going to take my first vacation this summer, and I'm giving a vacation to every writer and every director who works on my program, so that I am going to leave them destitute and they've got to put on their own hour show."

¹¹³ Ibid.

Feeling more than a bit embarrassed, I went to the agency and I told them Mr. Coe and his entire staff were vacationing, that they had reached the point of utter exhaustion. The account executive said, "I guess other arrangements will have to be made. What do you suggest?" Out of nowhere I said to him, "I'll produce it. I haven't produced anything, but I love the idea."¹¹⁴

Thus, Susskind became the producer of Philco Playhouse, but only for five weeks, since he then went on to produce his own show in partnership with Al Levy, head of Talent Associates.

With the fabled success of *Marty*, Susskind seized the opportunity to become a motion picture producer. His position at Talent Associates had kept him in close professional contact with the television branch of Theatrical Realism, which was now in great demand in Hollywood. Robert Alan Aurthur remembered that, "the minute those Academy Awards took place, Hollywood was leaping at the opportunity to emulate *Marty*, and that's why we got the deal, that's why the deal was so easy to make, and that's why we were allowed to do whatever we wanted to do."¹¹⁵

The deal they made was with M-G-M. Aurthur, Susskind, and Levy formed Jonathan Productions, named after Aurthur's son, to bring to the big screen *A Man Is Ten Feet Tall* and other projects they had in the works. As Aurthur recalled:

The West Coast had nothing to do with it. Dore Schary had been fired and Arthur Loew, Sr., who was a major stockholder in the company, was asked to come out of retirement and run the company until they got some kind of reorganization going. He very reluctantly did so. He was a man who enjoyed quiet expensive living. So at the time he happened to be president of the company and he happened to be headquartered in New York. We made the deal and he said go and make the picture. The money

¹¹⁴ David Susskind, "David and the Goliaths," *Show Business Illustrated*, January 23, 1962, p. 41.

¹¹⁵ Aurthur interview.

was nothing. I think it came in for something around \$505,000. They couldn't have cared less about what we did.¹¹⁶

What they did was make a film which *Variety* called “courageous, thought-provoking, and exciting;”¹¹⁷ the same kind of film Schary had wanted M-G-M to make and had now caused the executive's fall from grace within the studio's power structure. Ironically, Arthur Loew, as Schary's interim successor, gave the “go ahead” to a project that would have been a natural for the recently dismissed Schary.

David Susskind shares with Dore Schary, a lot more than a set of initials—both are typical examples of the phenomenon of the “literate mogul.”¹¹⁸ In his “Post Portrait” Ross drew the following biographical sketch:

David Susskind came to show business through a circuitous route. His earliest aspirations were to be a writer and a teacher. He was born in New York on Dec. 19, 1920, spent his formative years in Brookline, Mass. His father, who greatly influenced him, was an insurance salesman with a pronounced intellectual bent.

Susskind wrote editorials for his high school paper, contributed columns, at \$5 each, to the weekly Brookline *Chronicle*, deluged the Boston press with letters-to-the-editor. At the behest of his father, who felt that a New England College would be too “incestuous,” he enrolled at the University of Wisconsin.

Susskind got straight A's, but found the intellectual pressures at Wisconsin too undemanding. After two years, he transferred to Harvard, where he majored in history, government and economics.

He graduated in 1942 with a cum laude degree. His original plan was to take a Ph.D. in government; instead he went into the Navy after a brief stint with the War Labor Board. He spent four years in service, much of it as a communications officer in the Pacific. Long hours of reflection aboard ship led him to conclude that “academic life would be too monotonous—I thought I'd have to get into something active, vital.”

¹¹⁶ Ibid. The budget for *Edge of the City* is a matter of conjecture. Susskind estimated the cost of the film at \$512,000 in his S.B.I. article, however, during a recent interview with the writer, Susskind claimed the film only cost \$395,000 to produce.

¹¹⁷ Review of *Edge of the City*, *Daily Variety*, December 26, 1956.

¹¹⁸ Cf. pages 179-180.

The only vital activity immediately open to him, in 1946, was a \$55-a-week job as a press agent at Warner Brothers. From there he went to Universal, but soon tired of touting bad films. He also decided that “publicity men were expendable.” He wanted a “function” in show business, thought he found it in the agency business when an established agent named Al Levy hired him in 1947 at \$85 a week.

Not long afterward, Levy’s firm split up and he founded a new outfit, Talent Associates Ltd., to represent talent and to package radio shows. Susskind contributed the “Ltd.” To give the new firm tone; he had long been an Anglophile. It was only some years later, however, that Susskind became a partner in the firm.

Television was just getting off the ground and Talent Associates grew rapidly with the new industry. Eventually the firm dropped its agency business and concentrated on packaging live television shows. Susskind was away for three years, lured by a fat salary at MCA, the mammoth talent agency. Then he clashed with his boss and in 1952 went back to Talent Associates.¹¹⁹

It was at this point in time that the opportunity came up to produce Philco Playhouse, other television series, and eventually motion pictures. David Susskind becomes both, a producer and a product, of television’s first decade. His role as host of *Open End*, a controversial talk show program he produced from 1958 until 1986, put him in the homes of TV viewers and made his name a household word. This series was initially produced for Ely Landau’s Channel 13 (WNEW) in New York at the time when that station tried to create an intellectual alternative on the airwaves¹²⁰ and Susskind used it as a platform to convey his views and opinions on most issues to America. By 1959 a New York columnist noted that:

Within the span of a few years, David Susskind has evolved from an individual into a fantastic legend of his own creation. Through intelligence, persistence, a gift of gab, considerable charm and via a torrential flow of interviews, pronouncements and statements, broadcast and published, Susskind, wittingly or unwittingly has convinced millions

¹¹⁹ Irwin Ross, “David Susskind: A Post Portrait,” *New York Post Daily Magazine*, November 28, 1961.

¹²⁰ On several occasions Susskind used the WNEW TV studios to shoot some of his feature film productions.

that he is a high priest at the altars of art. With consummate skill he has conjured in an effort to extend the frontiers of television.¹²¹

In David Susskind one finds most of the elements of Theatrical Realism personified: the New York sensibility, the struggle to take art to the masses, the liberal crusader of social change. Some of his statements during the heyday of Theatrical Realism illustrate the point:

I feel a picture has to say something, that it has to have some meaning for our time. Sure, I know the old gag--if you have a message, call Western Union. But you take the pictures that are making money these days—*West Side Story*, *Judgment at Nuremberg*, some of those wonderful British and French and Italian films coming over—they're doing all right. And they're made by people with something to say; the Stanley Kramers, the Federico Fellinis, the Ingmar Bergmans.¹²²

Hollywood buys talent in order to convert it and usually succeeds. When they bring a Clifford Odets, to cite an example, to Hollywood, he no longer writes the kind of thing for which they wanted Clifford Odets in the first place. They want to recast Odets in their mold and they do. You cannot change Hollywood or Hollywood thinking. It's too deep, too moldy, too encrusted in dollar success. "They" make the converts. You go out there Jewish and they make you a Christian. You go out there Mohammedan and they make you Jewish. Whatever it is you are, they buy it, force you into a cell of luxury and mortgages and then, under duress, you must change. You must change to keep up with the set with which you travel; you must change to keep face with the trade papers and the peculiar, twisted competitive elements that enter your life out there. They buy you because you have created a certain kind of special electricity back where you come from, whether it's London, New York or Ankara. Then they want to remake you into their image and they are almost always successful. When I went to the West Coast I learned a lot—enough to make me want to work away from Hollywood, if possible.¹²³

¹²¹ Ben Gross, "What's On?" *The Daily News*, May 23, 1959.

¹²² Leo Mishkin, "Sight and Sound," *New York Morning telegraph*, November 16, 1962.

¹²³ Susskind, "David and the Goliaths," p. 41.

In 1961 Susskind announced his intentions of “establishing a full time production company to base and shoot in New York as an adjunct to Talent Associates,¹²⁴ but this never really came to fruition, although Susskind signed with Columbia to produce two Theatrical Realism films in the early sixties (*A Raisin in the Sun* and *Requiem for a Heavyweight*). By producing, in 1963, a filmed version of James Agee’s novel *A Death in the Family*, under the title *All the Way Home*,¹²⁵ Susskind completed his cycle of four Theatrical Realism films, of which the best one is the first one, *Edge of the City*. His comments on the film follow:

Edge of the City turned out to be a good picture by qualitative standards. The reviews were almost uniformly excellent and indicated that some young, adventuresome, imaginative moviemakers had come on the scene. The critics meant Martin Ritt, who had directed his first movie, Robert Alan Aurthur, who had done his first screenplay, and myself. But Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer chose the wrong tactics for releasing the picture. To begin with, they made me use the new title. They also invented an advertising program, artwork and copy, which suggested that it was an action, violence and mayhem picture of New York’s criminally infested waterfront. Actually, it was a story of a man’s love of man. A Negro and a white come together as strangers and begin an immediate friendship. Nothing is made of the race issue. It didn’t begin with a white man hating a black man and, at the end of the picture, each coming to understand that they’re both human beings. M-G-M devised a campaign that emphasized violence. “Drama of New York’s waterfront jungle, *Edge of the City*” was on the marquee at Loew’s State theatre in New York, where the film played some seven weeks. The ads were trying to say, “If you really want violence and blood, come see this movie.” There was one fight—at the end of the film--but that kind of advertising and promotion was a million miles away from its intent or reality. I think the M-G-M advertising campaign was threadbare and deceptive. The release pattern was also wrong. *Edge of the City* opened at a big Broadway theatre, Loew’s State, which seats some 3000 people. It subsequently played similar theatres around the country instead of going into a place I thought appropriate to the film; art houses, small, 500- to 800-seat theatres, where it might have stayed week after week, month after month, and built a legend of quality.

¹²⁴ “N.Y. Filmmaking,” *Daily Variety*, July 26, 1961.

¹²⁵ The film was directed by Alex Segal and starred Jean Simmons, Robert Preston, and Pat Hingle.

Consequently, the picture couldn't have had less of an audience or have been less commercially successful. It cost roughly \$512,000 and failed to realize any kind of profit.¹²⁶

Susskind and Robert Alan Aurthur have been, and still are, close friends and associates. Aurthur once offered Susskind the lead in his television production of Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?*¹²⁷ Susskind considered it for five seconds before he declined what would have been a most sardonic casting coup.¹²⁸

Born in New York in June 10, 1922, Aurthur took up writing in the late forties after serving in World War II. He contributed stories to *Harper's*, *Esquire*, and *The Saturday Evening Post* magazines. In 1951 he published a novel, *The Glorification of Al Toolum*, and became a freelance television dramatist, often contributing to the Philco Playhouse. In 1956 Susskind produced two of his works: *Edge of the City*, and a Broadway play entitled *A Very Special Baby*.¹²⁹ During the 1959-1960 season Aurthur produced *Sunday Showcase* for NBC, often writing the scripts for what became the last program of the "Golden Age of TV drama." In announcing this new series Aurthur promised that it would be adult, provocative entertainment. "I like to get people stirred up, so they will either love something or hate it."¹³⁰ Some of the shows in the series included the above mentioned *What Makes Sammy Run?*, a Reginald Rose script on the Sacco-Vanzetti trial, which was directed by Sidney Lumet; and *The American*, a

¹²⁶ Susskind, "David and the Goliaths."

¹²⁷ The program, directed by Delbert Mann, was part of the *Sunday Showcase* series which Aurthur produced in 1959.

¹²⁸ Aurthur interview.

¹²⁹ This play opened on November 14, 1956, soon after shooting on *Edge of the City* had been completed. It was directed by Martin Ritt, and the cast included Sylvia Sidney, Luther Adler, Jack Warden, and Jack Klugman.

¹³⁰ Frederick Guidry, "Interview with Robert Alan Aurthur," *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 13, 1959, p. 10.

dramatization by Merle Miller of the Ira Hayes' story, the Indian on the famous flag raising photograph of Iwo Jima who died an alcoholic.¹³¹

Sunday Showcase was a short-lived series. When it was cancelled Aurthur announced that he was leaving television for good because it was "stifling." In *TV Guide* he wrote the epitaph for an era:

A unique form of drama, born of and for the TV screen has come to an end. It was creative TV at its best. I would cite such shows as *Marty*, *Patterns*, *12 Angry Men*, and (immodestly) *A Man Is Ten Feet Tall* as extremely effective TV shows, later less successful films. They worked best on TV because they were created specifically for that medium, using every advantage, attempting to turn the disadvantages of the little screen into positive values How ironic that TV, which forced the movie industry into an economic revolution and a concomitant search for more truthful, adult films, now ignores the very talents and qualities that made TV a threat, satisfied to become mainly a purveyor of the worst kind of Hollywood C-picture junk. As long as 50 to 60 million Americans had the twice-a-week movie habit, Hollywood was fat and happy on the profits from the stream of dreary pictures. And as long as 50 to 60 million red-eyed lumps sit or lie, uncomplaining and unselective, each night watching that flickering screen, they will only get more and more of the same dreadful pap.¹³²

In 1961 Aurthur formed Edgewater Productions¹³³ in partnership with Gore Vidal and Reginald Rose. The announcement of the new company read, in part:

This is believed to be the first time that a group of writers have teamed up to work in films in a manner similar to the way Playwrights Co. operated successfully in the legit for 20 years The team's first project with Columbia is scheduled to start in the fall of this year. Under the arrangement, each of the writers will share in the profits of each film production. The pictures will be made in New York or on location. None is set for filming in Hollywood.¹³⁴

¹³¹ This teleplay was filmed as *The Outsider* the following year (1961) by Delbert Mann with Tony Curtis in the role of Ira Hayes. John Frankenheimer had directed the TV version.

¹³² *Variety*, February 1, 1961.

¹³³ The company was named after Gore Vidal's estate.

¹³⁴ *TV Guide*, June 17, 1961.

Produced as part of this arrangement was Aurthur's screenplay of *Lilith* (Robert Rossen, 1964) and Gore Vidal's film adaptation of his play *The Best Man* (Franklin Schaffner, 1964).

Throughout the sixties¹³⁵ Aurthur also wrote the screenplays for *Grand Prix* (John Frankenheimer, 1966), *For Love of Ivy* (Daniel Mann, 1968), and *The Lost Man* (1969), which he also directed. He worked as an executive in charge of new program development for United Artists-TV (1963-1964) and as vice-president of Talent Associates.

Edge of the City marked the beginning of Aurthur's close professional association with Sidney Poitier. To date they have worked together on three films and one Broadway play, often switching the roles of writer, producer, and director as befits each project. Aurthur wrote *Edge of the City* for Poitier who, in turn, developed the story on which Aurthur's script of *For Love of Ivy* was based. Aurthur wrote the outlandish Broadway comedy *Carry Me Back To Morningside Heights* which marked Poitier's debut as a theatre director, and Poitier made possible Aurthur's screen directing debut in a black adaptation of *Odd Man Out* entitled *The Lost Man*.

Another of Aurthur's professional associations dating to *Edge of the City* is that with Martin Ritt. The two men had been friends for some time when Ritt had been set to direct Aurthur's *A Very Special Baby* on Broadway after his acclaimed success directing Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge*.¹³⁶ Aurthur recalled how one day, while they were at the horse races at Belmont, he mentioned to Ritt the ongoing negotiations with Metro to take *A Man Is Ten Feet Tall* to the screen:

Marty asked me if there was any reason why he couldn't direct the film. Up to that point I has assumed that Robert Mulligan, who had done

¹³⁵ In 1959 Edward Dmytryk directed *Warlock*, a Western written by Aurthur and starring Anthony Quinn.

¹³⁶ The play was brought to the screen under Sidney Lumet's direction in 1962.

the TV version, would direct; but no one had been set yet. I reminded him that he was blacklisted in pictures. He said that if we would go in and bat for him he was sure he could get off the list. Immediately I thought that it would be a good idea to do the two projects together and David [Susskind] agreed also. So we did the movie first and then went on to do *Special Baby* on Broadway.¹³⁷

Martin Ritt's lifetime career is closely woven in the tapestry of Theatrical Realism. He was born in New York in 1920. An ex-butcher's boy, Ritt left law school at St. John's College to follow the lure of the theatre. When one looks back on his career and notices how many films Ritt has directed that deal with racial themes, it is ironic that he started his theatrical career as an actor in blackface playing the part of Crown in a "Borscht Belt" production of *Porgy and Bess*.¹³⁸ In the late thirties Ritt became involved with the Group Theatre. As he recalled:

I met a young director named Elia Kazan who got me my first job in *Golden Boy*. I was understudy to John Garfield, but my main chore was taking Luther Adler to the gym to get him in shape. . . . Then I spent a summer at Southampton where Kazan was teaching and directing. I pushed scenery all summer for twenty bucks a week and took Kazan's class in acting.¹³⁹

His career as an actor included stage roles in Irwin Shaw's *The Gentle People* (1939), Elmer Rice's *Two on an Island* (1940), and Garson Kanin's *Born Yesterday*. On screen he appeared in Cukor's *Winged Victory* (1944), and much later in Maximilian Schell's *The End of the Game* (1976). In the early fifties he taught at the Actors Studio and became established as a director with several plays and over one hundred television programs produced in New York to his credit. After directing *A View from the Bridge* and breaking out of the movie Blacklist with *Edge of the City*, Ritt's career as a film director was firmly on its

¹³⁷ Aurthur interview. For more on Martin Ritt and the Blacklist see pages 96-97

¹³⁸ *World Cinema*, October 16, 1970.

¹³⁹ Ritt's biography in a Dino de Laurentiis press release, 1960 (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science Library files).

way. When asked if he felt gratitude toward Susskind for giving him that first film job Ritt replied, with characteristic candor:

I am not grateful to him at all. I am not grateful to anyone. I have worked in show business all of my life. I pushed a camera and did all kinds of jobs to get where I'm at. It was long, hard work and I did it all myself.

With Susskind it ended up that I worked for him for nothing, because to get out of my contract with him I had to pay him back the \$10,000 I got for directing *Edge of the City*. When the picture was made M-G-M was going through this reorganization period and everything was very confusing, so I think that they didn't know that I was directing the picture until it came out. We shot it all there in New York and we did it very cheap, using real locations. The picture was well received but it didn't do much at the box office. Timing is very important for a film. That was one of the first black-white pictures. It wasn't sold very well at all, but it was seen in Hollywood and so I got lots of offers from the studios who had kept me on the list before.

But first I had to settle with Susskind (I was to do another picture for him) so that I could sign for seven years at Fox. I left there years later when I got *Hud* put together as a project and they wouldn't go along with it. They said, "How can Paul Newman play this character; he is a prick, Newman is a big star, he couldn't, shouldn't play this role." So, again I had to buy my way out of a contract and took the picture to Paramount.¹⁴⁰

In the late fifties, sixties, and early seventies Ritt became a leading Hollywood director with an emphasis on Southern dramas (*The Long Hot Summer*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Hud*) and films with racial themes (*Edge of the City*, *Paris Blues*, *Hombre*, *the Great White Hope*, *Souther*) often cast with "method" actors. His contract at Fox allowed him to work repeatedly with the Lunts of Theatrical Realism—Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward—and develop a rich color and CinemaScope approach to Theatrical Realism unlike that of other directors who remained faithful to the black and white "square" screen.

¹⁴⁰ Martin Ritt interview in June 1972.

In his early days at Fox Ritt took charge of the Actors Studio players under contract and used them often and well. While talking about *The Long Hot Summer*, Ritt remarked:

A lot of people didn't realize there was a hell of a lot of bravura acting in the picture. It didn't seem so because the performances fitted into each other—even Orson Welles, a brilliant, moody player who's usually his own island. Most of the young people were former Actors Studio students, using a certain kind of training. We understood each other—that was the advantage—like orchestra players knowing the tastes of a conductor.¹⁴¹

The taste of this conductor had been acquired in his long association with the people from the Group Theatre and the Actors Studio. Along with Daniel Mann, Ritt was considered a protégé of Kazan until he terminated their relationship after Kazan testified for the HUAC. Aurthur recalled that:

One of the reasons Marty used Sidney Meyers to edit *Edge of the City*, besides the fact that he was the best cutter in New York, was that he knew that Sidney would not work for Kazan. Sidney felt so strongly about the political situation that he would have nothing to do with him. This was Marty's way of saying to "Gadge," "I can use people who won't have anything to do with you."¹⁴²

Nevertheless, there were still a lot of people shared in common by Ritt and Kazan, strengthening the common stylistics among the two film makers. On this subject Robert Alan Aurthur remarked:

We were all somehow related to the Actors Studio and the people there. And each of us had his favorite actors. Paddy wrote *Marty* for Rod Steiger. I wrote *Ten Feet Tall* for Sidney and I wrote several shows for

¹⁴¹ Howard Thompson, "Ritt for the Record on Direction," *The New York Times*, June 1, 1958

¹⁴² Aurthur interview. Sidney Meyers was, until his death in 1969, one of New York's maverick film makers. He tackled social and historical issues in his films and television programs. His documentary drama, *The Quiet One*, about a black youth in Harlem, won the Venice Festival Award in 1949. In association with Joseph Strick he worked on *The Savage Eye*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and such filmed television programs as *East Side/West Side* and *The Power and the Glory*.

Steve Hill who was, at the time, the best young character actor around I wrote for Eli Wallach, Jack Warden

The New York acting style was very much in contrast to the Hollywood acting style. Occasionally an Edward G. Robinson or a John Garfield would break through, but that was rare. They were not like Hollywood stars. It was because that generation of actors at the Studio was so good, and because there was live television in New York, and because writers had the freedom to write for these actors. These actors became familiar faces on television and accepted, otherwise they would never have been seen because they weren't good looking people or standard leading men. They weren't your usual Hollywood stars.¹⁴³

But they were soon to become standard Hollywood stars, as Brando, Clift, Dean, and Newman would leave the New York stage for California soundstages. One of these actors, who followed the classical Theatrical Realism route to so-called stardom, was John Cassavetes, who was signed by M-G-M for seven years in 1957.

An article in *TV Guide* describes how, upon his arrival on the West Coast, he was...

. . . asked to pose for a photograph symbolizing the "torn shirt" school of acting. Cassavetes had just emerged from his swimming pool. He listened to the request, then disappeared into his bedroom.

He returned in 15 minutes attired in an expensive tailored suit, starched shirt and a Sulka tie. Looking very much like a Madison Avenue junior executive, he began to talk, not once mumbling or scratching. "I am not," he said slowly and clearly, "a torn-shirt actor. I'm not any particular kind of actor. I just try to play the roles the way they are written. People have mistaken me for an intense, troubled specimen of modern American youth because during my first two years in television I invariably had a knife in my hand. The fact is, I'm, not a delinquent and I never have been."¹⁴⁴

What he had been was a very ambitious and struggling New York actor. "In New York," recalled Cassavetes, "I lived with a bunch of guys in one large

¹⁴³ Aurthur interview.

¹⁴⁴ "No Torn Shirts for Him." *TV Guide*, October 5, 1957.

room and we survived by taking turns getting work to support us until the rest of us knocked on producers' doors. It was rough."¹⁴⁵

His break came in 1953 when he was spotted by James O'Connor, an actors' agent, at an East Side bar. O'Connor soon had him on the way to Hollywood to do a screen test at Fox as Marlon Brando's replacement in *The Egyptian*, a part that eventually went to Edmund Purdom. Back in New York Cassavetes landed the matador role in Budd Schulberg's *Paso Doble*, a one act teleplay on bullfighting, which was broadcast on February 14, 1954 as part of CBS' "Omnibus" program. The show received a lot of attention and, according to *TV Guide*:

After that the flood gates opened. He played in 26 top New York TV shows that first year, 23 the next. He also sandwiched in four feature movies: *Crime in the Streets*, *Edge of the City*, *The Fever Tree* and *The Night Holds Terror*.

Besides having been born and educated in New York (he studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts) Cassavetes has other roots in that city. One is that he made his start there—a few bit parts in four and a half years of making the rounds. Another is the theater workshop which he founded in conjunction with his actress-wife Gena Rowlands, Burton Lane and some other friends. The Cassavetes-Lane Workshop is a place where young performers work at their craft, paying only a couple of dollars a week to cover operating costs.¹⁴⁶

The studio at 225 West Forty-Sixth Street, Cassavetes explained, "hasn't even got a name, but our classes have grown to more than seventy pupils who work as a cooperative unit—actors, writers and others, chip in to build scenery and contribute props as well as write and act. Not so long ago—about a month ago, I think—we developed a study project which we called *Shadows*—it deals with a Negro-white problem—and we intend to film it as a non-profit, ninety-minute feature."¹⁴⁷

It is interesting to note that Cassavetes, in his maverick tradition, founded his own Actors Studio and had set out to make his own films as early as 1957, when he had just barely started his career as a film actor. His first film project,

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ *The New York Times*, January 20, 1957.

Shadows, which he announced in that year, was not completed and released until November of 1959, but it already signaled the presence of more than an actor and something other than an amateur film maker.¹⁴⁸

Cassavetes holds three of the indispensable attitudes of Theatrical Realism: (1) dislike of Hollywood, (2) the desire to make “art” films, and (3) an expressive social conscience. The first attitude was clearly expressed in 1957:

Cassavetes shrugs when asked how he feels about his current success. “I’m not so sure I’m going up. Where I come from, doing the Hollywood bit is a step down on the social scale.”

That fame and money mean little to him is reflected in a recurring dream. In this dream he sees Hollywood as a long street that’s bedecked with flags. He asks several people the reason for the flags but nobody can answer. There just seems to be a lot of hoopla over something that isn’t meaningful.

“I think the dream is trying to say,” pondered Cassavetes “that Hollywood isn’t the final answer for me.”¹⁴⁹

The second attitude was expressed in an interview with Smith:

Why does the word ‘art’ have to mean lousy, dull, uninteresting? Why are we all afraid of words like ‘art?’ Me, I’m consciously trying to be an artist doing works of art—in acting, in directing, in whatever I do. I want to be an artist—who’s ashamed of it? My picture [*Shadows*] is not a commercial picture. Maybe it’s rough and uneven, maybe it’s bad in places; but it tries to do something worth doing, tries to say something.¹⁵⁰

The third attitude, an expressive social conscience, brought him together with Stanley Kramer, who produced his 1963 film, *A Child Is Waiting*, in which Burt Lancaster, Judy Garland, Steve Hill, and Gena Rowlands enacted a story about the plight of mentally retarded children. The film, which is the only one of

¹⁴⁸ Cassavetes’ films as a director are an off-shoot of Theatrical Realism and improvisational theatre techniques. They do not form part of the film style now under study, with the only exception of *A Child Is Waiting*.

¹⁴⁹ “No Torn Shirts for Him.”

¹⁵⁰ Cecil Smith “Actor Directs No-Scripts Film,” *The Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 1960.

Cassavetes' works as director that may be included within the Theatrical Realism style, is mostly remembered by the feuds between Kramer and Cassavetes during the production. Kramer, who would not put up with what he interpreted to be Cassavetes' lack of discipline, took the film away from him, forcing Cassavetes to disown it, who in turn accused Kramer of playing "everything for what I call safe controversy. The picture was so mangled in the reediting I hardly recognized it."¹⁵¹

Cassavetes' concern for social issues, particularly racial discrimination, was clearly evident in the first part of his career, with his own film production of *Shadows*. He shared this concern with most of the people who made *Edge of the City*. Susskind, Ritt, Aurthur, Meyers, Rosenman, and Sylbert were often involved in motion pictures that made a direct and forceful plea for racial integration and understanding. They were the liberal conscience of a nation struggling to bring about long overdue social change, playing out their roles of media manipulators and crusaders for a rightful cause. And these people found in Sidney Poitier their most effective tool.

As Bogle wrote in his excellent book on the history of Blacks in American films:

Poitier came to the movies almost accidentally. Born in Nassau in 1927, the youngest of eight children, he lived in Miami before coming to New York in the 1940's. With no thought of a film career, he worked in New York at odd jobs as a dockhand, dishwasher, chicken plucker, and bus boy. One day while thumbing through the *New York Times*, he stumbled on an ad for actors at the American Negro Theatre. He auditioned—with disastrous results. But soon he became determined to be a successful actor. After minor stage roles and some road tours, Sidney Poitier came to films and just took over.

Poitier's ascension to stardom in the mid-1950's was no accident Foremost was the fact that in this integrationist age Poitier was the model integrationist hero. In all his films he was educated and intelligent. He spoke proper English, dressed conservatively, and had the best of table manners. For the mass white audience, Sidney Poitier was a black man

¹⁵¹ Hal Humphrey, "John Cassavetes—His Home Is Where the Art Is," *The Los Angeles Times Calendar*, March 1, 1964.

who had met their standards. His characters were tame; never did they act impulsively, nor were they threats to the system. They were amenable and pliant. And finally they were non-funky, almost sexless and sterile. In short, they were the perfect dream for white liberals anxious to have a colored man in for lunch or dinner.

Poitier was also acceptable for Black audiences. He was the paragon of Black middle-class values and virtues. American Negroes were still migrating north and were gradually increasing their political power. The rising middle classes and the power (limited as it might have seemed) of their money supported Poitier. Black America was still trying to meet white standards and ape white manners, and he became a hero for their cause. He was neither crude nor loud, and, most important, he did not carry any ghetto cultural baggage with him. No African cultural past. And he was almost totally devoid of rhythm. In short, he was the complete antithesis of all the black buffoons who had appeared before in American movies. This was one smart and refined young Negro, and middle-class America, both black and white, treasured him.¹⁵²

Poitier's first film, *No Way Out*, came at the end of Hollywood's postwar cycle of "message movies" in 1950. It was written by Lesser Samuels, directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, and made at Fox, the studio that had made racial discrimination a prestige subject with such films as Kazan's *Pinky* and *Gentleman's Agreement*.

