

Introduction

Contextualizing the tension between the ‘American Dream’ and Marxism in pre-blacklist Hollywood

The relationship between labour and capital in Hollywood was never noted for its harmony. Nevertheless, the class conflict within the American film industry usually resulted in workable compromises, albeit within a political framework limited by the prohibitive moral strictures of the Production Code of 1935 and the Motion Pictures Association of America (MPAA). Even the establishment of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in 1938, known as the Dies Committee after its first chairman Martin Dies Jr. (D-TX), did not significantly alter the uneasy co-existence between the Hollywood Left talent and old studio moguls. That is, not before the post-war reincarnation of HUAC, which left no room for political compromise: from 1947, the Committee went after Hollywood in earnest. Sometimes referred to as the Second Red Scare – the first followed the Russian Revolution – the political repression that followed in its wake is more commonly associated with Joseph McCarthy, a junior congressman from Wisconsin, who spearheaded the government attack on any political and cultural manifestation of un-Americanism (more precisely, anti-capitalism).

This unconstitutional attack on freedom of expression at the hands of the Congress marked a watershed not only in the relationship between labour and capital in Hollywood, but in the evolution of the dominant political aesthetics of American cinema. Thirty years ago, film

historian Richard Maltby declared, “No discussion of the relationship between American film and politics can regard itself as complete without devoting some space to the encounters between Hollywood and the House Committee on Un-American Activities.” Moreover, continued Maltby, “No adequate history of the Cold War in America can be written without reference to the blacklist and other agencies of cultural repression that were generated by those encounters.”¹ The persistence of the view of the central role of the blacklist in shaping subsequent American film practices is also manifest in more recent histories of Hollywood. Another film historian, Jon Lewis, recently wrote that “[t]eaching American film history requires a full-stop at the blacklist” because “the medium changed suddenly and significantly in 1947 when the Hollywood 10 were hauled in to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.”² For Lewis, that was “the historic moment when all the rules changed”; the blacklist offered the studios a “convenient way out” of perennial labour troubles. (Interview with Lewis, Feb 9, 2010)

The title of a chapter in Lewis’ *Hollywood v. Hard Core*, “How the Hollywood Blacklist Saved Hollywood,” exposes the economic rationalist standpoint of the old moguls. However, as it panned out, the historic defeat of radical Hollywood talent proved to be a pyrrhic victory for studio bosses: yes, the studios were purged of troublesome ‘reds,’ but their Wall Street backers went much further and completely reorganized their businesses, guided by the 1948 *Paramount Decision* which ruled that the integrated levels of production, distribution, and exhibition held by the studios constituted a monopoly. The studios were ordered to divest themselves of their distribution and exhibition arms.

¹ Maltby, R. (1981). “Made for Each Other: The Melodrama of Hollywood and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1947”. *Cinema, Politics and Society in America*. ed. Davies, Philip, & Neve, Brian. Manchester, Manchester University Press: 76-96.

² Lewis, J. (2009). “*High Noon* by Phillip Drummond [book review].” *Cinema Journal* 48.2 (Winter): 163-165.

In the lead up to this ‘historic moment,’ following the end of World War Two, the American economy was rocked by strikes. The Hollywood film industry was not spared ‘labour trouble,’ and it was not until the first HUAC hearings of 1947 were convened that radical Hollywood was put on notice. This period overlaps with the development of what came to be called film noir. However, the aesthetic evolution of American film noir (and film gris) was undercut by the studio heads, who saw this film mode as one which was likely to provide sympathetic portraits of the working class. The studio bosses were adamant that no trace of working-class activism would be allowed to reach the screen.

The moguls’ own defining ‘historic moment,’ one that crystallized their capitalist class consciousness, was the bitter, eight-month long strike at the Warners’ Burbank studios that began in October 1945, and which ultimately resulted in a 25% salary rise for film workers and artists. Paradoxically, this victory of skilled labour and (above-the-line) talent at the studio renowned for its commitment to the ‘social problem’ film, marked an end of the period in which Warners “made films in praise of the ‘little man,’”³ to quote one of the Warner brothers. The films to which Jack Warner was alluding include *I am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang* (1932), *Racket Busters* (1938), *The Roaring Twenties* (1939), and other films set in a proletarian milieu. In the end, the battle between labour and capital at Burbank ended with the crushing of the progressive, left Conference of Studio Unions (CSU), and the promotion of the company’s anticommunist International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE) union. What also made the strike significant was the level of violence that attended the arrival of scab labor

³ Foster, J. (1948). “Entertainment Only.” New Masses (66): 21-22.

and the studio's (ultimately unsuccessful) use of strong-arm tactics.⁴

William Wilkerson, writing in the *Hollywood Review* in 1947, saw the Waldorf Declaration as reflecting the “sudden desire to ‘clean house’ and to purge the industry of the so-called ‘realists.’ He looked forward to a new order, offering ‘pictures that tell of happiness, contentment and promise.’”⁵ But Jon Lewis uncovers a more pragmatic rationale for this ‘house cleanup.’ He reveals the elemental material interests that fuelled the studios’ and the Motion Picture Association of America’s (hereafter MPAA) instinctive anticommunism. In stressing that the Red Scare “did not mark the beginning of increased Federal regulation of Hollywood,” following the *Paramount Decision* of 1948, Lewis captures the essence of the lesson learned by these film capitalists: the blacklist “taught the studio membership of the MPAA that when they worked together they could turn a sow’s ear – how else can one describe the HUAC hearings – into a silk purse.”⁶ In other words, the ideological capitalist imperative went hand-in-hand with its profit motive.

For their part, Ceplair and Englund’s assessment of the significance of this defeat is that it represented a “sequel to the massive battle in which Hollywood in effect defeated radical trade-unionism.”⁷ Now, as Peter Stead surmised, “the impetus was coming from Washington.”⁸

The congressional hearings into the communist infiltration of the film industry (and all other

⁴ Correspondence with Jon Lewis, July 6, 2011

⁵ William Wilkerson in Neve, B. (2003). “HUAC, The Blacklist, and the Decline of Social Cinema.” *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959*. ed. Peter Lev, Berkley, UCal Press, p. 78

⁶ Lewis, J. (2009). “*High Noon* by Phillip Drummond [book review].” *Cinema Journal* 48.2 (Winter): 163-165.

⁷ Ceplair, L., & Englund, Steven (1979). *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community 1930 - 1960*. Chigago, University of Illinois Press, pp. 193-84

⁸ Stead, P. (1989). *Film and the Working Class: The Feature Film in British and American Society*. London, NY, Routledge, p. 153

industries and institutions) signaled this shift of gear by the White House towards a completely reconstituted, explicitly anticommunist, public discourse, where even the most innocuous liberal and democratic strivings by the adherents of the New Deal era effectively would be criminalised. However, it was a fundamental shift in the class orientation of the US Communist Party (CPUSA) (from the working class towards their ‘own’ capitalist class), manifested in its endorsement of Roosevelt’s Democratic government, that opened communists and fellow travelers to such attacks. This strategic shift had a profound impact on the American ‘cultural front,’ which, as is elaborated in Michael Denning’s historical study, was forged during the ‘proletarianization’ of mass culture in the US, borne of the mass radicalization of workers and artists after the Depression years. This active participation of the American working class in mass culture brought Hollywood face to face with an “untapped source of its vitality.”⁹ However, the artistic potential of this proletarian tide ultimately was sabotaged by its subservience to Stalinism. As Buhle and Wagner write in *Radical Hollywood*, “The war and the emergence of a Popular Front further detached them [the Hollywood Left] from the old premises of Marxism, and from the rigors of the Communist Party progress.”¹⁰

The perspective adopted in this doctoral thesis is that the Popular Front contained, rather than emancipated, American cinematic proletarian fiction.

The unhealthy political relationship between the social problem film and Stalinist aesthetics was critiqued by liberal critics of both pre- and post-blacklist epochs, and is powerfully embodied in

⁹ Jarrico, P., & Biberman, Herbert (1953/92). *Breaking Ground: The Making of Salt of the Earth. Celluloid Power: Social Film Criticism from The Birth of a Nation to Judgement at Nuremberg*. D. Platt. Metuchen, N.J. & London, The Scarecrow Press: pp. 478-484.

¹⁰ Buhle, P., and Wagner, Dave (2002). *Radical Hollywood: The Untold Story Behind America's Favorite Movies*. NY, The New Press, p. 342

some writing from Robert Warshow and Andrew Sarris. Warshow bemoans the emergence of the “middle-brow” culture of the “educated classes,” which meant that for the first time popular culture “was able to draw its ideological support from the most advanced sectors of society,”¹¹ or from the same Communist-inspired movement that Denning characterised as a “new historical bloc.”¹² But this bloc was precisely, as Warshow argues, what made it a ‘central problem’ for the American intellectual. “In one way or the other,” he concluded gloomily, the American intellectual of the 1930s identified him/herself with the Communist movement, which, after all, is “still the intellectual climate that was first established by the Communist-liberal-New Deal movement of the 30s.”¹³ In that context, joining the party was not necessarily about loving the Soviet way of life – it was primarily a moral gesture of a progressive intellectual, who never conceived of it as a treasonous political affiliation.

In the context of the sharpening crisis of both the economy and the ideological underpinnings of post-war capitalism in America and internationally, Washington recognised the far-reaching implications of the unchecked artistic strivings of the ‘Communist-liberal-New Deal movement of the 30s,’ which increasingly took the form of open criticism of capitalist relations in America. Post-war crime and urban dramas which gradually mutated into bleak, noirish portrayals of the inhumane aspects of the American Dream, offered perfect generic disguises for this kind of social critique.

¹¹ Warshow, R. (1971). “The Legacy of the 30s” (1947). The immediate experience : movies, comics, theatre and other aspects of popular culture. R. Warshow. New York, Atheneum: 33.

¹² Denning, M. (1996). The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century. London, NY, Verso, p. 63

¹³ Warshow, R. (1971). “The Legacy of the 30s.” (1947). The immediate experience : movies, comics, theatre and other aspects of popular culture. New York, Atheneum: 35.

After the blacklist, in the 1950s, films like *Marty* (1955), *On the Waterfront* (1954), and *Salt of the Earth* (1954), still the only officially banned American film to date, attempted to depict the reality of working class life, and the unreality of the American Dream, in a more concrete and confronting manner. However, as Quart and Auster note, “the film industry’s major pre-occupation was a non-ethnic middle class (e.g. Doris Day),” which would not change until the commercial success of *Godfather I* (1972) and *Godfather II* (1974) as well as the critical success of *Mean Streets* (1973). They further state that these films, “albeit within the confines of traditional melodramatic and violent Hollywood genre conventions, opened up questions of ethnicity, working-class mobility, family life, male-female roles, and the relationship of the working class to the American Dream.”¹⁴

Extending Auster’s and Quart’s criteria for problematising the treatment of the American Dream on film, this thesis argues that the most significant loss to American film art from the Red Scare was the consequence of the effective criminalization of those European Marxist or socialist ideas which had nourished the ‘proletarianised’ fiction of the Hollywood Left before the anticommunist establishment put a stop to this critical cultural dialogue with the Continent. That classical Hollywood owes a great deal of the glory of its ‘golden years’ to an unprecedented influx of radicalized, often socialist-minded Anglo-European talent, such as Robert Siodmak, Fritz Lang, Charles Chaplin, Fred Zinnemann, Michael Curtiz, Emeric Pressburger, Bertolt Brecht, and many others, is well recognised. However, one of the most discussed legacies of the émigré presence in Hollywood remains its formal stylistic contribution, as manifested in the iconic black and white expressionism of film noir. While not suggesting that these émigrés were

¹⁴ Auster, A., & Quart, Leonard (1981). The Working Class Goes to Hollywood. Cinema, Politics and Society in America. P. Davies, & Neve, Brian, Manchester University Press: pp. 163-175.

necessarily Bolshevik sympathizers, it seems clear that, once in Hollywood, the spirits of modernism and the avant-garde, cultivated in their old capitals, infused their formal cinematic innovation with progressive politics. That 1930s America proved a fertile ground for such a modernist synthesis of form and progressive content was demonstrated by, among others, Elia Kazan, who said to Michel Ciment in 1974, that when he was a student in the 1930s, the general sentiment among serious artists was that capitalism was a spent system, and that a new order based on socialist principles was not only a historical possibility, but a necessity.¹⁵ For his part, Abraham Polonsky related in a 1996 interview that “The attitude in our family was: if you’re not smart enough to be a socialist, you’re not smart enough to live.”¹⁶ In the lead up to the period of anticommunist witch-hunting, it appeared that socialism and Weimar expressionism could rejuvenate film noir.

Indeed, according to Buhle and Wagner, the two films in which Polonsky collaborated with John Garfield, *Body and Soul* (1947) and *Force of Evil* (1948), “quite simply embody the highest achievement of the American Left in cinema before the onset of repression. They were also among the first to reveal the promise of independent films in the United States, and by that measure, they summarise the best work of the generation that created the critical American cinema.”¹⁷ For Buhle and Wagner, some notable films of this generation—*Asphalt Jungle* (1950), *Brute Force* (1947), *The Strange Loves of Martha Ivers* (1946), *Try and Get Me* (1950), *A Place in the Sun* (1951), *The Naked City* (1948), *Night and the City* (1950), *They Live by*

¹⁵ Ciment, M. (1974). “The Political Issues; The HUAC: *Viva Zapata!* (1951), *Man on a Tightrope* (1952).” *Elia Kazan Interviews*, ed. William Bear (2000), Jackson, University of Mississippi Press: pp. 158-173.

¹⁶ Walsh, D. (1999). “Blacklisted US Film Director Abraham Polonsky Deat at 88 (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/oct1999/pol-o30.shtml>).” (Retrieved Sep 18, 2010.)

¹⁷ Buhle, P., and Wagner, Dave (2003). *Hide in Plain Sight: The Hollywood Blacklistees in Film and Television, 1950-2002*. NY, Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 326-27

Night(1949), and others are the “culmination of the Depression generation’s struggle to emancipate American dramatic art from the film corporations’ control.”¹⁸ Before the ‘historic moment’ in 1947 when ‘everything changed,’ wresting control from corporations was seen as a prerequisite for Polonsky’s and Garfield’s more ambitious artistic objective: to perform, in Polonsky’s words, “an autopsy on capitalism.”¹⁹

The story the thesis chapters tell

Chapter I concentrates on Polonsky’s and Garfield’s collaboration, and proceeds from an understanding that from 1945 to 1951 a brief window of opportunity opened up for overtly anti-capitalist cinema, presenting American film with a unique opportunity to evolve into a truly modernist art form, or at the very least, to have this as one possible strain of classical Hollywood cinema. The aesthetic synthesis of Clifford Odetsian street poetry along with other American theatrical and fictional idioms, accompanied by a sophisticated political consciousness, remains one of the landmarks of American film art. As Chapter I argues, when the blacklist criminalized these forms of political aesthetics, it also deprived future generations of film artists (and film audiences) of the kind of critical and creative tool set needed to illuminate the ‘big black box’ of contemporary capitalist crime and business.

In our current time, Mike Moore’s gimmicks in *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2010), such as encircling Wall Street banks with crime-scene tape, while amusing, merely highlight the most

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Andersen, T. (2007). “Red Hollywood”. *“Un-American” Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*. Krutnik, Frank, Neale, Steve, Neve, Brian, and Stanfield, Peter. New Brunswick, N.J. & London, Rutgers University Press: 259.

visible aspects of contemporary capitalist crimes. These comedic devices are no substitute for a creatively worked out, synthesized aesthetics that could reveal the extent of *invisible* “psychological injuries of class,” to borrow Thom Andersen’s phrase. One measure of what McCarthyism took from American cinema is evident in the fact that Moore is probably the most visible contemporary filmmaker critiquing Big Business crime. Abraham Polonsky is regarded as one of the main casualties of the blacklist, and this sense of loss of a possible cinematic direction is only reinforced by a real life crime-business thriller – the GFC/GEC – now playing out before global audiences, but without a contemporary Polonskian creative mind available to dramatise social devastation of this ‘giant ponzi scheme.’

Of all the challenges faced by the Hollywood Left in the 1940s and 1950s, it was the disintegration of their social network and base of support that contributed most of all to the weakening of their political immunity in the face of the growing reaction at home. As Reynold Humphries puts it, “[o]ne of the tragedies of the post-war period—due in no small part to the behaviour and attitudes of the American Communist Party (CPUSA) ... was the collapse of the alliance on the Left between liberals, radicals and Communists. Liberals left the ship long before it started sinking, although the mass exodus occurred after 1947.” Humphries then makes a useful distinction between the Stalinists of the CPUSA and the radicals whom he characterizes as “orthodox Marxists,” irreconcilably opposed to Stalinism.²⁰

Chapter II examines the turbulent career of the proletarian filmmaker Robert Rossen, which offers perhaps the most illustrative case study of the corrosive effect on an artist’s innate working-class consciousness of his subservience to the Stalinist wing of the Popular Front at the

²⁰ Humphries, R. (2008). Hollywood's Blacklists: A Political and Cultural History, Edinburgh University Press, p. 3

height of its credibility. While Rossen's 1930s work, which includes *Marked Woman* (1937) and *Racket Busters* (1938), demonstrates the skill and sensitivity he brings to his depiction of proletarian characters, their fates are inextricably bound up with their class enemies, embodied in the office of the District Attorney (DA). (Bogart, the racketeer in *Racket Busters* is the face of the Law in *Marked Woman*). Rossen's proletarian instincts, mollified by his Popular Front sensibilities, undergo something of a reawakening in his collaboration with Polonsky on *Body and Soul* (1947). Their creative differences that erupted during the making of that film express, in an aesthetic sense, the irreconcilable socialist and liberal impulses embodied in these two artists. While Polonsky made a definitive break with Stalinism, Rossen remained beholden to it, until his break with the Communist Party in 1947.

During the Red Scare of 1947 to the late 1950s, the witch-hunters had always based their anticommunism on "the assertion that the party and its adherents were part of an illegal conspiracy to destroy the American government by force and violence."²¹ The few challengers to America's involvement in WWII after the attack on Pearl Harbor, most notably the leadership of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP), were promptly imprisoned. As Chapter II will discuss in relation to the 'trucking' films of this era, these revolutionaries were at the forefront of the most militant truckers' and auto strikes in the 1930s. Revealingly, the Stalinist CPUSA wholeheartedly endorsed the arrests of these Trotskyists. From the standpoint of formal political logic, the Communist Party's support for the capitalist state against their left co-sympathisers might appear irrational. However, this political betrayal has to be viewed in its correct historical context. Despite their public professions of Marxism, the official Communist leadership,

²¹ Schrecker, E. (1998). Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America. New Jersey, Princeton University Press, p. 103

including its influential Hollywood branch, led by Lawson, sacrificed these core principles for political expediency by embracing the Democratic-sponsored Popular Front policy. This was a truly Faustian bargain on the part of the American section of the Stalinist Communist International (Comintern), however well-intentioned: the CPUSA surrendered its Marxist soul to the capitalist devil, forfeiting its fundamental principle of maintaining an uncompromising separation of bourgeois and proletarian interests. The price of the deal, which consisted in tying the interests of American workers to the ruling elite and sacrificing the former for the imperialist objectives of the latter in the war against their imperialist rivals, turned out to be political suicide.

One particularly revealing event, the nonaggression pact signed by Stalin and Hitler in 1939, finally compelled the CPUSA to put its cards on the table and take the Kremlin's side, thereby hastening its political disintegration. One blacklisted director, Bernard Vorhaus, provided one of the most cogent Stalinist rationalisations for this sordid deal:

[The Soviet Union] had tried for years to get a united front of the democratic countries against Hitler and hadn't succeeded, because they were hoping that Hitler and the Soviet Union would come to fight each other and either destroy each other or greatly weaken each other. It was only after the total inability to do this that the Soviet Union got time to build up its own defenses by signing this nonaggression pact. But I was also very much opposed to other Communist parties reducing their anti-German activities. I must say it was a very confused period.²²

²² Bernard Vorhaus qt. in Buhle, P., & McGillian, Patrick (1997). Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist. NY, St. Martin's Press, p. 673

While the Hitler-Stalin pact wreaked havoc on the Hollywood branch of the Party in the sphere of its revolutionary theory, it did little to dampen the combative spirit in the practical, day-to-day class struggle. The reality of this class antagonism presented American capitalism with a real challenge: the working people at home did not take attacks on their livelihoods lying down while the Fords and Rockefellers enriched themselves through explosive growth in the war economy. The infamous Burbank studio strike of 1945-46 was not exceptional in terms of the scale and intensity of the class battles at the time. As is usually the case when proletarian instincts are activated, or, to apply Broe's paraphrasing of Marx, when the 'class-of-itself' becomes 'class-for-itself', the working class's natural striving for social justice and equality can no longer be contained within the usual bourgeois, two-party, political channels. That means, in practical terms, that the critical task of policing the radicalised workforce is performed far more effectively by the workers' own official leadership, rather than the police. This thankless task was entrusted to the CP bureaucrats who were compelled to sabotage and suppress their members' industrial actions during the war, and who also were among the most committed enforcers of the wartime 'no strike' laws – in line with the imperialist aims of their government.

As the leader of American Trotskyists, James Cannon, quipped in relation to the CPUSA, "Never in history has any radical organization yielded up so many informers, eager to testify against it."²³ It is noteworthy that American Stalinism provided personnel for the committing of bloody crimes, including the assassination of Trotsky in Coyoacan, Mexico in 1940, as well as assisting the deaths of other left-wing figures such as anarchist leader Carlo Tresca, who was gunned down in New York in 1943. In all, the American CP was notorious for the use of goon squads

²³ Cannon, J. P. (1977). The Struggle for Socialism in the American Century: Writings and Speeches, 1945-47. NY, Pathfinder, p. 130

against opponents. During the 1943 coal strikes the CP called for the arrest and execution of United Mine Workers President John L. Lewis on charges of treason. The CPUSA's line on America's 'good' war was reflected in its Hollywood branch, which wholeheartedly lined up behind the war effort. Indeed, in the spirit of the Faustian bargain made with the Democrats, Lawson opened his script for *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943) with a quotation from Roosevelt. For all the healthy antifascist sentiment underlying these Hollywood war films, this liberal-Stalinist line could lead to only one logical conclusion.

A particularly odious manifestation of the CPUSA support for Democratic imperialism appeared in the front page of *Daily Worker* on August 9, 1945. This authoritative Stalinist mouthpiece reveled in the mass incineration in Hiroshima, describing it as part of a "one-two punch."²⁴ In *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund note, "The dozens of men and women who entered the Hollywood branches after 1941, however, were more overtly motivated by their 'Americanism' and impelled forward by a leftist brand of patriotism and the wartime alliance of communism and liberal democracy."²⁵

However, the Americanism Cannon had in mind had nothing in common with the CP's promotion of its government's imperialist interests. In one of the political ironies of the time, Cannon, the antiwar campaigner, turned out to be more patriotic than the cheerleaders of the American war effort in the Stalinist CP, at least in the original meaning of that term in America. In a message directed to the entire left radical milieu, the leader of American socialists linked the American Revolutionary tradition to classical Marxism: "You will never find two subjects which

²⁴ 'One-Two Punch', cartoon (1945). *Daily Worker*. (New York) 9 Aug.

²⁵ Ceplair, L., & Englund, Steven (1979). *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community 1930 - 1960*. Chigago, University of Illinois Press, pp. 183-84

fit better together. Marx sketched the whole broad outline of American capitalism as it is today in advance of its development. In return for that, American capitalism in all its main features is the crowning proof of Marxism. Our students go to Marx to study America, and study America to verify Marx.” To further emphasise this point, Cannon emphatically claimed that his party [Socialist Workers Party] “went to Marx – and discovered America.”²⁶ He provides a useful quotation from Trotsky, who declared that ““Marx will become the mentor of the advanced American workers.””²⁷ Cannon concludes, Karl Marx, the “supreme analyst of capitalism is most at home in the United States where the development of capitalism has reached its apogee.”²⁸

It was precisely at the end of the historical period beginning with the Depression and ending in the immediate postwar years that Marx seemed to upstage Uncle Sam, who was faced with the most serious political crisis of his existence. The surge of Hollywood Left artistic and production independence accompanied by the rise of film noir within the broader noir palette was a cinematic expression of a temporary shift in the balance of social power between the crisis-ridden bourgeoisie and labour in the US.

As is discussed in Chapter III, this political context invests Joseph Losey’s efforts to ‘bring Marx to American workers,’ with ever greater significance for American film art, although it cost Losey a career at home. In his educational trip to Moscow in 1935, Losey ‘went to Marx,’ indirectly, through collaboration with a key figure in Soviet avant-garde theatre, Vsevolod Meyerhold. This thesis argues that any theoretical milestone in American film art had to cut through its national myths – such as the uncritical acceptance of the ‘American Dream’ – and

²⁶ Cannon, J. P. (1951). From Karl Marx to the Fourth of July. The Militant (July 16).

²⁷ Trotsky qt. in Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

assimilate the highest theoretical levels attained not only in film art, but in dramatic art in general. Since Russian avant-garde drama, led by figures such as Meyerhold and Okhlopov, was at the forefront of the synthesis of revolutionary politics and aesthetics, it follows that the American 'cultural front' could only profit from acquainting itself with such theoretical achievements. The relative advantage enjoyed by Okhlopov, Meyerhold, Stanislavsky, Mayakovsky, and countless other Soviet artists over their American counterparts was their direct exposure to, and living through of, the first and only successful revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Therefore, these Proletkultists enjoyed a hitherto unprecedented intellectual climate – before the Stalinist clampdown – conducive to the creation of genuine proletarian art. It is no exaggeration to say that the 'cultural front' in America, fueled by the Depression, shared the same goal.

This is not surprising, since, as Warshow argues, unlike in Europe where it was just one of the contending radical ideologies – together with social democracy, labourism, various socialist and even Trotskyist tendencies – when communism gripped radicalized Americans, it was *the* ideology of progress. In Europe, the movement was “at once more serious and more popular,” and while it represented there “still only one current in intellectual life,” in America, “there was a time when virtually all intellectual vitality was derived in one way or the other from the Communist party.” Warshow concludes that the Communist party “ultimately determined what you were able to think about and in what terms.” Crucially, this resulted in “a disastrous vulgarization of intellectual life,” in which “the character of American liberalism and radicalism was decisively – and perhaps permanently – corrupted.”²⁹

²⁹ Warshow, R. (1971). “The Legacy of the 30s” (1947). The immediate experience : movies, comics, theatre and other aspects of popular culture. R. Warshow. New York, Atheneum: pp. 34-35.

With points like this in mind, Losey's place in the annals of American film art, aside from his well crafted American noirs like *The Lawless*, *The Prowler*, and *M* (he called *The Boy with Green Hair* too sentimental), should be reassessed in terms not only of how much of 'Marx he brought to American workers,' but also in terms of the extent to which he managed to resist the corrupting Stalinist conception of realism, so dominant at this time. The chapter on Losey will, therefore, reexamine his American work in terms of his Marxian and modernist imperatives, and explore the degree to which he was forced to surrender these tendencies to the studios, during the Hollywood stage of his artistic journey from Meyerhold to the UK and Harold Pinter.