With one foot firmly planted in the "message movie" tradition and the other in "film noir," *No Way Out* told the story of a race riot that resulted when a wounded hoodlum died at a large metropolitan hospital after being treated by Luther Brooks, a young black doctor, played by Sidney Poitier.

There are striking similarities between *Edge of the City* and *No Way Out*, not so much in their plot developments but in their use of characterization and manipulative elements to create desired attitude changes within the audience. The use of "Home Sweet Home" as background music whenever Poitier is seen with his family in *No Way Out* is just one example of what may have once been

¹⁵² Donld Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks—An Interpretative History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) pp. 175-176.

considered a subtle and subconscious way of smoothing and reassuring a white majority audience when the camera took them into a Black American home. In *Edge of the City* a similar effect is created more subtly in the Black home through the use of “modern, tasteful, middle class furnishings”¹⁵³ and the character of a grandmother who will only baby sit if she can watch Sid Ceasar’s TV show without interruption. In both cases the desired effect is to reassure the white audience that Blacks are “people just like us” and to erase the cultural differences that so often serve as grounds for fear and prejudice.

In this respect it is important to underline the fact that one of the operative elements of Theatrical Realism is its manipulation of reality to create a desired effect. When viewed today, the Theatrical Realism films dealing with racial issues strike an obvious note of idealism within their realistic context. But, as Pines stated in his work *Blacks in Films*:

It is important to remember at this stage that the liberalizing racial character-icon of the fifties and sixties is very much a product of white liberal-left social idealism. It is from this attitude that Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis, Harry Belafonte and James Edwards—i.e. the handful of blacks who dominate the Hollywood racial screen throughout this period—derive their cinematic *raison d’être* and maintain the liberal Black image.¹⁵⁴

Pines observed how “the liberal/left-wing grouping that operated in the motion picture industry in the late forties”¹⁵⁵ was mainly responsible for liberalizing racial themes. These film makers’ use of “well-meaning” propaganda techniques within their films made them prime targets for the HUAC investigations and victims of the blacklist. People such as Robert Rossen (*Island in the Sun*), Herbert Biberman (*Salt of the Earth*), Jules Dassin (*Uptight*), Joseph Losey (*The Lawless* and *Boy with the Green Hair*), Carl Foreman (*Home of the Brave*), Nedrick Young (*The Defiant Ones*), and Abraham Polonsky (*Tell Them*

¹⁵³ Richard Sylbert interview in March 1976.

¹⁵⁴ Jim Pines, *Blacks in Films—A Survey of Racial Themes and Images in the American Film* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1975), p. 64.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Willie Boy Is Here) were victims of the blacklist who made racial films before, and in most cases long after, the HUAC events. Their works were, by design and necessity, manipulative and propagandistic in nature; and the repression stemming from the HUAC and the blacklist only temporarily postponed their messages from reaching the screen.

The makers of *No Way Out* and *Edge of the City* clearly fit within the pattern of the liberal-left-wing social tradition described by Pines. Bogle noted how influential these film makers were in creating the image of Blacks during the fifties when he wrote about Poitier's character in *No Way Out*:

When one thinks of how much of Luther Brooks was to remain with actor Poitier, he is tempted to ask if scriptwriters Mankiewicz and Lesser Samuels should not be credited with creating the most important black actor in the history of American motion pictures. Obviously, what they did create was the character, the screen persona that Poitier was to popularize and capitalize on. In the early days, Poitier no more molded his image than did Stepin Fetchit; he lived out Hollywood's fantasies of the American Black man.¹⁵⁶

When Aurthur wrote *A Man Is Ten Feet Tall* for Poitier he was embellishing and elaborating on the persona created by Samuels and Mankiewicz, projecting his own experiences into a mythical mold that could only be filled by Sidney Poitier, whose skill as an actor had been greatly developed by then. As Bogle wrote:

After *Edge of the City*, no movie goers in America had any doubts about Poitier's talents. Nor did any fail to see what he represented. He was fast becoming a national symbol of brotherly love.

Oddly, when viewed, the incongruities and disparities ignored by the audience of 1957 are blatantly apparent. Poitier's character falls into the tradition of the dying slave content that he had well served the massa. His loyalty to the white Cassavetes destroys him just as much as the white slave's steadfastness kept him in shackles. In this case, writer Aurthur

¹⁵⁶ Bogle, p. 179.

smooths over the black man's death by having the white Cassavetes hunt down the killer.

Curiously, *Edge of the City* also revealed Sidney Poitier as a colorless black. So immersed is he in whites' standards that there is little ethnic juice in his blood. The dinner scene between Poitier, his wife, and their white friends is not an interracial summit meeting because there are no cultural gaps. Nor are there any cultural bridges to cross. All four are decent American citizens. Poitier also seems sexless in this movie. In previous features, scriptwriters were sure to keep Poitier's sexuality well hidden. He seldom had a serious movie romance. In those films in which he was married, it was generally to a sweet homebody type who seemed devoid of sexual passion. Dots Johnson had played this part in *No Way Out*. In *Edge of the City* it was Ruby Dee. She now remains the model movie mate for Poitier. (They have appeared in five films together.) An intense and talented actress, Ruby Dee is known for deft performances as unfulfilled, timid, troubled women Although she occasionally rose above her material—her breakdown after Poitier's death in *Edge of the City* was extremely powerful—even in her good work, Ruby Dee never seemed a complete person. She appeared to be the typical woman born to be hurt. Everything about her suggested frustration and pain. Her voice trembled and broke. There were deep shadows under her eyes. She looked thin, anemic, weak, and terribly underfed and unloved. She always seemed to force a smile while standing by nervously and accepting whatever her men might throw her way. Often, because her performances were as inhibited and keyed up as her characters, she seemed limited in range as an actress, and audiences longed to see her break loose.¹⁵⁷

If the characterizations of Blacks in *Edge of the City* seem to lack human dimensions and fall within the range of mythical projections of the liberal mind it is because the needs of the scenario are such that it calls for greater than life figures.

Of the other Theatrical Realism writers under discussion here one may broadly state that Chayefsky observes reality and recreates it to illustrate a moral parable, Williams lets an untapped torrent of emotion escape from his soul, Schulberg searches for the epic truth with man as a symbol of his country, Fine and Friedkin wallow in existential despair, and Aurthur manufactures effective

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 181, 199. In his original teleplay Robert Alan Aurthur mentioned the fact that the role of Tommy Tyler was to be played by a Black actor. Bogle's criticism of "colorless" and lack of "ethnic juice" is an integral and intentional element of Aurthur's creation.

social agendas within an entertainment format. In *Edge of the City* he has written the classic myth of a youth's initiation into manhood within the topical context of fifties alienation and racial discrimination.

Axel North, the protagonist, is a loner who has totally rejected society in the form of his parents and the army. He refuses to talk to his parents and, in a very effective character trait drawn by Aurthur which borders on the psychotic, he places long distance phone calls to his home but then refuses to speak, driving his parents into hysterics. His father works as a guard and represents the role of gatekeeper, "law and order," and the discipline he rejected when he deserted the army. What is more, North bears with him the weight of original sin. In keeping with the Cain/Abel myth which is echoed throughout the whole film, North had been indirectly responsible for his brother's death in a car accident, creating an unbearable feeling of guilt that is only successfully purged when a similar situation is relived, when his fraternal relationship with Tommy is ended after he, again indirectly, causes the latter's death. In classical Freudian terms, catharsis is brought on through the reenactment of the original trauma.

Axel North arrives at the railroad shipping docks a fugitive hoping to get work in Charlie Malik's crew. Malik hires him and takes a substantial cut from his salary as a pay-off to keep silent. Axel finds corruption everywhere except in the person of Tommy Tyler, a Black foreman whom Malik hates. Tommy is a philosopher, an Eric Hoffer in blackface, who sits by the docks munching a sandwich and ruminating on the nature of mankind during his lunch break. He quickly befriends newcomer Axel and sees through his tortured soul. In their conversations Tyler reinforces his confidence by pointing out that inner peace can only be found in self-respect. The process of initiation into manhood continues into sexual territory as Tyler sets him up with a social worker, played in all earnestness by Kathleen Maguire. Axel joins Tyler's crew and precipitates the wrath of Malik, but he is no longer afraid of blackmail. A fight ensues and Malik

kills Tyler, who had stepped in to prevent violence and defend Axel. After a period of doubts and recriminations, Axel completes his initiation into manhood by accepting his responsibility and taking Malik to justice, clearing his soul of the guilt he had been carrying.

Aurthur recalled that he had just completed three years of psychoanalysis when he wrote the original teleplay¹⁵⁸ and the Freudian influence is clearly seen in the film in instances such as when Poitier notices the pent-up emotions within Cassavetes and asks him to hit him in order to let off steam, by saying: “Hit me, make believe I’m Charlie, make believe I’m your father!” The Poitier character is not only a practicing philosopher, but an adept psychodrama therapist and the role model for the lost and tortured soul of Cassavetes. In this sense Aurthur has created a relationship between his leading characters deeply rooted in the tradition of what Bogle calls “the huckfinn fixation”:

The essential scenario for the exploration of the huckfinn fixation is quite simple: A good white man opposes the corruption and pretenses of the dominant white culture. In rejecting society, he (like Huck Finn) takes up with an outcast. The other man (like Nigger Jim) is a trusty Black who serves as a reliable ego padder. Traditionally, darkness and mystery have been attached to the American Negro, and it appears as if the white hero grows in stature from his association with the dusty Black. Blacks seem to possess the soul the white man searches for The huckfinn fixation perhaps represents the white liberal American’s dream of lost innocence and freedom. To fit into society, one loses the “spirituality” the Negro is believed to thrive on.¹⁵⁹

It is interesting to note that it was Robert Alan Aurthur who wrote in 1968 the definitive satirical treatment of the Jewish liberal/Black relationship in his sardonic comedy *Carry Me Back to Morningside Heights* which Sidney Poitier directed on Broadway. In a reversal of roles, an upper class Jew (played by David Steinberg) enters into a relationship in which he plays the role of a slave to a black family in order to expiate his liberal guilt. This material, which nowadays

¹⁵⁸ Aurthur interview.

¹⁵⁹ Bogle, pp. 140-141.

sounds like a likely pilot project for Norman Lear, was ahead of its time and, in Aurthur's words, "managed to offend almost everyone."¹⁶⁰

Edge of the City is a far richer film than the superficial subject matter would lead one to believe. In an eighty-four minute movie Aurthur's craftily conceived screenplay packs in an incredible number of elements directly related to Theatrical Realism. Besides the initiation into manhood and interracial relationship already discussed, the film touches on such subjects as union corruption, the morality of squealing, juvenile delinquency, Freudian psychology, the generation gap, and the individual's duty to uphold his conscience. As Pines accurately pointed out:

Edge of the City is essentially concerned with a white social problem (i.e. alienation) in which a Black non-racial character is useful in its ultimate resolution. This exemplifies an important type of Black image (nobility) in liberal movie-making. In these films racial conflict is specifically relegated to a secondary purpose, while thematic emphasis is placed on the idea of humanism-under-pressure.¹⁶¹

This theme of humanism under pressure is woven throughout the script and emerges in its final climax, which puts into action a lesson Poitier taught Cassavetes at one of their dockside chats—"A guy has to prove himself and rise alone from the lower forms to find self-respect, and when he finally does that, it can be said that that man is ten feet tall." What Aurthur skillfully did was to blend this element of self-respect with the element of social responsibility and leadership in a climax that works both as a socialist and humanist resolution.

Not to be underplayed as instrumental elements in the success of the film are Ritt's direction, Meyer's editing, and Sylbert's production design. From the moment the film begins with an energetic shot of Cassavetes running to catch a departing ferry boat we know we are about to see a film that moves briskly and

¹⁶⁰ Aurthur interview.

¹⁶¹ Pines, pp. 81, 84.

powerfully. Of all the Theatrical Realism directors, Martin Ritt has consistently shown the most cinematic flair in his staging and pacing of dramatic action, and in this, his first film, one is conscious of the care he has taken to make the most of each shot and sequence. Without falling into the “artsy” approach, Ritt is able to make his presence felt behind the camera by creating some stunning visual and verbal effects. As an example of the latter we must mention the powerful scene in which Jack Warden picks a fight with Cassavetes and Poitier intercedes and gets killed. As he lays dying, Cassavetes asks him, “Why did you do it? . . . It was my fight!” Poitier answers, “No, it was my fight!” and Ritt allows a long pause to linger for the audience to realize and say to itself, “No, it was our fight!” Similarly, Ritt uses highly symbolic patterns in arranging the visual elements within the frame. The last shot may be considered heavy handed by today’s critical standards, but when one considers the fact that it is not until this shot that the real theme of the film emerges, the shot must rate as an unqualified success. From a high angle crane, the camera picks up the figure of Cassavetes dragging the beat-up body of Jack Warden over the railroad tracks. Cassavetes himself is exhausted from the fight and can hardly manage to move. He is going to turn him in to the police and make sure that justice is carried out. Slowly, a group of on looking workers begins to form in the distance, then they start to follow him, forming a V-shaped pattern as the music builds up and the film ends. The point is made about how new leadership and social justice emerge from struggle and violent confrontation. The individual’s victory is the victory of the masses—the triumph of dialectics.

The film’s use of iconographic design elements is very conscious, yet never heavy handed. The presence and wardrobe of Cassavetes and Poitier (edginess, volatility, and restlessness trapped inside a pair of jeans and a leather jacket) provide a textural quality in keeping with the actors’ prior images in their films—*The Blackboard Jungle* and *Crime in the Streets*. Thus, *Edge of the City* is

able to cash in on the glamour of delinquency¹⁶² without really dealing with the subject. Saul Bass' opening titles, done in lower case typewriter style letters, give an element of fifties prestige to the production; and Joseph Brun's¹⁶³ carefully modulated photography maintains the look of documentary realism without being harsh or obtrusive.

Art Director, Richard Sylbert, lets loose his predilection for cages, wrought-iron fences, lattice patterns, peeling paint, exposed wiring, and naked light bulbs—all integral to the style's iconography. Leonard Rosenman's¹⁶⁴ avant-gardish score is interesting in its use of dissonance (as during the hook fight) but often calls attention to itself and becomes distracting.

When the film opened, the reviews were full of comparisons with *On the Waterfront*. The two films are undeniably similar in theme, texture, and style. Leonard Rosenman recalled that Kazan phoned him shortly after the film opened in New York and told him: "Tell your friends to stop copying me."¹⁶⁵ In personal interviews, Aurthur, Ritt, and Susskind have claimed complete coincidence in the two films' similarities, stating that they never even intended or expected that the two films would be compared or considered similar. Aurthur said that "the comparisons hurt" but they were unavoidable. Here is a sample of the press reactions:

¹⁶² Pauline Kael's *I Lost It at the Movies* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963) has a fine essay by this title on the subject of the "fifties-punk persona" as created by Brando, Dean, and the cast from the *Blackboard Jungle*.

¹⁶³ An article in *The New York Times* ("On Location in Gotham," April 15, 1956) mentions Boris Kaufman as the cinematographer on the film. Joseph Brun, who also photographed *Middle of the Night* and *Martin Luther*; and photographed, wrote, produced and directed an independent film set in Puerto Rico entitled *Elodia*, received sole screen credit.

¹⁶⁴ Rosenman is one of the leading composers of Theatrical Realism, often specializing in films with heavy psychological overtones. His Theatrical Realism films include *The Cobweb*, *East of Eden*, *Rebel without a Cause*, *Edge of the City*, *The Young Stranger*, and *The Outsider*. Most recently he composed the score for *Birch Interval* and the TV movie *Sybil*. It is of interest that Rosenman was James Dean's piano teacher and friend.

¹⁶⁵ Personal interview with Leonard Rosenman in March 1976.

In *Newsweek*:

Recipe: Take 1/3 *On the Waterfront*, 1/3 *Marty*, and 1/3 *Rebel Without a Cause*. Shake thoroughly and out comes the story of a withdrawn young man who gets a job loading freight in a railroad yard in New York, and ultimately comes to a violent showdown with his racketeering hiring boss.¹⁶⁶

Arthur Knight, in *The Saturday Review*:

If, as the saying goes, there had never been a Marlon Brando the movies would have had to invent one. The slurred speech, the sullen mouth, the slouching walk, and the built-up chip on the shoulder—these like his blue jeans, seem to characterize Hollywood's newest hero. Brando introduced him in *The Wild One*, the film that convinced the industry that juvenile delinquency was a commercial item, and the fantastic popularity of the late Jimmy Dean provided the clincher. Since that time every studio has tried its hand at explaining these youthful misfits—invariably in terms of unloving, uncomprehending parents—and exploiting the more lurid aspects of their headstrong ways. And because Brando himself has now gone on to better things, the studios have been busily developing reasonably exact facsimiles. If they can act too so much the better.

Perhaps the most promising of these newcomers is John Cassavetes, currently visible in *Edge of the City* (M-G-M). Recruited from television, Cassavetes has a handsome, sensitive face, a pained withdrawn manner, and the kind of lean, rangy frame that was just made for jeans. In this film, with its overtones of *On the Waterfront*, the image of Brando seems to hover over his every move and gesture and incoherent word.¹⁶⁷

In *The New Yorker*:

Edge of the City is inevitably reminiscent of *On the Waterfront*, but while it may be imitative, there's more to it than that; it has many solid moments, and the acting is a pleasure to watch.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ *Newsweek*, January 7, 1957, p. 68.

¹⁶⁷ Arthur Knight, "SR Goes to the Movies," *Saturday Review*, January 12, 1957.

¹⁶⁸ *The New Yorker*, February 9, 1957.

In *Variety*:

. . . [the film] is broadly in the category of *On the Waterfront* and *The Blackboard Jungle*. Like its predecessors, it packs a tremendous wallop; yet at the same time it has something important to say. This does not mean that *Edge of the City* should automatically be labeled a message film. It has elements of action and violence that will attract mass appeal audiences. Simultaneously, it has ideas that will please many sophisticates and the more-aware segment of the population. It is, to some extent, a social document. However, it is never preachy. It makes its point subtly without employing a sledge-hammer.¹⁶⁹

In *The Monthly Film Bulletin*:

The influences at work on it are fairly obvious: elements of the story, and the resolution in violence, seem to derive fairly directly from *On the Waterfront*; the dialogue, with its slightly studied naturalism, is after the Chayefsky manner; and the hero, with his burden of guilt and resentment, is another contemporary rebel, well played by John Cassavetes in the post-James Dean style. But the fact that the film is derivative does not greatly weaken its impact or reduce its interest.¹⁷⁰

Bosley Crowther, in *The New York Times*:

The defeatism of the white hero and his dependence upon his Negro friend, who is clear-headed, cheerful and courageous, is too reminiscent of the relation of the young stevedore and the priest in *On the Waterfront*. The backgrounds and style of staging are also, reminiscent of that film. . . . But the acting is superior.¹⁷¹

Edge of the City is Theatrical Realism at its best and most representative since it combines the elements of method acting, actual locations, social consciousness, "artistic" pretensions, adapted material, Freudian psychology, juvenile delinquency, New York talent, and liberal political ideology. Its place in

¹⁶⁹ *Variety*, January 2, 1957.

¹⁷⁰ *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, 1957, p. 56.

¹⁷¹ Bosley Crowther, "Question of Race," *The New York Times*, February 9, 1957, Section II, p. 1.

film history is guaranteed not only for its intrinsic values, but for the valuable insight it provides into the society and industry that produced it.

A FACE IN THE CROWD

Cast and Credits

Lonestar Rhodes	Andy Griffith
Marcia Jeffries	Patricia Neal
Joey Kieley	Anthony Franciosa
Mel Miller	Walter Matthau
Betty Lou Flockum	Lee Remick
Colonel Hollister	Percy Waram
Beanie	Rod Brasfield
Mr. Luffler	Charles Irving
J.B. Jeffries	Howard Smith
Macey	Paul McGrath
1 st Mrs. Rhodes	Kay Medford
Jim Collier	Alexander Kirkland
Senator Fuller	Marshall Neilan
Sheriff Hesmer	Big Jeff Bess
Abe Steiner	Henry Sharp
Printers	Willie Feibel
	Larry Casazza
Llewellyn	P. Jay Sidney
Mrs. Cooley	Eva Vaughn
Himself	Burl Ives
TV Director	Logan Ramsey

Producer, Elia Kazan; production manager, George Justin; director, Elia Kazan; assistant director, Charles H. Maguire; screenplay, Budd Schulberg; director of photography, Harry Stradling; camera operators, Saul Midwall, James Fitzsimmons; editor, Gene Milford; art directors, Richard Sylbert, Paul Sylbert; music, Tom Glazer; songs, Tom Glazer, Budd Schulberg; costumes, Anna Hill Johnstone; wardrobe, Flo Transfield; sound editor, Don Olson; sound, Ernest Zatorsky; technical advisors, Charles Irving, Toby Bruce.

Synopsis

Marcia Jeffries, roving reporter for a small Arkansas radio station, comes upon Lonesome Rhodes in a small town jail. A drunken down-and-outer with a guitar and an individual style in “Folksy” humor, Rhodes is given his own radio

show; within weeks he is the station's main asset. His power over his audience becomes even more apparent when he moves on to television. With Marcia and his self-appointed agent, Joey, Rhodes goes to New York, sends his sponsor's sales soaring, and rapidly becomes a national idol with frightening influence over his public. Regarding Marcia as his conscience, he asks her to marry him, then suddenly marries instead a little drum majorette, a representative of his adoring public. Marcia and Mel Miller, a writer attached to the program, watch with increasing horror as Rhodes becomes involved with a political group who are grooming an isolationist senator for the presidency. Appalled by his megalomaniac dreams, Marcia smashes him, leaving the sound on one night at the end of his show so that his public learns his true contempt for their gullibility. Rhodes is left alone with his empty fantasies of power.

Discussion

A Face in the Crowd is Kazan's "lost" masterpiece. The film is practically never seen today due to its lack of distributor,¹⁷² although there was an attempt to re-release the motion picture in August of 1974 in view of the Watergate crisis.¹⁷³ Most unlike any of Kazan's other films of the fifties, *A Face in the Crowd* stands apart in its use of the elements of *Theatrical Realism*. As a matter of fact it is, on the surface, the least theatrically realistic film of Kazan's until the director totally departed from the style with *America, America* in 1963. For this reason this film was chosen for discussion, because of a strong belief in the axiom that similarities can best be detected when comparisons are made between apparently dissimilar objects.

¹⁷² After the film's initial release by Warner Bros. the distribution rights reverted to Kazan's company (Newtown Productions). For nearly 40 years, *A Face in the Crowd* and Kazan's prior film, *Baby Doll*, were kept out of circulation. In 2005 WB Home Video released a DVD of *A Face in the Crowd* and in 2006 *Baby Doll* came out as part of the DVD boxed set *Tennessee Williams on Film*. Neither film has ever been shown on broadcast TV.

¹⁷³ The film had a one -week booking at the Elgin Theatre, a New York revival house.

First of all, there is little of the theatrical tradition in *A Face in the Crowd*. Kazan's work as a film director is noted by his use of material from other media. The theatre first comes to mind as the prime source of his films, but novels, short stories, and magazine articles often provided the subject for Kazan's screen work. All of his films, up to *America, America*, had been based on published material or, as in the case of *Viva Zapata* and *Splendor in the Grass* which were original screenplays, they were scripted by "men of letters" (Steinbeck and Inge) deeply rooted in the theatrical traditions.¹⁷⁴ In 1961 Kazan told the press that he was "a great believer in material written directly for the screen,"¹⁷⁵ but with the exception of *The Visitors* which was made in 1971 from an original script by his son Chris, Kazan's films (including those adapted from his own novels—*America, America* and *The Arrangement*) are noted for their reliance on dramatists, novelists, and journalists for their subject matter.

Yet Kazan is not to be considered only as an adapter of material for the screen. In most cases the sources only provide the inspirational spark to embark on a project and the film that results is always infused with an identity of its own. Sometimes the films are born of the fusion of two similar works (as in *Baby Doll* and *Wild River*),¹⁷⁶ result from investigative journalism (*On the Waterfront* and *Boomerang*),¹⁷⁷ or use a selected portion of a published work (*East of Eden*).¹⁷⁸ But in each and all cases Kazan approaches the material with a cinematic frame of mind, often contributing and collaborating on the writing of the screenplay.

Kazan found an ideal writer in Budd Schulberg, with whom he could develop a film project from conception through final execution. Together they worked on three projects: *On the Waterfront*, *A Face in the Crowd*, and *In the*

¹⁷⁴ *Splendor in the Grass* was advertised as William Inge's first play "especially for the screen."

¹⁷⁵ Bea Smith, "Original Pictures Favored by Kazan," *Newark Evening News*, November 1, 1961.

¹⁷⁶ *Baby Doll* is based on two one act plays by Tennessee Williams: *27 Wagons Full of Cotton* and *The Unsatisfactory Supper*. *Wild River* is based on two novels: *Mud on the Stars* by William Bradford Huie and *Dunbar's Cove* by Borden Deal.

¹⁷⁷ *On the Waterfront* was suggested by a series of articles by Malcolm Johnson. *Boomerang* was based on a *Reader's Digest* article by Anthony Abbott.

¹⁷⁸ The film was based on the last eighty pages of Steinbeck's novel.

Streets, the last one being an unrealized film dealing with Puerto Ricans in New York City¹⁷⁹

Budd Schulberg was born in New York in 1914 and grew up in Hollywood as the son of B. P. Schulberg, a studio executive who had been instrumental in forming United Artists, then headed Paramount Studios from 1926 to 1932, and went on to become an independent producer with diminishing fame and fortune until his death in 1957. The only precursor to the “literate moguls” that would rise to power in the late forties, B. P. Schulberg came to Paramount in 1912 as a publicist for the Famous Players Company that Adolph Zukor founded in an effort to bring “culture” and prestige” to the movie screen. When his contract at Paramount was not renewed in 1932, B. P. Schulberg “went back to independent producing, drifting from studio to studio, the overall direction down.”¹⁸⁰ Rumor had it that his misfortune was the direct result of a long-running feud between him and Louis B. Mayer, who made sure that as his own power rose in the industry Schulberg’s career would go down.¹⁸¹ On October 25, 1949, B. P. Schulberg took full page ads in the Hollywood trade papers begging for a job. He received no offers.¹⁸²

The direct experience of his father’s downfall caused in Budd Schulberg an attitude toward Hollywood that could only be described in pejorative terms. In the continuing saga of the New York vs. Hollywood syndrome, Budd Schulberg’s role is that of the most valuable defector. He packed up his bags, moved to the East Coast, and wrote scathing accounts of the land where sons of bitches grow on trees more abundantly than oranges. In two of his novels, *What Makes Sammy*

¹⁷⁹ This project, based on Schulberg’s adaptation of two novels: Oscar Lewis’ *La Vida* and Piri Thomas’ *Down These Mean Streets*, was set to go before the cameras in 1970 but Kazan was unable to secure financing when the New York labor unions refused to grant certain concessions to the production.

¹⁸⁰ Norman Zierold, *The Moguls* (New York: Avon Books, 1969), p. 159.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Ezra Foodman, *The Fifty Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), p. 364.

Run? and *The Disenchanted*, Schulberg elaborated on two common Hollywood myths: the rise to power of a ruthless operator, and the rape of the talented and sensitive writer by the movie industry. Needless to say, he became “persona non grata” in Hollywood, but he could not have cared less. Louis B. Mayer went on the record condemning Schulberg’s work and political liberalism, “insisting that blackballing him was too good for him and only deportation would be adequate punishment.”¹⁸³

Besides the hatred of Hollywood, Schulberg shared other formative elements of Theatrical Realism with people such as Kazan, Odets, and Lee J. Cobb. On May 23, 1951, Schulberg went before the HUAC and told how he “became a Hollywood communist Youth League member in the late 1930’s, how and why he quit, how Communist leaders tried to lure him back and how they attacked his writings when he refused.”¹⁸⁴ He also told the names of people with whom he had been associated during his days as a communist; names such as Richard Collins, Paul Jerrico, Ring Lardner, Jr., Waldo Salt, Meta Reis Rosenberg, Herbert Biberman, Albert Maltz, and Lester Cole—all of them names the committee had heard mentioned within their chambers more than once before. But, in principle, Schulberg had collaborated with the committee and given names, putting him with Kazan on the same boat up the same creek as far as some of his now former friends and associates were concerned. When that boat finally docked on the waterfront in 1954 its occupants came out to collect Academy Awards, but the trip had been a rough one. As Kazan recalled:

Spiegel was at a low point in his career . . . he was forced to do a picture and I think ours was the only picture he could get I was “persona non grata” among the intellectuals, “persona non grata: everywhere. I was nothing. The sense of triumph I had when we got the Academy Award for a New York picture made inexpensively by a lot of people like Spiegel, who was a clown, and I, who was “persona non

¹⁸³ Zierold, *ibid.*, p. 159

¹⁸⁴ Dan Markel, “Budd Schulberg, Film Writer, Claims Red Link Now Broken,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, May 24, 1951.

grata,” and Budd, who wasn’t anything much then either—the fact that we beat them all—was a great pleasure to me.¹⁸⁵

To many observers and participants, *On the Waterfront* was a transparent metaphor defending the position of those who collaborated with HUAC.¹⁸⁶ The film provided all the elements that made the comparison an obvious one, with the corrupt union bosses standing in for the Stalinist leadership of the Communist Party, and Terry Malloy caught in the dilemma of testifying against his own people. Left wing intellectuals and critics labeled the film as an unacceptable apology for squealing and Lindsay Anderson attacked the ending of the film as a fascist cop-out.¹⁸⁷

According to Kazan:

At the time, people wrote articles, they humiliated me in the press Because of what I’d done they said *On the Waterfront* was fascist in its ending. Well, it was not fascist. It was an exact description of what happened.¹⁸⁸

To say that we made the film as a defense of that just isn’t so The story is based on the experiences of a real person Yet to say that I’m not affected by what I went through in my life is not true either. But it’s not the main subject of the film. Nor was it the original reason why I did it. I went through that thing, and it was painful and difficult and not the thing I’m proudest of in my life, but it’s also not something I’m ashamed of.¹⁸⁹

I have never, because of my nature, felt apologetic about anything I did That’s called ‘a difficult decision’ because either way you go there are penalties I made a difficult decision. It was—it still is. I’ve never been at ease about it. I’ve never said: ‘sure that was good!’ It’s not that simple.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, p. 110.

¹⁸⁶ Among those interviewed by this writer, who viewed *On the Waterfront* in those terms, were Robert Alan Aurthur, David Susskind, and Leonard Rosenman.

¹⁸⁷ *Movie*, Winter, 1971-71, p. 7, contains a reference to said article.

¹⁸⁸ Ciment, p. 86.

¹⁸⁹ Stuart Byron and Martin L. Rubin, “Elia Kazan Interview,” *Movie*, Winter, 1971-71, p. 7.

¹⁹⁰ Ciment, pp. 86-87/

In March of 1976 when Schulberg was asked to comment on the same question at a conference following a screening of *On the Waterfront* at the Los Angeles International Film Festival, he answered cryptically: “I don’t see how there can be any connection, since the film was made years before the HUAC investigations.” Perhaps that was his way of dealing with a question he did not care to answer.

After the success of *On the Waterfront*, Elia Kazan became an independent producer and signed a contract with Warners that allowed him to make his films without any front office interference. As Alpert wrote:

By 1954 Kazan had enough stature to dictate to Hollywood the conditions under which he would make his films. He was through with Hollywood’s studios, and he would henceforth concentrate his efforts in the East. New York is limited in studio facilities, but he found the Gold Metal Studio in the Bronx, and Filmways in Manhattan, to his purpose. He gathered around him “New York” craftsmen like photographer Boris Kaufman and set designer Richard Sylbert, men who were opposed to what they considered Hollywood prettiness and polish, and soon enough Academy Award Oscars were finding homes in New York apartments.¹⁹¹

Soon after they received their Academy Awards, Kazan and Schulberg decided to do another film together.¹⁹² Schulberg wrote an interesting article on how this came about:

In April 1955, Elia Kazan and I met in the Oak Room of the Plaza, where we had first talked each other into taking on *Waterfront*. We decided we’d go again with a short story of mine called *Your Arkansas Traveler*.

The Arkansas Traveler is a gittar-pickin’, hillbilly hobo called Lonesome Rhodes, who reaches the pinnacle of TV fame and power. Since it was the lead story in a collection called *Some Faces in the Crowd*, a title for our film suggested itself: *A Face in the Crowd*

¹⁹¹ Hollis Alpert, *The Dreams and the Dreamers: Adventures of a Professional Movie Goer* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), pp. 136-137.

¹⁹² Their meeting in april of 1955 signaled the beginning of the project. By the time the script was finalized, Kazan had already complete two other films: *East of Eden* and *Baby Doll*. *A Face in the Crowd* opened on May 28, 1957, at the Globe Theatre in New York.

The following summer Kazan and I commuted from Connecticut together to learn as much as we could about the TV-advertising world. We drove down every morning at eight, swallowed as much as we could digest and drove back after dinner meetings at which we were often lucky enough to get Madison Avenue executives and personalities to let their hair down over a third cognac. Then in late August Kazan and I left for Arkansas to scout locations and get a first hand impression of rural Arkansas ways

In setting myself to write the screenplay I read over thirty typewritten pages of notes I made during that hot, full summer. Glancing over them in preparing this article, I was surprised at how many of these impressions provided scenes, characterizations and dialogue for the script.

When the first draft was completed, Kazan came down to Florida for an extended conference in my fishing shack on Siesta Key, off Sarasota. He put his finger on a soft spot, the sequence in which Lonesome Rhodes, at the height of his popularity and power, is invited to initiate a presidential hopeful into the mysteries of television charm.

“You’re guessing at this. You don’t really know it. It’s thin compared to the rest,” Kazan told me. I agreed. And so we went up to Washington together, and talked to correspondents, Congressmen and government officials.¹⁹³

This degree of collaboration between the two men in the development of the screenplay is unusual within the commercial film industry, yet it makes perfect sense when one realizes that Schulberg shared with Chayefsky the desire to turn the role of the screenwriter into that of “the playwright on Broadway.” In August, 1956, an article appeared in *Variety* which read, in part:

It’s Schulberg’s contention that “the writer is treated worse in Hollywood than the slaves before the Civil War.” He feels that as a result of the change that is now taking place in the film industry “the screenplay writer one of these days will be treated with the same prestige as the writer for the theatre.”

Discussing his working arrangement with Kazan, the outspoken novelist-screenwriter said he was a “co-maker” and not an “employee.” “Have you ever heard of a Hollywood director or producer inviting a

¹⁹³ Budd Schulberg, “The Private Life of a Movie Idea,” *New York Herald Tribune*, May 19, 1957. One of the people they sought for advice in Washington was Lyndon Johnson, who “was impressed by the fact that Hollywood people were talking to him.”

writer to rehearsals, asking his advice on casting, costumes and sets? Or asking, “Is this the way you visualize the characters?” The association with Kazan, he explained, was similar to that of a playwright and a theatre director. “It’s similar to working on a play during the tryout period,” he noted.¹⁹⁴

Kazan recalled that:

It was an ideal relationship and I urged him to be around everyday we were shooting. Then I edited and at the end of the cutting, he was back again and we discussed it. It was a totally collaborative effort, even down to the book for which I wrote the preface. Theoretically I think one man should make a picture. But in the rare case where an author and a director have had the same kinds of experiences, have the same kind of taste, the same historical and social point of view, and are compatible as Budd and I are, it works out perfectly.”¹⁹⁵

Since *A Face in the Crowd*, Schulberg has not worked with Kazan on a project to final completion. Their film on Puerto Ricans has been announced in the press many times, but has never been able to get in front of the cameras. As an influence on Kazan, Schulberg brought in an element of topical investigative social journalism that replaced the “theatrical” influence which Kazan had been trying to shake off when they began working together. As a figure of Theatrical Realism, Schulberg wrote two other films that could loosely be said to fall within the realm of the style, *The Harder They Fall* (Robson, 1956) and *Wind Across the Everglades* (Ray, 1959), but it is in his collaboration with Kazan that his stature as a Theatrical Realism writer is cemented.

The casting of the film is of peculiar interest because it underlines the role of Kazan as the creator of screen personae. As Kazan’s power increased within the industry he was able to diminish the need for established stars in his films and the studios were willing to take a gamble with virtual unknowns because Kazan’s name and track record, when linked to an established writer, or property, had

¹⁹⁴ Hy Hollinger, “Writer a Patsy in H’wood But New Era Dawning, Sez Schulberg,” *Variety*, August 5, 1956.

¹⁹⁵ *Ciment*, p. 112.

substantial drawing power.¹⁹⁶ At the time of the release of *A Face in the Crowd* an article in *Variety* appeared on this subject:

Filming in N.Y., according to Kazan, has many advantages, one of the prime ones being its “reservoir of new faces.”

Kazan contends that almost everybody talks about developing new faces but few people do anything about it. As for himself, he prefers to work with fresh talent. In *Face*, he brings to films for the first time Andy Griffith and Lee Remick and also employs such new faces as Anthony Franciosa and Walter Mathau.

Kazan said his reason for gambling with new faces is twofold. “First,” he said, “I get a kick out of working with people who are hungry. They’re like young fighters on their way up. It’s a life or death struggle for them and they give their utmost to the role. This quality disappears later. They become civilized and normal. Secondly, in subjects that purport to be realistic, new faces give them a sense of reality. The audience is more inclined to believe someone they have never seen before. If you use a recognized star who is well known to the public, the audience may feel they are play acting.”¹⁹⁷

Kazan is noted for introducing to the screen new actors in star-making roles. Brando,¹⁹⁸ Beatty,¹⁹⁹ Dean, Griffith, and less successfully Stathis Giallelis and Steve Railsback, have been the “new breed” of leading men he launched in splashy screen debuts that established their images in the public’s mind. Unfortunately, in some cases the images became indelible and the actors were trapped within their original roles. Brando spent a career running away from the

¹⁹⁶ It is interesting to note that in the ads for both *East of Eden* and *Splendor in the Grass* the names of Kazan, Steinbeck, and Inge were listed in bold typeface above the title, while the cast was listed in small letters at the bottom.

¹⁹⁷ Hy Hollinger, “Kazan Prefers ‘New Faces’ Because He Likes to Work with ‘Hungry’ Actors,” *Variety*, May 29, 1957.

¹⁹⁸ Brando’s actual screen debut was in Stanley Kramer’s production of Fred Zinnemann’s *The Men*, which was filmed in the interval between the Broadway and screen productions of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. But, undeniably, it was the role of Stanley Kowalski that gave Brando his initial splash.

¹⁹⁹ The advertising for *Splendor in the Grass* proclaimed: “and introducing Warren Beatty in his very first picture—a very special star!” The same line had been used for James Dean in the posters for *East of Eden*.

Stanley Kowalski character. And Andy Griffith has never been able to break the mold and escape from the “down home country boy” roles that he played early in his career. In fact, he comfortably ossified for nearly a decade on television with his own series in which he played a benevolent version of the Lonesome Rhodes character.

Griffith had already played a role on Broadway in *No Time for Sergeants* when *A Face in the Crowd* was released. He later repeated the same role in the film version of the play and went on to portray another variation of hayseed in *Onionhead*, a poor imitation of *Sergeants*, before settling down for his weekly TV show. Kazan recalled his casting of Griffith:

I had heard Andy Griffith on a record, then I saw him on TV. In most ways he did very well in the part. What he did especially well was what I saw in him first. He was the real native American country boy and that comes over in the picture. I had him drunk all through the last big scene because it was the only way he could be violent—in life he wants to be friends with everybody.²⁰⁰

Sayre’s comments on Andy Griffith’s performance reflect an accurate insight into the creation of the role by both the actor and the director:

Throughout this acutely American picture, Elia Kazan drew the best out of the cast. From the first shot of Andy Griffith being kicked in the ribs on the jailhouse floor while his hands strangle the air, to the final scene where his shadow rages over a white table cloth as he screams from a balcony to his lost audience, the actor made a stunning screen debut. The volcanic energies of the character, the gut-spilling laugh that makes his body jack-knife forward, the pious intensity with which he exclaims “Molly Hoses!” the gleeful slobbishness—all convey the monomaniac who ruins himself. There are a couple of details that recall Marlon Brando in Kazan’s *Streetcar*—the hefty sweating torso in the worn undershirt, or Lonesome yelling “Marcia!” to Patricia Neal at the pitch in which Stanley Kowalski cried “Stella!”—but Andy Griffith isn’t derivative. We’re merely aware that the two had the same director.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Climent, p. 113.

²⁰¹ Nora Sayre, “A 1957 Film Speaks of Watergate,” *The New York Times*, August 8, 1974.

Kazan's molding of the Griffith persona in *A Face in the Crowd* becomes obvious when the film is viewed in retrospect. Although the character of Lonesome Rhodes is built on two layers—the country boy folk singer, and the ruthless manipulator—occasionally a third layer is revealed which is as much a part of the character as a constant trait of all of Kazan's protagonists—a deep vulnerability and sensibility, a capacity for experiencing the primal pain that turns Kowalski's screaming of "Stella!" into a wounded animal cry and Rhodes begging Marcia, "Don't play with me, don't hurt me, don't hurt me . . ." into a plea for life. Besides this secret vulnerability, two other Kazan touches are evident in Griffith: a penchant for undershirts and a capacity to convey inner torture in hysterical and violent outbursts, both of which are staples of the Theatrical Realism style. On the subject of the undershirt Kazan has said: "I wanted to suggest that there was a slightly stale odor about him—that he slept in that undershirt and he never took it off, and he even fucked with it on."²⁰² On the subject of hysteria Kazan recalled that one of the elements that attracted him and Schulberg to the project was the memory of a film "Budd's father had made years ago in which a German actor screamed at the end, 'Nobody loves me!' and he is left all alone in his castle screaming for everybody to come back."²⁰³

It is ironic, yet consistent, that Griffith's career developed on television the same character traits that catapulted Lonesome Rhodes to fame and yet he would never be willing, or able, to take on the kind of roles of which he proved capable in his screen debut.

The co-star in the film is also of special interest. Patricia Neal was, at the time of shooting, the only seasoned film actress in the cast. Unfortunately, her seasoning had been left mostly to very poor chefs who used her in stale programmers. As a contract leading lady in Hollywood films of the late forties and early fifties, Patricia Neal posed an interesting problem—what to do with an

²⁰² Byron and Rubin, p. 10.

²⁰³ Climent, *Kazan on Kazan*, p. 114.

intelligent actress in an era when breasts and not brains defined femininity. Only two of her films from that period come to mind as worthy of attention: *The Fountainhead* (Vidor, 1948), in which she successfully came through in spite of an upstaging expressionistic production design; and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Wise, 1951), in which she will be forever remembered by science fiction film fans for uttering the famous words, “klatu, barada, niktū” with such force and conviction that no one in the audience, to this date, will snicker in disbelief at what could have become in the hands of almost any other actress just another campy scene. Had Neal remained in Hollywood, taking the sort of roles she was offered, her career would inevitably have followed the same path taken by Julie Adams and Faith Domerque, who often found themselves playing opposite giant insects, creatures from black lagoons, and robots out of whack. Instead she joined the ranks of Shelley Winters and Anne Bancroft,²⁰⁴ who returned to the stage and took occasional film roles that proved challenging. She joined the Actors Studio, went to live in London, and divided her time between raising a family and pursuing a stage and film career. In 1964 her performance in *Hud*, under the direction of Martin Ritt, garnered her a very deserved Academy Award.

In *A Face in the Crowd*, Patricia Neal creates a masterful role. While working with Kazan she was impressed by the calm that seemed to emanate from him,²⁰⁵ a quality which she absorbed and used in contrapuntual effect to Griffith’s hysterical role. As Marcia Jeffries, a recent graduate from Sarah Lawrence whose ambition is “to run the best radio program in Northeast Arkansas,” Neal personifies the educated postwar generation returning to its grass roots in search of unpretentious and unadulterated American culture. As she says in the film, “the real American music comes from the bottom up,” and while doing her on-location radio show she begins to enjoy her frequent sorties to “the bottom” with the same enthusiasm that Sullivan embarked on his travels.

²⁰⁴ Bancroft, at one low point in her career, was starring in films such as *Gorilla at Large*.

²⁰⁵ Gow, *Hollywood in the Fifties*, p. 117.

Patricia Neal turns the role of Marcia into one of the most singular portraits of women in American films. Kazan's heroines often tend to blend the elements of wife and mother into a pillar of strength from which the troubled leading men draw their support and in which they find their refuge. The characters played by Kim Hunter in *Streetcar*, Julie Harris in *East of Eden*, Eva Marie Saint in *On the Waterfront*, and Lee Remick in *Wild River* are the kind of women who take care of their men and know what is good for them. They understand them when they are restless, and their love for them is mixed with compassion and wonderment at the male animal.

If Kazan provided the American cinema of the fifties with its most arresting gallery of male images, his female characters appear to be projections of Freudian constructs emanating from the male character's needs and the plot's structure. The character of Marcia Jeffries transcends this conception of women and emerges as a complete and complex human being, thanks to Patricia Neal's perceptive creation of the role. Her character is built as a control mechanism or point of reference for the changes that Lonesome Rhodes goes through in the development of the film. Her stability and strength are supposed to remain constant as her enthusiasm diminishes in the face of Rhodes' growing power and corruption. Marcia is supposed "to sense things" that the script unfortunately telegraphs to the audience in a much too clear and loud voice, yet Neal is able to develop her own character beyond the needs of the plot and is able to convey how she is also affected by power and corruption without ever playing out a scene expressly written for this purpose. When she enters a bar, close to the end of the film, dressed in black and wearing a diamond brooch, she is not only superficially different from her first entrance into the jail as a roving reporter in simple work clothes—the course of events have taken their toll in her personality and demeanor and she expresses these changes with subtle gestures and mannerisms. Even in the last half of the film, when her presence becomes merely functional,

Neal manages to create the necessary subterfuge to import credibility to the film's upcoming climax, which she precipitates. In less capable hands her action would have been interpreted as jealousy or revenge. Only Patricia Neal has the strength of character to turn a destructive act into an affirmation of the self and be able to convey that concept to the audience. Her contribution to the film is invaluable.

The rest of the cast is equally interesting for various reasons. Making their screen debut are Anthony Franciosa and Lee Remick, both members of the Actors Studio who would build their careers on the Theatrical Realism style. Franciosa makes the most of his role as the hustling parasitic public relations agent who latches onto Lonesome Rhodes like a leech, and Lee Remick is curiously used as Lonesome's cheerleading bride, a part that seems to have been made to order for Carroll Baker, with whom Kazan had just finished *Baby Doll*. Remick appears, in retrospect, a bit too soft for an opportunistic and unfaithful Lolita; her face is inextricably associated with her later warmer roles, but she pulls this off with flying colors.

In the role of Mel Miller, the TV writer who plans to expose Lonesome Rhodes for what he really is, Walter Matthau, another Actors Studio member, in his third screen appearance, makes a very strong impression as a first-rate character actor by playing spokesman for the filmmakers. Characterized as a man of principle, the liberal intellectual he portrays is too cold and cynical to be a hero, although Schulberg gives him the girl at the end. As Mayersberg noted:

The writer appears in his habitual role of the conscience of the crowd in Elia Kazan's film *A Face in the Crowd*. Mel Miller (played by Walter Matthau) is a pipe-smoking, bespectacled, world-weary, sentimental, cynical writer-reporter who has seen it all. The writer is traditionally a man who is strong in the head and weak in the arm. He knows, he understands, but he cannot act.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Paul Mayersberg, "Passage to Hollywood," in *Sight, Sound and Society*, edited by David Manning White and Richard Averson (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1968), p. 181.

Kazan said of the character:

I thought of him as someone weak and vengeful. When he slams the book down on the bar and says, 'I'll get back at him through this book!'—it's a gesture that's semi-important. Why didn't he ever confront Rhodes directly? He only does it at the end when Rhodes is down.²⁰⁷

I've never been very favorably inclined towards 'intellectuals.' I mean—I like 'intellect.' But the intellectuals around New York who sit and complain about why they are not doing things, and a lot of the intellectuals I know from the progressive movements of various times—I donno, maybe some of that got in there. Budd thinks that the character is sympathetic. I don't think he has much gumption, or strength.²⁰⁸

As is typical of most of Kazan's work, *A Face in the Crowd* has no hero. But in this film the lack of ingratiating qualities in the main characters posed a difficult problem which may have been responsible for the film's commercial failure. Knight discussed the performances and made a valid point in his review of the film:

None of these problems, however, can be traced to Mr. Kazan's cast. As Rhodes, Andy Griffith creates from the start a figure of demoniacal intensity, of frightening lapses from rough amiability to sullen rage, a man consumed at the same time by tremendous egotism and profound self-doubts. Anthony Franciosa as a fast-talking, double-dealing manager, Walter Matthau as a reluctant rider on Rhodes's bandwagon, Lee Remick as the pretty drum majorette who momentarily attracts Rhodes's incessantly roving eye—all contribute performances that are sharply and deftly drawn. But the real triumph in *A Face in the Crowd* is the performance of Patricia Neal as the girl who—despite her intelligence, despite all reason—has succumbed to the same animal magnetism that attracts the crowds. Kazan has failed to establish this magnetism, but Miss Neal reacts to it so convincingly that one is almost persuaded it really exists. She brings to the film the only real warmth it has, the fire it so badly needs.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Byron and Rubin, p. 10.

²⁰⁸ Ciment, p. 116.

²⁰⁹ Arthur Knight, "Monster on the Make," *Saturday Review*, May 25, 1957.

In his program notes for the film, when it was shown as part of a Kazan retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, Silver wrote:

A Face in the Crowd is arguably *the* central film in Kazan's *oeuvre*. He had finally arrived at a sophisticated awareness of himself and his medium. His films were now to be increasingly more personal—far less bound by outside origins and other people's expectations. He had already conquered the theatre and he had redefined the very essence of movie acting by giving birth to at least four (Vivien Leigh and Brando in *Streetcar*, Brando in *Waterfront*, Dean in *East of Eden*) of the most brilliant performances in all cinema. No longer would he be so preoccupied with acting for its own sake, and Patricia Neal's portrayal of Marcia would be perhaps the last to reflect that supersensitive Kazan touch.²¹⁰

A Face in the Crowd is, of Kazan's films of the fifties, the one in which the Theatrical Realism style is least evident. In this picture he breaks away from the somber theatrical tradition and points his camera at the heart of America. In a 1947 *New York Times* article, the following was written about Kazan:

He dreams of making epic films that will portray America and its people; movies that will be shot not in studios, but in fields, mines, factories; *Boomerang!* was the first short step in that direction. 'I want to make folk movies, not folksy movies,' says Kazan. 'Odets discovered the Bronx, but no one has discovered America.' Kazan hopes to become the nation's cinematic Columbus.²¹¹

In an excellent article in *Film Comment*, Changas wrote:

In his later work, Kazan lived up to his desire to explore America. In moving away from metropolitan settings and into the idiosyncratic regions of America, Kazan brought to the screen fresh visions of sharply-etched worlds. . . . More and more Kazan was drawn to material involving characters from particularized areas of America, notably the South—Mississippi (*Baby Doll*), Arkansas (*A Face in the Crowd*), Tennessee

²¹⁰ Charles Silver, Program notes for *A Face in the Crowd*, Museum of Modern Art, January 28, 1971.

²¹¹ Estelle Changas, "Elia Kazan's America," *Film Comment*, Summer, 1972, p. 9.

(*Wild River*)—but also embracing the small towns of Kansas (*Splendor in the Grass*) and northern California (*East of Eden*). These isolated worlds where change is slow in coming and values remain ultimately stable reveal Kazan's attraction to innocence and tradition. A child immigrant from Turkey, Kazan views America much as we would expect a foreigner to—with a sense of wonder and fascination at the eccentricities of this country. [Yet] Kazan seems torn by tensions. . . . One is struck, for example, by Kazan's ambivalence towards America which emerges in most of his work. *On the Waterfront* and *A Face in the Crowd* contain an element of contempt for the ignorance and cultural vacuity of the masses in America. Yet much of Kazan's work is a celebration of American ideals. . . . These ambivalences—the sentimentality about Americana, yet the strong strain of social criticism of American institutions and myths—really make Kazan's films remarkably revealing of changing social attitudes over the past 25 years, and at their best, give his work a dramatic intensity that has the power to move us.²¹²

The first half of *A Face in the Crowd* is quite unlike anything Kazan had done before. It is light, breezy, and a sweeping story of a man's sudden rise to fame as a television entertainer. It is told with humor, satire, and irony and contains several charming montages. The second half, however, is more in line with the hysterical, grotesque, and Freudian elements of Kazan's previous work. Richard Sylbert's production design reflects this mixture of styles—the first part is basically white, airy, and open, with an emphasis on simplicity; while in the second part black is the dominant color and a sense of claustrophobia is conveyed through the use of diagonal lines, expressionistic sets, and patently false surroundings. The set for Lonesome's penthouse at the end of the film is a perfect example of the degree of symbolic stylization which the whole production so carefully utilizes without ever really leaving the realistic realm.

The turning point of the film occurs when Lonesome becomes involved with politicians and realizes that his power as an entertainer could take him beyond mere fame and fortune. As the critic for the *Monthly Film Bulletin* noted:

²¹² Ibid., pp. 9, 11, 14.

The weakness of Kazan's film is two-fold. It never indicates clearly enough the precise ambitions and strengths of the vaguely fascist political group which Rhodes joins, nor the extent to which he is using or being used by them. Because one cannot accept this vague outline of political danger, the end of the film collapses into hysterical ranting. Perhaps more important, the "liberal values" which Kazan and Schulberg are supporting are personified by a remarkably weak and indecisive character, the television writer, able to express his disgust only through some improbably high-flown dialogue. *A Face in the Crowd* skillfully builds up what seems finally a rather artificial monster and in its treatment of the television audience it sometimes implies that in Lonesome Rhodes the public is getting no more than it deserves.²¹³

In retrospect, Kazan was aware of the mixture of styles and the somewhat flawed second part when he told Ciment in 1974:

I learned a lesson about style in that film. The first part of *A Face in the Crowd* is more of a satire, and the second part tends to really involve you with Lonesome's fate and with his feelings. I think the first part works perfectly and the second part doesn't quite. Maybe the change should have been in the first part, despite the fact that it worked. If I made him less humanly attractive, it might have been less funny, but it would have made the two parts coherent. I think this is a good example of that mixture of styles which I think is a critical point in films. When you mix styles you're in a lot of trouble. In the beginning of a film you are saying to an audience: 'I want you to listen to this story and take it this way.' Afterwards you can't break it, you can't say: 'I want you to laugh at Lonesome Rhodes.' If it's a satire, you can't be terrorized emotionally later.²¹⁴

Although it appears that the character of Lonesome seems to turn into a media monster quite suddenly in the second part of the film, the groundwork for his personality change is carefully laid out in the first part and can be foreseen in such instances as when Maria first approaches him in jail to sing a song for her radio show and Lonesome answers with, "What do I get out of this?" or when he

²¹³ *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, 1957, p. 147.

²¹⁴ Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, pp. 117-118.

boards the train for Memphis and tells Anthony Franciosa, under his breath, “Boy, I’m glad to shake that dump!”

In a 1974 interview, Schulberg acknowledged that he based the character of Rhodes on a composite of Will Rogers, Walter Winchell, Arthur Godfrey, and Don Carney (Radio’s “Uncle Don”). From Rogers, Schulberg extracted the element of...

. . . a conservative in the guise of a shit-kicking populist. . . . Mr. Schulberg added that Rogers “wasn’t as ominous as Lonesome Rhodes. But there were elements of the same kind of deception—talking the language of the little people while sharing the life of the big people.”

Walter Winchell, whose column and radio show thrived in the thirties, forties and early fifties, was also a model for Lonesome: “If Winchell touted a stock, it would go way up—if he knocked it, it went down. Finally, he was able to affect the economy and political careers. He could do it with just a question like: “What’s going on at General Electric? Huh?” Then the three dots... He didn’t have to say anything—people would think: he must know something.

Arthur Godfrey, who made unknowns into stars or turned books into best sellers by pushing them on the air, contributed some of the folksiness of Lonesome Rhodes. (Fred Allen once called Godfrey “the man with the barefoot voice.”) He also kidded the commercials he had to deliver. Uncle Don, whose cloying children’s program was a seething success, was called “a saint, an oracle, and a pal” to infinite children by “Radio Guide” in 1931. It was widely believed that—after caroling “Good night, little friends, good night!”—he once concluded a broadcast with “I guess that’ll hold the little bastards.” That legend has been disputed. At any rate, it was fodder for the plot of *A Face in the Crowd*. Moreover, Lonesome shows an occasional kinship with Elvis Presley, although the latter wasn’t a direct influence.²¹⁵

Nevertheless, Lonesome Rhodes’ music starts out in a folksy vein and ends pretty much as standard 1957 rock and roll fare, and the parallel with Presley is quite obvious, especially when he is singing “Mama Guitar” to the rally back in his home town.

²¹⁵ Sayre, “A 1957 Film Speaks of Watergate.”

That sequence of the home town rally, with its images of nubile majorettes and plump farm matrons under umbrellas, is a brilliant piece of Americana. The sequence is carefully built up from a behind-the-scenes point of view showing all the elements that go into the creation of a mass media event—the agents haggling, the cameras getting ready, the fans waiting, the star pacing in his trailer, a mixture of anxiety and expectations that climaxes in a performance which, in this case, comes as a release not so much in the form of Lonesome’s gig on stage, but in the way the film montage is beautifully executed by Kazan’s superb selection of shots and Gene Milford’s rhythmic editing.

Another montage that proves to be a highlight of the film kids the commercial that Lonesome Rhodes makes for Vitajex, the little sugar coated pills that are supposed to provide an aphrodisiac energy boost. Kazan and company must have had a field day lampooning Madison Avenue selling techniques with such ditties as dancing girls, animation showing the path of a Vitajex pill through the body as a plumbing chart, the consumer changing from a pig to a wolf after ingesting the pill, the giant family size bottle and the suggestive jingle, “Oh Vitajex, what you’re doing to me!”

A Face in the Crowd is the closest thing there is to a Theatrical Realism musical. The film is a definite departure for Kazan in its use of music, humor, and traditional elements of the American entertainment film. Kazan told Climent:

What I like in the film is the energy and invention and bounce which are very American. It’s really got something marvelous about it, this constantly flashing, changing rhythm. In many ways, it’s more American than any picture I ever did. It represents the business life, and the urban life, and the way things are on television, the rhythm of the way this country moves. It has a theme that even today is completely relevant. Finally what I think is that it was ahead of its time.²¹⁶

It is interesting to note that Kazan’s use of television within a film was definitely ahead of its time. Years later John Frankenheimer would be praised for

²¹⁶ Climent, pp. 118-119

his use of TV monitors in films such as *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Seven Days in May*, but Kazan had already come up with ways of providing additional information with another viewpoint on a scene in *A Face in the Crowd*. The technique closely resembles cubism (theoretically, by showing two or more views on the same plane) or organically motivated split screen, by placing the TV set's picture within the larger motion picture frame. The sequences of the telethon and the on-camera wedding of Lonesome and Betty Lou are noted for the ingenious juxtaposition of what is really going on backstage and what the audience is allowed to see at home.