While the Hollywood Left, under the political leadership of the Lawson-led Hollywood branch of the Party, uncritically accepted the Democratic-Stalinist framework of the Popular Front, they were acutely aware of the dangers posed by the impact of US imperialism on the home front. Indeed, more perceptive members of the Hollywood Left drew the connection between the attacks on domestic culture and film and the interests of the American bourgeoisie. Lawson himself argued that "the development of an aggressive plan for the United States to control the world by military force after the end of World War II required a rapid reorientation of the dominant culture."³⁰ Dalton Trumbo, in his letter to Sam Sillen in 1953, identifies three main reasons why the HUAC targeted Hollywood: "(1) to destroy trade unions; (2) to paralyse anti-fascist political action; and (3) to remove progressive content from films."³¹ Philip French, in his 2008 lecture, "Cold War and American Cinema," elaborates on HUAC's "broader project that was shared across the conservative wing of the Republican Party and points right," with the main

³⁰ Lawson qt. in Neve, B. (1992). *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition*. London, NY, Routledge, p. 93

³¹ Dalton Trumbo qt. in Schawrtz, N. L. (1982). *Hollywood Writers Wars*. NY, Alfred A. Knoph, p. 286

objective to “bring into disrepute the political initiatives and achievements” of Roosevelt’s New Deal, and to “set about dismantling the structures he had created.”³² But Nancy Lyn Schwartz, even from the 1970s and 80s liberal perspective, further concretizes the political motivations behind the witch-hunting in Hollywood. She argues that it is a conflation of many internal and external factors, but the alignment of Wall Street with the Republicans seems to have been decisive. And the Republicans wasted no time in attacking the heritage of Roosevelt’s New Deal. As Schwartz explains, “Because of Hollywood’s support of Roosevelt, the publicity the movie industry offered could also be used in the post-war attempt to eradicate all vestiges of the New Deal era.”³³ Still, Abraham Polonsky goes one step further, relating this unfavorable political climate to the loss of the 1945-46 CSU strike in Hollywood and the subsequent defeat of the more radical unions of the CIO. This loss, Polonsky says, “made McCarthyism possible” because the unions were the main allies of the New Deal. In Polonsky’s view, while the spirit of the New Deal “did exist in some of the big CIO unions,” that spirit was “destroyed in the internal struggles within those unions.”³⁴ According to Dennis Broe, Polonsky’s assessment, “quite clear in its negative prognosis for the left, is also unusual in that it indicates a direct causality between the defeat of the most organized wing of the working class (the CIO and the CSU) and the attack on intellectuals which follows the attack on the progressive unions.”³⁵

According to Maltby, the publicity generated from this attack on intellectualism and progressivism fanned “the mutually supportive melodramas Hollywood and the Committee wove

³² French, P. (2011). *The Cold War and the American Cinema. I Found It at the Movies: Reflections of a Cinephile.* London, Carcanet: 257-275.

³³ Schawrtz, N. L. (1982). *Hollywood Writers Wars.* NY, Alfred A. Knoph, p. 286

³⁴ Abraham Polonsky in Broe, D. (2001). *Outside the Law: Labor and the crime Film 1941 - 55,* New York University, p. 276

³⁵ Ibid.

around their encounter in 1947.” As Maltby explains, so far as Washington was concerned, both HUAC and Hollywood shared “a political importance that was based not on the realities of political practice but on the power of suggestion.” This is where the melodramatic qualities of this particular encounter lie, and for Washington, the political benefits of “melodramatic oversimplification of political debate” served their interests well.³⁶ Those interests were bound up with the government’s imperialist agenda, both at home and abroad. In essence, doing away with the trappings of the New Deal and removing progressive content from movies were seen as a central prerequisite for the effective pursuit of this strategy. In that sense, the remarks by Dan Bessie on the “hidden agenda” of the witch-hunters are useful in further illuminating the real threat to the ‘military-industrial complex’ as perceived by its representatives. He remarks that, “Undoubtedly, progressivism was a target. The humanistic position assumed by Hollywood Communists was obviously viewed as highly controversial.”³⁷ In this context, Schwartz’s emphasis on the decisive character of the post-war alignment of Wall Street and the Republicans makes better sense. But this assessment is applicable only after Germany and Japan were neutralized as imperialist rivals of the US. After this was accomplished in 1945, Roosevelt’s Popular Front strategy was no longer serving the interests of US imperialism, but rather was an impediment to its expansionist policy. What was now required was nothing less than a rollback of its wartime ally, the USSR.

The aspiration for overseas dominance by the White House was accompanied by a domestic war on those political affiliations and ideologies which were perceived to be ‘un-American.’

³⁶ Maltby, R. (1981). *Made for Each Other: The Melodrama of Hollywood and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1947*. Cinema, Politics and Society in America. P. Davies, & Neve, Brian. Manchester, Manchester University Press: 76-96.

³⁷ Dan Bessie qt. in Gladchuk, J. J. (2006). Hollywood and Anticommunism: HUAC and the Evolution of the Red Menace, 1935-50, Routledge, p. 101

Historian Richard Pells, writing about the American liberals during the McCarthy era, offers pertinent insights into how this social layer sought to drop their own ‘un-American’ tag. The striking aspect of his comments, relating to the 1940s and 50s, is their pertinence today, or for that matter, across the entire post-war period. He writes:

Many of them were too eager to embrace established political and economic practices, too reluctant to reevaluate the diplomacy of the Cold War, too enamoured with the role of leaders and experts, too cooperative with McCarthyism, and too obsessed with the psychological and moral agonies of the middle class—a preoccupation that led them to neglect the systemic diseases of urban decay, racism, and poverty.³⁸

This rapid realignment of the 1940s liberals, in the context of the relative success of the domestic war on ‘un-Americanism’ coincided with, and was fueled by, the expansion of the material basis of US and world capitalism. Godfrey Hodgson, an American historian writing in the 1970s, at the height of liberal consensus politics, captures the intellectual climate of post-war America:

The war unleashed an economic leap forward, which gradually engendered a new social optimism. By 1945, the United States seemed to be the supremely successful society as well as the supremely victorious nation. Most Americans benefited from this new prosperity.... A few years earlier capitalism had seemed to be on the defensive. Suddenly, it seemed that it was the wave of the future. In the rich humus of the wartime boom, a social ideology sprung up to match anti-communism in international politics. The heart of this new ideology of free enterprise was a faith in the harmony of interests: the promise of American capitalism seemed to be that it could produce abundance on

³⁸ Pells, R. H. (1985). *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s*. NY, Harper and Row, p. ix

such a scale that social problems would be drowned under a flood of resources. Social conflict would become an anachronism.³⁹

This was the beginning of the longest period of economic prosperity in the history of the country, a development which seriously undermined whatever remained of the ‘spirit of October,’ contained in the Russian Revolution, in which an entire generation of sensitive and serious film artists, including the main subjects of this doctoral study, formed their creative beings. Whatever one’s attitude to this epochal event of the last century, in the sphere of drama and film it compelled artists to creatively rework the idea of the revolutionary potential of the working class. Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Vertov, and other modernist practitioners of Soviet montage strove to shift individualist aesthetics towards the social interpretation of the dramatized events, i.e., to achieve a ‘socialisation’ of dramatic representation. While the famous scene of the Odessa steps massacre may be out of place in the American idiom of this period (it will later be cited in US cinema everywhere from Woody Allen comedies to Brian de Palma’s gangster film, *The Untouchables*), classical Hollywood film noir nonetheless was a fertile ground for a degree of ‘socialisation’ of drama. It permitted an aligning of a particular film’s ‘internal’ narrative logic to the ‘external’ objective class logic of society. In 1973, Andrew Sarris, a key representative of US post-blacklist liberal criticism, aptly articulated the feeling of his epoch and spelled out unambiguously just why the Odessa massacre was out of place in pluralist America: “My own political position is rabidly centrist, liberal, populist, more Christian than Marxist.... I believe more in personal redemption than social revolution.... The ascending and descending staircases of Hitchcock are more meaningful to me than all the Odessa Steps.... I never wept for Spain or

³⁹ Hodgson, G. (1976). *America in Our Time*. NY, Doubleday, p.18

Chile...”⁴⁰ The select group of Hollywood Left filmmakers discussed in this thesis: Polonsky, Rossen, Losey, Kazan, and Biberman, were allowed to reverse this trend somewhat, before the second HUAC attack of 1951 put them on the defensive.

The last two directors on the list, Kazan and Biberman, are discussed in Chapters IV and V respectively. Kazan’s *On the Waterfront* and Biberman’s *Salt of the Earth* represent, in cinematic terms, two diametrically opposed sets of political aesthetics deployed in response to the post-1951 criminalisation of these filmmakers’ past affiliations. According to Sefcovic, it is remarkable that these seminal labor and union films – both representing “early examples of cinema realism and narrative adaptations of news stories about union struggles,” – “have not yet been read against each other.”⁴¹ Chapters IV and V of this thesis concentrate on *Waterfront* and *Salt* with a view to reassessing the political aesthetics of these classic labour films in terms of the two vastly different reactions they received from the anticommunist establishment. While Kazan’s rendition of the waterfront troubles, for all its undeniable skill and authenticity, was tailor-made for the ideology of the ‘American Way,’ Biberman, Wilson, Jarrico & co. bore the brunt of the witch-hunters’ wrath for presenting a working-class victory that was *complete*, and even worse, delivered by the workers’ own, *democratic* union. A contrast to the criminal, mobster outfit, led by Johnny Friendly, in *Waterfront* could not be starker. The suppression of *Salt* heralded, as Thom Andersen argued, one of the key legacies of blacklisting, “the

⁴⁰ Sarris, A. (1973). *The Primal Screen: Essays on Film and Related Subjects*. NY, Simon and Schuster, p. 61

⁴¹ Sefcovic, E. (2002). "Cultural Memory and the Cultural Legacy of Individualism and Community in Two Classic Films about Labor Unions." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19.3 (Sep): pp. 329-351; also, this is precisely what Dennis Broe carried out in a comprehensive manner in his dissertation Broe, D. (2001). *Outside the Law: Labor and the crime Film 1941 - 55*, New York University.

marginalization of neorealism in American cinema.”⁴² But the stunting of a fledgling neorealism was not the only ‘European’ casualty of the Red Scare.

Moreover, Chapter IV argues that Kazan’s passionate embrace of Stanislavskian Method acting reflects more than his desire to capture the authentic emotions of his actors, and the most prominent exponent of this new authenticity was Marlon Brando in the role of Terry Malloy. As Kazan put it in an interview with Scorsese, his ultimate desire was “stir up the real emotions,” to create something “unique,” that will perfectly capture a moment in time. But at what price?, is the question explored in this chapter. After all, if, as Kazan told Scorsese, all the films he made after his ‘friendly’ testimony of April 1, 1951, “were personal, they came from me,”⁴³ then one inescapable conclusion is that this cleansing ritual rid Kazan of the Stalinist shackles that held his true auteurist vision in check.

As discussed in Chapter V, the creators of *Salt of the Earth* saw no such creative conflict of interest with American Stalinism. Wilson, Jarrico, Biberman, and other blacklisted filmmakers associated with this essentially pro-union film could, at worst, be charged with promoting greater sensitivity of unions to the democratic aspirations of their rank-and-filers. However, for all their illusions in the self-reformative powers of union bureaucracy, the conflict of interest was all too real. The ferocity of attacks against the film crew, and the near successful suppression of its exhibition, testify to the raw nerve set off at all levels of Big Business, and Big Labour, by its promotion of ‘democratic unionism.’ It turned out that the kind of authenticity achieved by

⁴² Andersen’s “Afterword” in Krutnik Frank, Neale Steve, Neve Brian, and Stanfield Peter, Ed. (2007). *“Un-American” Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, London, Rutgers University Press, p. 275

⁴³ Scorsese, M., & Jones, Kent (2010). A Letter to Elia. USA, Echo Bridge Entertainment.

Michael Wilson, who effectively surrendered the editing rights to his screenplay to its protagonists, the New Mexico miners, was all too real and dangerous for the anticommunist establishment. While Kazan derived high levels of authenticity by ‘stirring up real emotions,’ from his *individual* star performers, in addition to his meticulous eye for detail, Wilson, Jarrico and Biberman foregrounded the *collective* qualities of the working class. When translated into their narration, the union at the center of *Salt of the Earth* was too ‘red.’

Indeed, it was only after the troublesome ‘reds’ and ‘pinks’ were pruned from the dominant ‘social problem’ discourse in Hollywood that a new wave of liberal critics, such as Sarris and Pauline Kael, could launch attacks on “sociologically oriented” film historians. Sarris famously wrote that these critics have been “misled” to believe that the “artistic essence of cinema is in its social concerns. Realism and social consciousness thus became the artistic alibis of socially conscious film historians, and genre films without a sociological veneer were cast into dustbins of commercial entertainments.”⁴⁴ While such liberal anticommunist criticism correctly exposed a real flaw in the Hollywood Left’s approach to American society, it is worth stressing that the CP’s own Stalinist leadership should take the main responsibility for opening its Hollywood sympathizers to what one might term, justifiable, liberal attacks.

Maltby argued that the hysteria surrounding the Red Scare “provided its historians with a perspective too narrow to encompass the implications of the Committee’s significance.” Moreover, this history, “is not contained within the history of its victims, nor is it sufficiently

⁴⁴ Sarris, A. (1996). The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929-68. NY, De Capo Press, p. 15

described by an account which discusses only the conventional[ly] political.”⁴⁵ The chapters that follow constitute an attempt to expand this history beyond the ‘conventionally political’ and contextualize the work of a select group of Hollywood Left figures whose films are deemed the most consummate expressions of the contending strands of the ideological landscape of post-war America. The resurgent anti-communist liberalism of Kazan will be counter-posed to the defiant Popular Frontism espoused in Biberman’s *Salt of the Earth*. Rossen’s Popular Front sensibility – from its high point in the late 1930s to its low point in the late 1940s – will be recontextualised in the period of the post-war surge in the Hollywood Left’s new-found sense of freedom in their exploration of social problems, which give rise to the heightened ‘social and psychological realism’ of film gris. It was during this brief window of opportunity for the revolutionising of the conventional Hollywood ‘social problem’ film that Polonsky’s Marxian perspective was allowed a creative outlet. The same claim will be tested when assessing Losey’s Marxist and modernist legacy on Hollywood – before he found a sanctuary in the more receptive climates of England and Europe.

Unlike most of the available literature on blacklisted filmmakers, this contribution to the subject of McCarthyism takes as its starting point a belief that, even if bitter political enemies, Stalinism and McCarthyism shared a fundamental hostility to Marxism and, in turn, to those artists most inspired by the possibilities offered by its dialectical materialism.

The next chapter moves on from these broad, introductory comments, to a contextualizing of Polonsky’s pre-blacklist films, and his collaboration with fellow blacklistees John Garfield and

⁴⁵ Maltby, R. (1981). *Made for Each Other: The Melodrama of Hollywood and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1947*. Cinema, Politics and Society in America. P. Davies, & Neve, Brian. Manchester, Manchester University Press: 76-96.

Robert Rossen, in what would turn out to be the last window of opportunity to perform ‘an autopsy on capitalism’ before the HUAC criminalized such cinematic endeavors.

Chapter 1

Conscious and ‘Unconscious’ Marxism in Hollywood: Abraham Polonsky, John Garfield and their cinematic challenge to ‘The American Way’

“This is Wall Street.... Tomorrow, July 4th, I intended to make my first million.” The edgy voice of the narrator belongs to Joe Morse, played by John Garfield, as he looks down on Wall Street from his brokerage, “high in the clouds.” Joe is a crooked lawyer who comes up with a brilliant scheme for his gangster boss, Ben Tucker, to take over all the illegal numbers rackets by rigging the lottery to draw a number everyone has bet on, thus bankrupting the small numbers banks, and paving the way for the big speculators to swoop in and bail them out. Morse and Tucker thus consolidate the small banks and form a monopoly. If this plot line resonates with today’s perceptions, and practices, of Wall Street, it is not accidental. Some old adages can be applied, among them, that sometimes life imitates art, or, more aptly, to paraphrase Marx, history may not repeat itself, but it certainly rhymes. Allowing for some minor technical adjustments to account for representing the highly evolved and sophisticated contemporary financial markets, all the key movers and shakers of *Force of Evil* would not be out of place in today’s Wall Street. As Dennis Broe points out in his groundbreaking study of the Hollywood Left’s challenge to capitalism after the war, *Film Noir, American Workers and Postwar Hollywood*, in its content, *Force of Evil*

“directly conflate[es] gangsters and Wall Street investors.”¹ But Reynold Humphries’s study of the film reveals just how far Polonsky goes beyond this notion, in his “far more ambitious” undertaking to show “that big business is crime and that capitalism is based on precisely this equation between the two.” In fact, argues Humphries, Joe’s remark in response to his and Tucker’s plans to bankrupt many small competitors, “We’re normal financiers,” only reinforces the notion that banking, “as the economic basis of capitalism is seen as a combination of robbery and criminality.”² In their introduction to their seminal collection of interviews with blacklisted filmmakers, *Tender Comrade*, McGilligan and Buhle make a rather sweeping assertion in support of Polonsky’s political aesthetics when they situate them in the field of post-war noir that was “imbued with the awareness that crime was at its base about capitalism and capitalism about criminal greed.”³

Nearly six decades on, on the eve of the sub-prime crisis, in July 2007, this is how the CEO of Citigroup Chuck Prince articulated Wall Street’s take on criminal greed: “When the music stops, in terms of liquidity, things will be complicated. But as long as the music is playing, you’ve got to get up and dance. We’re still dancing.”⁴ But in the spring of 2008, the music stopped. Something happened on Wall Street that set in motion a chain of events that could irrevocably change the course of the history of American, and world, capitalism. The fifth largest investment bank in the States, Bear Sterns, went bankrupt. On the surface of things this bankruptcy was nothing extraordinary in the world of high stakes financial speculation and gambling. In fact, the

¹ Broe, D. (2009). *Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood*. Gainesville, University Press of Florida, pp. 51-53

² Humphries, R. (2001). “When Crime Does Pay: Abraham Polonsky’s *Force of Evil* (1948).” *Q/W/E/R/T/Y: Arts, Literature & Civilisations du Monde Anglophone* 11(Oct 2001): 205-210.

³ Buhle, P., & McGilligan, Patrick (1997). *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist*. NY, St. Martin’s Press, p. xx

⁴ Namamoto, M. (2007). Interview with Chuck Prince, July 7, 2007. *Financial Times*. Tokio.

chief economics writer for the *Financial Times*, Martin Wolf, remarked that since the late 1970s there had been no fewer than 117 systemic banking crises in 93 countries, half the world's nations.⁵ This collapse, however, revealed something qualitatively new about the decay of global capitalism. Wolf elaborates: "For three decades now we have been promoting the joys of a liberalised financial system and what has it brought us? 'One massive financial crisis after the other' is the answer." But the crisis of 2007-2008, he continued, was "far and away the most significant of all the crises of the last three decades." What makes this crisis so significant, he explains, is that "It tests the most evolved financial system we have. It emanates from the core of the world's most advanced financial system and from transactions entered into by the most sophisticated financial institutions, which use the cleverest tools of securitisation and rely on the most sophisticated risk management. Even so, the financial system blew up...."⁶

Remarkably, this award-winning financial analyst felt, "I no longer know what I used to think I knew. But I also do not know what I think now." Emphasising the need to learn from history, he continued: "A fundamental lesson concerns the way the financial system works. Outsiders were aware it had become a gigantic black box. But they were prepared to assume that those inside it at least knew what was going on. This can hardly be true now."⁷ Even by the autumn of that historic year, no insider was able to look inside this 'gigantic black box'. Wall Street investment bank Lehman Brothers was the next casualty at the big end of town, collapsing in September of 2008, the biggest such collapse ever. Nearly two years on, according to the *Financial Times*, an official report released on March 11, 2010 by Anton Vaulkas, a bankruptcy court-appointed

⁵ Wolf, M. (2010). "Demand Shortfal Casts Doubt on Early Recovery," Jul 7, 2010, Ibid. London.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Wolf, M. (2008). 'The rescue of Bear Stearns marks liberalisation's limit.' *Financial Times* (London) 25 March <www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8ced5202-fa94-11dc-aa46-000077b07658.html> on 11 April 2008.

examiner, concludes, “that there is credible evidence against Mr Fuld [the CEO] and others for breach of their fiduciary duties and against E&Y [their auditors] for professional malpractice,” which is also a “further blow to the battered credibility of the entire banking industry.” The *Times* quotes Simon Maughan, analyst at MF Global in London: “Give bankers of any ilk an inch and they will take a mile.... Lehman might just have taken a couple of miles.”⁸

The initial trigger for the financial meltdown was a criminal practice by the loan sharks swooping into the previously untouched bottom tier of the population – those with virtually no credit history. This predatory practice eventually snowballed into another lucrative practice of repackaging the dubious sub-prime loans and selling them as ‘Collateralised Debt Obligations,’ or CDOs. The problem with these CDOs is elaborated by John Lanchaster in his article “Citiphilia” for the *London Review of Books*, a piece which deals with the ins-and-outs of the derivatives speculation. He writes that the “sub-prime derivatives were passed around and sold from bank to bank in an entirely untransparent way, in a gigantic game of pass-the-parcel.” Consequently, “no one knows who’s holding the parcel.”⁹

The purpose of this opening digression into the mechanics of Twenty First-century capitalism is to pose some key questions with which this thesis will attempt to grapple. Firstly, is American cinema equipped to dramatise, or at least fictionalise, such complex socioeconomic processes as they affect the vast majority of the population? And secondly, the central focus of the study, did the anticommunist purges of the Hollywood Left in the 1940s and 50s take away a vital component of American film art, curtail a tradition or model which would have enabled

⁸ Francesco Guerrera, H. S. a. P. J. (2010). Lehman file rocks Wall Street, March 12. *Financial Times*. NY, London.

⁹ Lanchaster, J. (2008). “Cityphilia.” *London Review of Books* 30.1 (January 3): 9-12. Lanchaster also wrote “Cityphobia” and later published *Whoops* (2010)

contemporary filmmakers to create the kind of cinema that could make sense of the ‘giant black box’ dominating our epoch?

If the financial experts are to be believed, we are passing through epochal changes to the financial system, comparable to those in which the blacklisted generation matured artistically – the second ‘Great Depression’. This detour into the current, incomprehensible financial instruments in no way suggests that filmmakers require sound grounding in economics in order to critique the material basis of the society in which they live; however, a strong sense of the social and psychological *impact* of economic practices on the population would give film artists a vital component – an *empathy*, or a certain *feeling*, for the working class. In any case, if profiting from trading in debt and repackaging it into CDOs seems a tad bizarre, or perhaps too technical and elaborate to be distilled into a workable film script, one need only go back six decades to the end of WWII, when a promising young filmmaker, Abraham Polonsky, carried out, in his own words, “an autopsy on capitalism,” in a film that Richard Corliss describes as part of “[Polonsky’s] late-forties trilogy on the profit motive.”¹⁰ In Jon Lewis’s words, *Force of Evil* “systematically reveals the intersections between criminal and capitalist enterprise, so much so that the two enterprises seem distinguished by style, not content.”¹¹

Locating Joe Morse’s law office on Wall Street is therefore a deliberate aesthetic choice. Like most successful noirs, the film provides a vivid sense of place, the cold and unwelcoming city. The cityscape is not just a noirish, visual backdrop to the human drama in its midst; rather, the visual symbols of the city’s financial power impinge upon the characters themselves. Christine

¹⁰ Qt. in Lamb, M. *Body and Soul* (1947). *The Films of Abraham Polonsky*. C. Brooks. LA, Filmic Writing Program at USC’s School of Cinema/Television for the A Polonsky Retrospective.

¹¹ Lewis, J. (2008). *American Cinema: A History*. NY & London, W. W. Norton, p. 208

Noll Brinckmann observes that all the major, symbolic landmarks, Wall Street, Trinity Church, the bank of the Hudson River, and other locales are “allowed to play themselves, as it were, and give a documentary touch to the film.” These monuments of financial capitalist power – the Stock Exchange and the leading banks of the Western world – “already signify to the audience the spirit of free enterprise.” Authenticity is thus “‘naturally’ accompanied by symbolic significance,” the symbols depicted being part of the audience’s reality.¹²

Nicholas Christopher stresses the aesthetic significance of the city in film noir in his important study, *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City*, and offers some valuable insights into how this textual relationship manifests itself in *Force of Evil*. This film, writes Christopher, “is a highly textured, allegorical 1948 film in which business offices, legitimate and otherwise, play a crucial symbolic role. Veiled beneath its exploration of the numbers racket, the film is one of the fiercest dissections of laissez-faire capitalism ever to come out of Hollywood.” Comparing the strategy of a “manipulation of types” in *Force of Evil* to the expose of the Hollywood types in Robert Aldrich’s *The Big Knife* (1955), Christopher points to the business world of Polonsky’s film, in which the director “anatomises the complex organism of a metropolitan numbers racket, itself merely a single tentacle of a nationwide gambling syndicate.”¹³ But this aesthetic strategy does not simplify business under capitalism; it actually exposes its essential features: the relentless drive for profit and its impact, aptly described by Thom Andersen as “psychological injuries of class.”¹⁴

¹² Brinckmann, C. N. (1981). "The Politics of *Force of Evil*: An Analysis of Abraham Polonsky's Preblacklist Film." *Prospects: The Annual of American Cultural Studies* no. 6: p. 369

¹³ Christopher, N. (1997). *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City*. NY, The Free Press, pp. 100-101

¹⁴ Thom Andersen’s Afterword in Frank Krutnik, Steve Neale, Brian Neve and Peter Stanfield (2007). *Un-American Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*. New Jersey, London, Rutgers University Press, p. 267

Before the repackaged sub-prime debts and securities were even a concept in the arsenal of corrupt financiers, *Force of Evil* organically linked its key plot device, numbers rackets, to real financial institutions. Brinckmann elaborates on this narrative logic. She argues that by using the numbers game as “one of the pivotal points of the plot” it was thereby possible to let the numbers banks play two simultaneous roles: “as the natural place where the numbers business would be conducted and, metonymically, as representatives of the real banks, ‘establishments for the custody, loan, exchange, or issue of money.’ (Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary)”¹⁵ Apart from the structural alignment between numbers rackets and capitalist business in *Force of Evil*, it was the class content of this crime drama that distinguished it from the standard social problem film of the time. As Nora Sayre explains in *Running Time*, Polonsky’s film was “concerned with working people [sic] at a time when Hollywood concentrated on the middle class.”¹⁶

The seamless synthesis of Marxian politics and modernism in *Force of Evil* has prompted a plethora of critical admiration for its director. In their recent *100 Film Noirs*, Hillier and Philips regard this film as a “lasting monument to the left-leaning film-making talents extinguished in the anti-Communist maelstrom of the HUAC investigations in the late 1940s and early 1950s.” Referring to Martin Scorsese’s comments on this film, they declare it to be “undeniably a major work of twentieth-century American art, comparable in terms of its aesthetic complexity, political concern and humanist vision to the work of Arthur Miller or Orson Welles.”¹⁷ Writing in *The Village Voice*, Michael Atkinson used the occasion of Kazan’s 1999 Lifetime

¹⁵ Brinckmann, C. N. (1981). “The Politics of *Force of Evil*: An Analysis of Abraham Polonsky’s Preblacklist Film.” *Prospects: The Annual of American Cultural Studies* no. 6: p. 369.