Kazan also makes effective use of television as a sardonic Greek chorus that comments on the action. In the blackmail scene in which a previously unknown Mrs. Lonesome Rhodes shows up to "collect her share," Kazan has a television set in the background intoning the song "An Old Fashioned Marriage." Unfortunately, Kazan belabors the point, by having Mrs. Rhodes turn the volume up full blast as she leaves the room. This scene curiously parallels the one in *The Arrangement*, in which Kirk Douglas is recovering from an accident by lounging poolside and dodging agents and associates while the TV set he has playing in the background shows a helpless creature being devoured by rapacious animals. No one has ever pointed a finger at Kazan for being subtle.

The political implications of *A Face in the Crowd* are probably what caused the film its initial failure at the box office and what will insure its place in film history as an unheeded Cassandra of the mass media age. When Lonesome Rhodes realizes "I'm not just an entertainer, I'm an influence, a wheeler dealer of opinion, a force, A FORCE!" as a group of politicians who have recruited his services to help sell, in the same manner that he sold Vitajex, a presidential candidate whose prior TV appearances had been catastrophic, his power pushes him over the edge of madness. As Matthau comments in the film, "It's dangerous—power . . . You have to be a saint to stave off the power that little box

can give you.” And it is at this point that the message of the film comes through. *A Face in the Crowd* is not like *The Great Man* with which it was compared by some critics,²¹⁷ or any version of *A Star Is Born*, or the myriad films that expose a fictionalized personality; *A Face in the Crowd* is unique in its conception of the relationship between a mass media personality and the larger sphere of society through politics. Only Peter Watkins’ superb and seldom seen *Privilege*²¹⁸ approximates this ruthless and accurate vision of mass manipulation by a show-biz personality for a covert political cause.

While doing his research in Washington, Schulberg wrote the following in a letter to Kazan:

Before going to bed at night I scribbled notes on the hotel stationery. Here’s a typical entry: “Senator X: In 1952 politics entered a new stage, the television stage. In some ways it’s healthy—now every voter can see and listen to the candidates. In some ways it may be a danger—slogans and smiles, the technique of advertising commercials pulling more weight than they deserve. And you have to be on your guard every moment. If you drop your eyes to read a prepared statement, they say you’re shifty-eyed. If your arm drops around a woman delegate’s chair, they say you’re a Lothario.

We’re on the track of our theme: Not the exposure of the American heel. That’s been done too many times. The theme is: Television is the greatest instrument for mass persuasion in the history of the world. What does it do to our protagonist? If this is merely another exposé of a heel, who will care? It must be the story of the quicksilver quality of success in America, of the supercharged phenomenon of power in America. This should be the measure of our film’s effect.”²¹⁹

Kazan summed it up this way: “It’s the idea of the power of TV, its emergence as a new force in American life. It’s a way of saying ‘just watch the thing.’ It’s a wonderful thing. It’s also a ticklish thing.”²²⁰

In 1971 Silver wrote:

²¹⁷ Such as Knight, Crowther, and *Variety*.

²¹⁸ In this film a rock singer (Paul Jones) becomes a puppet for the church’s political ambitions in Britain.

²¹⁹ Schulberg, “The Private Life of a Movie Idea.”

²²⁰ Milton Esterow, “Focus on ‘A Face in the Crowd,’” *The New York Times*, September 30, 1956.

The concerns of *A Face in the Crowd* could hardly be more current. . . . At the time of the film's debut, some critics argue that *A Face in the Crowd* was overdrawn and too bombastic. The events of the past fourteen years (the payola and quiz show scandals, the Goldwater nomination, and Tiny Tim's TV nuptials) seem, however, to have sustained the Kazan/Schulberg vision. We may laugh at the reference to "Dick Nixon's mutt," but it is not a very comfortable laugh. And there is no longer any humor at all in the line: "We've got to find 35,000,000 buyers for a product we call Worthington Fuller." For we have now seen cellophane-wrapped political candidates, and, in too many instances, the Lonesome Rhodes in each of us has bought them. The face in the crowd is our own.²²¹

In 2005 Warner Bros. Released a superbly restored DVD edition of *A Face in the Crowd* as part of a package entitled "Controversial Classics." The film, unavailable until then, received considerable attention from the home video press, which called it way ahead of its time in its prediction of the role television was to play in the future of American politics. Seen in retrospect, Kazan and Schulberg's *A Face in the Crowd* can be considered to be the first part of a trilogy on this subject spanning 43 years, with Chayefsky and Lumet's *Network* (1976) and Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* (2000) completing it. Many critics, including this writer, consider the film to be among Kazan's best work, not just for its dramatic and cinematic merit, but also for its unique value as a comment on the power of the media by two of its most highly talented and perceptive artists.

THE PAWNBROKER

Cast and Credits

(Ely Landau Productions, 1965)

Sol Nazerman

Marilyn Birchfield

Rodriguez

Ortiz

Rod Steiger

Geraldine Fitzgerald

Brock Peters

Jamie Sanchez

²²¹ Silver, Program notes for *A Face in the Crowd*.

Ortiz' Girl	Thelma Oliver
Tessie	Marketa Kimbrell
Mendel	Baruch Lumet
Mr. Smith	Juano Hernandez
Ruth	Linda Geiser
Bertha	Nancy R. Pollock
Tangee	Raymond St. Jaques
Buck	John McCurry
Robinson	Ed Morehouse
Mrs. Ortiz	Eusebia Cosme
Savarese	Warren Finnerty
Mortaon	Jack Ader
Papa	E. M. Margolese
Joan	Marianne Kanter

Director, Sidney Lumet; executive producer, Worthington Miner; screenplay, David Friedkin and Morton Fine; based on novel by Edward Lewis Wallant; producers, Roger H. Lewis and Philip Langner; director of photography, Boris Kaufman; art director, Richard Sylbert; music, Quincy Jones; associate producer, Joseph Manduke; costumes, Anna Hill Johnstone; film editor, Ralph Rosenblum; production coordinator, Alfred Markim; assistant director, Dan Eriksen; sound, Dennis Mailand; makeup, Bill Herman; hairdresser, Ed Callaghan.

Synopsis

Sol Nazerman is a Jewish pawnbroker. Tormented by memories of his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp, where his wife and children were exterminated, Sol is totally withdrawn from the world around him, incapable of showing emotion. In his shop in Spanish Harlem, Sol and his young Puerto Rican assistant, Ortiz, face the daily parade of customers. Ortiz sees Sol as the man who will teach him the ways of business so that he can start up on his own. Marilyn Birchfield, a social worker, calls at the shop to interest Sol in a scheme to help the young people of Harlem, but she leaves in anger when Sol fails to respond. Sol's shop is used by a Negro racketeer, Rodriguez, as a front to cover up his activities, but Sol ignores the real source of his income. When Ortiz' former friends chide him about his job in the pawnshop, Ortiz boasts about the money he has seen Sol put in the safe. A visit from Ortiz' girl, a prostitute working for Rodriguez, brings

Sol face to face with the reality of his position—but Rodriguez refuses to end their partnership. Sol wanders through the night, and next morning in the shop he gives his customers whatever they ask. Stunned by Sol’s rejection of him, Ortiz goes to his hoodlum friends and arranges with them to rob the pawnshop safe. When the hoodlums arrive, Sol goads them into shooting, but Ortiz tries to stop them and is hit. Ortiz dies in Sol’s arms; horrified, Sol impales his hand on a spike and staggers out of the shop.

Discussion

The problem today, with Culture booming and exploding everywhere and movies competing with novels and plays as okay subjects for critical exegesis, is rather the bad good movie, the movie with serious intentions and pretensions that turns its back haughtily on the box-office in order to make a Meaningful Statement about alienation, social injustice, the mechanization of modern life, the difficulty of communication, the impossibility of love, and other important matters, the movie that is directed up to the hilt, avant-garde-wise, the movie that lays it right on the line for the Browning Societies of our time, the audiences of the “art” movie house—over six hundred now as against twelve in 1945—and the film clubs that are proliferating in our colleges. . . . Which brings me to Sidney Lumet’s *The Pawnbroker*, the bad good film that has everything: alienation, anomie, neurosis, inability to love or communicate, the inhumanity of the metropolis, and the two great traumatic experiences of our age, the Jewish and the Negro, Harlem and the Nazi death camps. These themes are expressed with the most advanced technique: camera angles, extreme close-ups, jump cutting, subliminal flashbacks, bleakly sophisticated photography by Boris Kaufman (Vigo’s cameraman in the thirties), art direction by the accomplished Richard Sylbert, and the lead played by Rod Steiger, a respected Method actor whose style, which generally strikes me as rather mannered in the over-under-acting tradition of his school, was well-suited to the catatonic character he was required to impersonate here. Yet *The Pawnbroker* seemed to me a bore and a phony, a vulgarization of a serious theme, an exploitation of cinematic “effects” used without taste or intelligence.

--Dwight Macdonald²²²

²²² Dwight Macdonald, *Dwight Macdonald on Movies* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), pp. 135-136.

Sidney Lumet has spent most of his career wondering why the critics hate him so much. The passage quoted above is but one example of the critical abuse that prompted him to say:

Look, I don't fancy myself as *The Second Coming*. A director should always check himself, go back and look at his work as objectively as possible to see how it holds up and where he might have gone wrong. But in every case where the New York Supercritics (the chic ones as opposed to the unchic ones—everyone knows who they are), in every case where they knocked me, from *Long Day's Journey to The Sea Gull* to *Bye, Bye Braverman*, I have since been vindicated.

Journey is constantly being revived, *Sea Gull* has been warmly received in England and *Braverman* played so well when I saw it with an audience recently I missed one third of the dialog because of the laughter. After that one, the critics had almost convinced me I couldn't direct comedy. I've just stopped reading them.²²³

The problem with Sidney Lumet is that he is both a product and a victim of Theatrical Realism. When his first film (*Twelve Angry Men*) came out in 1957 Theatrical Realism was at its all time peak as a film style, and Lumet was able to ride the crest of the style's popularity and receive a warm critical reception for his impressive big screen debut. But the novelty soon wore off and critics began to deride the "little pictures about little people" that were so often being transplanted from the small to the big screen. This critical attitude was initially used to denigrate talents from the television industry who were beginning to enter theatrical films. They were likened to barbarians storming the holy citadels of "the theatah" and "the cinema." Paddy Chayefsky led a counterattack with several articles in the *New York Times*²²⁴ in which he maintained that his work was of a stature equal to that of Williams and Miller who, at the time, were the sacred cows of Broadway. But by 1961 the backlash against Theatrical Realism was such that film adaptations of Williams' and Miller's plays were greeted with

²²³ "Sidney Lumet Discusses His Critics—One Good Rap Deserves Another," *Variety*, January 28, 1970.

²²⁴ Cf. page 204-206.

such negative notices that it became clear that those cows were no longer sacred. Several years earlier critics had been in awe of these authors and marveled at the film versions of their plays, no matter how uninspired and crudely produced. Films such as *The Rose Tattoo* or *The Crucible* would have met drastically different receptions had they been released later, at the turn of the decade. It had simply become a matter of satiation.

Unfortunately for him, Sidney Lumet found himself at the start of his career in the thankless position of driving the last nails into the coffin of Theatrical Realism with his films of Williams' *The Fugitive Kind* (1960), and Miller's *A View from the Bridge* (1961). It was reported that at a sneak preview of *The Fugitive Kind* Tennessee Williams was booed by the audience.²²⁵ One can easily surmise the response Sidney Lumet got.

But Lumet was not the kind of person to take all this to heart. He already had a long history of confronting critics face to face, first as an actor, then as a television and theatre director. What others would easily interpret as fatal criticism, Lumet knew how to take as just another turn in his long career.

Lumet was born in Philadelphia on June 15, 1925. When he was four his family moved to New York where his father obtained a job at a small Brooklyn radio station, writing and directing radio plays. Lumet had his introduction to acting when he was given a role in one of his father's plays. For the next five years he played children's parts on the Yiddish stage. His first English stage part was in *Dead End*.

His first success came when he was twelve, when he was given a leading part in *The Eternal Road*, in the New York production. His performance drew the attention of the critics and a succession of Broadway roles followed.²²⁶

²²⁵ Eugene Archer, "View from Director Sidney Lumet's Chair," *The New York Times*, May 8, 1960.

²²⁶ "Biographical Sketch," *Films and Filming*, August 1960.

Lumet became a leading child actor involved with the Group Theatre and the Federal Theatre Project, appearing in such plays as Saroyan's *My Heart is in the Highlands*, Maxwell Anderson's *Journey to Jerusalem* (in the role of Jesus at the age of twelve), and the film *One Third of a Nation* (1939). As a young participant in the fervent years, Lumet was directly involved with the forging of Theatrical Realism, coming in close contact with most of the influential figures of the style.

After four years of military service he returned to Broadway as an actor. He was listed as one of the students in Robert Lewis' advanced acting class at the first meeting of the Actors Studio, but something must have happened since his name has never again been officially connected with the Studio. In the same year (1947) he founded the Actors Workshop on University Place in Greenwich Village...

. . . and with his group of actors staged off-beat plays, charging no admission but relying on contributions. It was during this period that Lumet's main interest changed from acting to directing, and in 1950 he was offered a job as an assistant director with CBS. Within a year he was directing his own plays and has since directed 150 plays for the *Danger* series, 26 *You Are There* shows, and many others. At New York's Phoenix Theatre he directed a revival of Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*.

During his work on television, Lumet became associated with playwright Reginald Rose, and when the latter's *Twelve Angry Men* was set up for filming with Henry Fonda starring, Lumet was asked to direct. For this, his debut as a film director, he won an Academy Award nomination.²²⁷

There seems to be a tragic element of historical determinism in Sidney Lumet's career. Had he continued working in small scale Theatrical Realism projects after *Twelve Angry Men* his position would have been somewhat solidified within the style of the fifties, but Lumet always yearned to "do something different" and he followed his critically successful²²⁸ first film with

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ *Twelve Angry men* was reported as a commercial failure.

two oddities: *Stage Struck* (1958), a remake of *Morning Glory* noted by its unreal Technicolor backstage atmosphere;²²⁹ and *That Kind of Woman* (1959), an uninspired romantic comedy with the unlikely coupling of Sophia Loren and Tab Hunter.²³⁰ After these resounding failures he returned to Theatrical Realism, but it was already too late. The recently arrived French New Wave was now the rage among intellectual circles, totally replacing the memories of Italian Neo-Realism from the previous decade as the art house standard of film appreciation. Lumet was climbing aboard the last car on the last train. His next three films seem to indicate a desperate scraping of the bottom of the Theatrical Realism barrel—a half-baked “pastiche” from Williams’ *Orpheus Descending*,²³¹ the French-American co-production of Miller’s *A View from the Bridge* (ironically partly shot in Paris during the height of the New Wave)²³² and, going all the way down to the roots, the film version of O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (1962).

After these three films Lumet must have felt the weight of all that canned theatre around his neck, and he turned again to Henry Fonda for another claustrophobic debate with *Fail Safe* (1964). This time the stakes were

²²⁹ The first color film to be completely shot in New York, *Stage Struck* starred Susan Strasberg and continued the association between Lumet and Henry Fonda that began with *Twelve Angry Men*, which Fonda co-produced (with Reginald Rose) and of which he has said: “That film won many awards. . . . I’m prouder of that than of almost anything else I’ve done in my career.” (James Hurt, compiler, *Focus on Film and Theatre* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 104.

²³⁰ So far this is the only film in Lumet’s career that was shot (partly) in Hollywood, an experience he vowed never to repeat.

²³¹ The film was titled, *The Fugitive Kind*. For more on this see program notes in Appendix B.

²³² While in Paris, Lumet was severely criticized by the *Cahiers* group and upon his return he made the following comments: “What French film theorists advocate is a kind of dislike of America. They reject the arts of acting and writing for the cinema. They throw out the close-up and call my style a TV-style, forgetting that D. W. Griffith used the close-up too. They became interested in the Negro—more power to them—and in Jazz. They moved the art of improvisation, as in Jazz, into the center of everything. You know why Jean Seberg is a star there? She’s cold, frigid, no talent, and that means she represents America for them.” He added that “he had found one of their pictures very good: *The 400 Blows*. But in general, they’re bored, they’re interested in titillation, ‘are the fingertips stimulated?’ Some of the very, very young ones are good, and he also accepts Resnais (*Hiroshima Mon Amour*) as something apart.” (Archer Winsten, “Rages and Outrages,” *New York Post*, May 5, 1962.)

considerably higher, since the subject of the argument was not the alleged crime of a juvenile delinquent, but the fate of mankind plunged into nuclear warfare.

Then came *The Pawnbroker*, a film that literally landed in his lap after a long history of aborted production attempts. But before getting into the film, a montage of Sidney Lumet quotations is presented to illustrate his production philosophy and the particular place he occupies within Theatrical Realism.

At the age of thirteen he wrote:

If you want to be an actor you must be prepared to work hard and sacrifice a great deal. An actor's life is easy when he lives in Hollywood with the sunshine and his own swimming pool, but he has to work hard in order to get there.

I advise all children who want to go on the stage to try first to find a profession where the hours are more regular and the pay is better. The theatre is no place for sissies or people who can't take it.²³³

Then later, in his thirties:

I feel I can improve by staying in the East, and there's always television and Broadway to pay my expenses. I'll let Hollywood come to me.²³⁴

The conscience picture is my kind of picture. It's not a problem picture in the cliché sense, but a thought-provoking one.

It's no longer enough just to entertain. The dimension, sadly lacking on TV, is one that makes people think. The low-budget, thought-provoking picture is what the industry needs to get them away from their sets. I plan to stick solely to topics I care about and that I believe to be important. And due to my stage and TV training I think I'm equipped to work under the short schedules called for by a budget of this type.²³⁵

I'm not looking for the assignment which only involves realism and personality study. It just seems to be going that way. But I've got an awful lot to say on film and I don't think there's enough time to get it finished.

²³³ "Young Veteran on the 'Warpath,'" *New York Tribune*, October 12, 1938.

²³⁴ Winsten, "Rages and Outrages."

²³⁵ Philip K. Scheuer, "'Conscience Movie' Sidney Lumet Aim," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 1963.

I'd like to make five pictures a year, but the way I work it is all I can do to get two in the can. For me motion picture making is just as exhausting as it is for the actor who works in my pictures. I put everything I have into it.²³⁶

"I'm not anti-Hollywood. It happens New York's my home, but aside from that, I like to work here. And there is an absence of Studio control here that I find I need to do my best."²³⁷

I'm in awe of Tennessee Williams. He's out of fashion now, but as soon as he dies he'll be back in.²³⁸

I goofed on the direction of *The Fugitive Kind*. . .²³⁹

Somebody has made a rule somewhere which says that writing doesn't belong on the screen. Starting, I guess, with the silent film, when a director was the writer and the story had to be seen and not heard, a trade notion grew that language has no place in the movies.

Today, when they talk about 'cinematic values,' they're really talking about scenery.

There's nothing wrong with having 10,000 head of cattle on a screen. But you can do so much more with people. The wide screen processes have tended to reduce the size of the human being. A human face is as cinematic as a cow's face. And you need the human sound.²⁴⁰

For me, photographing a human face that is saying something profound is as much cinema as a chariot race.

I don't understand why film must be one thing. I have had great arguments in Paris with many of the young French directors. They accuse me of loving language and of trying to impose it on the screen. I accuse them of achieving nothing more than a fine still photographer gets in a single shot. A Cartier-Bresson photograph tells me as much and perhaps more than all of *Breathless*. But the main point is that neither school is right or wrong. There are certain pieces of material that are better revealed in silent pictorial concepts and there are others that are revealed

²³⁶ . Dick Brooks, "Sidney Lumet: Director with a Taste for Realism," *Motion Picture Herald*, November 11, 1964.

²³⁷ A. H. Weiler, "Happy Group Portrait," *The New York Times*, June 13, 1965.

²³⁸ Rick Setlowe, "Don't Talk to Director Sidney Lumet about Censorship—Black or White," *Variety*, October 28, 1969.

²³⁹ William Peper, "Interview with Sidney Lumet," *World Journal Tribune*, January 22, 1967.

²⁴⁰ Art Seidenbaum, "Lumet Explains a Translation," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1962.

in language. Language should not be ruled out as part of a film technique.²⁴¹

Long Day's Journey into Night is not only my best film, it is one of the best films ever made.²⁴²

As soon as you do a play they say it's not a movie. What do they know about lenses? A music critic knows music. Movie critics don't know what lens is being used. *A Long Day's Journey into Night* is used at the Southern California film school as a classic example of the use of lenses.²⁴³

Take my word for it, that picture had more cinematic technique in it than anything you'll see in Hitchcock. Those things—you pick up a glass and you get the reflection of somebody's nose—they're easy. But what we did took tremendous planning. Each character was edited in a different rhythm. And if you look at close-ups of the actors at the beginning and the end of the picture, you wouldn't recognize them as the same people. This wasn't makeup, but it involved changes in lighting, lenses, angles of shooting—everything even to a change in the kind of film stock.²⁴⁴

So much of what the critics say is pure pap. They talk about such-and-such being 'well edited' for instance. Now every director knows that he, his cameraman and his editor are the only ones who know whether or not a film is well-edited. Unless the critic has seen every frame shot he has no idea what was available to work with. A film that looks good may just be average compared to what it could have been with existing material. Another film may represent a miraculous editing job because of the limitation of available footage. And yet they go on and on with such talk.

When you add this kind of basic misinformation about the medium to the Supercritic concept of working within a specific philosophical movement and performing some great public service (and of course getting more and more personal exposure in the meantime in direct relationship to how nasty they can be), you get a situation that is disastrous.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Sidney Lumet, "In a Film Journey," *The New York Times*, October 7, 1962.

²⁴² Peper, "Interview with Sidney Lumet."

²⁴³ Archer Winsten, "Rages and Outrages," *New York Post*, January 21, 1974.

²⁴⁴ "So Who and What, Is Cinematic?" *Variety*, July 12, 1967.

²⁴⁵ "Sidney Lumet Discusses His Critics...."

I have one word for the 'auteur' theory: BULL.²⁴⁶

I believe in continuity. All I want to do is get better, and quality can help me to solve my problems. . . . If I don't have a script I adore, I do one I like. If I don't have one I like, I do one that has an actor I like or that presents some technical challenge.

I did one movie simply because I wanted to see what it would be like to do a dramatic story in color. Before that, I snobbishly thought you could only tell a *serious* story in black and white.

Good work in movies involves personal risks, showing how you feel about something. The actor is infinitely more exposed than anyone else, and he is exposed at the very moment of creativity. Actors are the infantry, the ones in the line of fire!!!

There is this simplistic notion that the more autobiographical a movie is, the more value it has. Nonsense! What's more important is that the artist make known his view of the way the people on the screen behave.

I know people who disguise their lives, and their disguises are more exciting and revealing than the lives of people who throw themselves at you naked, I mean, is there anything you don't know about George Cukor from seeing his movies? Don't you know what he feels about food, about art, about women? Don't you know if he believes in God? I think Cukor is as personal as anyone telling you all about his childhood while the camera dollies in on a copy of Cahiers du Cinema.

I hope some day it's apparent that there is a lot of me in *Serpico*, just as there is a lot of me in *The Sea Gull*. They don't have to be similar works for me to emerge. When I made *Long Day's Journey into Night*—I gave Katie that moment when Edmund says to her, 'Mama, I'm going to die,' and she hauls off and whacks him as hard as she can across the face. If you don't understand something about me from that scene, then you just don't understand.²⁴⁷

One element that critics just do not understand about Sidney Lumet's career as a film director is his approach to each project as a challenge from a purely technical point of view. With the full understanding that this may sound like heresy, Lumet emulates Hitchcock to the extent that he sets up specific

²⁴⁶ Winsten, "Rages and Ourages," January 21, 1974.

²⁴⁷ Guy Flatley, "Lumet, The Kid Actor Who Became A Director," *The New York Times*, January 20, 1974.

technical problems with each film and sometimes succeeds in solving them. These challenges usually are dictated by the material, the budget, or his own relentless schedule. It is interesting to contrast Lumet's approach to *Twelve Angry Men* vis-à-vis Hitchcock's in *The Paradine Case*. Both were courtroom dramas heavily dependent on one set and close-ups of the actors' faces. Taking full advantage of the studio system's resources and Selznick's penchant for elaboration, Hitchcock set up a complicated network of multiple cameras and microphones to record the action simultaneously and complete the film in record time. Lumet, working with a low budget and short schedule, approached the problem in the following manner:

When you shoot a movie that is nothing but 12 men's faces as they talk angrily to one another and you shoot it out of sequence and the camera is being moved from one angle to another around a room, then you go elaborately nuts trying to be consistent about who is looking where and at whom.

In making *Angry Men* the camera went around the table, shooting chair by chair. Once lights and camera were pointed at a chair, then every speech, no matter its order in the movie, was shot. That meant that often you had only two or three actors in or near chairs, talking and arguing across the table with actors who were not there. You had to figure out where the nonexistent actor's eyes would be, so that the existent actor could stare him down.

I spent nights puzzling the problem and my script became a maze of diagrams. We had arguments on the set as people tried to explain to me that I was crazy. But the diagrams came out right 396 times in 397 scenes. One we had to shoot over because I had the stockbroker looking the wrong way as he spoke to another actor.

We did all we could honestly do on a one-set movie to heighten the drama. We created a claustrophobic tension by gradually changing camera lenses to narrow the room and crowd up the table. Little by little we lowered the camera level to shoot up at the furious jurymen. And the rate of changes in camera angles was stepped up as the talk grows louder and fiercer.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ "Movie's Director Talks of Tricky Troubles," *Life*, April 15, 1957.

Unlike other Theatrical Realism directors, with the possible exception of Martin Ritt, Sidney Lumet ventured into the established genres, often modifying them slightly to suit his own needs. *The Deadly Affair* (1966) was a downbeat spy thriller; *Bye Bye Braverman* (1968) a comedy for a rather specialized audience;²⁴⁹ *The Anderson Tapes* (1971), one of his best films, a caper in the great tradition; *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974) an all star stylish nostalgia whodunit; but his best work is in the urban pressure cooker variation of Theatrical Realism. As Richard Sylbert observed:

The ideal Sidney Lumet picture is seven men outside of a pay toilet and only one has a dime. That's what he does best. The more limited the conditions are, the more conflict he gets. Nine people in a bank, ten people on a train, twelve men in a jury room. . . . That's the key to his work.²⁵⁰

In the mid-seventies, Lumet directed three very commercial and critically successful films in a row (*Murder on the Orient Express*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, and *Network*). The last two were deeply rooted in the Theatrical Realism tradition, as would be his next one—the film version of Peter Shaffer's *Equus*, starring Richard Burton.²⁵¹ But there was a time in the late sixties/early seventies when his career appeared to be floundering. One of his projects was canceled just before shooting (*The Confessions of Nat Turner*), two of his films were shelved before reaching the screen: (*The Appointment* (1969) and *The Offence* (1973), and three were coldly received and got only spotty distribution: *The Last of the Mobile*

²⁴⁹ *Bye Bye Braverman*, by Wallace Markfield, details in black humor ranging from sophisticated to low-brow, the trip of four friends in search of a fifth's funeral. Lumet: "My God, these four post-depression Jewish intellectuals are everyone I grew up with." (A. A. Weiler, "A Funeral Grows in Brooklyn," *The New York Times*, April 23, 1967.)

²⁵⁰ Richard Sylbert interview in March 1976.

²⁵¹ Lumet then went on to direct *The Wiz* with Diana Ross in the role of Dorothy. With the exception of 1957's "Mr. Broadway," a musical television special chronicling the early career of playwright George M. Cohan, this has been his only musical, although he had also been announced to direct Barbra Streisand in *Funny Girl*, which ultimately went to William Wyler.

Hot-Shots (1969), *Child's Play* (1973), and *Lovin' Molly* (1974); but now he appears to be a “heavy contender” for the Academy Awards this year and, unless there is still some resentment against him for his staunch anti-Hollywood stand of the past, he is virtually assured of an Oscar for *Network*.²⁵²

But now back to the first of his films to be both a critical and commercial success.²⁵³ *The Pawnbroker* was a project which, as was stated earlier, literally landed in his lap in 1964 after a long history of aborted production attempts. Originally a 1961 novel by Edward Lewis Wallant,²⁵⁴ the film rights to the property had been purchased by Roger H. Lewis and Philip Langner. Lewis, a former executive in charge of publicity and advertising for United Artists, and Langner, who had been associate producer on Kramer's *Judgement at Nuremberg* and served in the same capacity for the Theatre Guild, had developed the project “under the aegis of M-G-M, but when the company wanted changes in the script, including a more upbeat tone, they had to pull out of the deal.”²⁵⁵ Lewis became “obsessed” with the project and made the rounds, receiving rejection after rejection while writing episodes for the TV series *The Defenders*.²⁵⁶ Finally they went to Ely Landau, who was receptive to the idea.

Landau is, without a doubt, the most colorful of the producers discussed in this work. He is the Joseph E. Levine of Theatrical Realism. As Abe Greenberg reported: “If ever a man was ready to take on the mantle of determination and

²⁵² Lumet lost the 1976 Oscar to John Avildsen, who directed *Rocky*.