¹⁶ Sayre, N. (1978). *Running Time: The Films of the Cold War*. NY: The Dial Press, p. 33

¹⁷ Hillier, J., & Philips, Alistair (2009). *100 Film Noirs: BFI Screen Guides*. London, Palgrave Macmillian, p. 97

Achievement Award to emphasise his “antithesis,” claiming that Polonsky was “easily the most talented filmmaker to be blacklisted, and the greatest HUAC loss.” Atkinson regarded *Force of Evil* as “more original, sublime, and lyrical than any Kazan film.”¹⁸ One gains a sense of the timelessness of Polonsky’s stature as an artist, by observing that even Kazan supporters are not short of praise for his ‘antithesis.’ In *Martin Scorsese Presents Force of Evil* (1996), the director praises this seminal work of a prominent member of the American Left in the classical Hollywood era:

Force of Evil appears on the surface to be a tightly structured, 90-minute ‘B’ film, but has so much more going for it. The moral drama has almost a mythic scale; it displays a corrupted world collapsing from within. In this respect, *Force of Evil* is very different from other film noir. It’s not just the individual who is corrupted, but the entire system. It’s a political as well as an existential vision.¹⁹

It is precisely the harmony between the political and existential components of its narrative that elevates this film above being a routine example of the crime genre. The film is, most of all, a genuine expression of its author’s political and artistic vision. Brinckmann describes *Force of Evil* as “a rare work of art that is poetical, popular, and political at the same time.... Although revealing the corruption of the capitalist system, the information it gives cannot be subtracted from its fictional, emotional impact, and although its effect on the viewer is agitational, there is no proposition for practical action.”²⁰ Polonsky’s eschewing of agit-prop in favour of cinematic

¹⁸ Atkinson, M. (1999). “The Anti-Kazan.” *The Village Voice* (Mar 16, 1999).

¹⁹ Scorsese qt. in Wagner, P. B. a. D. (2001). *A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Polonsky and the Hollywood Left*. Los Angeles, The Regents of the University of California, p. 125

²⁰ Brinckmann, C. N. (1981). “The Politics of *Force of Evil*: An Analysis of Abraham Polonsky’s Preblacklist Film.” *Prospects: The Annual of American Cultural Studies* no. 6: p. 357.

poetry is quite deliberate and is eloquently elaborated by the director himself. He proposed a move

in a direction away from technology ... toward compression, density, structure, elegance, metaphor, synthesis, magnitude and variety. I am of course speaking of poetry, and the literary form I have in mind for the screenplay is the poem. I am using the terms poetry and poem to characterise a screenplay which instead of conventional camera angles would guide the attention through concrete images (as in metaphor); which instead of stage directing the action would express it; which instead of summarising the character and motive would actually present them as data; which instead of dialogue that carries meaning where the film image fails, would be the meaning that completes the film image.²¹

Concrete images presented as data is precisely what Dudley Andrew, in his groundbreaking study of French poetic realism, *Mists of Regret*, proposes as a remedy for traditional Hollywood's "cinema of events." Andrew cites *Hotel du Nord* (*North Hotel*) (1938) as a classic example of a film that replaces "the highly plotted and gaudy American cinema" with one of "people, language, and milieu" distinguished by "detail, their nuance, and for the way they seemed to participate in the dialogue and action played upon them."²² As indicated earlier, the Wall Street locale indeed seems to impinge on the actions of the crime-business figures in *Force of Evil*. Also, as will be discussed later, Polonsky's innovative use of highly stylised street language in no way diminishes the dehumanising reality of conducting business under

²¹ Polonsky qt. in Schultheiss John & Schaubert, M., Ed. (1996). *Force of Evil: The Critical Edition*. Northridge, Calif., California State University.

²² Andrew, D. (1995). *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, p. 5

capitalism. Ultimately, argues Polonsky, such an “artistic synthesis”²³ would enable us to “escape from the paralysis of naturalism which has for so long distorted the reality of our condition on screen.”²⁴ Andrew saw poetic realism as a vehicle to escape the paralysis of naturalism as well as of propaganda cinema. He conceived of poetic realism as a “general impulse in the heart of cinema,” but of far greater importance to him was “its coming into phase with a culture that at a certain moment relied upon it for vision and expression.”²⁵

For a brief historical period between the end of the war and the second HUAC offensive in 1951, Polonsky was allowed to ‘come into phase with a culture’ which gave rise to the ‘street poetry’ of *Body and Soul* and the ‘fable of the streets’ that is *Force of Evil*, films that simultaneously undermined Hollywood conventions and the ideological foundations of the profit system. Richard Maltby elaborates on this culture which promoted a new kind of intellectual freedom, partially legitimated by Roosevelt to promote his war aims, that made possible previously unthinkable films like *Pride of the Marines* (1945) and *Mission to Moscow* (1943), finding ultimate artistic expression in post-war *film gris*. As Maltby notes, “it was not surprising that many of the talent involved in the wartime propaganda also created films like *Crossfire* (1947) and *Body and Soul* (1947).” But most of these films, according to Maltby, were melodramas with “too overtly political topics as their thematic content while remaining loyal to the formal structures of Hollywood’s unselfconscious linear narrative tradition.” The films thus “operated within a framework established by wartime propaganda, in terms of both their narrative

²³ Buhle, P. (1997). “Abraham Lincoln Polonsky’s America.” *American Quarterly* 49.4: pp. 874-881.

²⁴ Polonsky qt. in Schultheiss John & Schaubert, M., Ed. (1996). *Force of Evil: The Critical Edition*. Northridge, Calif., California State University.

²⁵ Andrew, D. (1995). *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, p. xi

construction and their general political sentiment, which was liberal and integrationist.”²⁶ This strategy is sharply at odds with French respect for poetic realism, which, according to Andrew, “respects cinema” precisely because it is opposed to “propaganda, social and psychological realism, and the fantastic” which “transport spectators outside the movies to some recognisable foreign land.” Poetic realism, on the other hand, “promises to drive its enfolded spectator into an ever-deepening cinematic world.”²⁷

“That ‘Communist Infiltration of the Motion Picture Industry’ should become a subject for investigation at exactly the time that the American cinema was expanding its wartime prerogatives of expression into areas of social controversy was not entirely coincidence,”²⁸ according to Maltby. Hence, “after the blacklist,” remarked Polonsky, “movies were almost labelled: *Beware, do not enter this territory* – the territory has social content.”²⁹ His French counterparts discussed by Andrew were not subjected to the same kind of culture-altering ideological assault that would have called into question their commitment to poetic realism. American film poets confronted a completely different film culture. In a 1974 interview Polonsky declared that “the style of the picture represents *Tucker’s People* [the title of the source novel] the way it finally came out It represents a great sadness. And I often thought that an old title that kept floating around in my mind, all those years, really fits that picture, which is A

²⁶ Maltby, R. (1981). *Made for Each Other: The Melodrama of Hollywood and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1947. Cinema, Politics and Society in America*. P. Davies, & Neve, Brian. Manchester, Manchester University Press: 87

²⁷ Andrew, D. (1995). *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, pp. 15-16

²⁸ Maltby, R. (1981). *Made for Each Other: The Melodrama of Hollywood and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1947. Cinema, Politics and Society in America*. P. Davies, & Neve, Brian. Manchester, Manchester University Press: 88.

²⁹ Polonsky qt. in Sayre, N. (1978). *Running Time: The Films of the Cold War*. NY: The Dial Press, p. 99

Great Darkness.”³⁰ While the idea of the great darkness might have been more appealing to publishers of serious novels, Hollywood deemed it too gloomy a title for the box office. (Here it is interesting to note that the source novel for Polonsky’s film, Ira Wolfert’s *Tucker’s People*, was later republished with the title, *The Underworld*). While certain artistic possibilities of the American crime genre were stunted by the anticommunist witch-hunting, the very stylistic conventions and thematic preoccupations of the genre lent themselves to a more sophisticated exploration of the emerging social type in corporate (underworld) America, or the archetypal embodiment of its elite: the gangster-entrepreneur. Joe Morse, the tragic (anti-)hero of *Force of Evil*, perfectly fits this characterisation: he is in possession of both the killer instinct and the corporate cover needed to make it in the big end of the town.

Max Lamb reflected on the differences between the hero and the anti-hero in Polonsky’s films by comparing *Force of Evil* and *Tell Them Willie Boy Was Here*, made nearly two decades later: “In terms of dramatic conflict, Polonsky defines an *anti-hero* as one who struggles to find his identity in a destiny that he refuses to fulfil. The *real hero* is one who struggles to find his own destiny and does so by becoming himself.”³¹ So, in *Tell Them Willie Boy Was Here* Polonsky equates real heroism with a principled stand. As in *Willie Boy*, Joe Morse’s heroic epiphany is linked to high principles, which in this case also equate anti-capitalism. In a 1974 interview, Polonsky said that *Force of Evil* is “about a real person, in a different kind of way. And of course, despite what he intends, he’s not going to be a hero. Because he can’t be a hero. It’s impossible to be a hero. You’re lucky if you stay alive. And all your ambitions and all your

³⁰ Polonsky, A. (1974). Abraham Polonsky: The Effects of the ‘Blacklist’ on a Writer. New York Times Oral History Program, May 2, Beverly Hills, American Film Institute/Louis B. Mayer.

³¹ Polonsky in Lamb, M. *Tell Them Willie Boy is Here* (1969). The Films of Abraham Polonsky, C. Brooks. LA, Filmic Writing Program at USC’s School of Cinema/Television for the A Polonsky Retrospective.

policies and all your conflicts and everything are unperfected. And all your relations are going to be destroyed by it.”³² The futility of classical heroism in the pursuit of the American Dream is expanded on by Robert Warshow in his influential studies of the American crime and western genres, collected in *The Immediate Experience*. In his essay “The Gangster as Tragic Hero,” he says that the archetypal gangster assumes all the contradictions of modern capitalism:

The peculiarity of the gangster is his unceasing, nervous activity. The exact nature of his enterprises may remain vague, but his commitment to enterprise is always clear, and all the more clear because he operates outside the field of utility. He is without culture, without manners, without leisure, or at any rate leisure is likely to be spent in debauchery so compulsively aggressive as to seem only another aspect of his “work.”³³

Warshow implies that this debauched and aggressive compulsion is a core feature of the gangster’s psyche. Written more than sixty years ago, describing a standard trope of American crime fiction, few passages could so aptly depict the social physiognomy of the American financial ruling class today – with the possible exception of an iconic image of Mike Moore theatrically encircling Wall St. banks with crime-scene tape to the notes of the “Internationale.”³⁴ Even Joe Morse’s rediscovered humanity at the end of *Force of Evil* cannot obscure the disturbing fact that his role as a corporate gangster, cloaked in the legality of his real role as a right-hand man for Tucker, is pulling him that much closer to the ranks of the financial aristocracy on Wall Street. Joe quips about the lure of high finance, admitting that he was “smart

³² Polonsky, A. (1974). Abraham Polonsky: The Effects of the ‘Blacklist’ on a Writer. New York Times Oral History Program. Beverly Hills, American Film Institute/Louis B. Mayer.

³³ Warshow, R. (1971). “The Gangster as Tragic Hero” (1948). The immediate experience : movies, comics, theatre and other aspects of popular culture. New York, Atheneum: pp. 131-32.

³⁴ Young, D. (2009). “*Capitalism: A Love Story* [review].” Hollywood Reporter **411**.20: 8.

enough to get in, but too weak to resist the corruption.” Even his brother Leo, who is of a completely different moral character, cannot resist the lure. Brinckmann draws a significant conclusion from this opposition: “Dramatically opposed in all important respects, they [Joe and Leo] represent a wide range of contamination, and their being brothers only adds to the sense of totality conveyed. The generality inherent in the motif of the two brothers has thus been employed to express a political statement.”³⁵ Indeed, by humanising these gangster figures Polonsky was able to provide a vivid sense of the socio-economic pressures exerted on the brothers. This, according to Reynold Humphries, is the film’s major achievement. In his recent re-evaluation of the film, Humphries locates Polonsky’s “genius” in moving his film into a “higher realm, that of an incisive, coherent analysis of the little matter of success and upward mobility,” of which Joe is a rather typical embodiment in Hollywood. What is not typical, however, is Polonsky’s “refusal to limit his film to a representation of the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist...but to move the discussion out into the whole question of class, that of the individual versus the collective, the individual as part of the collective.”³⁶ Aesthetically and politically, this approach was a great leap forward from the conventional, classical Hollywood depiction of “gangster capitalism,” the term used by Jon Lewis, who explains that such practices, as carried out by real mobsters during the previous period of Depression and war, was “less a veiled critique of an economic system” than a “stylised mode of doling out revenge (against that very system).”³⁷

³⁵ Brinckmann, C. N. (1981). “The Politics of *Force of Evil*: An Analysis of Abraham Polonsky’s Preblacklist Film.” *Prospects: The Annual of American Cultural Studies* no. 6: p. 375.

³⁶ Humphries, R. (2001). “When Crime Does Pay: Abraham Polonsky’s *Force of Evil* (1948).” *Q/W/E/R/T/Y: Arts, Literature & Civilisations du Monde Anglophone* 11(Oct 2001): pp. 205-210.

³⁷ Lewis, J. (2010). *The Godfather*. London, BFI Film Classics, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 74

Hence Polonsky's depiction of the atomization of the noir hero transcends the established Hollywood conventions and makes important strides towards fulfilling the promise of the genre which, from its beginnings, says Warshow, has represented a "consistent and astonishingly complete presentation of the modern sense of tragedy."³⁸ In *Force of Evil*, this 'sense of tragedy' goes beyond the doomed individual, and into a social sphere, making it remarkably aligned with the objective logic of late capitalism. In embracing the crime genre as a vehicle for a critique of business under capitalism, this crime film sacrifices nothing of its dramatic eloquence to its underlying anti-capitalism thesis. This is manifested in its dialogue, "with its Joycean repetitions and elaborate unpunctuated paragraphing," which is "unique in the American cinema, and at times achieves a quality of Greek drama, a poetry of the modern city."³⁹

Where does the poeticism of *Force of Evil* reside? The most apparent place to look for poetry in the film is its star's voice, but, according to Polonsky, poetry is "not limited to the voice-over – it is as much a quality of the dialogue, in fact, that is one of the most original and most beautiful features of the film." He emphasises the critical importance of the unity of all cinematic elements in the story, where "the language almost obeyed my intention to play an equal role with the actor and visual image and not run along as illustration, information, and mere verbal gesture."⁴⁰ Even this unique synthesis of styles could not fully account for the film's effectiveness. William Pechter, in his 1962 essay on Polonsky and *Force of Evil*, points to some rather familiar generic features of the film, such as "the bad-good guy involved in the rackets who finally goes straight,

³⁸ Warshow, R. (1971). "The Gangster as Tragic Hero" (1948). The immediate experience : movies, comics, theatre and other aspects of popular culture. New York, Atheneum: 129.

³⁹ Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg qt. in Christopher, N. (1997). Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City. NY, The Free Press, p. 101

⁴⁰ William Pechter in Sarris, A., Ed. (1976). Hollywood Voices: Interviews with Film Directors. NY, Avon, pp. 390-91

the ingénue who tries to reform him, etc.” Yet, Pechter argues, to have known this “was not to know enough.” How else, he asks, is one “to account for the fact that out of it all was created an original, moving, and even beautiful work, whose only tangency with clichés was at the point at which it transformed and transcended them?” It is “the presence of an artist,” concludes Pechter, that “both inexplicable and unpredictable” phenomenon.⁴¹ A central task of this chapter is to decipher this phenomenon and attempt to contextualize this presence in the blacklist era, and thereby indicate the aesthetic losses suffered by later eras of American film art through the absence of such artists.

Before the Red Scare, American capitalism of the first half of the twentieth century was still a long way from containing its proletarian opposition, organised in its still effective CIO-led unions. Brian Neve’s review of the Noel Burch and Thom Andersen documentary *Red Hollywood*, makes some useful points about the overall political climate in Hollywood at this time:

Despite Polonsky’s distinctive writing it is interesting that a good deal of later 1940s film making seems to suggest a similar saturation of ordinary life, including personal relationships, with calculations of profit and loss—even where the filmmakers concerned were unaffiliated with the left.... This suggests the relevance of the wider, Popular Front perspective instead of the emphasis on sometime Party members who faced the blacklist, and [shows] that the left had achieved a dominance in artistic circles that was slow to fade even in the changing post-war circumstances.⁴²

⁴¹ Pechter, W. (1962). “Abraham Polonsky and *Force of Evil*.” *Film Quarterly* 15.3: pp. 47-54.

⁴² Neve, B. (1999). “‘*Red Hollywood*’ Review Essay” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 19(no. 1).

But the presence of the proletarian ethos could not in itself explain that “inexplicable and unpredictable” ‘presence of an artist.’⁴³ Not even the powerful presence of the CPUSA, at the peak of its political influence in the Popular Front era, could account for Polonsky’s unique aesthetic synthesis of noir and a proletarian ethos. In any case, as shall be argued later, Polonsky’s art clashed with the official Communist Party line. As Terence Butler observes, in his comparative analysis of Polonsky and Kazan, “If a CP member, Polonsky was not largely out to toe any party line. His scripts are particularly striking in the complex way they examine how social roles influence individual motivation.” If anything, argues Butler, “Freud seems to have influenced Polonsky as much as Marx.”⁴⁴ Kazan’s flirtation with both Marx and Freud will be discussed in a separate chapter, but suffice to say, these two towering figures of the Hollywood Left stand at opposite ends of the political spectrum in post-war America: anticommunist liberalism and anti-CP Marxism; or, as Atkinson would say, each is the ‘antithesis’ of the other.

Polonsky’s adaptation of *Tucker’s People* (1943), Wolfert’s novel about numbers rackets, gangsters and businessmen, only reinforces this liberal-Marxist dichotomy. *Force of Evil* renders these common pulp elements as “a kind of symbol of the capitalist system,” crucially “link[ing] the legalised gambling of the stock market with the illegal numbers racket.”⁴⁵ While such expositions of the root causes of the protagonist’s downfall were by no means uncommon in the golden age of film noir, one is still struck by their prescience. What *Force of Evil* demonstrates is not only Polonsky’s successful realisation of Clifford Odetsian street poetry, along with the authenticity and talent of Garfield, but a highly conscious strategy aimed at bringing this noir

⁴³ Pechter, W. (1962). “Abraham Polonsky and *Force of Evil*.” *Film Quarterly* 15.3: pp. 47-54.

⁴⁴ Butler, T. (1988). “Polonsky and Kazan.” *Sight and Sound* 57.4: pp. 262-267.

⁴⁵ Broe, D. (2009). *Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood*. Gainesville, University Press of Florida, p. 49

drama into line with the objective logic, or dialectics, of late capitalism. Otherwise, sixty years on, *Force of Evil* would strike one as little more than a well-executed crime thriller. Polonsky was one of the few Hollywood filmmakers to grasp both the aesthetics and the politics of his epoch. His progressivism was of an entirely different calibre from the one espoused by, say, Robert Rossen (who will be discussed later in this thesis). One indication of a deliberate use of narrative devices to illuminate this socio-economic reality is what Imogen Sara Smith identifies as “a subversive touch,” in which “Joe’s plan is pegged to the popularity of betting on 776, ‘the old liberty number,’ on Fourth of July.” Appropriately, “patriotism is just an excuse for making a fast and dirty buck.”⁴⁶ In this cinematic challenge to the status quo, there is little to distinguish crime from business.

But Polonsky still ups the ante in this challenge. In a 1974 seminar, he reflected that “we’re not talking about criminal activity. We’re talking about social activity....”⁴⁷ The ‘socialisation’ of noir in itself marks an intellectual breakthrough in illuminating a ‘modern sense of tragedy,’ to recycle Warshow’s phrase. Polonsky evidently grasped the political character of his epoch. Indeed, the conflict between Joe and Leo transcends their personal differences, and its primary source is, to put it bluntly, the capitalist relations they are compelled to negotiate. This strategy subverts one of the main staples of Hollywood drama, in which both the problems and the solutions raised by the plot are to be framed within the personal, or the psychological, domain. In *Force of Evil*, even the “acquisitive characters” of Joe and Leo are based on ‘the socioeconomic system.’ As Nora Sayre explains, these doomed brothers “aren’t merely greedy: raised in poverty, they have legitimate hatred of its corrosions. But, in pursuit of cash, they collaborate

⁴⁶ Smith, I. S. (2008). “Plumbing the Depths of Capitalism: Force of Evil.” *Bright Lights Film Journal* **61** (Aug): 11.

⁴⁷ Polonsky, A. (1974). Abraham Polonsky: The Effects of the ‘Blacklist’ on a Writer. *New York Times Oral History Program*. Beverly Hills, American Film Institute/Louis B. Mayer.

with criminals who are metaphors for capitalists; self-deception results in self-destruction as the protagonists try to free themselves from the traps that they willingly entered.” Here, concludes Sayre, “Thomas Gomez and John Garfield as embattled brothers who can no longer separate themselves from gangsters.”⁴⁸

The anticapitalist logic of this narrative precludes such a separation. Colin McArthur’s study of American gangster films and thrillers, *Underworld U.S.A.*, places *Force of Evil* in the political context of the aftermath of the 1943 smashing of the “large-scale general labour racketeering” when criminal organisations “vied for control of the racing wire and other gambling operations.” *Force of Evil*, according to McArthur, “deals with one aspect of gambling ... and it faithfully reflects the quasi-respectability of the Forties racketeer.”⁴⁹

Indeed, in *Force of Evil*, Polonsky taps into a criminal-business milieu where, in Warshow’s words, “success is talking on the telephone and holding conferences.”⁵⁰ The blurring of the line that separates gangsterism and capitalism in American fiction during the 1930s and 1940s reflected what John Schultheiss characterises as “the ambience of Marxism” in American novels. Among representative examples arising out of this ambience Schultheiss lists, apart from Wolfert’s *Tucker’s People*, Chester Himes’s *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945) and *Lonely Crusade* (1947), Dashiell Hammett’s *Red Harvest* (1929), *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) and *The Thin Man* (1934), Nathaniel West’s *The Day of the Locust* (1939) and others.⁵¹ Wolfert’s source

⁴⁸ Sayre, N. (1978). *Running Time: The Films of the Cold War*. NY: The Dial Press, p. 33

⁴⁹ Colin McArthur qt. in Christopher, N. (1997). *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City*. NY, The Free Press, p. 102

⁵⁰ Warshow, R. (1971). “The Gangster as Tragic Hero” (1948). *The immediate experience : movies, comics, theatre and other aspects of popular culture*. New York, Atheneum: 132.

⁵¹ Schultheiss in Marsden, A. 2005. ‘Abraham Polonsky’ *Senses of Cinema* February
<<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2005/great-directors/polonsky/>> at 30 January 2007.

novel provides a strong sense of the dehumanising nature of the capitalist system through its depictions of the actions of the doomed protagonists trying to climb its rungs. As Diana Trilling wrote in *Nation* in 1943,

If [Wolfert] writes about gangsterism, it is as an aspect of our whole predatory economic structure, and at least by its implication his novel is as much a novel of legitimate American business methods and business people as it is of racketeering.... What Mr. Wolfert is saying is that gangsters are little different from their legitimate brothers, they have the same amount of principle and are driven by the same fears and insecurities, 'cutting the world to measure as they can and cutting themselves to measure where they have to.'⁵²

In what ways, then, Schultheiss's notion of the 'ambience of Marxism' intersect with serious filmmakers in America in the lead-up to the witch-hunts?

Hollywood Marxists: oxymoron or a sign of the times?

Historian William Appleman Williams, writing in the 1960s, criticises the "great evasion" of American artists and intellectuals in accepting the possibility that Marxism, "or any other critique of America's endless economic expansionism, might have something serious to add to the heated discussion on pervasive social anxiety."⁵³ This is a fair assessment of the intellectual climate in the wake of the anti-communist witch-hunting. And it did take a state-sponsored,

⁵² Trilling, D. (1943). "Fiction in Review." *Nation*: 899.

⁵³ Maximin, P. B. a. E. R. (1995). *William Appleman Williams: The Tragedy of Empire*. NY, Routledge, in Wagner, P. B. a. D. (2001). *A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Polonsky and the Hollywood Left*. Los Angeles, The Regents of the University of California, pp. 107-08

systematic offensive to bring about such a climate. As has been indicated, Polonsky fully embraced the Marxist approach in his storytelling, stating the “simple rule that consciousness stems from social relations, not vice versa, and must be understood concretely by detailing the relations.”⁵⁴

Yet, according to Pechter, the protagonist of *Force of Evil* is not “so simply and understandably the product of social determinations.” He is “not fighting to escape poverty, but to annex greater wealth.”⁵⁵ Even so, the contradictions between Joe Morse’s relentless drive for personal enrichment and his growing conscience do not obscure systemic flaws; rather, they put them in even sharper relief. In that sense, it is the “social determinations” that play a decisive role in this tragedy. And the social relations in the post-war period posed a number of disturbing problems to any serious filmmaker: unemployment, the damaged psychological condition of many war veterans, crime, and a host of other social ills. “As a statement on a society, the new series [film noir and post-war noir] came at just the right moment,” write Borde and Chaumeton in *Panorama of American Noir*.⁵⁶

It is in this cultural context that Broe’s re-definition of the noir genre along class (anti-capitalist) lines is useful because, “the argument is that for one period, 1945-50, in one genre, the ideals of the left were hegemonic, that they formed the core of the genre.”⁵⁷ Moreover, after expanding on the reasons for the “exceptional work” of noir filmmakers, he posits a crucial reason for these

⁵⁴ Buhle, Paul, and Wagner, Dave (2001). *A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Polonsky and the Hollywood Left*. Los Angeles, The Regents of the University of California, p. 108

⁵⁵ Pechter, W. (1962). “Abraham Polonsky and *Force of Evil*.” *Film Quarterly* 15.3: pp. 47-54.

⁵⁶ Borde, R., and Chaumeton, Etienne (2002). *Panorama of American Film Noir, 1941-1943* (trans. Paul Hammond). San Francisco, City Lights, p. 54

⁵⁷ Broe, D. (2009). *Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood*. Gainesville, University Press of Florida, pp. xxiv-xxv

distinguished artistic achievements: “they were attuned to the left paradigm,” conveying ideas “unusual in Hollywood, ideas of social inequality, ills of capitalism, positing a *class* perspective on the social issues explored in these films, and often arranging their stories to make the upper, controlling classes appear as the source of the central problem.”⁵⁸ This important observation raises the question of the potentially revolutionizing effect of just the kind of ‘left paradigm’ that was lost to McCarthyism. When filmmakers felt compelled to respond to the convulsions that gave rise to the 1930s left paradigm, film noir was a primary means of exploring this perspective.

Therefore, it is entirely understandable that late 1940s film noir articulated, consciously or unconsciously, the pressing political issues which impacted most on serious filmmakers at the time. In that sense, Dennis Broe’s study of the permutations of the style and content of Hollywood crime, or noir, drama from the late 1940s throughout the 1950s is a very useful re-evaluation of noir. It provides a hitherto under-explored classical Marxist class perspective on the historical problems of noir, the film mode under constant attack from the anticommunist establishment. Broe focuses on the shifts in the narrative positioning of the noir protagonist in terms of his/her relationship to the forces of law and order and powers that be in general. This movement of the protagonist outside the law, “a movement that became the predominant motif of the Hollywood crime film in 1945-50,” is the “permutation” by which Broe differentiates amongst noir films.⁵⁹ Broe, in essence, argues that these permutations of the working-class outsider in the crime genre of the late 1940s mirror the actual fate of the “outside-of-the-law” unionist of the post-war period.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. xxv

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. xvii

So, in the context of “one of the most active periods of working-class agitation and middle-class antagonism in American history,” it is worth noting “the central importance of class in the creation of film noir.”⁶⁰ According to this Marxian interpretation, noir represents “one of the few moments in American film when class-in-itself becomes class-for-itself,” as noir fugitives are compelled to “actualise the modes of working-class consciousness” in order to escape the forces of law,⁶¹ at a certain stage in their struggle against their exploiters, conscious of both the nature of this exploitation and the necessity to abolish it. The long occupation of the Burbank studios is cited as a representative example of this shift in workers’ consciousness. The filmic expression of this shift, synthesised and distilled through the conventions of the crime genre in the late 1940s, is the movement of the working-class fugitive outsider to the margins of capitalist society, in films such as *Champion* (1949), *Give Us This Day* (1949), *Gun Crazy* (1949), *Quicksand* (1950), *Try and Get Me* [aka *Sound of Fury*] (1950), *He Ran All the Way* (1951), and others.

Richard Maltby provides valuable insights into the ways this cultural shift reverberated in the political superstructure in the late 1940s. He frames the HUAC saga in terms of “the mutually supportive melodramas Hollywood and the Committee wove around their encounter in 1947.” In Maltby’s historical narrative, as far as Washington was concerned, “the Committee and Hollywood shared a political importance that was based not on the realities of political practice but on the power of suggestion.” This is where the melodramatic qualities of this encounter lie, and for Washington, argues Maltby, the political benefits of “melodramatic oversimplification of

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. xvi

⁶¹ Ibid, p. xx

political debate” served their interests well.⁶² Melodrama was the aesthetic cement of what Maltby refers to as the post-war “semi-documentary *policier* films,” which were inspired by wartime films as well as the experience of many Hollywood cinematographers and other personnel in overseas military units. Such documentary and naturalist credentials “gave credence to the role of investigator” at a time when “the tone of the emerging *film noir* reflected and produced a paranoid environment.” Furthermore, “The investigative narrative reflected and exemplified the self-defensive insecurity Hollywood felt in contemplating its newly-endorsed social function.”⁶³ For many blacklistees, including the subjects of this thesis, on the other hand, there was no such insecurity of social purpose – the need to critique the social relations of American capitalism.

In their *Panorama* of film noir, Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumont clearly identify the available aesthetic choices for such a political cinema within the studio system. They point to the difference between film noir told from “the point of view of the criminals”, with the fugitive viewed as an “inglorious victim” while the “police are rotten... sometimes even murderers,” and the later period’s mode of “police documentary” where the “investigators are portrayed as bright men, brave and incorruptible.”⁶⁴ This big shift in the thematic preoccupations of noir is an expression of the thoroughgoing assault by HUAC on the notion of any cinematic representation of a genuine working-class consciousness. Not only were individual filmmakers, actors and technicians purged from Hollywood, a longstanding democratic and liberal tradition was also

⁶² Maltby, R. (1981). *Made for Each Other: The Melodrama of Hollywood and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1947*. Cinema, Politics and Society in America. P. Davies, & Neve, Brian. Manchester, Manchester University Press: 78.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 83

⁶⁴ Borde, R., and E. Chaumont. (1955) trans. P. Hammond. 2002. *A Panorama of American Film Noir, 1941-1953*. San Francisco: City Lights, pp. 6-7.

eroded. This liberal tradition is manifested in Denning's concept of the "proletarianization" of American culture, in which the formation of the "cultural front" between 1934-48 gave expression to the increased influence and participation of the working class in the culture industry, making it the "contentious site of class struggle."⁶⁵

Moreover, war-time and post-war noir dramas present "different angles of vision," in which the police procedural considers "murder from without, from the official police viewpoint; the film noir from within, from the criminal's" perspective.⁶⁶ In other words, post-war noir tends to be set in the "criminal milieu itself," shedding "light on forbidden worlds"; whereas police documentary realism testifies "to the glory of the police". In noirs the cops are "of dubious character... even murderers at times."⁶⁷ After 1947, many leftist filmmakers were treated as outlaws, and so it is not surprising that they made some of their best pictures from the point of view of outsiders.⁶⁸ Interestingly, after the witch-hunts, the noir villain is no longer identified with a particular social (upper) class, he's simply a noir figure, with his individual psychological burdens.⁶⁹ Here, Broe has in mind films such as *T-Men* (1947) and *Call Northside 777* (1948). This depoliticisation of the noir villain is consistent with the central thesis of Gerald Horne's monumental study, *Class Struggle in Hollywood*. Horne demonstrates that the political vacuum in Hollywood created by the anticommunist purges was filled by the mobsters, who largely

⁶⁵ Denning, M. (1996). *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London, Verso, p. xvii

⁶⁶ Borde, R., and E. Chaumeton. (1955) trans. P. Hammond. 2002. *A Panorama of American Film Noir, 1941-1953*. San Francisco: City Lights, p. 6

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.7

⁶⁸ Naremore, J. (1998). *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts*. Berkeley, LA, University of California Press, p.128

⁶⁹ Interview with Dennis Broe, Feb 12, 2010

contributed to the quasi-respectability of the gangster figure.⁷⁰ This political shift to the right in crime drama was only reinforced by “documentary style techniques,” which Ali Jaafar, writing in *Sight & Sound* in 2006, compares with the political aesthetics of *Force of Evil*. Polonsky’s film, he argues, “propels its dream-turned-nightmare tale of low-lives and greed with stylised camera angles, expressionistic lighting and a screenplay written in Shakespearean iambic pentameters.”⁷¹ Polonsky’s modernist aesthetics, imbued with Marxism, operated on a different plane from the police procedurals, which, as Broe notes in his recent study on the “Return of the Police Procedural,” have swamped global TV networks with shows like *24*, where the ‘glory of the police’ is extended to all levels of the military-intelligence apparatus.⁷²

While the flood of police procedurals occurred after Polonsky’s adaptation of *Tucker’s People*, he too had to negotiate the tricky divide between the proletarian sense of justice and the official law. Reportedly, he was compelled to make changes to the script in relation to Morse’s relationship to the law and cops. Polonsky comments on the omissions from the original script:

Originally, the screenplay began and ended with the court trial....Aesthetically, it destroyed the continuing sense of the present which I wanted to be the feel of the film. The voice-over took the place of the original mechanical flashback technique and gave the sense of Morse meditating upon the nature of what he was living through, rather than supplying mere narrative elements in the story. Politically, I didn’t want Joe Morse to be co-operating with the police and the law in any way or to be seen doing so.⁷³

⁷⁰ Horne, G. (2001). *Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950: Moguls, Mobsters, Stars, Reds & Trade Unionists*. Austin, University of Texas Press, p. 100

⁷¹ Jaafar, A. (2006). “75 Hidden Gems: *Force of Evil*, Abraham Polonsky (US, 1948).” *Sight and Sound* 16.3: 86.

⁷² Broe, D. (2009). “Genre Regression and The New Cold War: The Return of the Police Procedural” *Framework* 45(2): pp. 81-101.

⁷³ Letter from Polonsky qt. in Brinckmann, C. N. (1981). “The Politics of *Force of Evil*: An Analysis of Abraham Polonsky’s Preblacklist Film.” *Prospects: The Annual of American Cultural Studies* no. 6: 380.

A string of personal tragedies places added pressure on Joe to cooperate with the law, prompting his final change of heart, “I decided to help.” But, Joe Morse’s final words, in which he informs us that he “turned back to give myself up to Hall,” are, according to Brinckmann, “much too explicit to be taken seriously.”⁷⁴ In an interview with Sherman, Polonsky explains the contradictions of this ending: “It was partly a cop-out. It was saying to the censor, ‘Look. It’s O.K. Don’t worry about it. He had a change of heart.’ But that was *completely* on the surface. I didn’t mean it at all. What I really meant were all those words at the end and all those images: ‘Down, down, down.’”⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the director’s intentions may not be the most decisive factor in conveying the unintended “structure of feeling”, as elaborated by Raymond Williams. As Dennis Broe put it, *Force of Evil* still “may be the ultimate statement of left disillusionment over the fate of the working class and left ideals after the war.”⁷⁶

In relation to this final twist, Pechter makes these perceptive remarks: “It is a moment entirely free from the pieties which customarily attend such a regeneration, nor has it any of that sense of straining to engage some good, gray abstraction like ‘Society,’ which hangs so heavily over the last sequence of *On the Waterfront*.”⁷⁷ The “revenge sagas” in Kazan’s and Polonsky’s films, in the words of Terrence Butler, are also “set apart” by Joe Morse’s “avoidance of identification with a violent hero.” Hence *Force of Evil*’s “true climax,” surmises Butler, is “not Joe’s showdown with hoodlums but his awakening to social responsibility” at the discovery of his

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 381

⁷⁵ Polonsky qt. in Sherman, E., Ed. (1970). *The Director's Event: Interviews with Five American Filmmakers*. NY, Atheneum, p. 20

⁷⁶ Broe, D. (2001). *Outside the Law: Labor and the crime Film 1941 - 55*, New York University, p. 223

⁷⁷ Pechter, W. (1962). “Abraham Polonsky and *Force of Evil*.” *Film Quarterly* 15.3: pp. 47-54.

brother's corpse.⁷⁸ And it is this commitment to social responsibility, without "straining" to conform to the prevalent mainstream discourse, which frees Joe to make such moral choices.

"I just kept going down and down there. It was like going down to the bottom of the world," says Morse as he descends the stone stairs to the rocks, to their very end under the George Washington Bridge, to recover his brother's corpse. "I found my brother's body at the bottom there. I had killed him." While, according to Broe, Leo's corpse at the base of the bridge "seems to announce the death of an entire age," offering a kind of a "lament for the end of the era of Popular Front,"⁷⁹ in the end it is the humane core of Joe Morse's character, buried under heavy layers of capitalist opportunism that prevails. However, "unconsciously," by going back to his brother Leo, "Joe is attempting to return to his class background," but, according to Humphries, he "cannot see things in those terms." By being concerned about his unfortunate brother, concludes Humphries, "Joe is proving the existence, not only of his own unconscious, but of a 'political unconscious.'"⁸⁰ Critics such as Broe and Humphries draw on the Marxist literary and cultural critic Raymond William's concept of a "structure of feeling," and Fredric Jameson's "political unconscious" to concretise their analysis of the film. This helps explain Pechter's idea of a 'lack of straining' in Polonsky's film to fit into the prevalent liberal discourse.

However, the ending shows signs of this very straining. Leo's death and Doris' love motivate Joe on a road to redemption—and he turns state evidence against Tucker to District Attorney Hill. This resolution is contradictory, in terms of Polonsky's Marxian politics. He himself has

⁷⁸ Butler, T. (1988). "Polonsky and Kazan." *Sight and Sound* 57.4: pp. 262-267.

⁷⁹ Broe, D. (2001). *Outside the Law: Labor and the crime Film 1941 - 55*, PhD thesis, New York University, p. 207

⁸⁰ Humphries, R. (2001). "When Crime Does Pay: Abraham Polonsky's *Force of Evil* (1948)." *Q/W/E/R/T/Y: Arts, Literature & Civilisations du Monde Anglophone* 11(Oct): pp. 205-210.

declared that Morse's change of heart and turn to the state apparatus is a "cop-out," that it remained on the "surface" of things, without altering the structure of feeling of the film. Polonsky's criticism of *The Best Years of Our Lives* is very fitting here: "Unfortunately, in the *Best Years*, as in most social-problem fiction, the artist falls into the trap of trying to find local solutions in existence for the social conflicts, instead of solving them in feeling...."⁸¹ When Joe Morse speaks first with his boss, then with the police, there seems to be a "direct parallel between Tucker and the Law on the other end of the telephone." Or, as Polonsky elaborates, "The People live in a lane, and on both sides of this lane are vast, empty places. On one side, it says LAW, and on the other, it says CRIME. But, in fact, you can't tell one from the other."⁸² Therefore, despite the paeans to the authorities at the end of the film, *Force of Evil* managed to breach two of the three major principles of the Production Code Administration (PCA): "the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil, or sin.... Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor sympathy be created for its violation."⁸³

In his screenplay for Don Siegel's *Madigan* (1968), however, written almost two decades after the HUAC dust had settled, Polonsky does not make such compromises in his political aesthetics. This is reflected in his characterizations of the two cops. In Polonsky's screenplay, writes John Schultheiss, "every character is compromised—no one emerges clean.... And, indeed, *Madigan*'s individualism is just as strongly challenged, and on his own terms: 'If it works, it's good. If it don't, it's lousy.'" The Police Commissioner Russell (Henry Fonda) goes 'by the book,' and while he "sits in his spotless office, *Madigan* is performing the dirtier side of

⁸¹ Polonsky, A. (1946). "The Best Years of Our Lives: A Review." *Hollywood Quarterly* 2 (April): pp. 258-259.

⁸² Polonsky in Sherman, E., Ed. (1970). *The Director's Event: Interviews with Five American Filmmakers*. NY, Atheneum, p. 14

⁸³ Qt. in Marsden, A. 2005. 'Abraham Polonsky' *Senses of Cinema* February
<<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2005/great-directors/polonsky/>> at 30 January 2007. .

police work in the streets. Russell says of Madigan: ‘I always get the feeling he’s out there ... doing something I’d rather not know about.’”⁸⁴ These characterizations bring to the fore the issue of the ambiguity of art cinema and its place in crime genre films of this era.

Polonsky addresses the question of the ‘ambiguity’ in the value systems portrayed in his films – “an evolution in the depiction of evil and character dilemmas, from the relatively morally clear situations in *Body and Soul*, to the more ethically complicated world of *Madigan*.”⁸⁵ In a 1987 interview, Polonsky elaborates this as a “philosophical question,” rather than one of political censorship, which suggests that these aesthetic choices would have emerged regardless of the impact of McCarthyism. He has always regarded *Body and Soul* as a “fable or myth or fairy tale of the streets,” as opposed to *Force of Evil* which is “far more literary, lyrical (but, interestingly, a more realistic portrait of the way people are in life).” Interestingly, Polonsky interprets this shift to ambiguity as an expression of his own personal growth as an artist. He sums this up: “You call it ‘ambiguity.’ I call it deep narrative meaning in terms of character.”⁸⁶

It is interesting to note that both Washington and the Kremlin shared an aversion to this approach to realism. In the historical context of the rising Cold War tensions, Polonsky’s views on the role of the artist, intellectual freedom and social commitment could further illuminate the critical and artistic issues at stake:

The role of the artist is not to worry about the political sensitivities of people, but to stimulate them into new areas of experiment and expression. A real work of art is a very

⁸⁴ Schultheiss, J. *Madigan* (1968). *The Films of Abraham Polonsky*. LA, Filmic Writing Program at USC's School of Cinema/Television for Polonsky Retrospective, Nov 9, 1987.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Polonsky in Ibid.

great discovery made through a complex process of creation. It is a process in which one kind of reality is transformed into another and so the product always contains more than the artist can conceive at any stage therein....⁸⁷

And one of the key reasons *Force of Evil* can be regarded as a work of art is precisely because its “very great discovery” in its “complex process of creation” is timeless and universal enough to shed light, artistically, on the inner workings of the ‘giant black box’ of American crime-business of the 21st century. In that sense, Peter Wollen’s thoughts on what constitutes ‘canonical’ work could further illuminate the intrinsic value of Polonsky’s art, organically inimical to the dictates of both the Hollywood industry and Stalinist bureaucracy. Writing on Gene Kelly in *Singin’ in the Rain*, Wollen argues that the artistic value of this musical film is derived from its “relationship between sound and image.” While this may seem the most basic relationship in film art, *Singin’ in the Rain* takes this further by making the artifice of dance and theatricality in general an integral part of this romance between Don Lockwood (Kelly) and Kathy Selden, which also becomes the most appropriate aesthetic device for defending the classical, silent Hollywood against the encroaching ‘talkies.’ There is, however, more to Kelly’s interest in this “integrated drama” in his “quest for authenticity, in the sense of a rejection of the ‘supplement.’”⁸⁸ In Kelly’s creative mind the theatrical ‘supplement’ springs organically from the film’s inner logic and politics, like Polonsky’s highly stylized, Odetsian language. These elements are not in the least ornamental, but anti-naturalist.

⁸⁷ Polonsky, A. (1956). “‘The Troubled Mandarins’ review.” *Masses and Mainstream* 9 (Aug): pp. 35-47.

⁸⁸ Wollen, P. (1992). *Singin’ in the Rain*. London, BFI Publishing, pp. 55, 59

Polonsky understood that cinematic naturalism, in its very nature concerned primarily with the surface appearances of things, will do little to sensitize the audience to the contradictions of the capitalist system. Interestingly, Polonsky claims that this crude naturalism leads social commitment to conformity, in both the United States and the Soviet Union. To this false social commitment he counter-poses the ideal of artistic ambiguity, and directs the following message to his colleagues:

Yet, if people are offended because their cherished illusions are shaken or their covering faiths outraged, well, that is the very point of literature, that is the very notion of a truthful life, to be shaken up, to be disturbed, to be awakened, even from a dream of the American or Soviet Paradise. There is no idea, no theory, no way of life that cannot be reshaped, illuminated and made more human by being subject to the imagination and criticism of the artist. (“The Troubled Mandarins” teleplay 45)⁸⁹

Perhaps the political line articulated in his review of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Troubled Mandarins*, about the left French intelligentsia, provides a clearer answer. The questions he poses to de Beauvoir are clearly designed to reorient himself politically in the Cold War era, being pulled by two diametrically opposed tendencies – communism and anti-communist liberalism. Where does one turn, he asks, “with a horizon bounded by Stalin’s Russia, McCarthy’s America, Algeria, Korea, Africa, any place?” In fact, discovers Polonsky, de Beauvoir has founded her fiction on those very questions: “Is it possible to have a Left, independent of but not hostile to the Communists? Are intellectual freedom and social

⁸⁹ Schultheiss, J. *Madigan* (1968). *The Films of Abraham Polonsky*. LA, Filmic Writing Program at USC's School of Cinema/Television for the A Polonsky Retrospective, p. 156

commitment incompatible? Can a man be an honest writer and a politician at the same time? Is the Western European tradition of humanism basic to socialism, or irrelevant to it?”⁹⁰

Revealing something of his nascent Marxism, however unconsciously, Polonsky offers a devastating critique of de Beauvoir’s liberal bourgeois morality. He argues that the author says in effect “that neither personal morality, not intellectual freedom, nor scientific truth, not artistic integrity have been permitted to play any independent role where they have conflicted with the Communist party line.” The implication is that the Communists [with capital “C”] are “simply indifferent” to these human needs and these needs will always be systematically suppressed.⁹¹

Polonsky’s argument with de Beauvoir is of a principled nature: she is seeking a convenient pretext to break with genuine communism and embrace the anti-communist left. In essence, this stance differentiates Polonsky not only from the French New Left, but also from ‘his’ own Hollywood branch of the Party. On the other hand, the mutual attraction between Kazan and the French New Left, as will be discussed in the chapter on Kazan, makes perfect sense in this historical context. In that sense, Polonsky, along with fellow blacklistees like Joseph Losey (discussed in a separate chapter) and Albert Maltz, represented a minority faction in the Hollywood branch of the Party, a minority that refused to throw the baby out with the bath water by refusing to surrender the classical Marxist ideals of their youth to this Stalinised outfit.

It is then entirely logical that Polonsky should defend Maltz against this Party leadership, since neither man could reconcile true art with their Party’s official policy on art. Still, as Maltz remarked, an artist must be judged by his works, not the petitions he signs. Had Polonsky’s

⁹⁰ Polonsky, A. (1956). “‘The Troubled Mandarins’ review.” *Masses and Mainstream* 9 (Aug): pp. 35-47.

⁹¹ Ibid.

career not been cut off by the Red Scare, he may have provided more than two films as a writer and one as a director to prove Maltz's point. In any case, one of the most noted features of his films and scripts is his conscious use of the crime genre in his quest to penetrate below the social surface. As it happens, this notion is also the title of an unrealised film script (*Below the Surface*) by German philosopher and exile, Theodore Adorno, one of the fiercest critics of the American 'culture industry.' Adorno's view that "all modern art assumes the function of dialectical theory,"⁹² clashed violently with his perception of Hollywood, where "every visit to the cinema leaves me, against all my vigilance, stupider and worse."⁹³ Adorno and Polonsky shared an aversion to classical Hollywood realism, with Adorno lamenting the technical ability of filmmakers to "intensely and flawlessly" duplicate "empirical objects" creating an "illusion" that the "outside world is the straightforward continuation of that presented on screen." As Adorno puts it, "Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies."⁹⁴ However, where these two dialecticians differed was in their relationship to the American vernacular, or the 'plebeian' component of modernism, which Polonsky fully embraced. And, as Miriam Hansen explains, in her rejection of the "binarism of classicism and modernism," prevalent in contemporary film scholarship, classical Hollywood cinema could be imagined as a "cultural practice on a par with the experience of modernity, as an industrially-produced, mass-based, vernacular modernism," without contradicting the vitality of both the industrial and aesthetic aspects of classical Hollywood. Citing Victoria de Grazia, Hansen illuminates the source of cultural power contained in American genres: de Grazia observes that, unlike earlier imperial practices of colonial dumping, American cultural exports "were designed to go as far as the market would take them, starting at home." In other words, "cultural exports shared the basic features of American mass

⁹² Adorno qt. in Jenemann, D. (2007). *Adorno in America*. Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, p. 107

⁹³ Adorno qt. in Ibid, p. 109

⁹⁴ Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, Theodore (1986). *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. NY, Continuum, p. 145

culture, intending by that term not only the cultural artifacts and associated forms, but also the civic values and social relations of the first capitalist mass society.”⁹⁵ Herein lies the significance of Polonsky’s oppositional political aesthetics lodged within this international vernacular: he attempted to create mainstream films with political meanings by “infusing a socialist critique of American society into ‘popular’ genre films.”⁹⁶ And genre, he explained,

...speaks for us in terms of summaries of the way we see life. We live out genres as we live out myths and rituals, because that’s the way we systematize our relationship to society and our relationship to people... I don’t think that the development of genres in the art forms are accidents. I think they’re fundamental to the way art operates on our life... So in the long run, they’re inescapable.⁹⁷

As Marsden writes in *Senses of Cinema*, in his overview of Polonsky’s career, what marks him as a great director is his ability to use genre to “structure the film visually and thematically.” Few directors, according to Marsden, can claim to have used “the form of a mainstream Hollywood genre movie” as does *Force of Evil*, “in order to take an explicitly political worldview out into the public eye.” The film’s damning critique of “crime *as* business” was “radical in [its] wholehearted embracing of a Marxist critique of the capitalist system, and the history that the system is built on, that is central to American society.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Hansen, M. (1999). “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism.” *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2: 59-77.

⁹⁶ Marsden, A. 2005. ‘Abraham Polonsky’ *Senses of Cinema* February
<<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2005/great-directors/polonsky/>> at 30 January 2007.

⁹⁷ Canham, J. and Cook, K. (1970). “Interview with Abraham Polonsky.” *Screen* 2(Summer): 58.

⁹⁸ Marsden, A. 2005. ‘Abraham Polonsky’ *Senses of Cinema* February
<<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2005/great-directors/polonsky/>> at 30 January 2007.

This thesis will argue that Polonsky's synthesis of American mass culture with his Marxian sensibilities in no way diminishes his dialectics. And by any objective assessment of American post-war politics, it is the exposure of the core economic fundamentals of its system that was least welcomed by the military-industrial complex. But does an infusion of Marxist critique of American business and society on film imply a surrender of the ideas of good cinema to that of good story, or political content over aesthetics? Or, to push this further along the Marxist line, should the aesthetic component of film art be conditional on the filmmaker's grasp of contemporary politics?

In probing this question, Aleksandr K. Voronsky, one of the foremost Marxist art critics of the Soviet Union, and a staunch enemy of Stalin and socialist realism in art, provides a useful theoretical benchmark. Writing during the 1920s, he conceives of "art as the cognition of life." Introducing Voronsky's ideas into this discussion is useful not only because, aside from Trotsky, he was the living link between the Hollywood left's contemporary society and the classical Marxist philosophy of art — best exemplified in Plekhanov — but also because he grappled, in the classical Marxist tradition of dialectical materialism, with the major theoretical issue of the day for these Hollywoodites: realism and truth in art.

An examination of classical Marxist thought on art should further illuminate some critical differences in approach between Stalinist socialist realism and the classical Marxist ideal of scientifically and historically-derived, objective truth in art. This is critical in differentiating between the policies espoused by the Hollywood branch of the CP, with its majority led by

Lawson, and, on the other side, Polonsky, Maltz, Maddoff and other defenders, however politically conscious, of truth and realism in film.

Writing in 1923, Voronsky poses the question,

What is art? First of all, art is the *cognition* of life. Art is not the free play of fantasy, feelings, and moods; art is not the expression of merely the subjective sensations and experiences of the poet; art is not assigned the goal of primarily awakening in the reader ‘good feelings’. Like science, art cognises life. Both art and science have the same subject: life, reality.⁹⁹

Here the scientific approach to artistic creation is evident.

Polonsky, even if hemmed in by the Hollywood ‘culture industry,’ adopted this artistic strategy when he utilised the noir and crime genre to articulate the “nature of things” in *Force of Evil* and *Body and Soul*. As was discussed earlier, he used an established genre, the crime drama, to portray the American business community as it is – to the best of his social, historical and political awareness. The artist, writes Voronsky, “must be on par with the political, moral, and scientific ideas of his epoch.” Moreover, “You can’t create novels, poems or paintings in our times if you haven’t defined your attitude toward the modern revolutionary conflicts. Whoever tries to deceive himself and his readers in this regard will in the end be deceived. Here feeling, intuition and instinct alone are insufficient”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Voronsky, A. K., Ed. (1998). *Art as the Cognition of Life: Selected Writings 1911-1936* Oak Park, Michigan, Mehring Books, p. 98

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 376

Therefore, modernist art “must pay incomparably more attention to social and political life.” In that sense, one must “turn to the core, to the sources of social life, to one’s immediate impressions which are primary and unspoilt.”¹⁰¹ Voronsky’s intransigent propagation of art as cognition of real life, as it really is, earned him a place in front of Stalin’s firing squad in April 1937.