²⁵³ In spite of several vitriolic pieces on the film by Macdonald, Farber, Kael, etc., whom Lumet calls the supercritics, *The Pawnbroker* got many favorable notices, became an intellectual/prestige picture, and was released several times.

²⁵⁴ Wallant, who died in 1962, had three other novels to his credit: *The Human Season*, *The Tenants of Moonbloom*, and *The Children at the Gate*.

²⁵⁵ Bosley Crowther, “Declaration for Independents,” *The New York Times*, May 2, 1965.

²⁵⁶ Archer Winsten, “Rages and Outrages,” *New York Post*, June 26, 1972, p. 21. After his association with Landau, Lewis went to work for Sam Spiegel in such films as *The Chase*, *The Night of the Generals*, and *The Happening*. After producing *The Swimmer* for Spiegel, their relationship “ended with mutual recriminations” and Lewis went on to produce *Shaft*, *Shaft's Big Score*, and *Shaft in Africa* for M-G-M in the early seventies.

showmanship worn so long by the mighty Joe Levine, it's this Landau chap—a sort of Santa Claus look alike, sans the whiskers.”²⁵⁷

It comes as no surprise that Landau's roots for his career as a film producer were firmly based in the world of New York's Golden Age of Television. In the early fifties he made a fortune when he realized that television's increasing appetite for programming could be filled with old movies and formed National Telefilm Associates to buy the TV rights to several studios' backlogs of features.²⁵⁸ Later on he acquired control of New York's Channel 13 (actually in Newark) and established the station as a source of innovative programming. At the time he stated that “if Channel 13 was to show a profit it had to be provocative, controversial, literate, adult and courageous.”²⁵⁹ David Susskind went there to do his talk show, *Open End*, and eagerly fulfilled all of the above requirements. But what Landau was most proud of in his days as a television producer was his series *Play of the Week*, which proved to be what would set the tone for his career in films. Landau shares with most of the Theatrical Realism people a desire to take culture to the masses, but unlike them he keeps a watchful eye on the money. When in 1961 he formed the Landau Company²⁶⁰ to import foreign films (classy ones such as *The Servant*, *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, *Sallah*, and pure exploitation such as *The Brides of Fu Manchu*, *Circus of Fear*, etc.) and back domestic productions, he set out “to fill the gap between so called art films and the overly commercialized box office movies being turned out by American companies.”²⁶¹ One of the first steps he took was to acquire the film and TV rights to all the works of Eugene O'Neill

²⁵⁷ Abe Greenberg, “Film's Ely Landau a Jolly Keen Giant,” *The Hollywood Citizen-News*, March 16, 1966.

²⁵⁸ Among others, N.T.A. owns the Fox, Selznick, and Kramer films for TV airing.

²⁵⁹ Joseph Wershba, “Daily Close-Up: Ely Landau,” *New York Post*, October 21, 1959.

²⁶⁰ Since the Landau empire is a confusing tangle of several companies which include The Landau Organization, The Landau Releasing Organization, The Landau Company, Commonwealth United, N.T.A., and The American Film Theatre, at times the use of one of these names to designate Landau's interests may be inaccurate in this text.

²⁶¹ Boyd Martin, “Show Talk,” *The Louisville Journal*, November 2, 1961.

controlled by the playwright's widow,²⁶² and announce a production schedule that included such lofty projects as *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, *Leonardo da Vinci*, *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, and *Cervantes*. He signed a contract with the Actors Studio Theatre to film (actually videotape) their productions and distribute them through his company. *The Hollywood Diary* reported at the time:

The former NTA executive pointed out that his firm will concern itself with production of "adult, provocative, controversial and stimulating" motion picture fare in keeping with the tenor of the times in which we live.

There are some three or four million people—perhaps more—who comprise an audience eager for mental stimulation and intellectual satisfaction through the medium of motion pictures, and which is not now being supplied to them through existing production sources.

In keeping with the aim of reaching this special audience, the productions of the new Landau company will be 'low budgeted' at around \$350,000 each, and filming will be planned wherever the locale dictates.

Landau expects to seek outstanding creative talents, players, writers, directors, in motion pictures and the theatre who, over the years, have indicated a desire to participate in a venture which transcends the norm of film making. They will receive initial compensation and will be compensated additionally through profit participation, and to a degree, in percentages of the gross.

Landau states that he intends to produce from eight to ten feature films during the next three years, including the O'Neill properties and other outside acquisitions he has in mind.²⁶³

Two of those outside acquisitions were *The Fool Killer* and *The Pawnbroker*, both of which were adapted from novels by David Friedkin and Morton Fine, a very prolific screenwriting team that had made a mark in television.²⁶⁴ Landau had announced *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* with Lumet as

²⁶² *The Hollywood Diary*, August 15, 1961, p. 9.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ Fine and Friedkin developed the TV series *Frontier* and were signed by Dore Schary to write, produce, and direct features at M-G-M in the early fifties, where they set a record by completing photography on *Capital Offense* in only nine days, which made Schary very proud of the team. They are credited with creating the character of Matt Dillon and the successful TV series, *I Spy*.

director,²⁶⁵ and he was already deep into preproduction and working on the script when Landau asked him to replace Arthur Hiller, who had been set to direct *The Pawnbroker*, only two weeks before shooting was scheduled to start. Lumet submerged himself in the project and made some script revisions, the most notable of which was his decision to change the pawnbroker's memories of his concentration camp experience from recurring dreams (as written in the novel) to subliminal flashes of memory, which were triggered by the pawnbroker's daily experiences in Harlem.²⁶⁶ One must presume that most of the cast, technicians, and locations had been chosen by Hiller; but speaking in terms of the film industry, New York is a small town and Lumet had already worked several times before with the people that had been selected, which had been part of the team that Kazan had put together in the mid-fifties when he contemplated dreams of establishing a "Hollywood on the Hudson," and included cameraman Boris Kaufman, art director Richard Sylbert, and costumer Anna Hill Johnstone—the three key people in defining a film's visual style.

As the pawnbroker, Lumet found Rod Steiger ready to bite into his meatiest role, the one that would catapult him from the ranks of a respected character "method" actor into stardom. Steiger's film career dates back to 1951 when Fred Zinnermann cast him in a small part in *Teresa*, but he made his first impression in his second film role as Marlon Brando's corrupt older brother in *On the Waterfront*, three years later.

Born in West Hampton, Long Island, on April 14, 1925, Steiger played football in high school and joined the navy at the age of sixteen, in which he served for five years. As a civilian he took a job as a clerk in the Office of Dependents and Beneficiaries and got involved with acting when some members

²⁶⁵ *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* was eventually directed by Robert Ellis Miller and distributed by Warner Bros. in 1968.

²⁶⁶ Stephen Farber, "Lumet in '69," *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1969, pp. 37-43.

in that department formed a theatre group. The following excerpt from an article by Mosby traces Steiger's rise as an actor:

In 1949 he was accepted by the Actors Studio in New York, which had launched a new concept of acting—"realistic and psychiatric," says Steiger.

"Elia Kazan and Lee Strasberg, the school directors, taught me to act from the inside out," he explains. "I learned what it means to talk to other persons in the story instead of reading lines with a phony voice."

Steiger's emotional performances in the class became legendary. Once, as a class exercise, the actor delivered a ballad about lynching. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he sang, "Laughter on the lips of the white one . . . fear in the heart of the black one . . ." The song was so raw emotionally that the audience, one witness recalls, was left in a state of shock. So was the tear-stained Steiger. It was then that Rod's fellow students dubbed him the Weeper.

After four more plays and leading roles in 150 TV dramas, Steiger became known along Madison Avenue as "the offbeat TV actor." When he was only twenty-eight, he dared to carry off TV portrayals of such elderly "villains" as Andrei Vishinsky, Rudolf Hess and Dutch Schultz. He also breezed through Romeo and Rasputin, roles that taxed the Barrymores. Then, to prove his remarkable range, he originated the tender part of Marty, a homely man searching for love, in the TV play of the same name. As a result Steiger was spirited off to Hollywood to discuss the movie version. However, he ran head on into another intense character, Burt Lancaster, producer of the film. Lancaster visualized Marty as soft and gentle. Steiger wanted to play him in typical, brooding Steiger fashion. The role (and an Academy Award) went to Ernest Borgnine.

But director Kazan remembered Steiger from the Actors Studio and cast him as Brando's brother in *On the Waterfront*. That role won Steiger an Oscar nomination and quintupled his salary. Then director Fred Zinnemann hired him for the Jud role in *Oklahoma!*

Steiger, who freely admits that his schooling has included a stretch on a psychoanalyst's couch, gives a fast analysis to every character he plays. This may not be approved of in the best medical circles, but it has made his portrayals of heavies more human than most. For example, some critics complained that he played Jud as if he'd been created by Dostoevski, making the simple farm hand stick out like a Freudian chapter in an otherwise frivolous book. But Steiger's theory is, "You don't put on a mustache and slink around to play a villain. There's good and bad in everybody." And Zinnemann adds: "Rod transformed Jud into a modern neurotic and made people feel sorry for him."

The Weeper has devised tricks for working himself into a cold fury when he plays villains. He pretends the other actors are Nazis who murdered his professional idol, Harry Baur, the late French actor. "I keep the emotion fresh by thinking these guys not only killed Baur, they put lighted straws under his fingernails first," he says seriously.²⁶⁷

If Steiger used such mental images to create his roles early in his career it is no wonder that, in 1964, he would jump at the chance to playing the role of Sol Nazerman, the pawnbroker who was tortured and lost his family in a Nazi concentration camp. Here he would have a field day imagining the atrocities that were committed against him during the war and let all the tortured elements of sado-masochism, which were his specialty, run a free course. And with Sidney Lumet's subliminal flashbacks underscoring his performance, Stanislavski's emotional memory exercises were turned inside-out and, for the first time, the audience could share the anguish of the character, giving an extra dimension to Steiger's performance. He was nominated for an Academy Award and won the Best Actor prize at the Berlin Film Festival. His Oscar would come two years later in the role of the bigoted sheriff in *In the Heat of the Night*. But *The Pawnbroker* was the role that made him a box office attraction.

When he started his career as an actor Steiger was often compared with Paul Muni, and in one of his early interviews with Hedda Hopper he told her:

"I would like to do four 90 minute shows a year and a biography of a great person. That's my idea of a series. I would also do them at certain holidays."

His taste in films runs to good small black and white pictures, "because you can say something in them. I understand from a business point of view there may be great controversy about this. If you make an honest picture against segregation on a small budget you already know

²⁶⁷ Aline Mosby, "The Weeper," *Colliers*, May 25, 1956. It is interesting to note that the reason for casting Borgnine in the film version of *Marty* was not a difference in the conception of the character between Lancaster and Steiger, as this article reports, but it was Steiger's refusal to sign a long-term contract with Hecht-Hill-Lancaster.

where it is not going to play. But don't try and make that kind of a film for 6 million dollars and expect to get your money back."²⁶⁸

Yet, nine years later he wrote:

After *The Pawnbroker* and *Dr. Zhivago* I couldn't find anything I wanted to do for almost two years.

Then I was offered *In the Heat of the Night*, and I was delighted that I had waited. It was decidedly worth waiting for. After *In the Heat of the Night*, I was offered a number of films, (as I was after *The Pawnbroker*), that had to do with social problems. I have nothing against such films at all, but I have no enthusiasm for filmed lectures.

Yet I feel it's essential for an actor to have a sense of belonging to the society we live in. I think if somebody asks you if you are for or against something you have to say "yes" or "no." The age of the dream machine is over. But films can only make you aware of problems, they can't solve them.²⁶⁹

This awareness of social problems, which is an integral element of Theatrical Realism, is the driving force of *The Pawnbroker*. As has already been discussed, in this chapter's section on *Edge of the City*,²⁷⁰ the relationship between Blacks and Jews is a favorite subject for analysis in Theatrical Realism, but in *The Pawnbroker* Sol Nazerman is confronted with a gallery of characters, each one of which is a personification of a social illness, and in the process of dealing with each one of them he comes to realize that he is just another element of the system that perpetuates the status quo. In Wallant's novel Nazerman is fully aware of his role as a front for organized crime (the pawnshop is used as a means of laundering money). In the film he avoids dealing with the issue of where the money comes from until the gangster forces him to admit his complicity. The official plot synopsis distributed by the Landau Company makes clear this weakness in the film, which is a conscious device on the part of the writers to create another catharsis for Nazerman:

²⁶⁸ Hedda Hopper, "Money Isn't Everything," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 1961.

²⁶⁹ Rod Steiger, "Rod Steiger in Europe for Bandit Film," *The Hollywood Citizen-News*, August 13, 1970.

²⁷⁰ Cf. pages 219-248.

A phone call introduces Rodriguez (Brock Peters), Nazerman's silent partner . . . a racketeer, slum lord and would-be gentleman. And Sol's life is bared, for the pawnshop is merely a front, a failing business arranged by Rodriguez for his own purposes.

Sol goes to Rodriguez, intending to end their partnership. But Rodriguez will have none of it. Rodriguez says Sol didn't know where the money came from only because Sol didn't want to. Rodriguez sends him off with a warning to behave.

After a night of wandering he returns to the shop and throws money away blindly.²⁷¹

The use of this device for dramatic purposes muddles the narrative of the film. As Hart observed in *Films in Review*.

I learned from publicity material, but not from what I saw on the screen, that his pawnshop is owned by a Negro gangster who needs an apparently legitimate "front" in order to bank money obtained from rackets, chiefly prostitution. That such a pawnbroker could become the partner of such a man and not know what he was doing is dubious, and the scene in which he learns "the truth" is incredible. Because this "revelation" conditions much of the subsequent action, the pawnbroker, and *The Pawnbroker*, lose the audience.

There are other inexplicabilities: the pawnbroker's relationship with the widow of his best friend, who was killed in a concentration camp (she has become the pawnbroker's mistress, but this is not explicated); the ambivalence of the pawnbroker's Puerto Rican assistant, who participates in the hold-up of the pawnbroker's shop; the character of the lonely social-worker who tries to befriend the pawnbroker; the character of the Negro gangster. One has the feeling that writers Friedkin and Fine, and director Lumet, were constantly hobbled by fears that Jews and Negroes would consider the truth anti-Semitic and anti-Negro and therefore altered reality so much they befuddled their story and ruined what might have been a significant social document.²⁷²

²⁷¹ Landau Company official plot synopsis.

²⁷² Henry Hart, "The Pawnbroker," *Films in Review*, May 1965.

The key words in Hart's piece are "altered reality"—the essence of Theatrical Realism, which is present throughout the film and keeps it within the dramatic tradition (this is no social *document* but rather social *drama*). In keeping with one of the precepts of dramatic literature, the script by Fine and Friedkin is manipulative in that it observes the law of character development and change. The first part of the film establishes Nazerman as an emotional mutant, a giant human callous "unable to feel again, deadened, past pain, past caring"²⁷³ while the second part goes to great lengths to show what it takes to bring this man to a state of open vulnerability. This is the stuff that drama is made of, not documentary.

The question the film poses (and there is always a question posed in Theatrical Realism) is motivated by a call for social action, but instead of asking the audience what it can do to change the conditions that create the "scum" in which the characters find themselves trapped, the film asks that most important and preliminary question of whether one should *care* at all about those people and their subhuman conditions; which is, after all, what the liberal sensibility is all about—caring as opposed to doing. This is illustrated in the juxtaposition of the characters of Steiger's pawnbroker and Geraldine Fitzgerald's social worker; both are an integral part of the system, yet they view themselves as being above it. When Steiger is finally made "to feel" his predicament he takes an all night walk through the city that culminates in his visit to the social worker's apartment at dawn. He has gone there expecting to find the care, sympathy, or pity that Fitzgerald dispenses as part of her profession. He talks about his past, the camps, his survival at the cost of his emotional sensibility. But Fitzgerald extends a hand to him only as a gesture of recognition. When she says, "loneliness is the normal state of affairs for most people," she is making clear that she places herself in the same predicament. She has also gone beyond caring about others and even herself, admitting that all that is left of her as a social worker is simply a professional stance.

²⁷³ Pauline Kael, "Review of *The Pawnbroker*," *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), p. 196.

This sequence is directed by Lumet and photographed by Kaufman in a style closely resembling the “alienation-effect” of Antonioni’s early sixties trilogy (*L’Avventura*, *La Notte*, *L’Eclisse*). There is the sterile and foreboding modern architectural masses—endless empty balconies piled up into identical white apartment buildings (“there are eight million stories in the Naked City—this is one of them”). There is the spatial relationship between the two characters—never facing each other, with their eyes fixed on a mental plane located somewhere in transcendental space. Fitzgerald up against a white wall in her apartment with her arms folded over her chest capturing all the “angst” that made Monica Vitti the star of the art house circuit. When she extends her arm to give him her hand, the ending of *L’Avventura* flashes subliminally in the art house audiences’ mind just as effectively as the images of a disheveled Magnani in *Open City* were recalled when America first saw *The Rose Tattoo*. Lumet was making the right connections this time by evoking Antonioni and not Rossellini, which is one of the keys to Lumet’s survival as a film director; he can mimic a style with the same ease as a chameleon changes color.

The Pawnbroker is significant for this study because it marks the absorption of another foreign stylistic wave into American film making. Although there are enough touches of Antonioni to make a case for another Italian influence on Theatrical Realism, the bulk of the debt is obviously owed to the French New Wave, especially Alain Resnais, which prompted Andrew Sarris to call the film “Harlem Mon Amour.” By dropping Neo-Realism and absorbing the New Wave, Lumet changed the superficial look of Theatrical Realism without changing its basic precepts—he simply updated the style.

Yet, to say that the critical and commercial success of the film is based solely on the fact that Lumet realized that *Last Year at Marienbad* and not *The Miracle* was now playing at the Paris Theatre is an overestimation of the actual situation. In keeping with the tradition of Theatrical Realism, *The Pawnbroker*

was filled with sensationalism and had more than a passing brush with the censors. In the same fashion that audiences two years later would line up outside a theatre and sit through Antonioni's *Blow Up* because someone had heard there was a glimpse of pubic hair, and three years later they would make *I Am Curious—Yellow* a top grossing film simply because it contained scenes of copulation; the public went to *The Pawnbroker* because it was the first American film to feature naked breasts in an extended scene. And it became so fashionable to talk about how the nudity had been handled “with taste—and was an integral part of the film,” that it became “de rigueur” in the cocktail party circuit to have been exposed to Thelma Oliver's chest. Every couple of years the film industry needs a “cause célèbre” to remind us of how far we have gone in fighting the evils of censorship (witness: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe*, and most recently *Last Tango in Paris*), but these films, in order to be successful, must contain a strong dose of unquestionable artistic and social merit, and *The Pawnbroker* perfectly filled the bill for 1965.

The Production Code Office, in an unprecedented move, made an exception in the case of *The Pawnbroker* and gave it its seal of approval although it violated the Code's ban on nudity because of the film's extraordinary artistic merit. Yet, the controversy assumed a new dimension when the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures condemned the film at the same time that the National Council of Churches gave it an award.

As part of the agreement Landau made at that time with the Code office, he promised that no reference or “come-ons” would be made in the advertising of the picture to the censorship problems and the bare breast scene. He kept his word, as the following article illustrates:

The Landau Company decided on an op art illustration for the film, *The Pawnbroker*, after having experimented with and discarded several other approaches. Two advertising agencies tried their hand at campaigns for this unusual and highly praised film, but both were rejected by the advertiser. The campaign that finally emerged after months of

experimentation resulted from a visit to the Museum of Modern Art by Paul Lazarus, Jr., executive assistant to Ely Landau, and Martin Michel, advertising manager of the Landau organization. There they saw and purchased an untitled painting by Tadasky of 32 concentric circles, an oil 40 inches square. The painting now hangs in the Cinema Rendezvous, one of three houses in New York showing the film.

From this painting came the symbolism of the three balls hanging outside the pawnshop. Much white space is used, and the size of the print ads have varied from a full page to a one-column strip.

According to one spokesman for the Landau Company, op art was used because it did to the eye of the spectator what *The Pawnbroker* did to the emotions of the moviegoer. The analogy is certainly valid.

The simplicity of the ad illustration chosen contrasts sharply to some of the discarded suggestions, some of which exploited the appearance of bare-breasted women in the film.

But at no time, it was said, did the producer contemplate exploiting in the ads the fact that the film had been denied, for a time, the Code Seal of the Motion Picture Association. The seal was later granted without any cuts in the nudity sequences.

One of the campaigns rejected contained such catchlines as: "Junkies, Punks, Prostitutes, Degenerates, stay away. *The Pawnbroker* is too strong for you."

Another ad contained the headline: "*The Pawnbroker* isn't for mommy and the kids. It may be even too strong for daddy."²⁷⁴

Yet, a year later, when Landau sold the distribution rights on the film to American International Pictures, the breasts were removed and the ads went sensational. As *Variety* reported:

This week, months after producer Ely Landau fought to keep Sidney Lumet's *The Pawnbroker* intact, Landau's new distributor, American International has accepted demands of the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures and agreed to cut out scenes showing bare breasts. In its turn, the NCOMP has taken the rare step of reclassifying the film, giving it an A-3 rating (morally unobjectionable for adults) instead of its previous "C" (condemned).

According to AIP, which predicts that the picture will now be able to get an additional 5,000 to 10,000 bookings, the Catholic Office made its

²⁷⁴ Walter Carlson, "Advertising: The Trend Toward OP," *The New York Times*, May 17, 1966.

decision to reclassify *The Pawnbroker*, even though it already had considerable payoff, “because of the film’s extraordinary value.”

Landau said that he had not seen the new version and that under the terms of his deal with AIP he had “neither approval nor disapproval” of the change. An AIP spokesman in Hollywood said that the current version eliminates “About two feet” of footage, and that the bare breasts had been eliminated from the crucial scene in the film by using a lab blowup that cuts the girl’s body off at shoulder level.²⁷⁵

If *The Pawnbroker* marks the end of Theatrical Realism by channeling the style in a new direction, it also marks the beginning of Lumet’s career as a commercial success, proving not so much that practice makes perfect, but that perseverance pays off.

²⁷⁵ *Variety*, August 3, 1966.

CHAPTER VI

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THEATRICAL REALISM

Icons are images and ideas converted into three dimensions. They are admired artifacts, external expressions of internal convictions, everyday things that make everyday meaningful.

Marshall Fishwick¹

Iconography is the branch of art history which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form.

Erwin Panofsky²

A stylistic analysis, in the broadest sense, includes all the artistic elements of a film. However, inasmuch as a film is essentially an organization of images, sounds, and movements, visual imagery might be a good starting point.

William Jinks³

Each film style has its own particular iconography, which is closely linked to the sociological factors that created it. The visual imagery of any given motion picture is one of the dominant cinematic codes to which Metz⁴ referred in his *Language and Cinema* as major criteria for the grouping of films into categories.

¹ Marshall Fishwick and Ray B. Browne, *Icons of Popular Culture*. Bowling Green, Ohio: University Popular Press, 1970, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³ William Jinks, *The Celluloid Literature*. Beverly Hills, California: Glencoe Press, 1974, p. 168.

⁴ Christian Metz, *Language and Cinema*, translated by Donna Jean Umiker-Sebeok. The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton and Company, 1974.

It is often through iconography that a film is first discernible as forming part of a stylistic movement.

In his book *Documentary Film*, Rotha defined and described what he called “the naturalist [romantic] tradition” in visual terms when he wrote about Flaherty’s *Man of Aran*:

There are moments when the instinctive caressing of the camera over the natural movements of a boy fishing, or of men against the horizon, bring a flutter to your senses; so beautiful in feeling and so perfect in reproduction that their image may seem indelible.⁵

Stylistic film movements leave one with such indelible images. The high contrast and diagonally distorted images of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* come to mind when German Expressionism is mentioned. Italian Neo-Realism evokes a poverty stricken father and son roaming the streets of Rome in *The Bicycle Thief*. The intellectual discussions between young people in Parisian cafes which Godard so often filmed in available light have become trademarks of the French New Wave. These images convey not only the visual style of those film movements, but also their emotional tone.

The iconography of Theatrical Realism imparts upon the viewer a basic feeling of determinism, despair, anxiety, and emotional imbalance. The merging of Freudian psychology, realism, sensuality, and fifties “pop” culture created a unique set of images that have become trademarks of the Theatrical Realism style. Marlon Brando in his wet torn T-shirt screaming “Stella!” in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, James Dean fidgeting with a rope in *Giant*, Elizabeth Taylor wearing a slip and caressing a brass bedpost in *Cat on a Hot Time Roof*—these are all icons of Theatrical Realism that reappear in many of the style’s films and in retrospect, have grown to become icons of the American culture of the fifties.

The salient characteristic of the iconography of Theatrical Realism is the attempt to merge the stylized with the realistic, the symbolic with the functional,

⁵ Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film*. New York: Hastings House Publishing, 1952, p. 84.

the contrived with the ordinary; and out of this confluence of disparate elements a tension emerges that is unique to the style.

In order to understand why such conflicting elements were brought together, one must take into account the fact that most of the works of Theatrical Realism had a prior incarnation before they reached the screen. Most of them were plays, and the original icons within them were developed for stage presentation where stylization is the widely accepted norm. When these plays became motion pictures the original theatrical icons were preserved and transposed into the more realistic medium of film, creating the aforementioned tension. Also, the fact that in the fifties American films were still largely made in studios, using designed sets and theatrical lighting techniques, underscored the schism between the theatrical and the realistic. There were occasional sorties into actual locations, but mostly the environments were artificially created in a studio and were supposed to be interpreted by the audience as real. The images of Theatrical Realism are also noted for the personalization and internalization of objects, props, and décor, which came about as a result of the Freudian symbolism so inherent in the culture of the times. During the shooting of *Streetcar Named Desire* Kazan reportedly told his production designer, Richard Day:

This is a very damp community, very hot—I want to see the walls perspire. I want to see actual water coming out of the walls. I want them crumbling. I want the environment to be a picturization of decay.⁶

Theatrical Realism coincided with a period of great technological change in American films. Due to the rising competition from television, Hollywood was forced to develop bigger and wider screens, full color, and stereophonic sound. These new formats favored spectacular subjects: musicals, costume dramas, travelogues, Westerns, etc. On first impression it seemed that Theatrical Realism, which virtually worshiped austerity, poverty, and squalor, would not be making much use of these new processes which were considered to be little more than

⁶ Michel Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*. New York: The Viking Press, 1974, p. 67.

glamourizing gimmicks; but Theatrical Realism became big box office in 1955 when use of the wide screen was reaching its peak and soon the studio bosses, eager to put to use the new processes, were insisting on color, stereophonic sound, VistaVision, or CinemaScope for all their class “A” pictures. Thus, Kazan embarked on the production of *East of Eden* (1955) in what Warner Bros. announced as “an intimate new use of CinemaScope and WarnerColor,”⁷ Daniel Mann directed *The Rose Tattoo* in VistaVision, and Twentieth Century-Fox announced that all their future film production would be in their own patented process of CinemaScope. Since color still was not the norm for the industry, this edict from the studio’s front office created a rather peculiar series of Theatrical Realism films in black and white and CinemaScope which included *The Three Faces of Eve*, *No Down Payment*, *A Hatful of Rain*, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Blue Denim*, and *The Hustler*.

Ironically, the immediate effect of the large screen on Theatrical Realism films was to emphasize the theatrical element as opposed to heightening the feeling of realism. The general consensus at that time was that cutting within a scene on the large screen would be too jarring and should be kept to a minimum. As Kazan stated regarding *East of Eden*: “CinemaScope made it impossible to cut too often, so I did a staging that was much more relaxed, more like a stage—more across.”⁸ This same notion was carried to an extreme in Fred Zinnemann’s film of *A Hatful of Rain*, which consists of interminably long static shots within an apartment. It almost took filmmaking back to the canned theatre that hit the screens at the time of the introduction of sound.

When Martin Ritt signed a contract with Twentieth Century-Fox in 1957 he brought a new vitality to the studio’s wide screen Theatrical Realism films. Nicholas Ray had already demonstrated, in Warner’s *Rebel Without a Cause*, that

⁷ Joe Morella and Edward Z. Epstein, *Rebel—The Rebel Hero in Films*. Secaucus, New Jersey: The Citadel Press, 1973, p. 87.

⁸ Ciment, p. 122.

the new screen size could be used with great flexibility in staging by breaking it down into separate planes. It was all a matter of adjusting to the new technology.

But iconography is not as concerned with the color or size of the screen as with what is in it. The icons of Theatrical Realism could be loosely grouped into three categories: locational, textural, and behavioral.

The first category, locational, refers to the background settings for the films. In Theatrical Realism films a profusion of tenements, small apartments (usually the kitchen or bedroom), jazz clubs and other places that could be categorized as “hangouts,” decaying Southern mansions, small towns, and institutions such as schools, prisons, insane asylums, and reformatories are prevalent. These environments are always harsh, raw, and antagonistically related to the protagonists. The textural icons include peeling paint and plaster, exposed electrical wiring, symbolic lattice-work patterns evoking cages, torn clothing, underwear (a T-shirt for men, a slip for women), sweat, heat, and humidity. The behavioral icons include shouting, extreme physicality, eruptive violence (usually out of context, as in the home), insanity, juvenile delinquency (and its uniform as introduced in *The Wild One*), the woman as temptress, bedroom scenes of verbal confrontation, and embraces in which the woman dominates the man and serves him as a pillar of strength.