So how does Polonsky’s method harmonise with the classical Marxist view? Polonsky often described himself as a Marxist, “not a socialist or a communist.”¹⁰² That is to say, he was committed to Marxist dialectics and aesthetics while rejecting the crude didacticism and authoritarian leadership of the official CP, i.e., the Stalinists. While most of the besieged left-wing Hollywood filmmakers maintained their apolitical liberal stance while putting their faith in the existing Stalinist organisations and their fronts, Polonsky’s sophisticated theoretical grasp of Marxist politics and of the political aesthetics involved in film art rendered him a qualitatively different and more dangerous political animal. Buhle and Wagner lend more weight to Polonsky’s modernist pretensions:

More than anyone else in the studios or independents during this unique moment of mass-culture creativity, Polonsky managed to develop a style of heightened dialogue, stylised camerawork, and forceful characterisation that transcended genre. In these films... can be found the kernel of some of the best films ever produced in the United States, right up to the beginning of the new century.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 387-88

¹⁰² Wagner, D, and Buhle, P. (2001). *A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Polonsky and the Hollywood Left*. Los Angeles, The Regents of the University of California, p. 5

¹⁰³ Ibid, pp. 8-9

While Buhle and Wagner's use of the term 'kernel' may seem extreme, the point here is that aspects of Polonsky's films suggest the possibility of an even more fully achieved American film. But is such exalted praise of Polonsky justified in an aesthetic sense? An answer to this question would greatly assist in an objective examination of the legacy of McCarthyism on American film art and one of its most gifted and conscious practitioners. Pechter's examination of the aesthetics of *Force of Evil* points to some enduring qualities that stay with audiences, and prevent the film from becoming dated:

As in *Odets*, the effect is naturalistic, and, as in *Odets*, it is achieved by an extreme degree of mannerism, artifice, and stylization. But the astonishing thing about *Force of Evil* ... is the way in which the image works with the word. Nothing is duplicated, or supererogatory. Even in so simple an instance as that of the heroine's face in close-up, as the first person narrative runs "Doris wanted me to make love to her," is the relationship of word to image complementary rather than redundant.... Throughout the film, Joe is constantly commenting upon the action, telling us not only what he and the others think, but even describing his own, overt actions as we see him engaging in them.¹⁰⁴

This synthesis of modernism and Marxism in an artistic American vernacular only reinforces the vivid sense of place that was urban America in the 1940s. As Hillier and Philips note, "like so many socially driven *film noirs* of the period, *Force of Evil* melds a highly dramatized *noir* style with an extraordinary amount of graphic detail picturing the everyday textures and realities of New York life." Strongly influenced by the paintings of Edward Hopper, George Barnes's cinematography "vividly captures the ways in which social surroundings help determine the

¹⁰⁴ Pechter, W. (1962). "Abraham Polonsky and *Force of Evil*." *Film Quarterly* 15.3: pp. 47-54.

nuances of character.”¹⁰⁵ Garfield’s Joe Morse is a case in point. Robert Sklar’s seminal study of classical Hollywood’s ‘tough’ male leads, *City Boys*, describes the way the social contradictions of capitalism impinge on Joe’s proletarian character. According to Sklar, he “uncomfortably straddles the high-rise world of Tucker and Wall Street and the neighbourhood world of Leo and his origins.” The statuettes of footballers on his desk, writes Sklar, are “signifiers of athletic skill” that serve as references to the (proletarian) “power bottled up inside him” by his unsavoury role in Tucker’s capitalist enterprise. Indeed, Joe Morse “has been formed by a society seemingly without alternatives to corruption, whether of Tucker’s big-time or his brother’s penny-ante variety.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, Polonsky utilized one of the staple conventions of film noir, gangster-entrepreneur, as a political vehicle in his attack on the profit system. The ‘force of evil’ unleashed by the system alienates the brothers. And, as Grant Tracey argues, “The whole ‘Tucker business,’ the money-making scheme, alienates workers from their work and each other.” Further, Tracey stresses that the eventual death of Leo is placed “by Polonsky and screenwriter Ira Wolfert in a social context. Unlike other noirs, *Force of Evil* blames institutions (Wall Street) and the pursuit of monopoly capital for dehumanising and destroying people.”¹⁰⁷

So, could Polonsky’s highly developed sense of the essential political and social issues in his times be a major contributing factor to his films’ aesthetic effectiveness?

The FBI certainly seems to have feared so. The Bureau’s assessment of Polonsky’s work, in particular *Force of Evil*, provides a clear sense of the exact political issues the state was trying to

¹⁰⁵ Hillier, J., & Philips, Alistair (2009). *100 Film Noirs: BFI Screen Guides*. London, Palgrave Macmillian, pp. 98-99

¹⁰⁶ Sklar, R. (1992). *City Boys, Cagney, Bogart, Garfield*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, p. 209

¹⁰⁷ Grant, Tracey, “10 Shades of Noir: Force of Evil.” *Images*(2), <http://www.imagesjournal.com/issue02/infocus/force.htm> (accessed June 16, 2009)

suppress on screen. Referring to the film's use and combination of visual images, language and personalities, Hillier and Phillips state that this is "one of the very few, and certainly the most politically astute, examples of American *film noir* when word and image are correlated together in such a complex fashion as to depict a human universe utterly bankrupted by greed and financial gain."¹⁰⁸ By the time this film was released, Polonsky's FBI dossier had "sharpened astonishingly," and the attention he attracted was "bordering on obsession."¹⁰⁹ Some of the FBI reports characterised him as "one of the really brilliant men in the [Left] movement," full of "brilliant ideas," and evidently "headed for a very successful future as a screen writer and possibly as a director." Another report related that "POLONSKY feels capitalism and the capitalistic system is the thing that killed his father who was a small druggist who died at an early age."¹¹⁰

But such radical views did not fall from the sky, nor was Polonsky unusual in his hatred of the capitalist system. Contrary to popular belief, there was a strong tradition in American culture of stories about the working class. "American culture was transformed by the CIO[Congress of Industrial Organisations] working classes, by those Tillie Olsen called the 'nameless FrankLloydWrights of the proletariat,'" writes Michael Denning in his study of the "proletarianisation" of American culture, *The Cultural Front*. While it obviously did not result in a socialist culture, "[l]abor sensibility scarred the dominant culture in these decades."¹¹¹ Denning provides a valuable historical perspective on the vital importance of working class culture in the

¹⁰⁸ Hillier, J., & Philips, Alistair (2009). *100 Film Noirs: BFI Screen Guides*. London, Palgrave Macmillian, p. 99

¹⁰⁹ Wagner, D., and Buhle, P. (2001). *A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Polonsky and the Hollywood Left*. Los Angeles, The Regents of the University of California, p. 12

¹¹⁰ FBI Document #100-138754-0297 qt. in Ibid, p. 12

¹¹¹ Denning, M. (1996). *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London, NY, Verso, p. 152

creation of 20th-century American fiction. He writes that “in any view of the American cultural situation, the importance of the radical movement of the Thirties cannot be overestimated. It may be said to have created the American intellectual class as we know it in its great size and influence.”¹¹² Significantly, he stresses the emergence of organised labour in America, the age of the CIO, as a watershed development marking “the first time in the history of the United States that the left – the tradition of radical democratic movements for social transformation – had a central, indeed shaping, impact on American culture.”¹¹³ It is this radicalisation of American culture that shapes the “formation and definition of the city boy,” writes Sklar, outlining a social phenomenon which “came not only from the dominant practices – both in ideology and commercial exploitation – but also from oppositional culture.” The role of left-wing politics is, according to Sklar, “central” to the on- and off-screen character of the city boys like Garfield, as it is to the character of classical Hollywood.¹¹⁴ Thus noir thrillers written by the studio’s contract writers “might be taken as the emblem of the Los Angeles Popular Front: for *noir* was, in Mike Davis’s brilliant summary, a ‘fantastic convergence of American ‘tough-guy’ realism, Weimar expressionism, and existentialized Marxism—all focused on unmasking a ‘bright, guilty place’ (Welles) called Los Angeles.’”¹¹⁵

The last of these elements, “existentialized Marxism,” has always been a contentious issue with the Hollywood left and its branch of the Communist Party of America (CPUSA), led by John Howard Lawson. One does not have to be versed in classical Marxist philosophy of art to

¹¹² Lionel Trilling qt. in Ibid, p. 3

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Sklar, R. (1992). *City Boys, Cagney, Bogart, Garfield*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, p. 9-10

¹¹⁵ Mike Davis in Denning, M. (1996). *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London, NY, Verso, p. 19

appreciate the ferociousness of the struggles waged within the Hollywood branch over the issues of art, revolution and liberation. The infamous ‘Maltz affair’ of 1946, which erupted over Albert Maltz’s article in *New Masses*, “What Shall We Ask of Writers?”, is perhaps the most concentrated expression of the battle between the Marxist and Stalinist ideologies among the Hollywood progressives. The following section presents a more detailed discussion of its significance then, and its legacy now.

Post-war shift in the left paradigm

The Maltz controversy drew a sharp dividing line between the proponents of the Stalinist ‘art as a weapon’ doctrine defended by Lawson and the CP, and those, like Polonsky, who defended Maltz in espousing his ideal of truth and realism in art. Maltz strongly condemned what he called the “political novel,” which, he claimed, “usually requires the artificial manipulation of characters and usually results in shallow writing.” As an alternative to the political novel, he advocated the realism of the “social novel,” which is primarily concerned with “revealing men and society as they are.” To achieve this aim, the social novelist “presents all characters from their point of view, allowing them their own full, human justification for their behavior and attitudes, yet allowing the reader to judge their objective behavior.”¹¹⁶

This artistic strategy was, curiously, at odds with the Hollywood Left leadership. Polonsky describes their misguided social commitment ideals in a 1978 interview:

Their attitudes (about film) reflected – to a certain extent – what was going on in the Soviet Union, which had destroyed the dynamic aesthetic movement of its late 1920s. So

¹¹⁶ Maltz, A. (1946). What Shall We Ask of Writers? *New Masses*. 58.7 (Feb 12), p. 22

they thought of aesthetics in terms of social content. To them, the social content of a film was its aesthetic. If the Party line of progressive social ideas or progressive subjects was treated in a film – *that* was communist aesthetics.¹¹⁷

The ‘communist aesthetics’ referred to was, of course, the Stalinist aesthetic. The act of “criticising the concept of ‘art as weapon’” was, according to Walter Bernstein, equivalent to “heresy,” and he added, Maltz “might as well have attacked Stalin.” The Party “fell on him like the wolf on the [flock],”¹¹⁸ instead of building defences against the resurgent right.

Interestingly, Lawson demonstrated his intellectual integrity a decade or so later when he had a chance to visit the Soviet Union and reassess his views on ‘art as weapon.’ This concept, in the words of this “dean of the Hollywood Ten,” was “used mechanically and misleadingly in the thirties and there was a lot of loose talk (in which I participated),” about “proletarian art.” Lawson defends his Stalinist intransigence during the period of “personal and intellectual difficulty in 1949 and 1953,” that led to a “defensive approach to Hollywood and [his] own role there” manifesting itself in a “reaction in the opposite direction, a narrowly ‘political’ and mechanistic approach to film and especially American film in 1953.”¹¹⁹ But this intransigence was deeply rooted in a Stalinist cultural politics that dominated the Hollywood CP, as evidenced in Lawson’s enthusiastic, and rather uncritical, endorsement of post-war Soviet cinema.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Zheutlin, B., & Talbot, David (1978). Creative Differences: Profiles of Hollywood Dissidents. Boston, South End Press, p. 83

¹¹⁸ Bernstein, W. (1996). Inside Out: A Memoir of the Blacklist. NY, Knopf, p. 197

¹¹⁹ Horne, G. (2006). The Final Victim of the Blacklist: John Howard Lawson, Dean of the Hollywood Ten. Berkeley, LA, University of California Press, pp. 249-50

¹²⁰ Lawson, J. H. (1953). “Towards a People’s Art: Two Camps in the World of Film.” Film in the Battle of Ideas. J. H. Lawson. NY, Masses and Mainstream: pp. 82-89.

The post-war Soviet appeal could be explained, at least partly, by a certain weakening of the social realist element that could be discerned in the post-war progressives' filmmaking. Sergio Giovacchini poses some important questions that go to the heart of the political aesthetics explored in this thesis, when he asks, "Was social realism pushed completely out of the center of Hollywood style?"¹²¹ He claims that Hollywood's "democratic modernism" underwent a fundamental shift after the war, which manifested itself in a tendency for the protagonists to move away from class solidarity towards solitude, i.e., individual solutions were found to the social problems posed by the narrative.¹²²

But things are not as clear-cut as that. Paula Rabinowitz problematises Giovacchini's, as well as Denning's, uncritical acceptance of a broad cultural "forcefield," or proletarian cultural front, which sought to "forge a democratic mass capable of overcoming the divisions of ethnicity, race, and religion," but often at the expense of "the class analysis"¹²³ central to the key figures explored in this thesis. Nevertheless, Rabinowitz usefully places classical Hollywood's kitschy vernacular in the context of the "twin spectres of unemployment and mass murder, and the burgeoning popular culture of Hollywood..."¹²⁴ It is this fortuitous intersection of historical and cultural trends that laid the groundwork for post-war *film gris* and *film noir* to reach artistic heights and achieve what Andersen regarded as a 'psychological and social realism' hitherto unseen in Hollywood, despite the collapse of the 1930s collectivist, or modernist, paradigm. According to Buhle and Wagner, film noir is "the single most important mass-artistic achievement borne out of the American Left in the Twentieth century, both a response to artistic

¹²¹ Giovacchini, S. (2001). Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of The New Deal. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, p. 191

¹²² Ibid, p. 193

¹²³ Rabinowitz, P. (2002). "Hollywood Modernism (book review)." *Cineaste* 27(2): pp. 54-55.

¹²⁴ Rabinowitz, P. (2002). Black & White Noir: America's Pulp Modernism. NY, Columbia University Press, p. 6

possibility and an alternative to the retreat into the accommodationist political aesthetic (“artistic free enterprise,” in Henry Luce’s cogent phrase) of the New York intellectuals’ high modernism.”¹²⁵ Even though he belonged to the New York intellectual circle, there was nothing “accommodationist” in Polonsky’s modernism. Rather, his cinema espoused the kind of popular “modernist aesthetic” that many American filmmakers incorporated into “the classical Hollywood style as a way of revitalising standardised conventions and genres without alienating the studios, and by extension, the public.”¹²⁶ While, according to Naremore, “Welles was the most spectacular manifestation of a growing acceptance of modernist values throughout the culture,” the movie studios nevertheless “needed to lighten or ameliorate the darkness of modernism and mute its intensity.”¹²⁷

And in its deliberate use of the crime genre, and politically sophisticated content, *Force of Evil* espoused modernist ideals in a pulp context. (High modernism is particularly applicable to an assessment of another blacklisted, Joseph Losey, who will be discussed in a later chapter.) A corollary of the Red Scare was the historic defeat, or excommunication of this direction in American film art – along with some of its directors-practitioners. This is reflected in what Giovacchini refers to as “the last hurrah of the unencumbered progressives,” *Salt of the Earth*. Even if “relieved of the ideological oppression of their studios after being blacklisted,” this historic labour film stands as a “representative of the defeated 1930s paradigm.”¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Wagner, D., and Buhle, P. (2002). Radical Hollywood: The Untold Story Behind America's Favourite Films. New York, The New Press, p. 359

¹²⁶ Mann, D. (2008). Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, p. 147

¹²⁷ Naremore, J. (1998). More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts. Berkeley, LA, University of California Press, pp. 47-48

¹²⁸ Giovacchini, S. (2001). Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of The New Deal. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, p. 210

The best representatives of this paradigm were the original Hollywood Ten, plus Orson Welles (who became a European exile in 1948), and Charles Chaplin (barred from re-entering the US until 1972), who do in fact constitute a left-wing school or community.¹²⁹ Analysing socially engaged, post-war noirs such as *M*, *The Prowler*, *Ruthless*, *Thieves' Highway*, *Force of Evil*, and other Garfield films, Naremore observes that these films and a few others allowed working-class characters from marginalised ethnic groups to “express themselves in dignified form for almost the first time, and they offered a vivid contrast to the WASP look of utopian Hollywood.”¹³⁰ For example, Cy Endfield in *Try and Get Me* “nicely conveys the class structure of a city, and most of its minor characters—such as the ‘tough’ women who go drinking and dancing with the kidnappers—are unusually complex.”¹³¹ The famous lynch-mob sequences are “profoundly unsettling, and the story as a whole is such a thoroughgoing indictment of capitalism and liberal complacency that it transcends the ameliorative limits of the social-problem picture.”¹³²

This is the social and political environment that gave rise to sensitive and gifted figures of the Hollywood left, such as Polonsky and John Garfield. The films they made together are a testament to the artistic possibilities of *film gris* and *film noir*. They embodied a radicalised mass culture of the Depression and WWII era. But do their work and personae prove the Marxist contention that good art should play an emancipatory role? How does the combination of Polonsky’s and Garfield’s respective political make-ups pan out in *Force of Evil*? How does it affect Joe’s psychology?

¹²⁹ Naremore, J. (1998). More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts. Berkeley, LA, University of California Press, pp. 124-25

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 125

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 126

¹³² Ibid, p.127

Joe's desire to succeed in this (criminal-)business world gives rise to an acute moral dilemma, which tears him apart. His younger brother Leo (Thomas Gomez) is also involved in the numbers racket, but, as a small numbers banker, he risks total destruction. Here the contradiction between the drive for profit and the maintenance of healthy relationships finds its sharpest expression. Importantly, it is this basic social contradiction that is at the heart of Joe's inner torment. As one review states, Joe "may be willing to take risks in Tucker's enterprise, but as his last name suggests, (re)Morse, and his self-absorbed repetition of "guilty," he's a man of conscience, who vainly tries to hide behind a street-smart sense of Social Darwinism."¹³³ This is a fruitful aesthetic strategy: tying characters' psychology to the nature of social relations. Few filmmakers in Hollywood could achieve such a synthesis of the inner and the outer forces in their protagonists.

In Polonsky's case, the artistic ability to synthesise the objective and subjective factors in his characters and their relationships owes as much to his own writing talent as his political and class orientation. Asked how he goes about reconciling the political with the personal in his writing, Polonsky raises a critical point – both are integral, inseparable parts of an artistic persona:

I don't have ideology over here and writing over here, and I say, 'What kind of a bridge can I build between what I believe in most and what I'm doing?' That's the thing, isn't it? I mean I don't see it as two separate things.... The stuff is all together. And I keep saying, 'How can I use this fellow, and how can I use this fellow, and how can I use myself?' I am my ideology, I hope, confused as it is.... [B]ut about the things I have made, people say, 'Why do you put your ideas in it?' They're saying that! They're putting ideas in it! I

¹³³ Grant, T. (2006). "10 Shades of Noir *Force of Evil* (<http://www.imagesjournal.com/issue02/infocus/force.htm>)."
Images 2(accessed June 16, 2009).

didn't put my ideas in it. I wrote it. Those are my ideas. That's my story. That's my meaning. It's all the same thing.¹³⁴

This unity between Polonsky's artistic personality and his social awareness is clearly manifested in *Force of Evil*, where the real social pressures are brought to bear on the relationship between the two brothers. Both are essentially crooks, the only difference being that Joe is situated at a much higher end of the racket, where all the key decisions are made. He pleads with his brother to join him there: "Leo, let me take you out of this airshaft and get you a real office, in a real building – an office in the clouds." As Nicholas Christopher notes, "real" but also in the "clouds" is "a paradox to which Joe seems oblivious. And it is that obliviousness, and his hubris while standing on the most impermanent of ground, that leads to his inevitable downfall."¹³⁵ When Leo refuses Joe's offer to join in his high end of the racket, insisting he is running an "honest" business, Joe retorts with his take on the reality of contemporary capitalist ethics: "Honest! Respectable! Don't you take the nickels and dimes and pennies from people that bet just like every other crook big or little in this racket? They call this racket 'policy' because people bet their nickels on numbers instead of paying their weekly insurance premiums... Tucker wants to make millions, you [to Leo] thousands, and you [to secretary Doris], you do it for \$35 a week."¹³⁶

Brinckmann explains that these pressures of the profit system, rather than some "innate moral deficiency" have to be held responsible for their mistakes. *Force of Evil* is "not about the evil

¹³⁴ Polonsky, A. (1974). Seminar With Abraham Polonsky held November 13, 1974. Film History Program, Center For Advanced Film Studies. Beverly Hills, California, American Film institute.

¹³⁵ Christopher, N. (1997). *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City*. NY, The Free Press, p. 103

¹³⁶ Broe, D. (2009). Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood. Gainesville, University Press of Florida, pp. 51-53

eternally and inescapably present in the human race.”¹³⁷ In that sense, the eternal, universal morals of its Abel and Cain source are universal only as far as the modern capitalist system permitted – Joe and Leo are Abel and Cain with clearly differentiated, timeless motivations, but are also two brothers swept up in the tide of capitalist free enterprise. And the system, as opposed to the mythical-biblical setting of Abel and Cain, blurs the moral divisions: capitalist social relations impart to their personal relationship a high level of complexity and ambiguity. So even the ‘good,’ or ‘lesser evil’ represented in brother Leo, who foregoes the Faustian temptations of his big brother, relates in a rare moment of candour:

I’ve been a businessman all my life, and honest, I don’t know what a business is.... Real estate business, living from mortgage to mortgage, stealing credit like a thief. And the garage, that was a business. Three cents overcharge on every gallon of gas – two cents for the chauffeur, and a penny for me. A penny for one thief, two cents for the other.

This exchange is particularly interesting, because, in the words of Reynold Humphries, it “indicates just how political an animal Polonsky was” for the way Leo finally succumbs to the invisible force of evil. His bitterness towards his more powerful brother Joe is, according to Humphries, an expression of the “ideology of an exchange economy” in which “gambling on horses to become rich, rigging bets so as to control the city’s economy, offering a woman flowers to obtain her love” are all equally acceptable aspects of its “fetishistic dimension,” which, moreover, is “central to the film.”¹³⁸ This aspect is inseparable from the relationship of the two brothers, “which is the central love story of the film,” writes William Pechter,

¹³⁷ Brinckmann, C. N. (1981). “The Politics of *Force of Evil*: An Analysis of Abraham Polonsky's Preblacklist Film.” *Prospects: The Annual of American Cultural Studies* no. 6: 374.

¹³⁸ Humphries, R. (2001). “When Crime Does Pay: Abraham Polonsky's *Force of Evil* (1948).” *Q/W/E/R/T/Y: Arts, Literature & Civilisations du Monde Anglophone* 11(Oct): pp. 205-210.

commenting on “the Freudian ‘family romance,’ a love thwarted mutually by guilt, and ending in anguish.” Pechter concludes that, “in terms of plot, the film ends utterly without stereotypic satisfactions,” pointing to the death of the ‘good’ brother; Joe’s imminent confession to the police, and the absence of the final, “solipsistic kiss.”¹³⁹

In a 1970 interview with the British journal *Screen*, Polonsky observed that the “studios had permitted only liberals and the conservatives the self-confidence to make strong political films.” Frank Capra could do “anything he felt like,” and “John Ford might do something tremendous” like *Grapes of Wrath* (1940). The Left, by contrast, “was carefully watched, and knew it, understanding better than liberals the limits imposed by the studio system’s economics and management.” Leftists, Polonsky observed, knew “that you can’t get any radical activity in films. People who aren’t radicals don’t know that,” and added that it would certainly “be a lie to say that American left-wingers didn’t do [any] pictures with radical activity. They did pictures with humanist content with a flavour of democracy.” As Buhle and Wagner aptly remark, “in the Hollywood climate, that was radical.”¹⁴⁰ Perhaps that explains, at least partially, the witch-hunters’ hounding of a star who was by no means a Communist radical, John Garfield.

John Garfield, a quintessential American star

As indicated earlier, Robert Sklar provides a valuable study of the “twentieth-century American mass media phenomenon of the City Boy,” arising from the “teeming ethnic polyglot of the

¹³⁹ Pechter, W. (1962). “Abraham Polonsky and *Force of Evil*.” *Film Quarterly* 15.3: pp. 47-54.

¹⁴⁰ Canham, K., and Cook, J. (1970). “Interview with Abraham Polonsky.” *Screen* 2(Summer): 58.

modern industrial city – especially New York,”¹⁴¹ that gave rise to a distinct group of male stars, including Garfield, Cagney and Bogart. To appreciate the significance of Garfield’s highly authentic portrayals of the American urban (under-)classes, it is instructive to digress into the historical conditions that gave rise to what Michael Denning terms “proletarian writing—the ghetto pastorals, the tales of unemployed drifters, the racial romances, the gangster stories,” which were also adapted to the film noir and film gris of post-war Hollywood. In *Cultural Front*, Denning cites some of the better known examples of screenwriters/ex-proletarian writers: Vera Caspary (*Laura*), Daniel Fuchs (*Panic in the Streets*), Alfred Hayes (*Clash by Night*), Ben Maddow (*The Asphalt Jungle*), Albert Maltz (*The Naked City*), Jo Pagano (*Try and Get Me*), Clifford Odets (*Deadline at Dawn*), and Horace McCoy. In other cases, continues Denning, novels were adapted to the screen: di Donato’s *Christ in Concrete* became Dmytryk’s *Give Us This Day*; Thomas Bell’s *All Brides Are Beautiful* became John Berry’s *From This Day Forward*; and Budd Schulberg’s original stories based on Malcolm Johnson’s newspaper articles became *On the Waterfront*.¹⁴² As Sklar explains, While the “formative public event” of Cagney’s and Bogart’s adolescence had been WWI, for Garfield, it was the social shock of the stock market crash and the Great Depression that shaped his character.¹⁴³

So, John Garfield’s star qualities can best be appreciated within this socio-political context, which gave rise to film gris. And “the first axiom of film gris,” declared Thom Andersen in his seminal essay “Red Hollywood,” is John Garfield. Andersen coined the term film gris to describe a certain type of post-war noir, “distinguished from the earlier noir by its greater psychological

¹⁴¹ Sklar, R. (1992). *City Boys, Cagney, Bogart, Garfield*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, p. xii

¹⁴² Denning, M. (1996). *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London, NY, Verso, p. 228

¹⁴³ Sklar, R. (1992). *City Boys, Cagney, Bogart, Garfield*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, p. 82

and social realism.”¹⁴⁴ He characterises Garfield, himself a kid fighting his way out of the slums, as an actor who “managed to embody in his screen persona a group that never before appeared in American films, the Jewish working class.”¹⁴⁵ Garfield, “a product of the New York tenements, Jewish, involved in several pioneering films of the streetwise, socially aware variety (*Body and Soul*, *They Made Me a Criminal*, *Gentlemen’s Agreement*, *He Ran All the Way*)” was, writes Nicholas Christopher, never a communist even though he was left-leaning—never more “to the left than the liberal wing of the Democratic Party”. But more importantly, “before Marlon Brando and James Dean, Garfield was Hollywood’s first smouldering antihero, sexy, up-from-the-streets, brash and dangerous—but sensitive. Whether playing a boxer, a drifter, a revolutionary, or even a violinist, Garfield brought these qualities to all his roles.”¹⁴⁶

What qualities are we talking about? In a recent public lecture, “The Crisis of American Filmmaking & Cultural Life,” held in New York, film critic David Walsh addressed this very question. Walsh stresses that even though “simplification, caricature and emotional ‘rounding off’ were very much present” among the original City Boys, nevertheless, at their best, actors like Cagney, Muni, Robinson, etc, who “embodied something about the American personality, or personalities,” were able to convey, convincingly, their working-class character. Even Bogart and Fonda, raised in more privileged circumstances, also embodied this essential quality of the times.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Andersen, T. (2007). “Red Hollywood”. *“Un-American” Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*. F. Krutnik, Neale, Steve, Neve, Brian, and Stanfield, Peter. New Brunswick, N.J. & London, Rutgers University Press, pp. 257-8.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Christopher, N. (1997). *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City*. NY, The Free Press, p. 101

¹⁴⁷ Public Meeting: Walsh, D. (2010). *The Crisis of American Filmmaking & Cultural Life*, Feb 21, Roosevelt Hotel, NY www.wsw.org/articles/2010/mar2010/nyca-m18.shtml accessed on 18 Sep 2010.

Garfield established himself as a stage actor with the Group Theatre in Clifford Odet's *Awake and Sing* before accepting a movie contract with Warner Brothers in 1938. The Warners built their reputation as Hollywood's 'social problem' studio, frequently drawing from Depression era proletarian culture. Nevertheless, unhappy with the limited choice of films in the rigid studio system, Garfield formed his own production company, Roberts Productions, which chose a new independent studio, Enterprise, as a base from which to work. As Ellen Eyles remarked, "In its time [Enterprise Studio] created a tremendous stir and still stands as a noble failure of artists versus the system."¹⁴⁸ Instrumental in this lofty artistic endeavour, alongside Garfield, was an upcoming writer, Abraham Polonsky.

Polonsky said that what made Garfield so important, "far more than his overall brilliance as an actor, was his presence as 'a star who represented a social phenomenon ... without contradiction in the imagination of those who loved him for something that lay in themselves.'" It spoke to the time when lower-class "Jews who didn't join the money system gravitated to socialism ... rebellion ... and self-consciousness, harsh or neurotic."¹⁴⁹ These flawed human qualities resonated with the broad mass of the movie-going public. And, as Maltby explains, it is audiences who create stars, not studios, adding that "stars are representative of the audience, as much their 'property' as the studio's."¹⁵⁰ Contextualising personal star qualities in their political and social context is precisely what Christine Gledhill carries out in her 1991 study of the Hollywood star system, where she provides one of the most succinct and useful elaboration of the relationship between the star and the studio and political system that produces him/her:

¹⁴⁸ Marsden, A. 2005. 'Abraham Polonsky' *Senses of Cinema* February
<<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2005/great-directors/polonsky/>> at 30 January 2007.

¹⁴⁹ Polonsky qt. in Wagner, P. B. a. D. (2001). *A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Polonsky and the Hollywood Left*. Los Angeles, The Regents of the University of California, p.131

¹⁵⁰ Maltby, R. (1995). Performance. *Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*. London: Blackwell, p. 100.

The star challenges analysis in the way it crosses disciplinary boundaries: a product of mass culture, but retaining theatrical concerns with acting, performance and art; an industrial marketing device, but a signifying element in films; a social sign, carrying cultural meanings and ideological values, which expresses the intimacies of individual personality, inviting desire and identification; an emblem of national celebrity, founded on the body, fashion and personal style; a product of capitalism and the ideology of individualism, yet a site of contest by marginalised groups; a figure consumed for his or her personal life, who competes for allegiance with statesmen and politicians.¹⁵¹

Therefore, it is significant that in the context of a sharp crisis of postwar American capitalism that Polonsky grounded the emotional intensity of *Force of Evil* in his star actor. As Christine N. Brinckmann explains, "... [T]he Garfield character serves as a center of emotional intensity in a rigorously condensed plot loaded with thought and information. But it also serves to give an emotionally and, to some degree, politically satisfactory ending to *Force of Evil*."¹⁵² This assessment of Garfield's performance is completely rejected by Sklar. Commenting on Garfield's "new imploded, constrained performance style" which he carries "almost to an extreme," Sklar notes that it is not until the first meeting with Leo, that he "smiles and enlivens his face." Otherwise, Garfield's Joe "maintains an immobile expression, hardly moving any part of his face other than his mouth to speak." While some repressing of the inner emotions may be a useful screen acting tool, the problem of *Force of Evil*, according to Sklar, is that it "lacks the necessary creative elements of an effective ensemble to compensate for Garfield's "repression of

¹⁵¹ Gledhill, C. (1991). *Stardom: Industry of Desire*. Ed. Christine Gledhill. London: Routledge, p.xiii.

¹⁵² Brinckmann, C. N. (1981). "The Politics of *Force of Evil*: An Analysis of Abraham Polonsky's Preblacklist Film." *Prospects: The Annual of American Cultural Studies* no. 6: 377.

energy.” Indeed, in contradistinction to Brinckmann’s assessment, “performance plays a relatively small part in the film’s impact.”¹⁵³

According to Sklar, the possibility that “something more complex” underlies Joe Morse was “unintentionally undercut by Polonsky’s decision to add the voice-over,” which, argues the author, apart from “defining the character,” provided cover for insufficiently expressed “gesture, or facial expression, or dialogue intonation.” Garfield, surmised Sklar, “could not compete with the young Method performers in conveying the state of a psyche in quieter, less demonstrable ways.”¹⁵⁴ But his persona, however poorly expressed, still embodied the most powerful, if repressed, aspects of the proletarian character of the City Boy phenomenon. That could not be taken away. Or, to again cite Sklar, the “personality,” as conceived by Lee Strasberg, where the performances were “‘natural’ emanations of their inner selves,”¹⁵⁵ cannot but show.

In *Force of Evil*, Garfield’s Joe Morse regains his humanity by being forced outside of his personal shell. It is impossible to separate Garfield’s subjectivity, infused with the Jewish working-class ethos, from the emotional impact of Joe’s challenge to the system that gave rise to it. Nicholas Christopher’s poem, “John Garfield,” gives a vivid sense of the personal tragedy of the star’s subjectivity and his downfall:

The city’s last tough guy
Sidles down 44th Street
Bumming a smoke, feinting a punch—
...

¹⁵³ Sklar, R. (1992). *City Boys, Cagney, Bogart, Garfield*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, p. 209-10

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 213

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 272

After Hollywood, the big money,
The girls with the roulette eyes,
He's blacklisted out of pictures
When he won't give names—
“A matinee socialist,” McCarthy calls him.
His voice a hoarseness,
Health gone to hell,
The good looks rumpled up in West Side hotels
With ex-society girls and B-actresses,
In the end drinks
For nine months straight,
Blacks out regularly at dawn,
Dead at 39, journalists delighted
To report an English girl,
Under-aged and on junk,
In bed with him at the time.¹⁵⁶

Adding to the sense of Garfield's tragedy is a “grim coincidence” of his and his co-star Canada Lee's untimely demises in distress within two weeks of each other,¹⁵⁷ as noted by Jay Maeder of New York Daily News. He cites his famous predecessor at New York Daily News from half a century before, Ed Sullivan, who gives a flavour of the discussion of these premature deaths in the right of the center press at the time. In an epitaph for these city boys, Sullivan notes that “the

¹⁵⁶ Christopher, N. (1982). *On tour with Rita: Poems by Nicholas Christopher*. New York, Alfred Knoph, p. 12-13

¹⁵⁷ Maeder, J. (2000). *Body and Soul: The Lonesome death of John Garfield*, May 1952. nydailynews.com, Nov 17, 2000 (accessed July 20, 2011). NY.

Commies take over, body and soul. ... Both of them were warm-hearted kids, easy prey for the bait that Commies dangle before confused liberals. ... Each of them was trapped because he thought with his heart.”¹⁵⁸

Garfield may have worn his proletarian heart on his sleeve, but there are also objective, historically-derived reasons for his mass appeal. The well developed classical Hollywood star system only accentuated what was already a strong, organic bond between the masses of the working people and ‘their’ stars. In 1950, James wrote,

For the last twenty years ... the most outstanding feature of the American movie is the complete domination of the star system ... whereby a certain selected few individuals symbolize in their film existence *and in their private and public existence* the revolt against the general conditions. If the great body of the public did not need stars, there would be no stars.... [italics in original] Thus Rita Hayworth is in no sense a mere creation of predatory industrialists for stupid masses ... but is a product of the age.... No publicity in the world can create a great star, the mass chooses its major stars with remarkable judgement.¹⁵⁹

British historian Eric Hobsbawm also argues that “The artist sprung from the unskilled poor, and playing for the poor is in a peculiar social position....” So the star

¹⁵⁸ Ed Sullivan qt. in Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ James qt. in Denning, M. (1996). The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century. London, NY, Verso, p. 154

is not merely a success among this sporting or artist public, but the potential first citizen of his community or his people.... For the star was what every slum child and drudge might become: the king or queen of the poor, because the poor person writ large.¹⁶⁰

Or, in Denning's words, "the kings and queens of the CIO working classes." Denning concludes that the implicit and explicit politics of the star are a crucial part of the 'star image,' the persona created by the studio's publicity. In some cases, continues Denning, "the roles played by the star reinforced the star's political affiliations."¹⁶¹ As Sklar surmised, the role of the left-wing politics was "central" to the on- and off-screen character of City Boys like Garfield.¹⁶²

The centrality of the left, proletarian sentiment in Garfield's character was reflected in his short and tragic life. Freedland discusses Garfield's tortured dilemmas in the last year of his life as he was being hounded by the FBI and HUAC. There were rumours that he was blacklisted because he dared to go against the big boys in the town, and challenge the system by establishing his own production company, Enterprise, which produced some undisputed classics of *film gris*: *Body and Soul*, *Force of Evil* and *He Ran All the Way*.¹⁶³ Still, his daughter Julie Garfield suspected her father was chosen by HUAC because they knew he was very liberal and "probably very interested in Marxism."¹⁶⁴ These interests, combined with his status of "kind of the CIO working-class," were a dangerous combination in post-war America.

¹⁶⁰ Eric Hobsbawm qt. in Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 155

¹⁶² Sklar, R. (1992). *City Boys, Cagney, Bogart, Garfield*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, p. 10

¹⁶³ Freedland, M. (2007). *Hollywood on Trial: McCarthyism's War Against the Movies*. London, Robson, p. 173

¹⁶⁴ Julie Garfield in Ibid, p. 174

A tactic the FBI employed against Garfield was to “bring his wife into the affair” by forcing him to name her as a card-carrying Communist.¹⁶⁵ To make himself more employable, Garfield even published a pamphlet, in collaboration with Arnold Forster, “I Was a Sucker for a Left Hook” in a desperate attempt to fend off the witch-hunters.¹⁶⁶ But Garfield’s personal misfortunes reflected broader political realignments. These were, in turn, reflected in the declining faith in the political independence of the working class. As Brian Neve draws out, in his review of the documentary *Red Hollywood*, “[W]hile the working-class resistance to John Garfield’s man on the run in *He Ran All the Way* (1951) is seen as indicating the historic defeat of the Communist Party, given the ‘orchestrated hysteria of the forties and fifties,’” this is compared with the “assumed solidarity that greeted Garfield’s character” in *Dust Be My Destiny* (1938).¹⁶⁷ It is as if the collective morale of the American working class was dealt severe blows at the end of its most radical period. And *its* own star’s fate became a highly visible manifestation of an end of *its* era.

In the end, in a tragic twist of fate, Garfield did stay true to his working-class principles. In the blunt words of Polonsky, “He said he hated Communists, he hated Communism. He told the committee what it wanted to hear. But he wouldn’t say the one thing that would keep him from walking down his old neighbourhood block. Nobody could say, ‘Hey, there’s the fucking stool pigeon.’”¹⁶⁸

The American working class – a path to a new realism?

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 175

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 175

¹⁶⁷ Neve, B. (1999). “*Red Hollywood* Review Essay.” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* **19**(no. 1).

¹⁶⁸ Polonsky qt in Navasky, V. (1980). *Naming Names*. NY, Hill and Wang, p. xix

Still, Garfield's courage under fire expressed something more than simply his individual principles—as discussed above, he fully embodied the working-class character of his times. Yet Hollywood's treatment of the working class in American society “has never been noted for its realism.”¹⁶⁹ Even Warner's social problem dramas of the 1930s and 40s “never got beyond depicting workers as a mixture of urban ethnics, taxi-drivers, bellhops and chorus girls, all looking for the main chance,” nor did Frank Capra and others dramatically enrich that image.¹⁷⁰ As Thom Andersen puts it, the left-wing “social problem” films of that period, which include *They Made Me a Criminal*, *Fury*, *Pinky*, *Boomerang*, *Intruder in the Dust*, *The Home of the Brave*, *Little Caesar* and others, “were protests against the vestiges of feudalism in American society; the most frequent targets were sharecropping, contract prison labor, and forms of peonage based on racism.”¹⁷¹

And it is no wonder that realism in American film suffered lasting damage, when compared to some counterparts in Europe and internationally that enjoyed a relative political advantage of working within a political framework – albeit bourgeois - which not only allowed, but even encouraged its Stalinist and Social-Democratic attachments (Labour in Britain, Communists in Italy and France). As Jon Lewis explains, the kind of neo-realism arising out of the Stalinist climate in Italy would have been “too overtly political for Hollywood.” Lewis also notes that “popular film can't be so overtly political.”¹⁷² One could easily find a spot in any of the

¹⁶⁹ Leonard Quart & Albert Auster qt. in Davies, P., and Neve, Brian, Ed. (1981). Cinema, Politics and Society in America. Manchester, Manchester University Press.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Andersen, T. (2007). “Red Hollywood”. “Un-American” Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era. F. Krutnik, Neale, Steve, Neve, Brian, and Stanfield, Peter. New Brunswick, N.J. & London, Rutgers University Press: 259.

¹⁷² Interview with Jon Lewis, Feb 8, 2010

European and other national cinemas of the 1950s for the banned American neo-realist film, *Salt of the Earth*.

Since the American Dream was always cloaked in definite class interests, primarily in terms of the upwardly mobile middle class, it is useful to hear socialist film critic David Walsh give a contemporary take on this issue. If today Walsh's comments seem to come from an 'extreme left' position, it is one that was taken for granted among the Hollywood Left before the Red Scare. While the working class and its pursuit of the American Dream has occupied an important part in American cinema since the 'social problem' films of the Depression era, and more notably during the New Hollywood renaissance of the late 1960s/early 1970s, "examining American society to the root in film was," according to Walsh, "for all intents and purposes banned in the United States following the anti-communist witch-hunting of the late 1940s and 1950s." Walsh adds that "[p]ermission was granted to condemn any number of specific ills – racism, poverty, conformism, materialism, militarism, even the anticommunist hysteria itself – but not the social relations of American capitalism. Whatever he or she might go on to say, the artist was now obliged to take as his or her starting point the greatness and essentially unchallenged stature of 'American democracy.'"¹⁷³

Polonsky's earlier-mentioned review of the much lauded *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1947) gives a clear sense of an exasperation felt among the Hollywood radicals eager to give themselves permission to expose the social contradictions of capitalism. For Polonsky, *The Best Years* "indicates for every director and writer that the struggle for content, for social reality, no

¹⁷³ Walsh, D. (2006). "American Artists and American Tragedy." World Socialist Web Site Review Feb-May 2006: pp. 72-75.

matter how limited the point of view, is a necessary atmosphere for growth in the American film.” In his view, the movie had shown more interest in the banker Stephenson (Frederick March) than in the working man Fred Derry (Dana Andrews), concentrating on the plight of those least affected by the war, i.e., the story is about the problems of the rich. To Polonsky this demonstrated that “the movies just seem to find it impossible to deal with people who work for their living in factories and on farms.”¹⁷⁴

Polonsky’s comments on *Odd Man Out* and *Monsieur Verdoux* capture some of the main preoccupations of a group of serious filmmakers before the onset of the HUAC repression:

You cannot examine life without opening a floodgate of truths.... But when these truths conflict with presuppositions rooted in interest, then you must obey the truth or refuse to look. In *Odd Man Out* the storytellers refused to look. To the senseless world they say: there will always be authority, needed, aided, loved; and there will always be rebels, both weak and heroic; and people are torn with fears of self and not-self; and man is a storm-tossed creature adrift on the dark seas of eternal conflict and misery; but if we have some inner dignity and charity toward others and ourselves, while we cannot change life, we can learn to endure it. If we cannot change human nature and the conditions of its existence, let us at least be kind to each other. Let us *indeed* be kind! We can get used to not being used to life, as many as suffering neurotic can vouch for.

This is, of course, plain antirealistic perversity with which the psychiatrist is more familiar than I, and no décor of objectivity, not real street lights, street signs, tenements, mills, not any real object or place, makes this position aesthetically realistic. These works

¹⁷⁴ Polonsky, A. (1947). “*The Best Years of Our Lives*: A Review.” *Hollywood Quarterly* 2(Apr): pp. 257-260.

are not created from the point of view of mastering reality. You cannot master reality unless you recognise its content and this, despite its bravura clownishness, *Monsieur Verdoux* does. *Realism is based on content....* The accidents of a literary verbal heritage or stylistic modes are not central to the method of realism.¹⁷⁵

Interestingly, what gets lost in the anticommunist witch-hunts is not realism per se, but the very content Polonsky alluded to. Jon Lewis elaborates on a seeming contradiction between the loss of serious message films and the concomitant examination of social issues, and the persistence of Hollywood realism to this day. Even though blacklisted figures like Rossen and Kazan eventually named names, their particular realism, a “poetic, urban realism” remained their signature style.¹⁷⁶ On the all-important question of realism in art, which the Hollywood Left debated with utter seriousness, it is instructive to cite one of the most authoritative anti-Stalinists, Leon Trotsky. While few, if any, Hollywood film workers read Trotsky’s essays on art and culture, his work embodied all the progressive intellectual currents of their time. He makes some crucial points. “What are we to understand under the term realism?” he asks, and continues:

At various periods, and by various methods, realism gave expression to the feelings and needs of different social groups.... What do they have in common? A definite and important feeling for the world. It consists in a feeling for life as it is, in artistic acceptance of reality, and not in a shrinking from it, in an active interest in the concrete stability and mobility of life. It is a striving either to picture life as it is or to idealise it, either to justify or to condemn it, either to photograph it or generalise and symbolise it. But it is always a preoccupation with our life of three dimensions as a sufficient and

¹⁷⁵ Polonsky, A. (1947). “*Odd Man Out* and *Monsieur Verdoux*.” *Hollywood Quarterly* 2(July): pp. 401-407.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Jon Lewis, Feb 8, 2010

invaluable theme for art. In this large philosophical sense and not in the narrow sense of a literary school, one may say with certainty that the new art will be realistic.¹⁷⁷

In *Force of Evil* this realism, more psychological than observational, manifests itself in what Pechter refers to as the film's impurity. Much has been said about the highly stylised nature of this film. Pechter writes that "it is literary and dramatic, but only insofar as a film is a literary and dramatic medium, and no further. Beneath and beyond that, there is the autonomous beauty of poetic diction; the aesthetic paradox that what is harrowing in life may be that and be also beautiful in art."¹⁷⁸ This is an important point, which goes to the heart of the Marxian, or genuine social realist, approach of Polonsky, in diametrical contradistinction to the crude 'socialist realism' of message films, cleansed of their 'impurity.' *Force of Evil* demonstrated that the "autonomous beauty" of images, even the "harrowing" walk down the stairway to the base of the bridge, where Joe discovers his brother's corpse, offer an aesthetically pleasing sense of place, and its beauty, both independently and within the plot. Even before this downward walk, Joe walks along Wall Street at night, his low-angled perspective creating an impression of being crushed by the financial power symbolised by the skyscrapers. In an interview with Buhle and McGilligan, Polonsky expressed his disagreement with the way David Raksin's music accompanied Joe's descent to his brother's body: "At the end of the story, the music soars, although the picture is going the other way..."¹⁷⁹ But, as Humphries bluntly asserts, "Raksin was right and Polonsky wrong."¹⁸⁰ This again proves Polonsky's own proscription of 'solving

¹⁷⁷ Trotsky, L. (1925, 1991). *Literature and Revolution*. (trans. Rose Strunsky) London, RedWords, p. 264

¹⁷⁸ Pechter, W. (1962). "Abraham Polonsky and *Force of Evil*." *Film Quarterly* 15.3: pp. 47-54.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Polonsky in Buhle, P., & McGilligan, Patrick (1997). *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist*. NY, St. Martin's Press, p. 489

¹⁸⁰ Humphries, R. (2001). "When Crime Does Pay: Abraham Polonsky's *Force of Evil* (1948)." *Q/W/E/R/T/Y: Arts, Literature & Civilisations du Monde Anglophone* 11(Oct): pp. 205-210.

problems in feeling,' even if the solution does not accord with the creator's intentions or common sense. A cruder approach would dictate uniformly bleak visuals and language, working in unison to deliver a straightforward, pessimistic feeling to the story, allowing no manifest contradictions to find expression. In other words, standard Hollywood fare, inflexible even in the face of paradigm shifts in American culture and politics following the war.

This opinion is echoed by Robert Sklar who explains that Hollywood's reliance on its proven genres was increasingly running into some objective problems, not least of which concerned shifts in demographics and the impact of television:

What Hollywood had learned to do extremely well – comedy, musicals, genre westerns, melodramas, popularisations of classics – did not provide many lessons for a new era of seriousness and responsibility. Hollywood's triumph had been overwhelmingly a triumph of formula, and the novelty and freshness of American commercial movies had come from the inventive new ways in which formulas were reshaped to meet the times. Formulas worked beautifully in their place – and continue to do so – but formulas and significant social themes did not mix effectively.¹⁸¹

This raises the question of whether Hollywood's evident mastery of the generic conventions would suffice in the sharp post-war realignments. As Brian Neve points out, the "social ethos" of Rossellini was outside the possibilities for post-war Hollywood. After 1950, explains Neve, a "proletarian view was out of kilter" for a range of objective reasons: TV and broad economic growth conspired to push social problems out of the cultural mainstream. The proletarian view was "past its zeitgeist," concluded Neve. (Interview with Brian Neve, Feb 19, 2010) But

¹⁸¹ Sklar, R. (1975). Movie-Made America: A Social History of American Movies. NY, Random House, p. 280

Polonsky's contribution to American cinema demonstrates that even if it went 'past its zeitgeist,' in the late sixties, the strong 'social ethos' could be ingrained into the most American of genres, the western. In fact, Polonsky's first and only post-blacklist directorial effort, *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*, offers another cinematic lesson in the seamless integration of the author's political aesthetics into an established genre. Specifically, according to Max Lamb, *Willie Boy* "starts at the end of *Force of Evil*. One again, Polonsky has chosen a character who becomes a real hero by fulfilling his own destiny." Thus, "the core of the film is contained in the clash between Coop (Robert Redford), the anti-hero, and the real hero, Willy (Robert Blake)," ¹⁸² just as the core of *Force of Evil* was the complex relationship between Joe, the anti-hero, and his brother Leo.

The problem for post-war Hollywood was that its standard narrative strategy (linear, continuity narrative and goal-oriented hero) proved too rigid a platform for projecting an increasingly contradictory social and human condition. The evident artistic inflexibility of the old studios was only further exposed by the newly emerging art film in Europe, in particular Italian neorealism. Rossellini's *Open City* (1945) was emblematic of a new kind of cinematic realism, which Hollywood was compelled to emulate. Connected with the artistic desire to emulate Italian cinematographers was the left filmmakers' natural inclination to treat the problems of working-class life in an artistically truthful manner. According to Robert Ray, Hollywood's attempt to solve the problem of an increasing demand for art-house films was to "blend the serious social consciousness of the foreign movies with old-fashioned storytelling." The result was a "social problem picture." However, "in retrospect," summarises Ray, "these films' commercial success obviously depended on their conservatism, thinly disguised by an outward display of social

¹⁸² Lamb, M. *Tell Them Willie Boy is Here* (1969). *The Films of Abraham Polonsky*. C. Brooks. LA, Filmic Writing Program at USC's School of Cinema/Television for the A Polonsky Retrospective.

concern.”¹⁸³ It is noteworthy that Polonsky’s approach to storytelling proceeded from the opposite perspective: to reveal the inner workings of the system, or the ‘social ethos,’ to use Neve’s phrase, through his characters’ actions. In that sense, both Willie Boy and Joe Morse can be seen as embodiments of their specific epochs. As discussed earlier, a great artistic value of *Force of Evil*, and perhaps a key to its contemporaneity, resides in the way it anchors Joe’s epiphany in his specific epoch – when the battle between capital and the working-class was far from resolved. As Christopher observes, “In Joe Morse, Garfield created a character of unalloyed ambition and a greed so forthright that it seems almost refreshing at times.” Commenting on his boss Joe Tucker, and his strategy of legalising his racketeering, Christopher notes that “[t]his crucial transition in film, from the violent gangsterism of 1930s crime to white-collar, high-rise, criminal syndicates of the postwar era, is evinced in near textbook fashion in *Force of Evil*.”¹⁸⁴ This is another feature of a work of art, which seeks to align its content to actual contemporary developments and directly challenge mainstream discourses of its time, in this case discourses which erect a sharp line of divide between crime and capitalism. It is this quality that made “Polonsky’s Marxist critique [sic] organic to the film’s structure, making this the most truly radical film to come out of Hollywood.”¹⁸⁵

Polonsky’s ability to illuminate the objective logic of American capitalism was not lost on the state and its more farsighted defenders. The impetus for the special attention bestowed upon Polonsky by the political establishment and the FBI was precisely the image of American society

¹⁸³ Ray, R. B. (1985). *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*. NJ, Princeton University Press, p. 144

¹⁸⁴ Christopher, N. (1997). *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City*. NY, The Free Press, pp. 101-102

¹⁸⁵ Shepler, M. (2003) “Hollywood Red: The Life of Abraham Polonsky.” *Political Affairs*. **82.8**: pp. 14-17

he presented in his films. His unique story-telling talent and highly developed political consciousness marked him out, at least in the eyes of the more farsighted witch-hunters such as his case agent R. B. Hood of the LA Bureau, as ‘a very dangerous citizen.’ Naturally, the military-industrial complex responded swiftly and decisively to the qualitatively changing cultural front in Hollywood, which expressed all the residual anti-fascism and democratic humanism that had nourished the masses during the war. A great fear gripped the establishment: the politically awakened population, triumphant after defeating fascism, coupled with undiminished levels of class militancy from the Depression, was an intolerable obstacle to both the White House’s and Wall Street’s global imperialist ambitions in the post-war era. And the “cultural servants of Wall Street,” as Lawson termed the cultural industry of America, had to make their paymasters’ “double goal of war and fascism” appear “sweet and palatable” since it “runs counter to the deeper popular desire for peace and to the democratic aspirations of the masses of people.”¹⁸⁶ While warnings of the dangers of fascism might have appeared excessive to his fellow Americans at the beginning of the Cold War, and the longest period of economic expansion in their history, interestingly, Lawson’s warning about the “drive against freedom of speech and association” designed to “suppress opposition to the war program and assure the ‘tranquility’ of home front when the cold war became hot”¹⁸⁷ is striking for its prescience.

These dire warnings from the “dean of the Hollywood Ten” should lend a more gloomy tone to the contemporary liberal-capitalist perspective contained in John Lanchester’s article, “Cityphilia,” mentioned at the start of this chapter. However, some half a year after the publication of “Cityphilia,” in the fall of that same historic year of 2008, Lanchester’s article

¹⁸⁶ Lawson, J. H. (1953). Film in the Battle of Ideas. NY, Masses and Mainstream, p. 10

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 14

“Cityphobia” updates “Cityphilia,” as he struggles to make sense of the Lehman Brothers fallout. According to Lanchester, the major lesson to be derived from the crash of 2008 is that “what will, what must, die is the mystical belief in the power of the markets that has dominated political and economic discourse in most of the Western world for the last several decades. The markets have so manifestly, so flagrantly malfunctioned that we can’t go back to the idea of unfettered liberal capitalism as a talisman, template or magic wand.” Lanchester hopes that the “unquestioned Cityphilia” is gone for ever. But his characterisation of the bewilderment of the entire financial elite reveals utter pessimism about the future of capitalism: “Unfortunately, we have no current model of where to go from here, apart from a more heavily regulated form of growth-based liberal capitalism.”¹⁸⁸

In other words, more of the same, only reined in somewhat. By whom, though? Perhaps the same corporate gangsters that drove their system into the ground? Oliver Stone’s sequel to *Wall Street* bases its plot on just that premise. After his release from jail for precisely this kind of criminality, Gekko is now fighting to ‘warn’ other traders (read racketeers) of the impending doom, in an effort to restore this noble profession to its original legal parameters. To again quote Gleibermann, Gekko has replaced “Greed is good” as a mantra with “Leverage is bad.” And, as one reviewer aptly asks, “who would disagree”? Gekko, chastened by his prison time, has become “an oracle of *responsible* greed,” as well as a “man full of regret at how he messed up his family’s life.” If all that sounds “a bit soft, even cheesy,” it is, but, concludes Gleibermann, Michael Douglas “makes it believable — and compelling.”¹⁸⁹ But then again, if “*responsible* greed” is all that is required to make the gambling of pension, health and other vital social funds

¹⁸⁸ Lanchester, J. (2008). “Cityphobia.” *London Review of Books* 30.20 (October 23): pp. 3-5.