These icons are illustrated in the photography section with stills from Theatrical Realism films. Careful examination of each of these examples will show more than one iconographical element at work in each image, creating the intuitively perceived emotional effect of Theatrical Realism.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

When this study was initially concluded in 1976, one could hardly say that Theatrical Realism was dead. Chayefsky's work was finally being directed by Lumet in *Network*, Kazan had made a comeback with an artistically ambitious but unsuccessful version of *The Last Tycoon* starring Robert De Niro (the new Brando) and produced by Sam Spiegel, Martin Ritt and Water Bernstein revisited the blacklist years in *The Front*, and a little movie like *Rocky* loomed as the decade's *Marty* with Sylvester Stallone about to become a real contender.

The American film industry today seems to have gone back to the same dichotomy that characterized the mid-fifties, with expensive wide screen special effects movies on one hand and talky, significant films with artistic pretensions on the other. The climate may be right for another manifestation of Theatrical Realism, but if that is the case where are the new Tennessee Williams, Arthur Millers, William Inges? Is John Avildsen the new Kazan? Is Gilbert Cates the new Daniel Mann? Is Martin Scorsese the new Sidney Lumet? Lumet is still around, as busy and more successful than ever. Does the industry need another one? Or maybe the industry should ask, more fittingly, does it need or want Theatrical Realism?

Well, as long as the people who created the style are alive and working, and their films are seen and imitated, the style will be with us. Not as fervently

pursued as it was in 1957, when almost half of Hollywood's output was in the style, but certainly the occasional T-shirt and dripping kitchen sink may be expected to make their appearances on the American screen, along with mumbling newcomers, starkly frank writers, and socially and psychologically motivated directors.

In this work an attempt has been made to understand and organize a sizable body of work within American film history. An identification has been made of the fact that what these films had in common was a stylistic similarity in content and execution, and an attempt was made to define the style. In the process the conclusion was reached that generic style was the result of interaction between artists who held similar attitudes and had similar experiences while working in closely related media. This conclusion led into the areas of politics, sociology, and economics as well as criticism, literature, theatre, television, and film, with the hope of establishing direct and similar relationships between these factors, the artists, and their work. To the best of this writer's knowledge such an investigation had never been carried out with respect to the body of work under study, and it hopes to provide a first step toward the scholarly study of this area of American film history which has often been snubbed by the present critical establishment.

An attempt has been made to be impartial in the approach to these films and their makers as would befit a study of a historical nature, putting aside personal preferences and maintaining objectivity when voicing criticism (if that is at all possible), and substantiating any authoritative claims.

The question that drew the writer initially into the project, "If Theatrical Realism was so highly regarded as an 'artistic, prestigious, and legitimate' film style in the fifties, why is it in such critical disrepute today?" led to the realization that the cinema's ephemeral components are as fragile, if not more fragile, than those of any other art. If one takes an overall look at the film titles listed in Appendix A that comprise the works within this style, one must agree with present critical standards that proclaim a disproportionately small number of them

as worthy of artistic standing. Yet critical standards are always in a state of flux. If film history is going to consist of something more than personal or prevalent preferences, it is the scholar's duty to organize and classify the wheat along with the chaff.

A study of this nature can never be considered to be complete. In this book the decision was made to focus on the work of personalities whose careers were directly related to, and were based on, the success of the style. With the exception of Delbert Mann (who was born in Kansas but started his career in New York) these people were all New Yorkers, usually second generation Americans of the Jewish faith, and had an active history of socio-political involvement with progressive or liberal causes. But, although they represent the "hard core" of Theatrical Realism, they by no means constitute the only practitioners of the style. An even greater number of film makers in Hollywood whose careers dated back to other decades and other styles took up Theatrical Realism and made it a genuine manifestation of the national artistic mood, rather than a small movement expressing the talents of a few New York film makers.

People such as Robert Wise (*Somebody Up There Likes Me, I Want to Live*), George Stevens (*A Place in the Sun, Giant, The Story of Anne Frank*), Richard Brooks (*The Catered Affair, The Blackboard Jungle*), Otto Preminger (*The Man with the Golden Arm, Anatomy of a Murder*), Fred Zimmerman (*The Men, A Hatful of Rain, Member of the Wedding*), Joseph L. Mankiewicz (*No Way Out, Suddenly Last Summer*), John Huston (*The Misfits, Freud, The Night of the Iguana, Reflections in a Golden Eye*), and Nicholas Ray (*Rebel Without a Cause*) made some of the best Theatrical Realism films and their careers have been discussed only marginally and should be carefully analyzed in other future studies.

Besides these seasoned Hollywood professionals there were many other film makers, such as Jack Garfein, Mark Rydell, Daniel Petrie, Alexander Mackendrick, Joshua Logan, Stuart Rosenberg, Carol Reed, etc., who made significant contributions to the style but defied classification. And there was the

second generation from television comprising Arthur Penn, Robert Mulligan, Sidney Pollack, Norman Jewison, and John Frankenheimer, whose work was post-Theatrical Realism and observed such similarities to warrant their study as a specific and separate group of film makers.

If a lot of areas went unexplored due to the limitations of the study, there were also many areas that were carefully researched but did not find their way into the text. Notably, in the first stages of research some pieces were written which diffused the focus of the work and had to go, such as a detailed comparison of the careers of Marilyn Monroe (from sex symbol to actress) and Carroll Baker (from actress to sex symbol), a piece comparing Chayefsky's *The Passion of Joseph D* to Peter Shaffer's *Travesties*, and more research than was eventually necessary to provide the background for the New York theatre people (such as the Group Theatre, the Actors Studio, Lincoln Center, etc.). But there were advantages to this surplus of information. The writer possesses the most complete collection of Paddy Chayefsky memorabilia (if someone were ever to write an unauthorized biography, by all means contact this writer), which it is hoped will prove to be a valuable investment. Also, the writer came across delightful bits of trivia (*Marty* was patterned after Martin Ritt, Sidney Lumet's bogus suicide attempt, Sam Spiegel getting locked out of the Dorchester Hotel in London, Jack L. Warner congratulating Leonard Rosenman after only hearing the bass line to the score of *East of Eden*, etc.). It has been hard work, but it has actually been fun.

It might be customary now to pose the question of what led to the decline of Theatrical Realism. Changes in taste and the desire to move on to something else accounted for the style's demise. Paddy Chayefsky, in an interview in 1961, said about *Middle of the Night* (1959): "I would have preferred not to have done it as a film at the time it was done. The realistic style had reached its limit and exhausted its audience."¹

¹ Richard L. Coe, "Chayefsky Gains More than Girth," *The Washington Post*, September 24, 1961.

By the time he was interviewed by this writer in 1976, Chayefksy had not only realized why the “realistic style” had reached its limit by the early sixties, but had found a way of writing successful films which had eluded him for a decade in which he stumbled from Broadway (*The Passion of Joseph D.*) to elephantine film musicals (*Paint Your Wagon*). *Hospital* and *Network* represented a new successful direction for his work based on a surreal vision of a society gone mad. He said:

The decline of Theatrical Realism came about because of the general decline in the quality of life. Everything’s become more and more unreal. Totally insane right now. There is a great deal of dehumanized life going on. People disassociate themselves from what they really are. So you have to write about what they are *unreally* as opposed to really. They’ve erased their roots. Realism has disappeared and what there is of it is grotesque. *Dog Day Afternoon* and *Hospital* are real and grotesque. My kind of realism was kitchen drama, portraits of people.... How do we preserve humanity in a dehumanized world? That’s what I’m writing about.²

The careers of both Daniel and Delbert Mann took the same turn in direction toward light comedy and escapist entertainment, with increasing commercial success but decreasing critical esteem. In his column for February 5, 1962, Archer Winsten described Delbert Mann during an interview, and, in passing, used the same term selected here to denote the style under study (the only instance the writer found in his research):

There he was sitting pretty with a lot of theatrical realism to his credit, things like *Marty*, *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, *Middle of the Night*, and *Separate Tables*. He was chosen to do *The Outsider*, and that was a change of pace because he hadn’t been out in the open West with Indians before, nor had he been a war or soldier specialist. Come to think of it, he has never used his special knowledge of the Air Force where he won a Distinguished Flying Cross.

But his interest in flying, athletics, children, and realistic drama, and his successes in all of these fields, led to a most surprising turn in his

² Paddy Chayefsky interview in January, 1976.

career. He said, "I've suddenly become a comedy director. I was really surprised when Bob Aurthur and Marty Melcher asked me to do *Lover Come Back!*"³

In 1965 the United Press distributed an article which read, in part:

Daniel Mann, in a way, was partially responsible for the dirge-like movies of the 50s and early 60s. Once affiliated with the Actors' Studio, Mann turned his considerable talent to such dramas as *The Rose Tattoo*, *The Rat Race*, *Come Back*, *Little Sheba*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

"The era of psychological drama is over," Mann said the other day. "And I stopped teaching at the Actors' Studio long ago because the concentration was on acting techniques irrespective of the play. I prefer inspiration to technique."

"In this day of space flight and astonishing new horizons audiences are looking for innovations and a new kind of entertainment."

So what is Mann doing about it?

For one thing he is directing *Our Man Flint* at 20th Century Fox, an action-filled romp along the lines of James Bond, although he dislikes the comparison.⁴

The marriage between Elia Kazan and Tennessee Williams that gave birth to Theatrical Realism ended in divorce in May of 1960, as the following article, which is quoted at length, illustrates:

Tennessee Williams emerged from the workroom of his apartment in an East Side brownstone at noon the other day, poured himself an outsized martini and talked about a few things that were uppermost in his mind.

His chief preoccupation, at the moment, is Elia Kazan's withdrawal last week as the director of the new Williams play *Period of Adjustment*. Mr. Williams professes to regard the withdrawal as the termination of what had been a fabulously successful dramatist-director alliance, which began in 1947 with the production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Mr. Kazan has said, officially, that he had to give up *Period of Adjustment* because it conflicted with work on a movie that would keep him busy well beyond September, when he was to have staged the play.

³ Archer Winsten, "Rages and Outrages," *New York Post*, February 5, 1962.

⁴ "Daniel Mann Directs New Type of Film," *The Morning Telegraph*, July 9, 1965.

Mr. Williams does not credit Mr. Kazan's official excuse, nor does Mr. Kazan sympathize with Mr. Williams' emotional interpretation of the situation.

In the present case, Mr. Williams feels, a "misunderstanding" is responsible for Mr. Kazan's walk-out, and it is a misunderstanding that apparently goes deeper than the technical problem of juggling a time schedule. Evidently Mr. Williams believes that a public airing of his interpretation of the facts is in order.

"I think," Mr. Williams said, "that Kazan has been upset by people who accuse him of looking for popular success—people who snipe at his so-called melodramatic interpretation of my plays." ("I'll admit that the sniping has annoyed me," said Mr. Kazan. "But I'm used to being sniped at, and would never give up a play for a reason like that.")

"I've been so preoccupied with my own work," Mr. Williams went on, "that I wasn't aware of how much sniping was going on. The fact is, Kazan has been falsely blamed for my own desire for success." ("He should have said that earlier," declared Mr. Kazan, who recently wrote Mr. Williams, accusing him of being "terrified of failure.")

"It's quite true," Mr. Williams said, "that I want to reach a mass audience. I feel it can dig what I have to say, perhaps better than a lot of intellectuals can. I'm not an intellectual. And perhaps, at times, I've exceeded the dignified limits in trying to hold an audience, but it's wrong to blame Kazan for this. My cornpone melodrama is all my own. I want excitement in the theatre. Wherever I've been excessive, it's due to a certain hysteria on my part that takes over. By accident of nature, I have a tendency toward romanticism and a taste for the theatrical."

"The charge that Kazan has forced me to rewrite my plays is ridiculous. Nobody can budge me an inch. Kazan simply tried to interpret, honestly, what I have to say. He has helped me reach my audience, which is my aim in life—the bigger the audience, the better. His withdrawing has been shattering to me. I felt at home with him."

Looking something less than shattered, Mr. Williams, who is sun-tanned and trim from a recent stay in Key West, continued to defend his defecting director at his own expense.

"There are people," he said, "who have put the blame on Kazan for the ending, which they didn't like, of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*." ("Read the preface Tennessee wrote to *Cat*," suggested Mr. Kazan, somewhat ominously. "The sniping all started then.")

"Kazan has also been blamed for the poor second act of *Sweet Bird of Youth*. The truth is, the second act of that play is just not well written. I was in a terrible state of depression at the time, and couldn't function, except on just a craftsmanship level. Kazan wanted a great second act, and I couldn't give it to him. I'm re-writing the act now, for the published version; I'm going to stick with my two main characters, whom I should

never have left in the first place. The act is weak because I couldn't really identify with Boss Finley."

"As for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*," said Mr. Williams, it was true that he wrote two different endings, one at Mr. Kazan's suggestion. "But both those acts are mine. I wrote them, not Kazan."

Mr. Kazan, Mr. Williams went on, was the most courageous director he knew.

"He had the courage to do *Camino Real* seven years ago and to believe in what it said, even though his own wife didn't like it, and I had to read it aloud twice to backers who stalked out without comment. Kazan certainly wouldn't have done *Camino Real* to achieve commercial success. I don't think a director ever showed such courage."

The play was a controversial failure, but Mr. Williams regards it as Mr. Kazan's greatest production, "with possible exception of *Death of a Salesman* and *Streetcar Named Desire*."

Having gotten that off his chest, Mr. Williams thought it expedient to point out that there were other directors who could mount his future plays on Broadway. He said that Jose Quintero, who directed *Summer and Smoke* off-Broadway after it had failed uptown, and who is preparing an off-Broadway revival of *Camino Real* for a May 16 opening, was "just as brilliant as Kazan."

Mr. Williams also thinks a great deal of George Roy Hill, who has replaced Mr. Kazan as director of *Period of Adjustment*. Actually, Mr. Quintero was thought of also as Mr. Kazan's replacement, but he was already committed to direct *Laurette* early next session.

"There will be another new play for Quintero, and I'm glad he's doing *Camino Real*. He's a great artist. He may bring out new facets in the play. There is as much of a contrast as between two writers."

Mr. Williams' new play is, he said, as much of a departure as *Camino Real* was. "The two plays are poles apart, though; *Camino* is a fantasy, and this is perhaps my most realistic play. Actually, it is a comedy, set in Memphis of today, but we are not calling it that because there is a danger of the actors gagging it up. It's written as a play with humor and has an ending that's non tragic. The people at the end still have problems, but they have found each other, and maybe they can now solve their problems together. It's an unambitious play. I only wanted to tell the truth about a little occurrence in life, without blowing it up beyond its natural limits."

As far as Mr. Williams' immediate future is concerned, he claims it will be movieless, as well as Kazan-less. He will never, he said, do another movie adaptation.⁵

⁵ Arthur Gelb, "Williams and Kazan and the Big Walk-Out," *The New York Times*, May 1, 1960.

It is interesting to note that Theatrical Realism figures turned to comedy, of all things, in the early sixties, as if trying to prove their versatility.

But some of the other people stuck to their guns. Ely Landau found himself with a closet full of Eugene O'Neill properties that he had to get on the screen. So, he coined the term "legitimate film" and was able to talk the American Express Company into a joint venture which Vincent Canby described in *The New York Times*:

The American Film Theatre is designed to bring culture to the otherwise depressed American movie goer...manufacturing the coffee table movie, something which is supposed to establish one's intellectual credentials by physical association. Purchase tickets, but give them to your friends.⁶

Occasionally there are still films that try to maintain the style alive. Jonas Mekas said that John Huston's *Fat City* was "patched up from leftovers of the Actors Studio and the cinema of Kazan."⁷ Films such as *I Never Sang for My Father*, *Save the Tiger*, *Summer Wishes*, *Winter Dreams*, and *Scarecrow* had their roots in Theatrical Realism and continue to remind one that the style still surfaces and is far from being dead and buried. The commercial success of Avildsen's *Joe* and *Rocky*, Chayefsky's *Hospital* and *Network*, and Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon* have shown that Theatrical Realism, when made topical and energetic, can bring ticket buyers to the box office.

In December of 1976 *Variety* reported:

A total of \$23,000 was pledged last night by representatives of the New York film and TV production industry as the first step toward financing the reopening of the long abandoned Astoria Stages across the East River from Manhattan.⁸

⁶ *The New York Times*, January 27, 1974.

⁷ *The Village Voice*, August 17, 1972.

⁸ "N.Y. Raises 23G to Help Re-open Astoria Stages," *Variety*, December 9, 1976.

This announcement was enhanced by some union concessions designed to encourage more film and television productions to return to New York. Whether this had any significant effect is hard to tell even with today's hindsight. But the most fascinating question was whether New Yorkers would continue to view Theatrical Realism as their indigenous film style. This proved not to be the case.

In her review of Paul Newman's film of Paul Zindel's *The Effect of Gamma Rays of Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds*, Pauline Kael came very close to defining Theatrical Realism and writing its epitaph. For such a perceptive and articulate writer that she is, one feels her struggling to find a term to describe these films, which was the main purpose of this study:

Paul Zindel writes what are essentially camp versions of the matriarchal mood-memory plays of Tennessee Williams and William Inge; his specialty is sentimentality made piercing by cruelty. The final mood is of horror and hope, a sort of upbeat resignation: Beatrice and the blighted Ruth will sink lower, but Matilda, the young scientist, will bloom. This muted optimism is the neatest Broadway heart-clutcher imaginable. Manipulative realism—that's what the mood-memory play has come to.

Full of echoes of old plays and movies as Zindel's devices are, they have some theatrical vitality; he has talent, I suppose. But his plays are worthlessly "moving"—lyricized suders with stand-up comic numbers, and synthetic to the core. I've watched Julie Harris and Maureen Stapleton trying to go the full distance with his showcase roles, and all I could see up there was the actress working to get laughs. In a theatre that's starved, *Marigolds* (the best of his works) can get by, because it "plays," but Beatrice, the good-bad witch, terrible when you're under her spell, funny and pathetic when you escape and can look back on her, is a mawkish travesty of Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie*. She is mother the destroyer, the twisted belle—the ogress in the psychosexual fantasy that pervades theatrical Americana.

There's a likable "trouper" quality about Joanne Woodward. She's a briny actress, with her feet on the ground, and with great audience rapport: she has a wide streak of humor about herself that you sense and respond to. Unlike the fabled goddess-stars, she's very "real" in her presence, and she makes far more direct contact with the audience. And she's Southern, which gives her the right quality for a role that is fifties-TV out of Southern gothic—the slatternly mother in her faded cotton bathrobe trying to sell dance lessons on the phone while dreaming (of her father, of course). *Splendor in the Grass* comes to mind; Beatrice is like

one of those Inge fifties people who were washed up as soon as they got out of high school—victims of baroque circumstances. Joanne Woodward had the right forlorn gallantry for *The Stripper* (from Inge's *A Loss of Roses*), and she gives this Zindel role the sashaying toughness it requires.

Paul Newman can't turn camp Americana into naturalistic Americana, but he gives it some sensibility—a tasteful version of fifties-TV “depth.” He's an unobtrusive director, keeping the camera on what you'd look for in the theatre; his work is serene, sane, and balanced. The movie is touchingly well made—touchingly because the treatment the material gets is much better than it deserves.⁹

If the theatre of the fifties belonged to Tennessee Williams and William Inge, the sixties and seventies belonged to Neil Simon and Tom O'Horgan. The polarization of the theatre into establishment comedies and underground “tour de force” circuses shattered the tradition of Theatrical Realism on stage as well as in films. The pipeline was broken. Gone were the eruptive verbal battles in small black and white kitchens of the Bronx, the man in his T-shirt, the wife in her bathrobe, and the sink dripping. For lack of a term, Kael called this “a vision of camp Americana or fifties-TV depth.” But it was Theatrical Realism—a unique film style, an art movement, a wave that swept over American stages and screens during the fifties... and is no more.

⁹ Pauline Kael, “The Current Cinema,” *The New Yorker*, December 23, 1972.

APPENDIX A

LISTING OF

THEATRICAL REALISM FILMS

AND PERSONNEL

THE NEW YORK FILM

I. PRECEDENTS

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn (1945) – Elia Kazan

Port of New York (1949) – Laszlo Benedek

Panic in the Streets (1950) – Eliza Kazan

Detective Story (1951) – William Wyler

II. THEATRICAL REALISM

The Glass Menagerie (1950) – Irving Rapper

Death of a Salesman (1951) – Laszlo Benedek

On the Waterfront (1954) – Elia Kazan

Marty (1955) – Delbert Mann

The Man with the Golden Arm (1955) – Otto Preminger

The Catered Affair (1956) – Richard Brooks

Patterns (1956) – Fielder Cook

The Wrong Man (1956) – Alfred Hitchcock

Somebody Up There Likes Me (1956) – Robert Wise

Twelve Angry Men (1957) – Sidney Lumet

The Bachelor Party (1957) – Delbert Mann

Sweet Smell of Success (1957) – Alexander Mackendrick

The Garment Jungle (1957) – Vincent Sherman

Middle of the Night (1959) – Delbert Mann

Butterfield 8 (1960) – Daniel Mann

Murder Inc. (1960) – Stuart Rosenberg

The Hustler (1961) – Robert Rossen

A View from the Bridge (1962) – Sidney Lumet

Two for the Seesaw (1962) – Robert Wise

III. POST-THEATRICAL REALISM

Mr. Buddwing (1966) – Delbert Mann

A Thousand Clowns (1966) – Fred Coe

Up the Down Staircase (1967) – Robert Mulligan

Me, Natalie (1969) – Fred Coe

THE SOUTHERN DRAMA

I. PRECEDENTS

Tobacco Road (1941) – John Ford

Intruder in the Dust (1949) – Clarence Brown

Pinky (1949) – Elia Kazan

II. THEATRICAL REALISM

A Streetcar Named Desire (1951) – Elia Kazan

The Member of the Wedding (1953) – Fred Zinnemann

The Rose Tattoo (1955) – Daniel Mann

Baby Doll (1956) – Elia Kazan

The Strange One (1957) – Jack Garfein

Hot Spell (1957) – Daniel Mann

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1958) – Richard Brooks

God's Little Acre (1958) – Anthony Mann

The Sound and the Fury (1959) – Martin Ritt

The Long Hot Summer (1958) – Martin Ritt

The Fugitive Kind (1960) – Sidney Lumet

Wild River (1960) – Elia Kazan

Desire in the Dust (1960) – William Claxton

Sanctuary (1961) – Tony Richardson

Summer and Smoke (1961) – Peter Glenville

Sweet Bird of Youth (1962) – Richard Brooks

To Kill a Mockingbird (1962) – Robert Mulligan

III. POST-THEATRICAL REALISM

This Property is Condemned (1966) – Sidney Pollack

The Chase (1966) – Arthur Penn

Reflections in a Golden Eye (1967) – John Huston

Hurry Sundown (1967) – Otto Preminger

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter (1968) – Robert Ellis Miller

The Last of the Mobile Hot-Shots (1969) – Sidney Lumet

WUSA (1970) – Stuart Rosenberg

THE SOCIAL MESSAGE FILM

I. PRECEDENTS

- The Grapes of Wrath* (1941) – John Ford
How Green Was My Valley (1941) – John Ford
The Lost Weekend (1945) – Billy Wilder
The Best Years of Our Lives (1946) – William Wyler
Gentleman's Agreement (1947) – Elia Kazan
All My Sons (1948) – Irving Reis
All the King's Men (1949) – Robert Rossen

II. THEATRICAL REALISM

- No Way Out* (1950) – Joseph L. Mankiewicz
The Men (1950) – Fred Zinnemann
The Salt of the Earth (1953) – Herbert Biberman
The Wild One (1954) – Laszlo Benedek
The Blackboard Jungle (1955) – Richard Brooks
I'll Cry Tomorrow (1955) – Daniel Mann
Trial (1955) – Mark Robson
Rebel Without a Cause (1955) – Nicholas Ray
A Cry in the Night (1956) – Frank Tuttle
The Harder They Fall (1956) – Mark Robson
Storm Center (1956) – Daniel Taradash
Crime in the Streets (1956) – Don Siegel
Edge of the City (1957) – Martin Ritt
A Hatful of Rain (1957) – Fred Zinnemann
The Young Stranger (1957) – John Frankenheimer
I Want to Live (1958) – Robert Wise
The Defiant Ones (1958) – Stanley Kramer
Inherit the Wind (1960) – Stanley Kramer

A Raisin in the Sun (1961) – Daniel Petrie
The Young Savages (1961) – John Frankenheimer
The Outsider (1961) – Delbert Mann
Judgment at Nuremberg (1961) – Stanley Kramer
A Child Is Waiting (1962) – John Cassavetes
The Birdman of Alcatraz (1962) – John Frankenheimer
The Days of Wine and Roses (1962) – Blake Edwards
The Victors (1963) – Carl Foreman
Requiem for a Heavyweight (1962) – Ralph Nelson
One Potato, Two Potato (1964) – Larry Peerce
Nothing But a Man (1964) – Michael Roemer

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA

I. PRECEDENTS

- Spellbound* (1945) – Alfred Hitchcock
Pride of the Marines (1945) – Delmer Daves
Till the End of Time (1946) – Edward Dmytryk
The Snake Pit (1948) – Anatole Litvak
Don't Bother to Knock (1952) – Roy Ward Baker

II. THEATRICAL REALISM

- The Cobweb* (1955) – Vincente Minnelli
The Rack (1956) – Arnold Laven
Tea and Sympathy (1956) – Vincente Minnelli
The Three Faces of Eve (1957) – Nunnally Johnson
Fear Strikes Out (1957) – Robert Mulligan
The Goddess (1958) – John Cromwell
The Young Lions (1958) – Edward Dmytryk
Suddenly Last Summer (1960) – Joseph L. Mankiewicz
Long Day's Journey into Night (1962) – Sidney Lumet
The Miracle Worker (1962) – Arthur Penn
Something Wild (1962) – Jack Garfein
Freud (1963) – John Huston
David and Lisa (1963) – Frank Perry
The Night of the Iguana (1964) – John Huston
Lilith (1964) – Robert Rossen
The Pawnbroker (1965) – Sidney Lumet

III. POST-THEATRICAL REALISM

- Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe?* (1966) – Mike Nichols
Rachel, Rachel (1968) – Paul Newman

Who Is Harry Kellerman? (1971) – Ulu Grosbard

Sybil (TV, 1976) – Daniel Petrie

ENLIGHTENED AMERICANA

I. PRECEDENTS

- King's Row* (1941) – Sam Wood
A Place in the Sun (1951) – George Stevens
So Big (1953) – Robert Wise

II. THEATRICAL REALISM

- Come Back, Little Sheba* (1952) – Daniel Mann
About Mrs. Leslie (1954) – Daniel Mann
East of Eden (1955) – Elia Kazan
Picnic (1955) – Joshua Logan
Bus Stop (1956) – Joshua Logan
Giant (1956) – George Stevens
No Down Payment (1957) – Martin Ritt
Wild Is the Wind (1957) – George Cukor
A Face in the Crowd (1957) – Elia Kazan
Desire Under the Elms (1958) – Delbert Mann
Some Came Running (1958) – Vincente Minnelli
Anatomy of a Murder (1959) – Otto Preminger
Elmer Gantry (1960) – Richard Brooks
The Dark at the Top of the Stairs (1960) – Delbert Mann
The Misfits (1960) – John Huston
Splendor in the Grass (1961) – Elia Kazan
All the Way Home (1962) – Alex Segal
Hud (1963) – Martin Ritt

III. POST-THEATRICAL REALISM

- The Outrage* (1964) – Martin Ritt
Baby, the Rain Must Fall (1965) – Robert Mulligan

I Never Sang for My Father (1970) – Gilbert Cates

The Effect of Gamma Rays (1972) – Paul Newman

Sometimes a Great Notion (1972) – Paul Newman

Summer Wishes, Winter Dreams (1973) – Gilbert Cates

THEATRICAL REALISM DIRECTORS

I. HARD CORE THEATRICAL REALISTS

Elia Kazan	Delbert Mann
Sidney Lumet	Martin Ritt
Daniel Mann	

II. THE TELEVISION GROUP – SECOND GENERATION

John Frankenheimer	Arthur Penn
Norman Jewison	Sidney Pollack
Robert Mulligan	

III. THE HOLLYWOOD GROUP – JUMPING ON THE BANDWAGON

Richard Brooks	Robert Rossen
Edward Dmytryk	Otto Preminger
John Huston	George Stevens
Stanley Kramer	Robert Wise
Joseph L. Mankiewicz	Fred Zinnemann
Vincente Minnelli	

IV. OCCASIONAL PRACTITIONERS AND NEWCOMERS

John Avildsen	Alexander Mackendrick
Laszlo Benedek	Paul Newman
Herbert Biberman	Mike Nichols
Gilbert Cates	Clifford Odets
Fred Coe	Daniel Petrie
Carl Foreman	Nicholas Ray
Jack Garfein	Stuart Rosenberg
Joshua Logan	Mark Rydell

THEATRICAL REALISM ACTORS

I. OLD GUARD REALISTS

Ernest Borgnine	Anna Magnani
Shirley Booth	Fredric March
Lee J. Cobb	Burgess Meredith
Broderick Crawford	Paul Muni
Bette Davis	Anthony Quinn
Melvyn Douglas	John Randolph
Betty Field	Thelma Ritter
Henry Fonda	Edward G. Robinson
Dorothy McGuire	Spencer Tracy