¹⁸⁹ Gleibermann, O. (2010). “*Wall Street II: Money Never Sleeps* [review].” *Movie-Critic.EW* (May 14, 2010).

on the stock market a perfectly legal mode of profit accumulation, where is the line separating business and crime? In Polonsky's day this would have been called, straightforwardly, racketeering.

So, Gekko's actions some two decades after *Wall Street I* showcase much more than Oliver Stone's skills as a dramatist – they reveal the level of his political consciousness, in particular the kind of grip liberalism still holds over his artistic 'soul.' Before the HUAC went on an offensive, it was socialist ideas that animated socially committed filmmakers like Polonsky; in its aftermath, liberalism triumphed, and rules to this day. This is manifested powerfully in "Cityphobia," where Lanchester candidly states that, while none of the proposed measures built into the financial system may provide an effective cure, "in the absence of another set of ideas about how the world should work, it may turn out to be what we have to settle for."¹⁹⁰ It might be true that there is no rational solution to the economic crisis of capitalism within its *own* political framework. However, as Polonsky warned, artists should not fall into the "trap of trying to find local solutions in existence for the social conflicts," but instead "solv[e] them in feeling..."¹⁹¹ For the 21st-century regeneration of film art, a cinematic indictment of Bernie Maddoff and Wall Street could be a good start. If Polonsky were alive today, the setting for his 1947 masterpiece, *Force of Evil*, would have been offered an even richer source of images and ideas for a sequel that could both delight and sensitize audiences to the 'giant black box' of modern capitalism.

¹⁹⁰ Lanchester, J. (2008). "Cityphobia." *London Review of Books* 30.20 (October 23): pp. 3-5.

¹⁹¹ Polonsky, A. (1946). "The Best Years of Our Lives: A Review." *Hollywood Quarterly* 2 (April): pp. 258-259.

Chapter II

Robert Rossen and the transitional period in Hollywood

Having tried to shed some light on the objective and historical driving forces of Polonsky's Marxian narrative, this chapter turns to consider the case of one of his key collaborators, Robert Rossen, a skilled practitioner of the conventional social problem film who did not share his colleague's intransigent anti-capitalism. Rather, he strove to accommodate his left-wing sympathies with a Rooseveltian New Deal perspective. As was indicated in the previous chapter, late 1940s Hollywood underwent a profound transformation in both its stylistic and thematic preoccupations. Also, as was argued in regard to Denning's idea of the 'proletarianisation' of American culture since the Depression, the Hollywood Left responded by placing a far greater emphasis on 'social and psychological realism,' creating what amounted to a distinct sub-genre, *film gris*.¹ The Hollywood Left's striving for greater artistic truth reflected, in the creative sphere, intensifying class struggles both within the Hollywood studios (Warner Bros. Burbank strike was the most infamous of them), and in American society at large – the first two post-war years saw an almost continuous wave of strikes and other industrial actions – only accelerated the impending political repression against all the critical voices in American culture.² But Rossen's artistic and political sensibilities were shaped more profoundly by the Great Depression

¹ Andersen, T. (2007). "Red Hollywood". "Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era. F. Krutnik, Neale, Steve, Neve, Brian, and Stanfield, Peter. New Brunswick, N.J. & London, Rutgers University Press: p. 257.

² For further information on this wave of strikes, a particularly useful reference is Horne, G. (2001). Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950: Moguls, Mobsters, Stars, Reds & Trade Unionists. Austin, University of Texas Press; and Broe, D. (2009). Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood. Gainesville, University Press of Florida, pp. 31-34

and even greater political struggles that followed. This volatile context placed significant pressures on the studios which, by 1936, all came under the financial control of either Morgan or Rockefeller financial interests. As Charles Eckert explains, in addition to rendering films more “formulaic and innocuous, this domination drew Hollywood into a relationship of pandering to the most conservative canons of capitalist ideology.”³ It is in this production, and political, context that Rossen came to artistic maturity, so it is worthwhile delving into one of the defining events that captured the political character of the times, the historic victory of the Minneapolis truckers’ strike of 1934.

This historic event brought to the surface the chasm that separated the class interests *within* the organized labour movement, also endowing the workers with an unusually high level of political clarity. On the one side of this class divide in 1930s Minneapolis stood two official labour organizations: the Federal Labor Party lead by Thomas Latimer, later appointed a city mayor, and the International Board of Teamsters lead by Daniel Tobin. Fiercely opposed to these bureaucracies was a political phenomenon not seen since this period, but only glimpsed in its unconscious, embryonic form in the NUMMI car strike – workers asserting their own class interests in direct opposition to their nominal leaders. Farrell Dobbs, the socialist leader of the Local 574 (later 550), was the voice of his truckers’ political independence. To apply Broe’s application of classical Marxist categories in film noir, the 1930s Local 550 truckers reached the ‘class-for-itself’ level of consciousness.⁴ This was manifested not only in the truckers’ intransigence against the union goons and police, but also in their conscious opposition to

³ Eckert, C. (1991). Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller. Stardom: Industry of Desire. ed. C. Gledhill. London: Routledge, p. 61.

⁴ ‘Class-for-itself’ is a classical Marxist term denoting the level of consciousness reached by an organized, politically conscious workforce acting in a strategically planned manner, as opposed to the ‘class-in-itself’ mode that signifies atomized workers merely fighting for immediate and economic, rather than political gains.

Roosevelt's Democrats, the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) and, in particular, to their cheerleading for America's involvement in the WWII. It is little wonder that the CIO-550 (as the Local became known), and its political affiliate, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), became principal defendants under Roosevelt's Smith Act of 1941.⁵

The Smith Act gave the government carte blanche to suppress any opposition to its war policies. While the CPUSA fully endorsed the imprisonment of these antiwar socialists, the leader of its Hollywood branch, John Howard Lawson, came close to his political opponents when he identified the main political motives behind the flagrantly antidemocratic actions of his Democrat allies. He stated that, "The development of an aggressive plan for the United States to control the world by military force at the end of World War II required a rapid reorientation of the dominant culture," which could only be accomplished by "destroying the gains made by the labour movement" as well as the "destruction of the *ideas* that reflected these gains and activities."⁶ This would eventually include Lawson's own Party. Hence, not even the Allied victory in WWII released a sufficient amount of pent-up class tension at home, even within the workers movement. Commenting on the latter, Republican Kid Clardy rather bluntly articulated the delight with which the political establishment viewed the acts of violence against the CP bureaucrats by the radicalized workers they nominally represented, stating: "This is the best kind of reaction there could have been to our hearings."⁷

⁵ Dobbs, F. (1973). *Teamster Power*, Anchor Foundation, p. 115; Dobbs, F. (1975). *Teamster Politics*, Anchor Foundation, p. 172; Dobbs, F. (1977). *Teamster Bureaucracy*, Anchor Foundation, p. 113

⁶ Lawson, J. H. (1953). *Film in the Battle of Ideas*. NY, Masses and Mainstream, p. 14

⁷ Cate, D. (1994). *Joseph Losey: A Revenge on Life*, Oxford University Press, p. 364

Rossen's artistic sensibilities are inseparable from such historic transformations in Big Labour. In fact, it is only within this historical context that Rossen's pre-blacklist work can be judged with a sufficient level of objectivity. This context invests Humphrey Bogart's contemptuous name calling of "those suckers," directed at the truckers whose union he is about to bust with his band of racketeers, with greater political relevance. This is the opening scene of *Racket Busters*, a 1937 labour-crime drama written by Rossen, about the epic struggle between the old, left militant Truckers Association and the rival union set up by the mobsters, the Manhattan Trucking Association.

While there are fundamental historical differences between Rossen's formative years – characterised by the high point of union militancy and the political prestige of their liberal Popular Front allies – and today when unions act as little more than bureaucratic shells of their former selves and the utterly discredited liberals who are prostrating themselves to US imperialism even more openly in publications like *The Nation* and *New York Times*, there are nevertheless some striking historical parallels to Rossen's 1930s proletarian fiction. Jon Lewis' characterisation of the relationship between Big Business and crime in post-war noir as "distinguished by style, not content,"⁸ applies with even greater force to Big Labour. Bogart and his band of union thugs share a common strategic goal, if not the means of achieving it, with their real life counterparts in today's United Auto Workers (UAW): a controlling stake in their company's profits. The different tactics of achieving the highest possible control over the wealth generated by the labour of their members corresponds more to the different historical periods than the political character of these organisations. While Bogart's racket is illegal, the contemporary UAW has quite legally been elevated into a major company stakeholder of the GM

⁸ Lewis, J. (2008). *American Cinema: A History*. NY & London, W. W. Norton, p. 208

– owning no less than 17% of the entire car industry stock! This fundamental conflict of interest wracking the contemporary workers movement, is in evidence as far back as the 1930s when the AFL and Teamster bureaucrats smashed the rank-and-filers of their organizations. This fact is at the heart of the central contradiction of Big Labour: it is fundamentally opposed to socialism.

This contradiction, as this chapter will show, proved to be a major stumbling block for Rossen in the first period of the evident decline, and rupture, of the broad radical-liberal alliance in the late 1940s manifested in the disengagement of the Democrats from the Communist Party of the US (CPUSA), and the rest of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The current chapter will attempt to position the creative differences between Rossen and Polonsky that erupted during the creation of *Body and Soul* within the diametrically opposed perspectives of an amorphous Popular Front liberalism and a class-conscious Marxism embodied by these two key figures of Hollywood Left.

Robert Rossen is a particularly interesting and instructive case study of the Hollywood Left because his career straddled the epochal divide in American politics between the period of the New Deal and World War Two, and the political repression that followed. It is more than a historical coincidence that this transitional period in American culture coincided with Rossen's Communist Party membership. It is noteworthy, and symbolic, that his membership in the Communist Party spanned the period between the highest and the lowest point of American Stalinism's alliance with liberalism (1937-47). As a recent study of the blacklisting period notes, "Rossen's work exemplifies the Popular Front strategy of using formulaic fictions as a vehicle for social critique."⁹ This is a fair characterisation of another major subject of this study, Elia

⁹ Introduction in Krutnik Frank, N. S., Neve Brian, and Stanfield Peter, Ed. (2007). "Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era. New Brunswick, New Jersey, London, Rutgers University Press, p. 13

Kazan, despite his renunciation of his Party membership after only 18 months. However, according to Denise Mann, Kazan's "career ran counter to those of other left-wing filmmakers like Abraham Polonsky and Robert Rossen."¹⁰ Mann usefully counter-poses Kazan's individualistic "artistic rebellion" to Rossen's "forthright expression of leftist politics."¹¹ As critical a distinction as this is between two 'friendly witnesses,' an even more important one is that which occurs between the two collaborators on *Body and Soul*, Rossen and Polonsky, especially *before* Rossen named names. This brief historical moment between the filmmaker's collaboration with Polonsky and his eventual renunciation of communism provides a more workable framework for assessing the legacy of the Popular Front on his political aesthetics. As opposed to Polonsky and other practitioners of *film gris*, Rossen embodied the 'old' Left, the progressive movement limited to *promoting* American democracy, rather than *exposing* its underlying class and capitalist foundations.

Earl Browder's famous slogan, 'Communism is the Twentieth Century Americanism', can be used to draw a neat line of divide within the Hollywood Left between the adherents to Roosevelt's 'American Way' and its sharp critics in the anti-Stalinist camp – figures like Polonsky and Losey, who consciously strove to graft classical Marxism onto the Hollywood crime genre (Losey will be discussed in the following chapter). The irreconcilability between the two camps of social realism in Hollywood was most sharply manifested in the creative battles fought between Polonsky and Rossen over the ending of *Body and Soul*. This chapter will now elaborate on the aesthetic and political significance of these creative differences. For now it will suffice to say that the two diametrically opposed endings proposed by the writer and the director

¹⁰ Mann, D. (2008). *Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, p. 147

reflect not only the two men's creative subjectivities, but more importantly, their relationship to the institutions of American capitalism, emphatically demonstrating their opposing views on the strength and revolutionary possibilities of the American working class.

If Polonsky represented 'conscious' Marxism in Hollywood, Rossen was the 'unconscious' anti-capitalist. Or, to apply Reynold Humphries' notion of the "proletarian unconscious," which he used to theorise the invisible social force that pulls Joe Morse irrepressibly towards his proletarian roots in *Force of Evil*,¹² even if one doubts Polonsky's grasp of classical Marxist dialectics, there is no disputing a strong presence of the 'proletarian unconscious' in *Body and Soul*. While Polonsky sought to challenge the ideological foundations of the American Way, Rossen adapted to the democratic and liberal traditions of his nation. Rossen could not withstand the sharp ideological alignments after the war, whereas Polonsky had precisely the political aesthetics necessary for the new period. At the outset of the paradigm shift in post-war Hollywood, which gave rise to *film gris*, Rossen was still close to the Communist Party although, unlike Polonsky, he embraced its nominal ideology largely uncritically. This is what made him vulnerable to Stalinist demagoguery and the attacks aimed at it by the anticommunist establishment. Rossen's left critics often cite his cinematic adaptation of Robert Penn Warren's award-winning *All the King's Men* as a sign of his political backsliding. Buhle and Wagner, in *A Very Dangerous Citizen*, identify *All the King's Men*, in which Rossen adopted the novel's premise and made a populist outsider into a villain, as a definite political retreat by the director in the face of his disillusionment with the official Stalinist line. In this Oscar winning film, they argue, he

¹² Humphries, R. (2001). "When Crime Does Pay: Abraham Polonsky's *Force of Evil* (1948)." Q/W/E/R/T/Y: Arts, Literature & Civilisations du Monde Anglophone 11(Oct): pp. 205-210.

“adroitly pulled back from the 1930s aesthetics radical implications.” Polonsky, on the other hand, “held to those implications, albeit in changed form.”¹³

While one is justified in demanding that the director rework the source material to faithfully fit into his political vision, one cannot ignore the production and historical context of *All the King's Men*: the rupture of the Popular Front alliance, prompting Rossen's resignation from the Party, which indeed precluded the filmmaker's engagement with the '1930s aesthetics radical implications.' Seen in this light, Rossen's faithful adaptation of Penn Warren's novel was not so much a 'political retreat,' as alleged by John Howard Lawson and supported by other hard-line branch members like Biberman and Bessie;¹⁴ rather, the filmmaker's political 'crime' was his vivid and truthful account of the rise and fall of a Southern demagogue, Willie Stark (based on Louisiana governor Huey Long in the 1930s) without the compensating element required by the Stalinist cultural leadership – the emancipation of the masses. In Edward Dmytryk's fascinating account, “It was *Cornered* all over again,” referring to a similar grilling he was subjected to for his own film. Dmytryk recalled that Rossen was “really getting hell for exposing the evils of dictatorship, the rock on which the Communist Party was founded.” Enraged, Rossen shouted “Stick the whole Party up your ass!” and literally stormed out of the Party.¹⁵ The heresy that saw Rossen attract the wrath of his cultural commissars in the Party is no more than what they all aspired to in the 1930s. While the Party leadership was justified in critiquing Rossen's pessimism, contained in the portrayals of gullible voters, this thesis rejects the Stalinists' demand

¹³ Buhle, P., and Wagner, Dave (2001). A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Polonsky and the Hollywood Left. LA, The Regents of the UCal, p. 111

¹⁴ Horne, G. (2006). The Final Victim of the Blacklist: John Howard Lawson, Dean of the Hollywood Ten. Berkeley, LA, University of California Press, p. 215

¹⁵ Dmytryk, E. (1996). Odd Man Out: A Memoir of the Hollywood Ten. Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, pp. 115-16

that the filmmaker alter the political perspective of Penn Warren's novel to suit the officially sanctioned political aesthetics of the day. This thesis argues that Rossen's development as an American film artist had to stem from his own, independent political clarification of social problems at the centre of his films, which will gradually be incorporated into his *auteurist* vision, rather than submitting to the Party's cultural dictates. But McCarthyism prematurely ended Rossen's collaboration with Polonsky, at the point when Rossen began to break away from the 1930s Popular Front paradigm, and increasingly adopt Polonsky's Marxian sensibilities, as manifested in their complex collaboration on *Body and Soul*. The "apolitical" Rossen, according to Buhle and Wagner, is often characterised as a "good Warner Brothers writer,"¹⁶ a skillful practitioner of the crime genre capable of creating highly dramatic (and melodramatic) stories, whereas Polonsky's Marxian perspective forms the core of his content. As was argued in the previous chapter, his grafting of his politics onto the crime genre was a highly conscious endeavour.

Rossen, on the other hand, was the product of a very different environment, which in the early 1930s gave rise to the Warner Bros. social problem film. But, as opposed to post-war noir, the early social problem film articulated the vitality, rather than crisis of American democracy. Even in the late 1930s, when it became increasingly apparent that not even Roosevelt's New Deal measures would stem the fallout from the recent Depression, such films were "associated with a 'formula' that upheld the fundamentals of American democracy far more than it questioned them."¹⁷

¹⁶ Buhle, P., and Wagner, Dave (2001). A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Polonsky and the Hollywood Left. LA, The Regents of the UCal, p. 111

¹⁷ Roffman & Purdy (1981) in Neve, B. (1984). "The Screenwriter and the Social Problem Film, 1936-38: The Case of Robert Rossen at Warner Brothers." Film & History 14.1: pp. 2-13.

Keeping in mind this conformist approach to American social reality, it is instructive to stress that the goal of the Hollywood social problem film formula, was to convince the film-going public of three things: “that America’s social problems were not systematic or structural; that these problems were caused by ‘bad individuals’; and that they could be corrected by an elite of individuals, acting in the public good.”¹⁸ Rossen matured artistically in this filmmaking culture and in the 1930s reformist paradigm, well before the ideological vacuum of the early post-war years was filled with the contesting liberal and socialist perspectives. Whatever the level of political consciousness of filmmakers in Hollywood before the rupture of the liberal and socialist wartime alliance, it was the socialist perspective that would yield more aesthetic rewards for serious filmmakers interested in social problems.

In comparing Rossen’s contribution to the social problem film with the blacklisted directors of the following generation, such as Losey, Dassin, Berry, Endfield, and others, it is worth stressing that these men of the left belonged to different generations, with the younger blacklistees reaching their artistic maturity after the onset of the Red Scare. From his tough New York East Side neighborhood, Rossen began his Hollywood career in 1936. Rossen’s creativity was nourished in the leftist theatres in New York of the thirties, which imparted to the young writer an ethos “steeped in the thirties combativeness, ethnic origins, and the sense of the tough city.”¹⁹ His arrival coincided with the political and artistic ascendancy of a new generation of what Denning terms “plebian artists and intellectuals” who, like Rossen, had grown up in the kinds of ethnic, working-class neighbourhoods of the “modernist metropolis.” This was the period in which Odet’s *Waiting for Lefty*, a Group Theatre play about a taxi strike, captured the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Albert La Valley qt. in Ibid.

imagination of this urban proletariat in the Depression years. The fact that this was “the most widely performed play in America – and the most widely banned,”²⁰ illustrates both the class tensions and the artistic strivings of the period. A truly exciting element of this resurgence in drama of and by the working class was the fact that dramatists and their companies, spawned from initiatives like the Federal Theater Project, were coming into contact with working-class audiences.²¹ Alice Evans, a writer for the journal *New Theatre*, one of many such publications at the time, captures the spirit of 1935:

I saw a thousand workers from the silk and dye mills of Paterson, New Jersey, pack the Orpheum Theatre there for the strike benefit program presented by the New Jersey section New Theatre League sponsored by the American Federation of Silk Workers. Against the gaudy curtains of a converted burlesque house, three dramatic groups presented plays that dealt mainly with trade union problems ranging from *Laid Off* by David Pinsky, to *Waiting for Lefty*, both given by the Newark Collective Theatre, and including *Exhibit A* presented by the Bayonne Theatre Against War and Fascism, *The Union Label* by the Paterson New Art Group.

The most exciting thing about this program with its high points of audience participation during *Union Label* and *Waiting for Lefty* was that silk workers *liked* it, and their enthusiasm was contagious.²²

What is striking in Evans’ description is the way it captures the breadth and depth of an emerging proletarian culture, at a grass-roots level, at the heart of a superpower in economic

²⁰ Wendy Smith in Denning, M. (1996). *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London, NY, Verso, p. xv

²¹ Stead, P. (1989). *Film and the Working Class: The Feature Film in British and American Society*. London, NY, Routledge, p. 74

²² Alice Evans qt. in Ibid.

ascendancy, usually thought of as immune to such ‘foreign’ ideologies. In fact, many historical studies of American pre-WWII society uncover a rich socialist tradition, and also strong organisational traditions of the workers’ movement resembling that of pre- and Weimar Germany. That this ideological threat to the status quo was taken seriously is reinforced by an extraordinary warning issued by Theodore Roosevelt, in the wake of the Russian Revolution, in which he told Congress that “every farsighted patriot should protest, first of all against the growth in this country of that evil thing which is called ‘class consciousness.’”²³ And, to a large extent, it was the spirit of the October Revolution in Russia that infused the American worker’s movement with socialist ideas, reinforced by huge waves of migration from the old continent. Denning vividly describes the powerful pull that socialist ideas had on this generation of plebian artists, “who were caught between the memories and stories of their parents and the realities of urban streets and shops.”²⁴ Whatever their party allegiances, they were all “communists.” This was the period of three major, epoch-defining general strikes, all led by young communists: in San Francisco by the Communist Party; in Minneapolis by the Trotskyists; and in Toledo by the American Workers Party. A further flowering of this fledgling socialist intelligentsia was reflected in a surge of proletarian stories and magazines. Moreover, any picture of this flurry of mass proletarian culture is incomplete without noting its organic connection to the ideals of high modernism, embodied in intellectuals like Malcolm Cowley, as well as Dos Passos and Langston Hughes. For example, Cowley’s chronicle of the moderns, *Exile’s Return*, called on artists to “take the workers’ side” in the class struggle.²⁵

²³ Roosevelt qt. in Horne, G. (2001). Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950: Moguls, Mobsters, Stars, Reds & Trade Unionists. Austin, University of Texas Press, p. 39

²⁴ Denning, M. (1996). The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century. London, NY, Verso, p. xv

²⁵ Cowley qt. in Ibid.

This sentiment was perhaps best manifested in the 1936 American Writers Congress, which ended with the respected novelist James T. Farrell calling for the singing of ‘The Internationale.’²⁶ And the corresponding class consciousness among artists was aptly articulated by Meridel Le Sueur:

There is only one class that has begun to produce mid-Western culture and that is the growing yeast of the revolutionary working class, arising on the Meseba range, the wheat belt, the coalfields of Illinois, the blown and ravaged land of Dakota, the flour mills, the granaries.... It is from the working class that the use and function of native language is slowly being built in such books as those of James Farrell with the composition and the colloquialism of the streets of Chicago; of Jack Conroy with his worker heroes going from the auto industry in Detroit to the coalfields; of Nelson Algren, of the worker-writers in the *Farmers Weekly* and the *Western Workers*.²⁷

Modernism and noir

In addition to the slogan ‘take the workers’ side’ advanced by Cowley and the 1936 Writers’ Congress, another key historical component of the prewar culture, modernism, infused American film art with equally ‘dangerous’ perspectives, at least in the eyes of the political establishment. Paula Rabinowitz, in her study of the permutations of modernism on American soil, traces the strands of the “political theory of America’s problematic democracy disguised as cheap

²⁶ Stead, P. (1989). *Film and the Working Class: The Feature Film in British and American Society*. London, NY, Routledge, p. 75

²⁷ Le Sueur qt. in Ibid.

melodrama” to the very “suppression of working-class organizing” in the broader society.²⁸ In *More Than Night*, James Naremore argues that a great many American film noirs were “clearly indebted to modernist art, and sometimes the indebtedness went beyond mere technique.” Moreover, writes Naremore, “there was, in fact, something inherently noir-like in the established tradition of modern art.”²⁹ As modernist art was a conscious aesthetic response, often ambivalent, by artists in major European and American metropolises to the rampant growth of capitalist progress and its institutions by 1914, it offered a tailor-made perspective for any artistic critique of the dominant bourgeois values of family, God, and sexual mores. Eschewing old values in art naturally led to artistic innovations, which emphasised “subjectivity and depth psychology,” and found its most prominent expression in the works of authors such as Henry James and Joseph Conrad, in which “impressionistic narration and the control of point of view became the hallmarks of modern literary art.” This support for “‘deep’ narrative techniques, involving stream of consciousness and nonlinear plot,” was conducive to “reveal[ing] death savagery or death instinct—a killer inside us, living below the surface of rational life.”³⁰

While emphasising subjective consciousness in the narrative at the expense of documentary objectivity may add confusion when discussing modernism in film art (Eisensteinian montage, and Brechtian theatre, both associated with formal experimentation in the service of objectivity), assessing the selected filmmakers’ relationship to modernism enhances our understanding of the extent of aesthetic losses to McCarthyism. In his discussion of the chief characteristics of modernist fiction, David Lodge says that it

²⁸ Rabinowitz, P. (2002). *Black & White Noir: America's Pulp Modernism*. NY, Columbia University Press, p. 18

²⁹ Naremore, J. (1998). *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts*. Berkeley, LA, University of California Press, p. 41

³⁰ Ibid, p. 43

eschews the straight chronological ordering of its material, and the use of a reliable, omniscient and intrusive narrator. It employs, instead, either a single, limited point of view or multiple viewpoints, all more or less limited and fallible; and it tends toward a complex of fluid handling of time, involving much cross-reference back and forward across the temporal span of the action.”³¹

In principle, such an aesthetic strategy of accentuating subjectivities could serve the greater political objective of illuminating social factors in American fiction, hence responding to the increasing social and psychological complexities of human condition borne of post-war capitalism. It is no accident that these modernist principles enjoyed a kind of metamorphosis in American crime films of the 1940s. As Rabinowitz puts it, “The twin specters of unemployment and mass murder, and the burgeoning popular culture of Hollywood and other mass media are the sources for America’s pulp modernism.”³² Discussing this pulp modernism, Naremore states that, like the early twentieth-century modernism, “Hollywood thrillers of the 1940s are characterized by urban landscapes, subjective narration, nonlinear plots, hard-boiled poetry, and misogynistic eroticism.” Also, and crucially, “they are somewhat ‘anti-American,’ or less ambivalent about modernity and progress.” But then, in this critical historical juncture, any exposure of the dehumanizing effects of the growth of American economic power was profoundly ‘un-American.’ Moreover, modernism in the American crime film produced more “artful” results in terms of more complex and subjective “narrative and camera angles,” more shades of gray and psychological complexity; “eroticised and dangerous” women, problematic

³¹ Lodge qt. in Ibid.