II. FROM THE ACTORS STUDIO (ACTORS STUDIO MEMBERS)

Carroll Baker	Viveca Lindfors
Joe Don Baker	Jack Lord
Martin Balsam	Tina Louise
Richard Boone	Karl Malden
Marlon Brando	E. G. Marshall
Roscoe Lee Browne	Walter Matthau
Montgomery Clift	Steve McQueen
James Dean	Paul Newman
Sandy Dennis	Geraldine Page
Bruce Dern	Jack Palance
Bradford Dillman	Estelle Parsons
Keir Dullea	George Peppard
Mildred Dunnock	Sidney Poitier
Anthony Franciosa	Lee Remick
Ben Gazzara	Cliff Robertson
Lee Grant	Eva Marie Saint

Barbara Harris	Diana Sands
Julie Harris	Madeleine Sherwood
Pat Hingle	Kim Stanley
Kim Hunter	Maureen Stapleton
Anne Jackson	Rod Steiger
Salome Jens	Rip Torn
Shirley Knight	Jo Van Fleet
Martin Landau	Eli Wallach
Cloris Leachman	Gene Wilder
Ron Leibman	Joanne Woodward

III. TO THE ACTORS STUDIO (*DENOTES STUDIO MEMBER)

Anne Bancroft*	Zero Mostel*
Warren Beatty	Patricia Neal*
Richard Beymer*	Anthony Perkins*
Yul Brynner	Jan Sterling*
Jane Fonda	Franchot Tone*
John Forsythe*	James Whitmore*
Celeste Holm*	Shelley Winters*
Marilyn Monroe	

IV. WITH HIS OWN STUDIO

John Cassavetes

V. CONVERTED STARS

Tony Curtis	Vivien Leigh
Kirk Douglas	Lee Marvin
Ava Gardner	Kim Novak
Susan Hayward	Robert Ryan
William Holden	Frank Sinatra

Shirley Jones

Elizabeth Taylor

Deborah Kerr

Natalie Wood

Burt Lancaster

VI. FROM NEW YORK TELEVISION (NOT IN THE ACTORS STUDIO)

Andy Griffith

Jack Warden

Don Murray

THEATRICAL REALISM WRITERS

I. THE PLAYWRIGHTS

Michael Gazzo
William Inge
Arthur Miller
Clifford Odets
Eugene O'Neill
Terrence Rattigan
Calder Willingham
Tennessee Williams

II. THE SCREENWRITERS

Harriet Frank, Jr.
Morton Fine
Carl Foreman
David Friedkin
Evan Hunter
Ernest Lehman
Frank Pierson
Irving Ravetch
Stewart Stern

III. THE NOVELISTS

Erskine Caldwell
Truman Capote
William Faulkner
Edna Ferber
James Leo Herlihy
Carson McCullers
Larry McMurtry
John Steinbeck
Budd Schulberg

IV. THE TV WRITERS

Robert Alan Aurthur
Paddy Chayefsky
Sumner Locke Elliot
Horton Foote
Abby Mann
Tad Mosel
Richard Nash
Reginald Rose
Rod Serling
Gore Vidal

THEATRICAL REALISM PRODUCERS

Robert Alan Aurthur

Louis de Rochemont

Charles K. Feldman

Harold Hecht

Mark Hellinger

John Houseman

Stanley Kramer

Ely Landau

Sam Spiegel

David Susskind

Jerry Wald

Hal Wallis

Walter Wanger

Darryl F. Zanuck

THEATRICAL REALISM PRODUCTION DESIGNER:

RICHARD SYLBERT

FILMOGRAPHY

- 1954 *On the Waterfront* (uncredited assistance)
- 1956 *Crowded Paradise*
Patterns
Baby Doll
- 1957 *Edge of the City*
A Face in the Crowd
- 1958 *Wind Across the Everglades*
- 1959 *The Fugitive Kind*
- 1960 *Murder Inc.*
- 1961 *Mad Dog Coll*
Splendor in the Grass
- 1962 *Walk on the Wild Side*
The Manchurian Candidate
Long Day's Journey into Night
- 1963 *All the Way Home*
- 1964 *Lilith*
- 1965 *How to Murder Your Wife*
The Pawnbroker
- 1966 *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe?*
Grand Prix
- 1967 *The Graduate*
- 1968 *Rosemary's Baby*
- 1969 *The Tiger Makes Out*
- 1970 *Catch 22*
- 1971 *Fat City*

- 1972 *Carnal Knowledge*
The Heartbreak Kid
- 1973 *The Day of the Dolphin*
- 1974 *Chinatown*
The Conversation
- 1975 *Shampoo*

THEATRICAL REALISM ICONOGRAPHY

I. SEMINAL ICONS

- Marlon Brando in a wet torn T-shirt screaming “Stella!” in *A Streetcar Named Desire*
- James Dean fidgeting with a rope in *Giant*
- Elizabeth Taylor in a slip, caressing a brass bedpost in *Cat on a Hot Time Roof*

II. LOCATIONAL ICONS

- Tenement buildings
- Small apartments (usually the kitchen or bedroom)
- Clotheslines
- Jazz clubs and other places that could be categorized as “hangouts”
- Decaying Southern mansions
- Small towns
- Schools
- Prisons
- Mental Institutions
- Reformatories

II. TEXTURAL ICONS

- Peeling paint and plaster
- Exposed electrical wiring
- Symbolic lattice-work patterns evoking cages
- Torn clothing
- White underwear (a T-shirt for men, a slip for women)
- Sweat, heat, and humidity

II. BEHAVIORAL ICONS

- Shouting
- Extreme physicality
- Eruptive violence (usually out of context, as in the home)
- Insanity
- Juvenile delinquency (and its uniform as introduced in *The Wild One*)
- The woman as temptress
- Bedroom scenes of verbal confrontation
- Embraces in which the woman is a pillar of strength for the man

APPENDIX B***THE FUGITIVE KIND***
PROGRAM NOTES*

When Anna Magnani won her Academy Award for *The Rose Tattoo* in 1956 she told the press she wanted Marlon Brando to come to Rome and bring the Oscar to her personally. He and Spencer Tracy were the two American actors she said she would like to work with. Brando was not about to play delivery boy for her, but she got her wish granted three years later when *The Fugitive Kind* started shooting at the Gold Medal Studio in the Bronx, something which she probably soon regretted along with most of the people involved in the project.

The Fugitive Kind is a prime example of “talent run amok.” It marks the culmination of all the excesses of “Theatrical Realism.” What should have been a landmark film turned out to be a tombstone, and it is only when viewed as such that the film yields its maximum enjoyment value.

The project was put together by two former agents—Martin Jurow and Richard Shepherd—and its above-the-line cost was staggering for the time. Brando, who was in the midst of editing *One Eyed Jacks*, was to get a million dollars for the picture. His financial position and personal commitments made this an offer he could not refuse, so he commuted between the two projects on opposite coasts, creating undue pressure on everyone concerned.

The chemistry between Brando and Magnani proved to be volatile. What, to Tennessee Williams, must have seemed like a marriage made in heaven between two of his most consecrated performers turned into a tense relationship, with Magnani locking herself up in her dressing room and refusing to rehearse,

* These program notes were made by this writer for a showing of *The Fugitive Kind* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1977.

claiming that she was “a spontaneous animal,” and Brando slurring his lines to the point that Magnani would wait for her cues when they had already been given.

In an interview shortly after the shooting was over, director Sidney Lumet claimed that rumors of clashes between Magnani and Brando were exaggerated. He said that they may not be the best of friends, but that they worked together like professionals. Magnani’s trouble was in her difficulty with the language; she had to learn her part phonetically. She did not understand all that people said to her on the set, but she hated to admit it. Part of the problem may have stemmed from the fact that the Williams/Meade Roberts screenplay considerably shortened the play *Orpheus Descending* on which it was based, and now the story belonged to the female lead and the Brando role was meant as a foil. The character he was to play was the one who did not change; the transition, and therefore the main drama, belonged to the heroine’s character.

The main casualties of this shortened version, which leaves many gaps in the narrative, are the characters played by Joanne Woodward and Maureen Stapleton. They appear and disappear almost at random. Woodward’s nymphomaniac is definitely her most grotesque screen appearance, and Stapleton’s “good wife,” who should provide comfort for Brando (she played the Magnani role on stage), is reduced to a mere question mark. Victor Jory is surprisingly effective as Williams’ incarnation of the “evil upstairs,” and he makes the most of his predictable unpleasantness.

When the film opened in 1960, at Grauman’s Chinese, it was heralded as having “an all-star Actors Studio cast,” headed by its most distinguished alumnus, Marlon Brando. This was a rather curious tagline that was far from being true, and yet it obviously was meant to prepare (or forewarn) the public for a film which contained more “method/angst” style of acting than had ever been seen before in a movie. The film also contained the most excessive work by two of the most influential New York film craftsmen of the decade: Boris Kaufman and Richard Sylbert. Kaufman’s cinematography is rooted in the documentary and realistic traditions. Brother to Dziga Vertov, and an indispensable collaborator to

Jean Vigo in France and then later to Elia Kazan in the United States, Kaufman usually created the illusion of realism with highly theatrical effects. At one point in the film, as Brando tells Magnani about some symbolic birds, the lighting in the story slowly fades until his eyes alone are illuminated. This form of theatrical stylization, of which Lumet was so fond, becomes a recurrent stylistic index for the film. Sylbert's highly symbolic art direction, with its use of lattice work cages enclosing the characters, synthesizes the dichotomy between realism and stylization that lies at the crux of the film.

Dumping on Sidney Lumet has been a critic's pastime for many years. Suffice it to say that he now admits to having "goofed" on the direction of the film. He said that he had never seen good work come out of tension, and that *The Fugitive Kind* clearly supported his statement.

Critical reaction and box office response to the film was mostly unfavorable. Helen Weldon Kuhn's "jingoistic" paranoid reaction in *Films in Review* stated that "*The Fugitive Kind* was such a mess of technical incompetence and psychopathic misrepresentation as to be a disgrace to American culture. It derived from one of the last scraps at the bottom of Tennessee Williams' barrel of degenerate plays." She asked why this was turned into a motion picture. The answer was also a disgrace to American culture; to wit, "people hoped to make money out of it. Fortunately, they were not likely to. But, in the world market, *The Fugitive Kind* could, and probably would, be exploited as hate-the-United States propaganda."

Yet, the film has exceptional merit if looked at as the dying gasps of Theatrical Realism and of the Stanley Kowalski character (Williams: "Marlon Brando is Marlon Brando. I just wish he didn't remember Kowalski so well."), as the logical end of the road for all the perturbed Southern women that Woodward portrayed in the fifties, as the culmination of Magnani's slow burning volcano technique, and as the epitome of the South as represented in fifties films that titillated with Freudian aberrations under the guise of social concern.

The Fugitive Kind distills a witch's brew of fifties "Theatrical Realism" which, though never pleasant to take, is of incalculable historical value in the stylistics of the American cinema.

APPENDIX C

PLATES

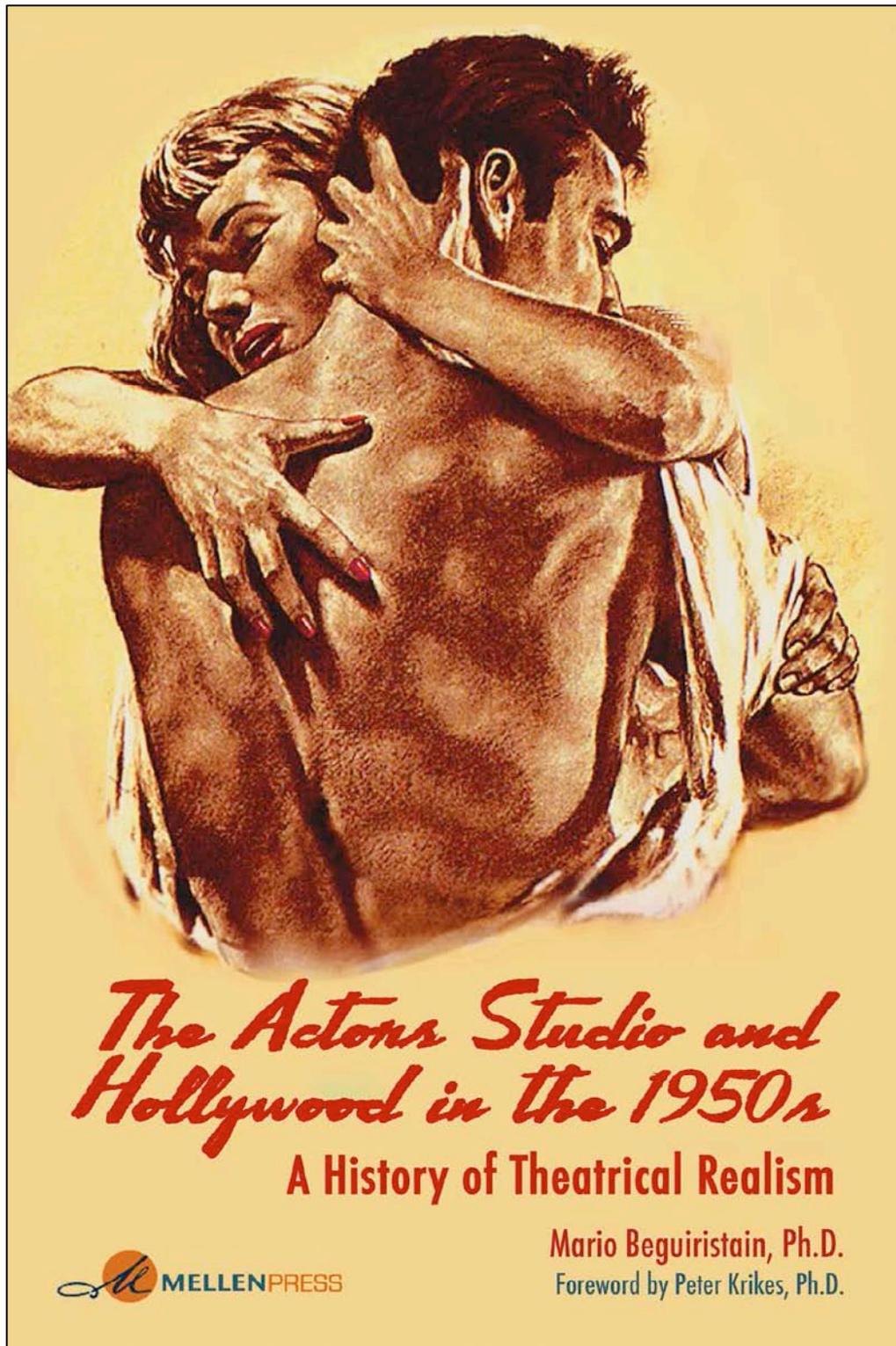


Plate 1: German poster artwork portraying Kim Hunter and Marlon Brando in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, directed by Elia Kazan.
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Plate 2: Poster for *The Rose Tattoo*. Tennessee Williams' steamy and silly sex tale is presented as daring, provocative, yet classy adult entertainment -- in B&W VistaVision. Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. © 1955 Paramount Pictures Corporation. All rights reserved.

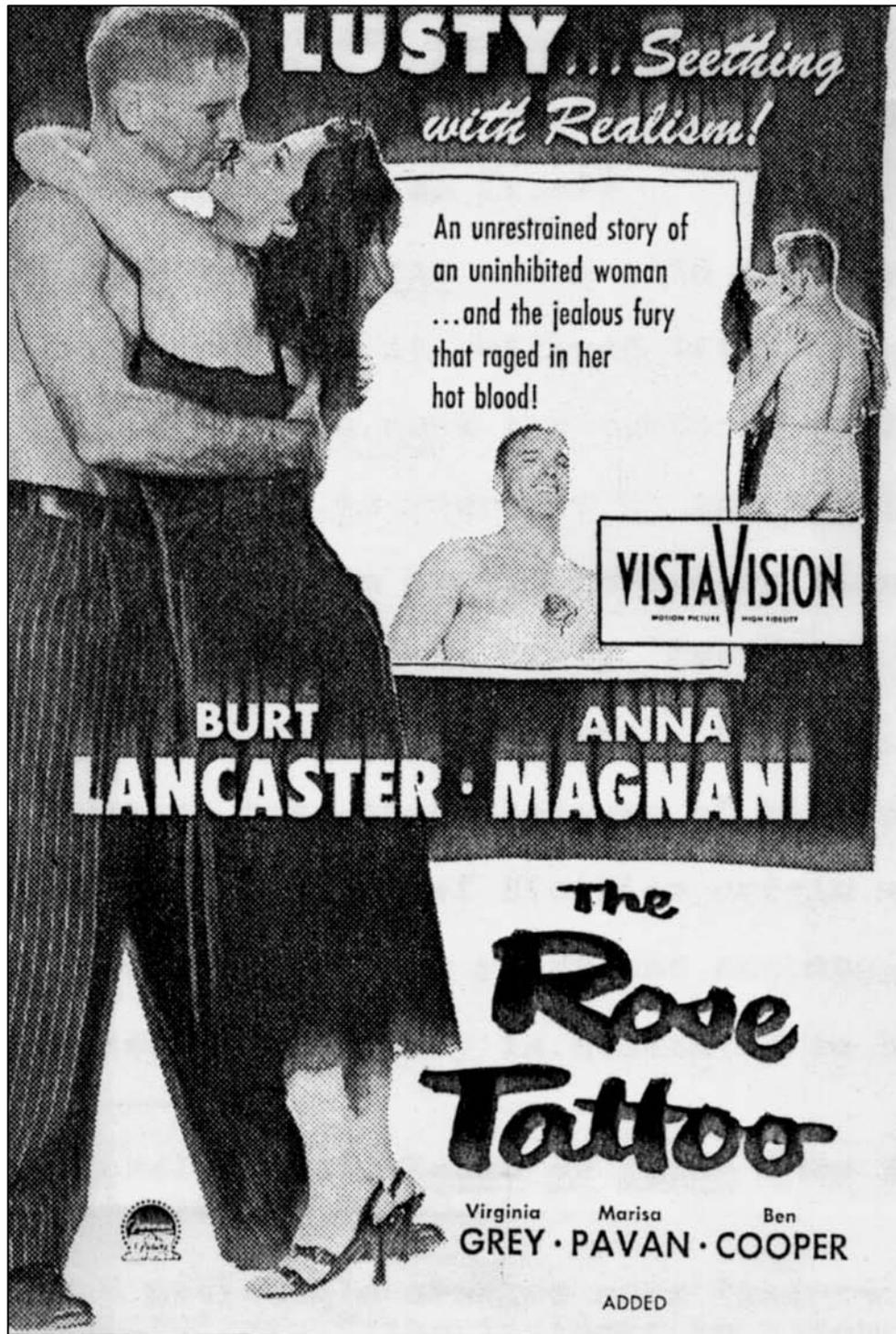


Plate 3: Exploitation Poster for *The Rose Tattoo*. The classy adult entertainment strategy is abandoned in favor of an all stops out approach.

Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. © 1955 Paramount Pictures Corporation. All rights reserved.



Plate 4: Zolya Talma, Anna Magnani and Burt Lancaster in *The Rose Tattoo*. When Magnani finally “goes Hollywood,” it’s because her friend, Tennessee Williams has written a script especially for her and Hal B. Wallis waives her through the Paramount Gates with a big fat contract -- never mind her wild unkempt hair.
Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. © 1955 Paramount Pictures Corporation. All rights reserved.



Plate 5: Physicality in *The Rose Tattoo*. Domestic violence is one of the iconographic hallmarks of Theatrical Realism.

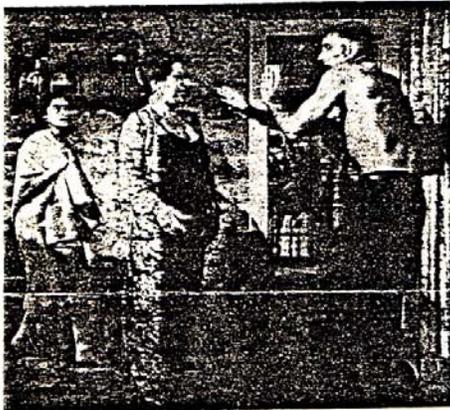
Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. © 1955 Paramount Pictures Corporation. All rights reserved.



MAGNANI'S anguish in squeezing into prop corset is real. Off-screen, she won't wear one

Magnani in Hollywood

ITALY'S "TIGRESS OF THE TIBER," UNKEMPT AND DISHEVELED, IN ILL-FITTING CLOTHES, EXPLODES ALL OVER TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' "THE ROSE TATTOO"



SLUGGING MATCH between Serafina (Magnani) and Alvarado (Burt Lancaster) won respect of latter, himself an ex-pugilist. "She plays rough and wild," he says. "You duck fast or get socked"

ANNA MAGNANI has been called "the world's greatest actress," "the last of the shameless emotionalists" and "the most impressive actress since Garbo." She makes her Hollywood-movie debut next month in Tennessee Williams' "The Rose Tattoo"—originally written especially for her. When the stage play opened four years ago on Broadway, Magnani declined to appear in it—fearing, according to some, that her broken English would make her ridiculous; according to others, that Broadway would try to glamorize and tame her tornado-like technique. (Maureen Stapleton, young American actress, scored a great success in the role.)

Magnani's insistence upon "ultra-realism" is in sharp contrast to accepted Hollywood practice. She uses no makeup; visits no beauty parlors; allows no one to "do" her Medusa-mop (she chased Paramount's hair-dresser off the set, yelling: "Tripe! This is not Magnani!"). She abhors bras and girdles, and flirted her face, messed her hair and wore sloppy, badly fitted clothes to portray the distress of the play's lovelorn widow, who had buried her heart and hopes in the past with her dead husband.

The Italian star's passion for muscular as well as emotional realism resulted in colleague Virginia Grey's coming out of their climactic gutter fight with three ribs broken. Virginia was fairly warned—for Magnani had screamed: "Script say 'fight'—so we fight!" —J. Z.

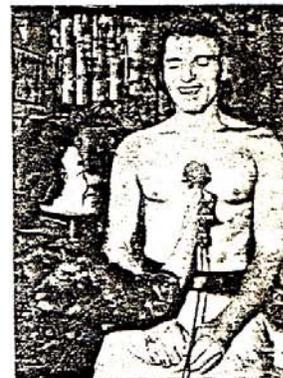
FILM gives full play to Magnani's love of earthy comedy and drama. Below, beginning of free-swinging drinking bout and brawl



FRUSTRATED, suspicious, Serafina demands that young sailor (Ben Cooper), in love with daughter Rosa, kneel before statue of the Madonna and swear he will respect Rosa's innocence



WITH rose tattoo similar to Serafina's first husband's, Alvarado hopes to woo and win her



15

Plate 6: Article from *Cue Magazine* announcing Anna Magnani's tempestuous arrival in Hollywood for the filming of *The Rose Tattoo*.



SERAFINA (Magnani) to FATHER DE LEO (Sandro Giglio), speaking of her dead husband: "I gave my husband much glory. I was a peasant, but I brought him glory. I came to him with one dress, but I brought him glory; he was a baron, and I brought him glory . . ."



"To me the marriage was beautiful like a religion. Now my marriage is dreams and memories only. And I don't believe that the man I kept in my heart gave me horns!"



"You used to . . . you used to hear the confessions of my husband. Father, please—did my husband ever speak of a . . . of a woman to you . . . Tell me!"

Plate 7: Magnani's "aria" in *The Rose Tattoo*. Columnist Ruth Waterbury wrote: "She demotes almost any other actress you can think of into a childish amateur."



Plate 8: Anna Magnani, Anthony Quinn and Anthony Franciosa in *Wild is the Wind* under George Cukor's direction. Completing her two-picture deal with Hal B. Wallis at Paramount, Magnani heads home.
Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. © 1957 Paramount Pictures Corporation. All rights reserved.

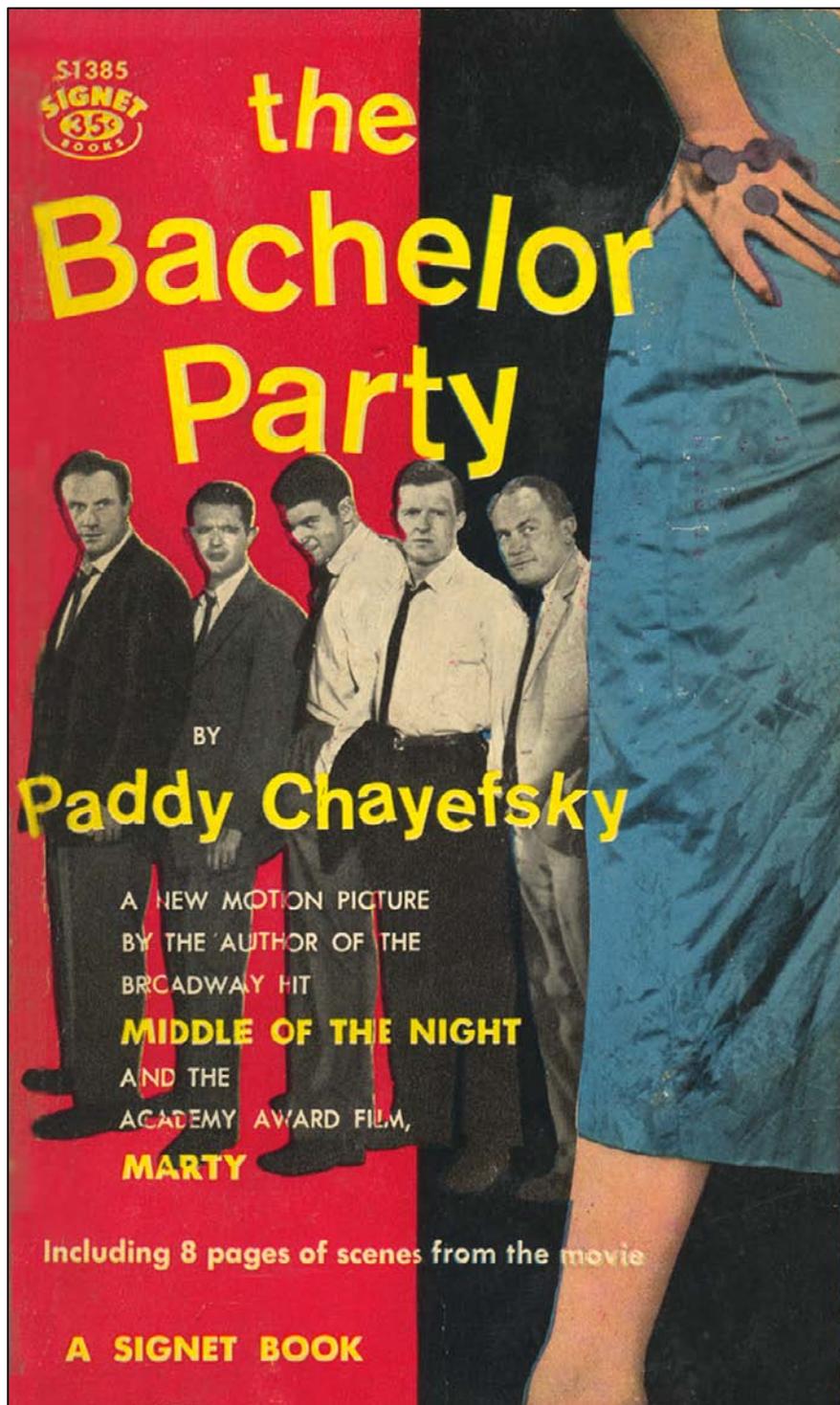


Plate 9: Salacious content is emphasized on the cover of the Signet Paperback edition of Paddy Chayefsky's *The Bachelor Party*—to be had for 35¢.
All images © 1957 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. All rights reserved.



Plate 10: Boozing in *The Bachelor Party*. Walpurgisnacht begins... and the night is young!
© 1957 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. All rights reserved.



Plate 11: Watching stag movies in *The Bachelor Party*. "Where do they get those girls?"
© 1957 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. All rights reserved.



Plate 12: Temptation in *The Bachelor Party*. The Existentialist (Carolyn Jones in her Oscar-winning role) needs to hear someone say, “I love you;” while Jack Warden is oblivious that he’s crashing a Greenwich Village lesbian party.
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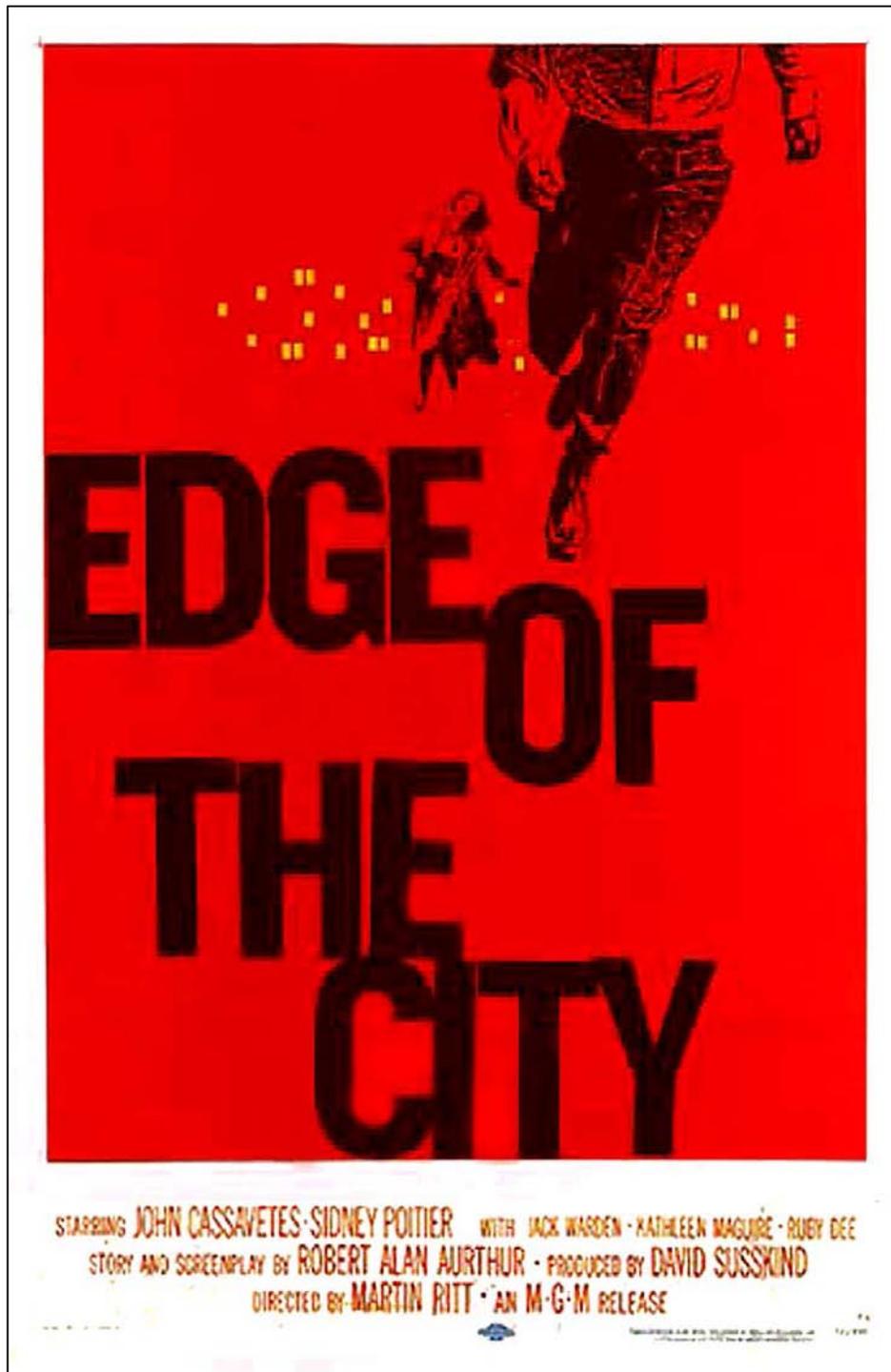


Plate 13: MGM took a classier approach to the marketing of *Edge of the City* with this advertising campaign designed by Saul Bass.
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Plate 14: Dockside philosophizing in *Edge of the City*. John Cassavetes and Sidney Poitier share their insights into the human condition. The filmmakers were accused by Kazan of riding on the coattails of *On The Waterfront*.

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Plate 15: Racial taunting in *Edge of the City*. Cassavetes comes to the defense of Poitier when Jack Warden picks a fight.
© 1957 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. All rights reserved.



Plate 16: Racial tensions dissipate in *Edge of the City*, if only for a moment.
© 1957 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. All rights reserved.



Plate 17: Domesticity and integration in *Edge of the City*. Kathleen Maguire, Sidney Poitier and John Cassavetes.
© 1957 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. All rights reserved.



Plate 18: Friendly visitations in *Edge of the City*.
© 1957 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. All rights reserved.

POWER! He loved it!
He took it raw in big gulps... he liked
the taste, the way it mixed with the
bourbon and the sin in his blood!



AN **ELIA KAZAN** PRODUCTION

BUDD SCHULBERG'S

**a Face
in the
Crowd**



STARRING
ANDY GRIFFITH and **PATRICIA NEAL**

WITH **ANTHONY FRANCIOSA** · **WALTER MATTHAU** · **LEE REMICK**

Story and Screen Play by **BUDD SCHULBERG** · Songs by **TOM GLAZER** and **BUDD SCHULBERG**

Directed by **ELIA KAZAN** · A **NEWTOWN** Production · Presented by **WARNER BROS.**

Plate 19: Poster for *A Face in the Crowd*. Elia Kazan and Budd Schulberg take on American mass media in a prophetic tale of show-biz fame and political demagoguery. © Newton Productions, Inc. Licensed by Warner Bros. Entertainment Company. All rights reserved.



Plate 20: Elia Kazan at the time he was directing *A Face in the Crowd*—intense in a T-shirt.



Plate 21: Elia Kazan and Andy Griffith on the set of *A Face in the Crowd*.
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Plate 22: Lonesome Rhodes milking a telethon for all it's worth in *A Face in the Crowd*.
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Plate 23: “Vitajex” TV commercial in *A Face in the Crowd*. “Come get the family size bottle, folks!”
© Newton Productions, Inc. Licensed by Warner Bros. Entertainment Company. All rights reserved.



Plate 24: Andy Griffith and Patricia Neal in *A Face in the Crowd*, directed by Elia Kazan.
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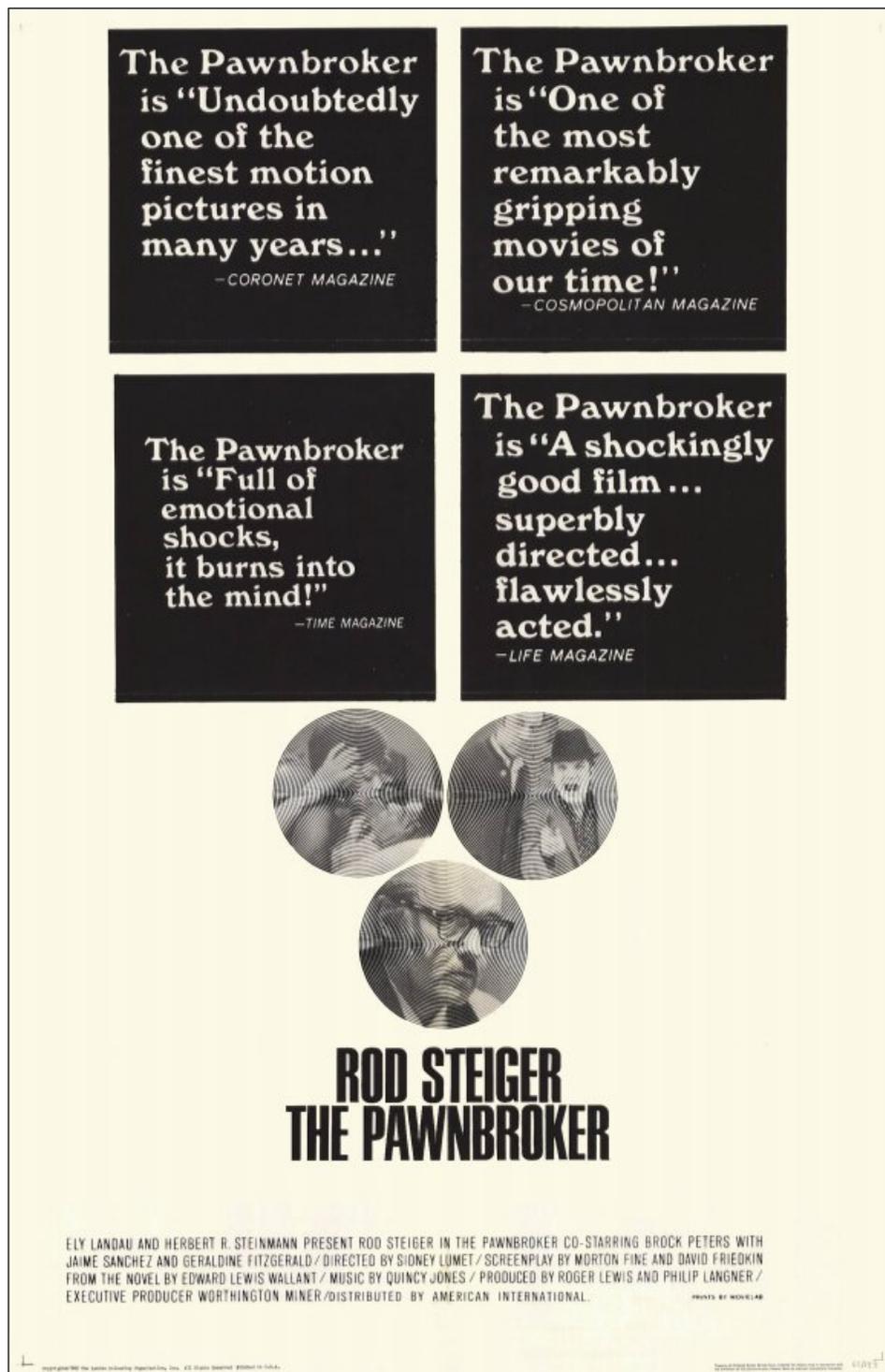


Plate 25: Poster for *The Pawnbroker*. Critical acclaim for an American "Film d'Art."
 Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. © 1965 Republic Entertainment Inc.® A Paramount/Viacom Company.
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Plate 26: Exploitation poster for *The Pawnbroker*. Luridness comes to the rescue of an American “Film d’Art.”
 Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. © 1965 Republic Entertainment Inc.® A Paramount/Viacom Company. All rights reserved



Plate 27: Alienation in *The Pawnbroker*. Social Worker Geraldine Fitzgerald tries to reach out to an insensitive Rod Steiger.
Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. © 1965 Republic Entertainment Inc.® A Paramount/Viacom Company. All rights reserved.



Plate 28: Backyard flashbacks in *The Pawnbroker*. Cold lemonade from Nancy R. Pollock brings Rod Steiger back to the present.
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Plate 29: Rod Steiger as Sol Nazerman opening his shop in the morning in *The Pawnbroker*.

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Plate 30: The Woman in a Slip on a Bed: Elizabeth Taylor in Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, directed by Richard Brooks for M-G-M.

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Plate 31: The Woman in a Slip on a Bed: Eva Marie Saint in Elia Kazan's
On The Waterfront.

Courtesy of Columbia Pictures. ©1954, renewed 1982 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.
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Plate 32: The Woman in a Slip on the Bed with her Mother: Debbie Reynolds and Bette Davis in Paddy Chayefsky's *The Catered Affair*, directed by Richard Brooks.
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Plate 33: The Woman in a Slip on a Bed: Kim Novak in Paddy Chayefsky's
Middle of the Night, directed by Delbert Mann for Columbia.

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Plate 34: The Woman in a Slip on a Bed: Natalie Wood in William Inge's *Splendor in the Grass*, directed by Elia Kazan.
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Plate 35: The Woman in a Slip Getting Out of the Bed: Susan Hayward and Richard Conte in *I'll Cry Tomorrow*, directed by Daniel Mann.

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Plate 37: The Embrace: Shirley Booth and Burt Lancaster in William Inge's
Come Back, Little Sheba directed by Daniel Mann.
Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. © 1952 Paramount Pictures Corporation. All rights reserved.



Plate 38: The Embrace: Don Murray and Patricia Smith in *The Bachelor Party*.
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(VHS screen capture)



Johnny: "Honey, there is no other woman. Look, baby—you don't know how much I need you, how much I love you, sometimes I want to bury myself in you . . ."
Celia: "Well, do . . ."

Plate 39: The Embrace: Don Murray and Eva Marie Saint in *A Hatful of Rain*, directed by Fred Zinnemann from the play by Michael V. Gazzo.
© 1957 Twentieth-Century Fox Film Corporation. All rights reserved.



Plate 40: The Embrace: Kim Stanley and Lloyd Bridges in Paddy Chayefsky's
The Goddess, directed by John Cromwell for Columbia.
Courtesy of Columbia Pictures. ©1958, renewed 1987 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.
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Plate 41: The Embrace: Andy Griffith and Patricia Neal in *A Face in the Crowd*, directed by Elia Kazan.



Plate 42: The Bedroom Scene: This Al Hirschfeld caricature for Jack Garfein's *Something Wild* fully illustrates the iconography of Theatrical Realism: Carroll Baker in a slip with disheveled hair on an equally disheveled bed, Ralph Meeker in a dirty undershirt aggressively making a fist and about to lunge at her, the peeling plaster and the exposed plumbing – all are essential icons of the style.
 ©1962 Al Hirschfeld Estate. Author's Collection. All rights reserved.



Plate 43: The Bedroom Scene: Joanne Woodward and David Wayne in *The Three Faces of Eve*. Eve White's bedroom is simple and austere, while Eve Black, her "naughty" counterpart, enjoys a drink and a cigarette in a tawdry motel room.
© 1957 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. All rights reserved.



Plate 44: The Bedroom Scene: Robert Preston and Dorothy McGuire enjoy marital bliss in William Inge's *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* under the direction of Delbert Mann.
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Plate 45: The Bedroom Scene: Don Murray and Patricia Smith discuss an abortion in Paddy Chayefsky's *The Bachelor Party*, directed by Delbert Mann.

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Plate 46: The Bedroom Scene: Alcoholism in bed—Jack Lemmon and Lee Remick in J.P. Miller's big screen adaptation of his Playhouse 90 teleplay *The Days of Wine and Roses*, directed by Blake Edwards.
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Plate 47: The Bedroom Scene: Paul Newman and Geraldine Page in Tennessee Williams' *Sweet Bird of Youth*, directed by Richard Brooks.

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Plate 48: The Bedroom Scene: Explicit postcoitum. Paul Newman and Patricia Neal in Larry McMurtry's *Hud*, directed by Martin Ritt. Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. © 1963 Paramount Pictures Corporation. All rights reserved.

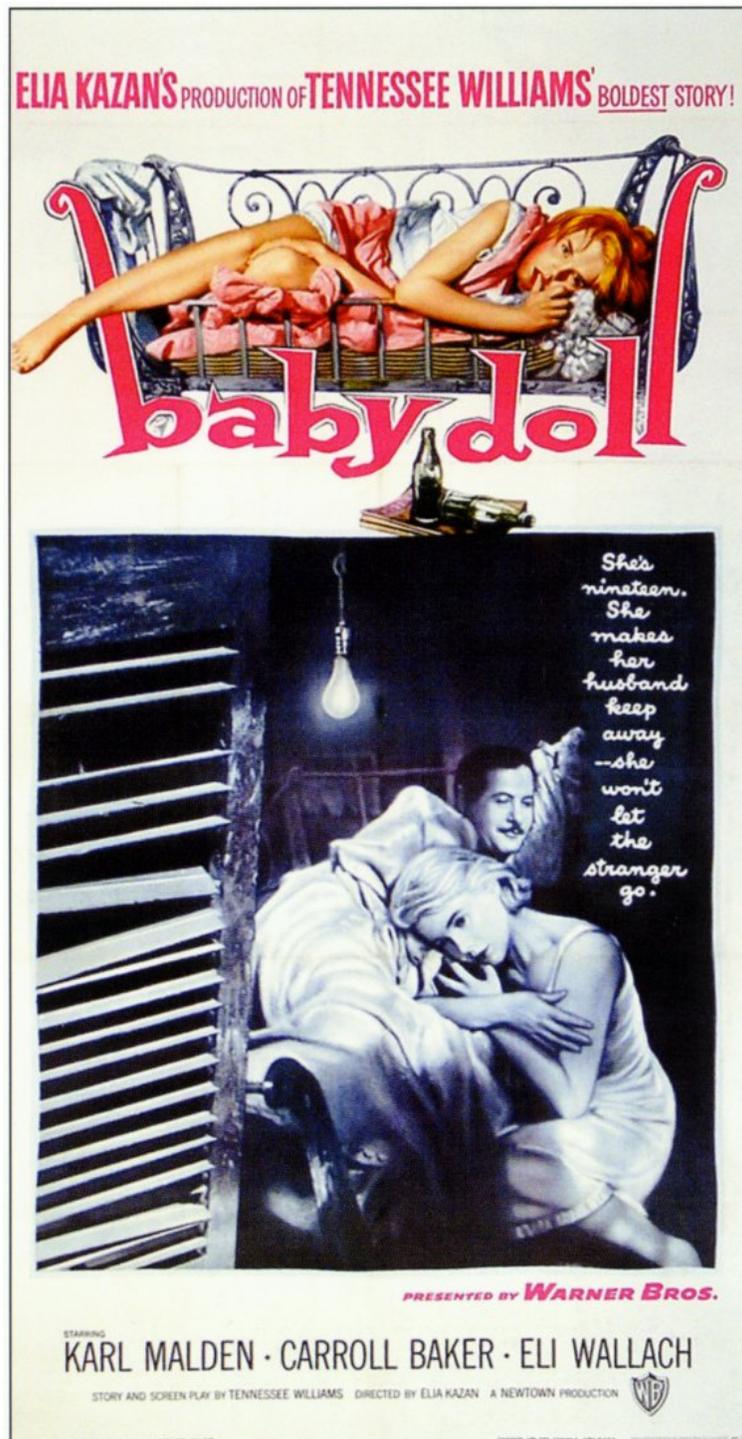


Plate 49: Implied fellatio made it to the poster of Tennessee Williams' *Baby Doll*, directed by Elia Kazan.
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Plate 50: The Kitchen Scene: Debbie Reynolds announces “I’m getting married” to her parents (Bette Davis and Ernest Borgnine), who react to the news with surprise in Paddy Chayefsky’s *The Catered Affair*, directed by Richard Brooks.
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Plate 51: The Kitchen Scene: Carol Lawrence and Raf Vallone (the male Anna Magnani?) in Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge*; set in Brooklyn, but filmed in Paris at the height of the French New Wave by Sidney Lumet.
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Plate 52: The Kitchen Scene: Esther Minciotti asks her son, Ernest Borgnine, “When are ya gonna get married?”
in Paddy Chayefsky’s *Marty*, directed by Delbert Mann.
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Plate 53: Torn Clothing: Kim Hunter and Marlon Brando in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, directed by Elia Kazan. All that shouting pays off when Stella comes down the stairs.
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Plate 54: Torn clothing in William Inge's *Picnic* (Rosalind Russell and William Holden). Theatrical Realism iconography favored torn T-shirts, but William Holden blew into town with only *that* shirt on his back.
Courtesy of Columbia Pictures. © 1955, renewed 1983 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. All rights reserved.

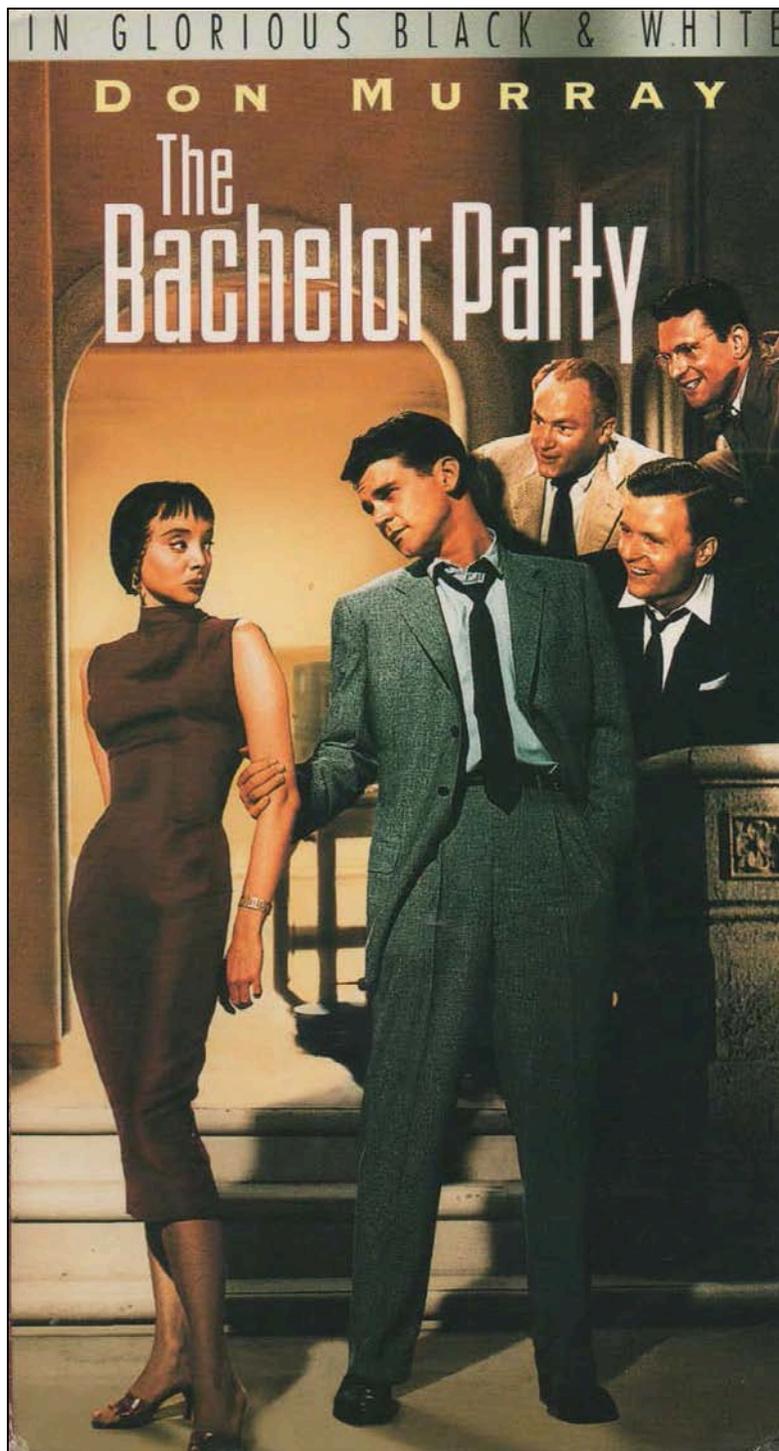


Plate 55: The Woman as Temptress: Don Murray and pals contemplate an overture to Carolyn Jones in Paddy Chayefsky's *The Bachelor Party*, directed by Delbert Mann.
(VHS Cover Art)

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Plate 56: The Woman as Temptress: Carroll Baker beckons Karl Malden with a promise to deliver the goods in Tennessee Williams' *Baby Doll*, directed by Elia Kazan.

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Plate 57: The Woman as Temptress: Sophia Loren in Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*, directed by Delbert Mann.
Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. © 1958 Paramount Pictures Corporation. All rights reserved.



Plate 58: The Woman as Temptress: Susan Hayward in *I Want to Live*, directed by Robert Wise.
A hyperactive heart of gold stops beating in the gas chamber.
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Plate 59: The Woman as Temptress: Tina Louise entices Buddy Hackett in Anthony Mann's film of Erskine Caldwell's sizzling Hillbilly potboiler *God's Little Acre*.

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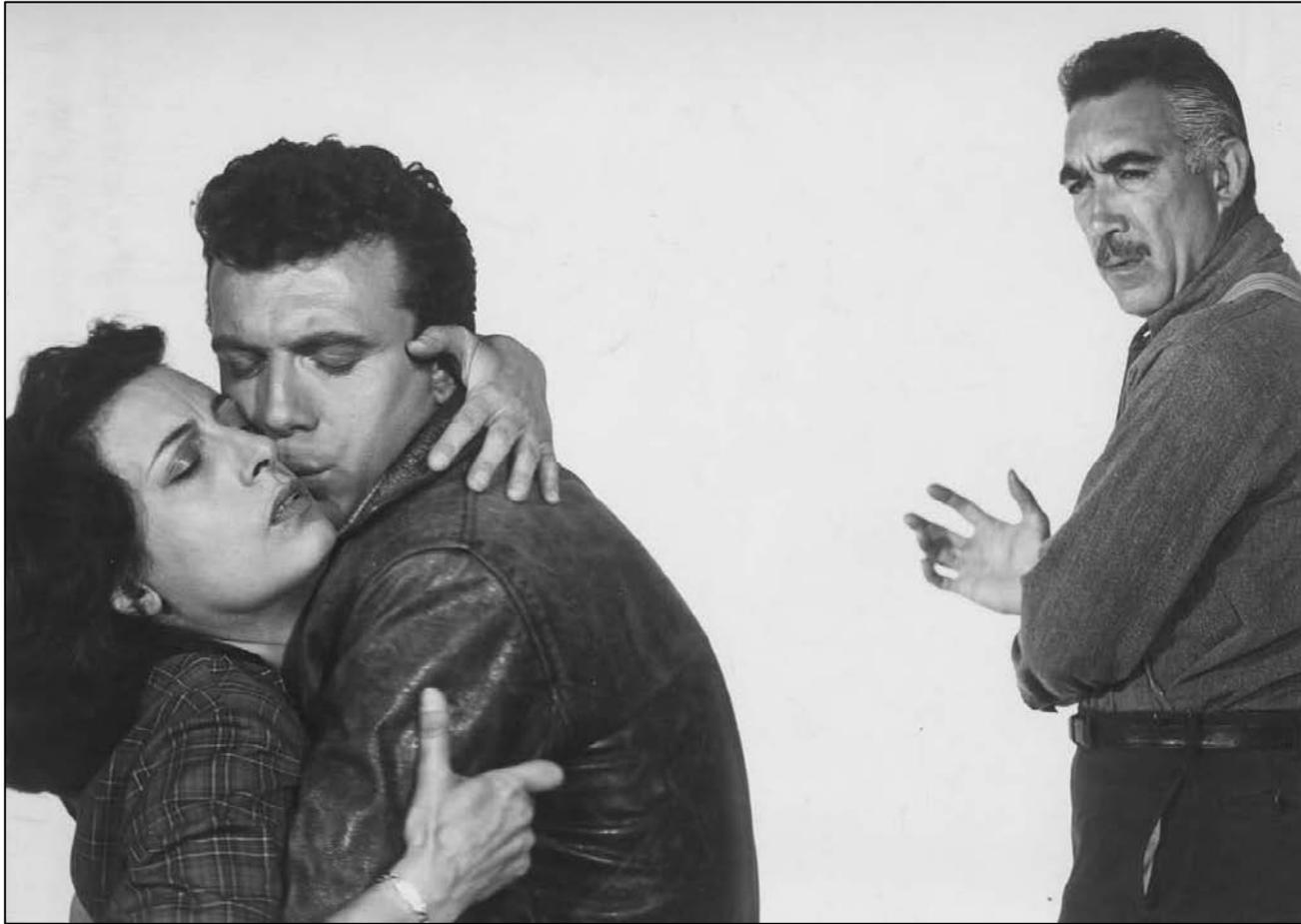


Plate 60: The Woman as Temptress: Anna Magnani provokes jealousy as she discards husband Anthony Quinn in favor of the younger Anthony Franciosa in *Wild is the Wind*, directed by George Cukor.
Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. © 1957 Paramount Pictures Corporation. All rights reserved.



Plate 61: The Woman as Temptress: Kevin McCarthy intrudes on his father (Fredric March) with a prostitute in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, a Stanley Kramer production directed by Laslo Benedek.
Courtesy of Columbia Pictures. ©1951, renewed 1982 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. All rights reserved



Plate 62: The Woman as Temptress: Marilyn Monroe demonstrates her paddleball coordination in John Huston's film of Arthur Miller's original screenplay *The Misfits*.
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Plate 63: Domestic Violence: James Dean lunges at his father (Jim Backus) while his mother (Ann Doran) tries to hold him back in *Rebel Without a Cause*, directed by Nicholas Ray.

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Plate 64: Domestic Violence: The radio on its way out the window. Kim Hunter, Marlon Brando and Vivien Leigh in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, directed by Elia Kazan.
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Plate 65: Domestic Violence: James Dean trying to see his mother in John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, directed by Elia Kazan.
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Plate 66: Domestic Violence: From horseplay to violence—Anthony Franciosa, Eva Marie Saint and Don Murray in Michael V. Gazzo's *A Hatful of Rain*, directed by Fred Zinnemann.
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Plate 67: Domestic Violence: Frank Sinatra offers a chair to Kim Novak
in Otto Preminger's *The Man with the Golden Arm*.
©1955 United Artists. All rights reserved



Plate 68: Domestic Violence: Carroll Baker offers some coffee to one of her customers in *Sylvia*, directed by Gordon Douglas.
Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. © 1965 Paramount Pictures Corporation. All rights reserved.



Plate 69: Domestic Violence: Carroll Baker keeps Ralph Meeker at bay in Jack Garfein's *Something Wild*.
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Plate 70: Juvenile Delinquents: Paul Mazursky, Sidney Poitier, Vic Morrow, Rafael Campos and Jameal Farah as the gang in Richard Brooks' *The Blackboard Jungle*.

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Plate 71: Juvenile Delinquents: Janet Leigh about to be terrorized in Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil*.
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Plate 72: Juvenile Delinquents: Dina Merrill being terrorized in *The Young Savages*—screenplay by Edward Anhalt and J. P. Miller based on a novel by Evan Hunter, directed by John Frankenheimer.

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Plate 73: Juvenile Delinquents: Burt Lancaster riding the New York subway in *The Young Savages*—the gang's all here.
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Plate 74: Juvenile Delinquents: The gang hanging out by the pawnshop in *The Pawnbroker*.
Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. © 1965 Republic Entertainment Inc.® A Paramount/Viacom Company. All rights reserved.



Plate 75: Juvenile Delinquents: The price of delinquency and the good doctor who works the slums.
Paul Muni in Daniel Mann's *The Last Angry Man*.
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Plate 76: Cages: Marlon Brando and Karl Malden in *On The Waterfront*.
Courtesy of Columbia Pictures. ©1954, renewed 1982 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. All rights reserved.



Plate 77: Cages: Anthony Perkins' breakdown in *Fear Strikes Out*, directed by Robert Mulligan.
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Plate 78: Cages: Jean Seberg in *Lilith*, directed by Robert Rossen from a screenplay by Rossen, Robert Alan Author and J. R. Salamanca.

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Plate 79: Rod Steiger at the end of *The Pawnbroker*.

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Plate 80: Superb use of CinemaScope by Nicholas Ray in *East of Eden*. The young wolf (James Dean) goes on the prowl, while the emasculated father (Jim Backus) wears an apron and cleans up the mess at home.

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