³² Rabinowitz, P. (2002). Black & White Noir: America's Pulp Modernism. NY, Columbia University Press, p. 6

endings, and pathological violence.³³ Such a list reads like a powerful set of ingredients for a social critique of the American city, and its social and class tensions. Naremore identifies an important development in the evolution of modernism in America, which he terms the “countertradition” – the entrance of working-class men and women, and crime stories set in their milieu. Referring to the influence of Weimar silent film, French noir, and Hitchcock’s British films, Naremore concludes that, “What united the three types of cinematic modernism was an interest in popular stories about violence and sexual love.”³⁴ So this permutation in the evolution of American modernism in fiction was the result of an interaction with mass culture. This was a powerful social factor in shaping future crime, urban thrillers on film. Frank Krutnik, in his 1991 study *Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*, traces the social origins of the ‘hard-boiled’ story, itself an expression of the social transformations in pre-war American culture. He argues that the ‘hard-boiled’ story is a

more dynamic mode of crime fiction. Whereas the classical detective is often at one remove from the milieu which gives rise to the socially disruptive act of murder, the ‘hard-boiled’ investigator immerses himself in this milieu, and is tested by it in a more physical and life-threatening manner. Crucially, the private eye – the most archetypal ‘hard-boiled’ hero – operates as a mediator between the criminal underworld and the world of a respectable society.³⁵

Here Krutnik emphasises the significance of the proletarian milieu, and his argument is entirely consistent with Denning’s study of the ‘laboring’ of American culture in the period of the CIO

³³ Naremore, J. (1998). More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts. Berkeley, LA, University of California Press, p. 45

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 45-46

³⁵ Frank Krutnik, S. N., Brian Neve and Peter Stanfield (1991). In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity. London and NY, Routledge, p. 39

ascendancy. Denning introduces a useful approach to the analysis of the impact of objective factors in shaping artists' work. Referring to Raymond Williams' notion of the artist's alignment with his environment, Denning's discussion shifts the "analysis of the artistic career from an individual narrative of commitment to an account of the ways social and formal alignments that produce artists and intellectuals are reshaped and transformed."³⁶ Denning's discussion supports Naremore's idea of a modernist 'contertradition' in America. Indeed, he argues that "the melodramas of commitment" that dominate the culture of the 1920s and 30s are better understood as "the uneasy but powerful alliance" between three distinct "social and aesthetic situations: that of the *moderns*, the *émigrés*, and the *plebians*." The key to understanding the social and aesthetic circumstances of Rossen and other serious filmmakers in Hollywood during this period is that the "*moderns* were generally well-established before their associations with the left, and their work was transformed as a result,"³⁷ whether they were conscious of that or not. This is consistent with Rabinowitz's elaboration of this 'uneasy but powerful alliance' through her critique of the social and political factors that led to noir's recourse to melodrama and nostalgia. For Rabinowitz, one of those chief political factors – "An inheritance from the CPUSA's Popular Front attempt to meld communists... into the People, the sentimental invocation of 'family,' 'movement,' 'community,' and 'culture'" – held the danger of "insidiously repress[ing] conflicts and differences within America's class and racial structure."³⁸

Andrew Ross, in his study of American intellectuals and popular culture, usefully employs the metaphor of "contagion" stemming from this very repression of class differences in postwar

³⁶ Williams in Denning, M. (1996). The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century. London, NY, Verso, pp. 58-59

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Rabinowitz, P. (2002). Black & White Noir: America's Pulp Modernism. NY, Columbia University Press, p. 134

American culture. In addition to the “anti-Stalinist reaction to the predominantly lower middle-class values of Popular Front culture,” Ross locates the causes for the political dilution of postwar modernism in the “democratic culture” that sought to “reflect and accommodate the new middle classes of the pre-war and postwar periods,” which to the high-brow intellectuals of the time was an “expression of hopelessly mainstream, sentimental egalitarianism – in short, a dilution of true radicalism.”³⁹ As will be discussed in following chapters, Losey’s modernism, even in the context of institutionalized anticommunism in America, was articulated with the most left positions of the political spectrum permitted at the time, embodying aspects of the Soviet avant-garde *before* its Stalinist degeneration. The American cultural front potentially offered a fertile ground for the growth of such a leftist modernism. The injection of large doses of American urban and working-class idiom suffused American crime drama with a particularly authentic quality. Therefore, in a paradoxical turn of the story of American modernism, one could say that the progressive filmmakers of the radical Hollywood Left achieved the best artistic results when they assimilated, not eschewed, the best of the preceding bourgeois culture, or *modernists*, as well as the strategies of ‘hard-boiled’ crime writers like Hammett. This seeming ideological contradiction contains the seeds of some future political battles between two distinct groups of writers, the Stalinist and socialist camps. This is discussed later in a section about the Writers Congresses.

These tendencies were at work in the 1930s cultural front, as it developed in Depression-era America, to form an alliance of radical artists and intellectuals who made up the ‘cultural’ part of

³⁹ Ross, A. (1989). No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture. New York, Routledge, p. 57

the Popular Front.”⁴⁰ The latter reference to the Popular Front is particularly noteworthy in relation to Rossen’s work – the 1930s were the apogee of the intelligentsia’s support for the official institutions of capitalist democracy, embodied in Roosevelt’s New Deal policies. And, as Denning explains, the notion of the cultural front “itself was an attempt to theorise the relation of culture to politics.”⁴¹ While in full agreement with Rabinowitz’s critique of Denning’s theorisation of the ‘cultural front’ which, according to her, “papers over the Party affiliations and factionalism” by uncritically accepting its practitioners’ tendency to “minimize class, racial, and ethnic differences within the American populace,”⁴² Denning’s historiography nevertheless provides a crucial theoretical link between the strivings of Hollywood radicals and the emergence of American modernism. Importantly, according to Denning, “writers and artists of the modernist generation attempted to reconstruct modernism, to tie their formal experimentation to a new kind of social and historical vision, to invent a ‘socialist modernism,’ a ‘revolutionary symbolism.’”⁴³

It is in the context of this intellectual fervor that the Writers’ Congress of 1935 assumes a critical place as it revealed some deep divisions that were soon to come to the surface. More than a decade before the infamous Maltz affair, this “first national gathering of writers in US history” produced its own comparable ‘scandal’ in the ranks of the American socialist-Stalinist intelligentsia, by way of Kenneth Bourke, a well-known modernist writer and aesthetician. As in the Maltz affair, what would today seem like a minor squabble over terminology – the categories

⁴⁰ Denning, M. (1996). The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century. London, NY, Verso, p. xix

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Rabinowitz, P. (2002). “Hollywood Modernism (book review).” *Cineaste* 27.2: 54-55.

⁴³ Denning, M. (1996). The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century. London, NY, Verso, pp. 59-60

of the ‘worker’ and the ‘people’ – turned out to be the explosive bombshell of the congress. In his address to the congress, “Revolutionary Symbolism in America,” Bourke made the heretical suggestion that the “symbol of the ‘people’ would provide a more powerful basis for propaganda than the symbol of the ‘worker.’”⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that this tendency of the ‘radicals’ to broaden their social base in times of crisis persists to this day, as seen in today’s ‘anti-capitalist’ protest groupings, such as the Anti-Capitalist Party in France, the Left Party in Germany, the International Socialist Organisation in the US, the Respect coalition in Britain, or the Socialist Alliance in Australia.

The ferocity of the outrage this ‘heresy’ provoked in the ranks of American socialist-minded intellectuals is highly significant and not at all out of proportion to their modernist and socialist ideals. Responses by the Party’s literary heavyweights veered from Joe Freeman’s “We have a snob among us!” to German émigré Friedrich Wolf’s comparison of Bourke’s use of the terms to “Hitler’s harangues to the *Volk*.” As Denning argues, this story became “a representative anecdote because of the larger dramatic reversal: before the year was out, Bourke’s ‘populist’ heresy, his call for a politics around the symbol of the ‘people,’ became orthodoxy,” as the CP fully embraced the policy of the Popular Front.⁴⁵ Hence, what emerges out of these conflicts is another seeming ideological paradox, in which the writers associated with the CP and Stalinism were drawn closer to the bourgeois, Democratic Party of Roosevelt. As discussed in the previous chapter, Polonsky went the other way in support of Maltz’s ‘heretical’ challenge to the ‘Art as Weapon’ Stalinist doctrine.

⁴⁴ Bourke qt. in p. Ibid, pp. 442-43

⁴⁵ Freeman & Wolf qt. in Ibid, p. 443

So, for the purposes of further illuminating the significance of the political and aesthetic leap into post-war *film gris* from the 1930s discourse characterised by Hollywood's embracing of Rooseveltian, Popular Front ideology, it is instructive to expand on the sharp creative conflict that took place in the making of *Body and Soul* between the two embodiments of these perspectives: its writer Polonsky and director Rossen.

Body and Soul (1947)

Body and Soul is the first of what film scholar Richard Corliss calls Polonsky's "late-forties trilogy on the profit motive." Max Lamb describes it as "[A] vivid, fervent account of an impoverished youth's capitulation to the dictates of capitalism." The film is, according to Lamb, "an outstanding example of the author's cinematic skills." Despite the bleakness of the story, and at the same time its exhilarating effect, writes Lamb, "it's alive because of the moral fervour the author has put into the writing."⁴⁶ The film, Polonsky says, "is not so much about how mean *prizefighting* is; it's about how mean *life* is. Prizefighting distils it."⁴⁷ This thematic approach reflects Polonsky's grasp of the crime/boxing film genre's possibilities. For Lamb, this constitutes another serious contribution to American cinematic art – Polonsky's storytelling distils not life in general, but life lived at a particular period of American capitalism. The prizefighting arena becomes a concentrated expression of the brutality of free market competition, while not taking anything away from the exhilaration of the boxing action itself.

Charley (John Garfield) is facing an excruciating dilemma: whether to throw the fight as

⁴⁶ Lamb, M. *Body and Soul* (1947). *The Films of Abraham Polonsky*. C. Brooks. LA, Filmic Writing Program at USC's School of Cinema/Television for the A Polonsky Retrospective.

⁴⁷ Polonsky qt. in Ibid.

demanding by his boxing boss, in order to scoop up the betting profits, or punch his way to victory and regain personal integrity. The battles between the director, Rossen, and his writer Polonsky, over the ending of the saga are legendary. Rossen wanted a typical noir, doomed hero ending, where Charley is killed by the mobsters for betraying them, while Polonsky insisted on a superficially happy ending, affirming Garfield's character. The shock of Ben's (his sparing partner's) death triggers Charley's repressed humanity and decency, offering him something of an epiphany.

Buhle and Wagner suggest something much more fundamental than mere generic considerations in the creative battle between Rossen and Polonsky over the ending:

With Rossen's ending, the only meaning in Charley's awakening is personal: Charley glimpses his likely future as a discarded fighter who dies penniless in the ring. His awakening is the American individualist's realisation that it is time, in the lingo of another genre, to strap on his guns and clean up the gang that has taken over the boxing business. But for Charley to die in a hail of bullets is entirely logical from that view. But that would be mere naturalism, ... a knowing noir grimace.⁴⁸

For Polonsky, on the other hand, Charley's decision not to throw the fight,

...is rooted in his dawning comprehension that he is fighting not only for himself, but for Ben and his neighbourhood and everyone the system has ground down.... Hence Polonsky's frequently expressed frustration with Rossen's ending: this is not a fable about Charley Davis, it is a fable of the working class; it would be "crazy," as Polonsky

⁴⁸ Buhle, P., and Wagner, Dave (2001). A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Polonsky and the Hollywood Left. LA, The Regents of the UCal, p. 115

once said of Rossen's ending, for a group of left-wing storytellers to conclude their finest work by killing off the proletariat!⁴⁹

This is significant: Polonsky applies the classical Marxist ideal of the emancipation of man through art,⁵⁰ but does so by allowing the objective logic of his story to emerge organically, not by imposing his politics on it. What is remarkable about this ending is that it goes completely against the grain of the doomed noir hero of the period; however, and this is crucial, it does perpetuate that Marxian ideal of the emancipated man, who experiences something of an epiphany, a reawakening of his *class* being, finally reunited with his brothers and sisters. This accords with the Lacanian logic elaborated by Reynold Humphries in his analysis of *Force of Evil*, which manifests itself in the lure of the "proletarian unconscious" that also pulls its anti-hero Joe Morse on the road to redemption.⁵¹ After beating his opponent, he is met triumphantly by his wife (Lilli Palmer) and his cheering neighbourhood. While this is not social realism in accordance with the noir logic, it adheres to a higher, objective logic of the much needed emancipation of the entire working class – a spectre that appeared much more real for working-class neighbourhoods such as Charley's in the late 1940s.

After Charley commits his hanging offence, he is confronted by his boxing manager (Lloyd Gough). But the boxing rebel stoically maintains his proletarian dignity, taunting his boss with the defining line: "What are you going to do, kill me? Everybody dies!" This is much more than a wise-guy's individual act of defiance; as Polonsky remarked, "... not only was that line

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ A good start on Marxist approach to emancipator art is Plekhanov, G. V. (1912/57). *Unaddressed Letters: Art and Social Life* (Eugene Hirshfeld, trans.). Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House.

⁵¹ Humphries, R. (2001). "When Crime Does Pay: Abraham Polonsky's *Force of Evil* (1948)." *Q/W/E/R/T/Y: Arts, Literature & Civilisations du Monde Anglophone* 11(Oct): pp. 205-210.

effective in the film, but the line was a fight in the film.” The fight in the film spilled into the famous creative conflict with Rossen, who wanted Garfield dead in a pile of garbage. Polonsky remembers that “it made me laugh because this picture is a romance, a folklore romance in the streets of New York. It’s not that kind of picture. It’s not a heavy picture. It’s the opposite. And it’s full of humanity and feeling and reflects a lot of the ‘30s and stuff like that. But fundamentally, it’s a romance of the streets and I knew it.” (“But anyhow, out of that fight came the line.”)⁵² To appreciate the importance of placing *Body and Soul* in its intended, Marxian context, rather than in the tradition of Hollywood melodrama, it is instructive to review Robert Sklar’s reading of the film. By proceeding from the conventional Hollywood perspective, Sklar interprets *Body and Soul* not as a fable of the working class, but as Charley’s personal story. He charges Polonsky with a “serious strategic error” in prevailing over Rossen in the construction of the ending of *Body and Soul*. From that standpoint the argument that the “downbeat endings” of films such as *Marked Woman* and *The Roaring Twenties* made them “more memorable” and “truer to life” than *Body and Soul* are entirely reasonable. Why? Because the protagonists “caught in the nexus of capitalist forces find it less easy to escape them.”⁵³ However, for the purposes of this study, *Body and Soul* must be seen in the political and aesthetic terms intended by its director. Polonsky related his disagreement with Rossen’s pessimistic perspective of Charley’s fate when he charged the writer with thinking that “death was truer than life, as an ending.” But radicals of his mould knew “the opposite is true.”⁵⁴ Sklar too concedes that the ending stems not only from “capitalist calculation,” but also from “radical aesthetics.”⁵⁵

⁵² Polonsky in Lamb, M. *Body and Soul* (1947). *The Films of Abraham Polonsky*. C. Brooks. LA, Filmic Writing Program at USC’s School of Cinema/Television for the A Polonsky Retrospective.

⁵³ Sklar, R. (1992). *City Boys, Cagney, Bogart, Garfield*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, p. 186

⁵⁴ Zheutlin, B., & Talbot, David (1978). *Creative Differences: Profiles of Hollywood Dissidents*. Boston, South End Press, p. 76

⁵⁵ Sklar, R. (1992). *City Boys, Cagney, Bogart, Garfield*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, p. 186

By getting away with this snub, Charley articulates a palpable mass sentiment at a *particular* time in America's history of class conflict – this is not just Charley's victory, but a victory against capital set during a time of a particularly fragile balance of class forces in that country. In that sense it is the film's production context that imparts to its ending a more subversive connotation. A character like Charley who defies his boxing manager and lives to tell the tale becomes more attuned to the collective psyche of the mass of the audience during a brief historical period between the war and the Red Scare when American capitalism was forced on the defensive in the face of a resurgent and organized working class. Within this historical context, the inner logic of *Body and Soul's* narrative could still lead to a dramatically plausible, life-affirming ending for the working-class hero. Rossen's ending expressed the inner logic of undefeated gangster-capitalism, while Polonsky's reinforced the undefeated nature of the working class. Indeed, as Neve explains, *Body and Soul* is "perhaps a last hurrah of the 1930s proletarian optimism..."⁵⁶

Columnist Ed Sullivan – Roosevelt-era 'socialist' turned McCarthy-era red-baiter – pinpointed *Body and Soul* in 1952 as "the subversive media production incarnate." It set a "pattern that the Commies and their sympathisers in TV networks, agencies and theatrical unions would like to fasten on the newest medium." From "the director down," those who "are on the American side of the fence" had been excluded, replaced by "Commies and pinks."⁵⁷ Indeed, Sullivan's concerns were not unfounded. *Red Hollywood* provides a compelling commentary of the way in

⁵⁶ Neve, B. (1999). "'Red Hollywood' Review Essay." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* **19**(no. 1).

⁵⁷ Kanfer, S. (1973). *A Journal of the Plague Years*. NY, Atheneum, p. 178

which “a mercantile approach to human relations determines even the language we speak.”⁵⁸ As Broe explains, *Body and Soul* was a “metaphor for life under capitalism,” with the crucial question often being “the boxer’s ability to maintain his integrity and working-class values in the face of a machine that turns all activity into money.” In addition, Broe concludes, the film was “a metaphor for the working-class writer’s relationship to the studio.”⁵⁹ And, one might add, a metaphor for the working-class writer’s conflict with capitalist state institutions.

Max Lamb’s argument about the source of the film’s superiority to its predecessors, and, he adds, “its many successors,” further supports the main thesis about the centrality of an author’s political clarity in creating effective images. Lamb claims that this is due to the “author’s deeply felt personal view of the social system.” This depth is manifested in the clarity of the message: “Look at the numbers, Charley,” the crooked fight promoter tells the young fighter. “People use words, but they mean numbers. Everything else is addition and subtraction. The rest is conversation.” In Neve’s words this cinematic moment provides a “powerful critique of the ubiquitous language of commerce....” Neve concludes that “perhaps the most distilled and self-conscious example of such dialogue” is the famous “addition and subtraction” speech discussed earlier.⁶⁰ (To find a similarly succinct line about the workings of a corrupt system, one would have to go to *The Asphalt Jungle* and *The Killing*, where crime is described as simply ‘a left-handed form of endeavor’.) Characterising this as “One of the most eloquent moments in film history,” concludes Lamb, “this Polonsky dialogue has been appropriated for the Michael

⁵⁸ *Red Hollywood* (1985), dir./written by Noel Burch and Thom Andersen

⁵⁹ Broe, D. (2009). *Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood*. Gainesville, University Press of Florida, p. 50

⁶⁰ Neve, B. (1999). “‘Red Hollywood’ Review Essay.” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 19(no. 1).

Douglas character in *Wall Street*, a contemporary permutation of *Force of Evil*.”⁶¹

But needless to say, *Wall Street*'s appropriation of this classical noir dialogue does not extricate it from its stifling Reagan-era context. Unlike its classical noir counterpart, the working-class protagonist's (Charley Sheen) downfall doesn't signify the corresponding systemic downfall. There is a world of difference between Stone's targeting of the "value system that places profits and wealth and the Deal above any other consideration," along with what Roger Ebert calls the "atmosphere of financial competitiveness so ferocious that ethics are simply irrelevant,"⁶² and a Polonskyan 'autopsy on capitalism.' The implication is that if only Greed wasn't seen to be good, the system could be purged of its Gekkos and the rest of the Wall Street billionaires could carry on making their fortunes legally. "Although Gekko's law-breaking would of course be opposed by most people on Wall Street," writes Ebert, "his larger value system would be applauded. The trick is to make his kind of money without breaking the law."⁶³ That misses the point. But then again, the film and this critique were made before the 1987 crash, not to speak of the social devastation of the 2008 GFC and its attendant financial criminality. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Stone captures something of Ebert's liberal capitalist logic some 23 years later in *Wall Street II: Money Never Sleeps*, when Gekko, the liberal conscience of the sequel, promotes "*responsible* greed."⁶⁴ It is a testimony to Polonsky's artistic talent, combined with, or nourished by, his socialist consciousness that his late 1940s crime dramas today offer far more realistic evocations of the American financial aristocracy's psychosis some fifty years later than

⁶¹ Lamb, M. *Force of Evil* (1948). *The Films of Abraham Polonsky*. C. Brooks. LA, Filmic Writing Program at USC's School of Cinema/Television for the A Polonsky Retrospective.

⁶² Ebert, R. (1987). "Wall Street" [film review, Dec 11, 1987]. *Chicago Sun-Times*.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Gleibermann, O. (2010). "Wall Street II: Money Never Sleeps" [review]. *Movie-Critic.EW* (May 14, 2010).

do Stone's 1987 and 2010 Wall Street stories (both serious artistic efforts nevertheless).

The conflict over the ending of *Body and Soul* represented a clash of irreconcilable political ideologies held by the two filmmakers. The ideological battle was between a socialist and capitalist ideology, albeit with the latter one representing a more party-political Democratic variety. (In the 1930s, even into much of the 1940s, the political differences between the two grand parties of the American political establishment carried more meaning; one could still credit Roosevelt's Democrats with some genuinely progressive reforms, within the capitalist framework.) Also, *Body and Soul*, according to Buhle and Wagner, could easily be described as the last film of the 1930s, despite its release in 1947. This is not only because the opportunity to "treat the Depression in film did not arise until after the Second World War," but because of the main films released on the subject, "in some sense *Body and Soul* stands as the final word, a revision of the Group Theater's *Golden Boy*, with none of that film's sentimentality or social ambivalence."⁶⁵

Beyond the characteristic Polonsky writing, "with its tone of philosophical playfulness and Odetsian lyricism and its mix of individual autonomy and ideological constraints on speech and action,"⁶⁶ a key contributing aesthetic component to the power and prescience of *Body and Soul*, is the conscious manner with which Polonsky grafted his central myth onto his narrative.

William Pechter has identified Polonsky's central story line, which runs through much of his fiction. The overarching spine of his genre story is, "ambitious slum boy battles his way up to success." Pechter describes this myth as empowering for the "sense of flexible and sensitive

⁶⁵ Buhle, P., and Wagner, Dave (2001). A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Polonsky and the Hollywood Left. LA, The Regents of the UCal, p. 113

⁶⁶ Neve, B. (1999). "'Red Hollywood' Review Essay." Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television 19(no. 1).

human relationships” it depicts among the hardened working-class characters.⁶⁷ In that sense, the highly conscious political aesthetics underlying *Body and Soul* could not coexist with any significant dose of “sentimentality and social ambivalence,” common to social problem films of Rossen’s early period in Hollywood. These aspects are also at odds with Polonsky’s Marxist, or at least quasi-Marxist approach to his storytelling. This brings Rossen’s aesthetic strategy in *Body and Soul* into sharper relief. As explained in the previous section, by having Charley killed by his boxing boss, Rossen articulated, in a cinematic sense, a (still) dominant liberal and Democrat ideology. In that sense the only dramatically plausible conclusion to a crime story belonging to a 1930s paradigm would be one that underestimates that epoch’s as yet unrealised revolutionary potential of the proletariat. Therefore, Charley gets what’s coming to him, according to a classical noir pattern.

But, as Naremore insists, classical noir aesthetics combined modernist sensibilities with progressive content, which was precisely the aim of the generation of artists and filmmakers, radicalised by the Depression, of which Rossen himself was a successful embodiment. The strategy of “viscerally authentic boxing footage that propels the dramatic action,” and “constitutes its climax,” took its cue from wartime newsreels.⁶⁸ And photographic realism and authenticity in style expressed in the aesthetic domain the renewed drive to truth and realism in art. Hillier and Philips argue that Rossen’s cinematographer, James Wong Howe, “instigate[s] a dynamic and unstable visual field in order to display their perception of the play of social pressures within urban life.” In what amounts to applied Marxist dialectics, the spaces “around its characters also seem to possess a force of their own, leading to the staging of alternate

⁶⁷ Pechter, W. (1962). “Abraham Polonsky and *Force of Evil*.” *Film Quarterly* 15.3: pp. 47-54.

⁶⁸ Christopher, N. (1997). *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City*. NY, The Free Press, p. 175

channels of possibility of their opposite: an awareness that power lies beyond one single person's control." Importantly, Hillier and Philips acknowledge the debt early twentieth-century modernism in America owes to its 'plebeians' and 'emigres,' as manifested in *Body and Soul*, which serves as a "reminder of how much the vitality of the US's migrant history has sharpened the ability of mass culture, especially through the interstices of *film noir*, to condense the nation's troubled experience of modernity in the twentieth century."⁶⁹

Moreover, as Stead's discussion of *Body and Soul* showed, Garfield's naturalistic performance suggested "that Hollywood was seriously looking at how the lessons taught by Odets and the Group Theatre, which Garfield, of course, had learned at first hand, could be used as the basis for a new cinema."⁷⁰ In fact, Stephen Belcher identified this movie as a return to the "old tenement" genre, with a crucial difference of delving "deeper into its milieu."⁷¹ But this represented not a return to the old Warner Bros. "picturesque" and "generic" city streets, but rather, as argued by Robert Sklar, the streets of *Body and Soul* are "grim and temporally specific to the Great Depression years."⁷² Still, according to Naremore, *Body and Soul*, among other boxing films of the period, such as *The Set-Up*, *Champion* (both 1949), *The Harder They Fall* (1957), featuring Bogart's last screen appearance, "constitute one of several junctures at which classic film noir is nearly indistinguishable from Odets-style social realism and from the larger history of the proletarian or 'ghetto' novel." In concluding *City Boys*, Sklar notes that this iconic image of the urban working class had "become a fundamental marker of American culture in the middle

⁶⁹ Hillier, J., & Philips, Alistair (2009). *100 Film Noirs: BFI Screen Guides*. London, Palgrave Macmillian, pp. 34-35

⁷⁰ Stead, P. (1989). *Film and the Working Class: The Feature Film in British and American Society*. London, NY, Routledge, p. 149

⁷¹ Belcher, S. (1947). "Body and Soul." *New Movies (National Board of Reviews)* 22.6.

⁷² Sklar, R. (1992). *City Boys, Cagney, Bogart, Garfield*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, pp. 184-85

decades of the twentieth century.” By the 1980s, however, the city boys seemed displaced in American society. “As the twentieth century neared its close,” concluded Sklar, “his successor as the central iconographic male figure in American culture had not yet been identified.”⁷³

Naremore concurs when he argues that the violence in the films with City Boys was used in a more socially conscious way than, for example, it was in Scorsese’s *Raging Bull* (1980), “fusing prewar images of economic depression with anxiety about fascism and cataclysmic destruction.”⁷⁴

By the end of World War Two, when all the nostrums of an earlier era had effectively been exhausted, when mass sentiment shifted sharply from patriotic anti-fascism to domestic anti-capitalism, no politically-conscious filmmaker could be indifferent to the fate of his/her working-class heroes. As Krutnik explains,

The wartime cultural mobilisation had been rapid, intense and, above all, of a temporary nature. The postwar era promised further uncertainties: by no means simply a return to the prewar situation. It was not only the returning soldiers who were confronted with a disillusioning reality, for the very process of unification towards a common and localised goal – a victorious end to the war – led in the immediate postwar period to a highlighting of those very divisions which had been repressed in the ideological consolidation of wartime.⁷⁵

Sylvia Harvey put it more bluntly, saying that “it may be argued that the ideology of national

⁷³ Ibid, p. 277

⁷⁴ Naremore, J. (1998). More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts. Berkeley, LA, University of California Press, pp. 102-03

⁷⁵ Frank Krutnik, Steve Neal, Brian Neve and Peter Stanfield (1991). In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity. London and NY, Routledge, p. 59

unity which was characteristic of the war period, and which tended to gloss over and conceal class divisions, began to falter and decay, to lose its credibility once the war was over.”⁷⁶ This loss of a sense of national inter-class unity was manifested in what the director and co-founder of the Mercury Theater John Houseman in 1947 described as the “current American Legend.” Writing about excessive violence and cynicism pervading the “tough” guy or gangster movie up to that period, before the advent of *film gris*, he characterised this series of movies as presenting “a fairly accurate reflection of the neurotic personality of the United States of America in the year 1947.” Using the example of *The Big Sleep*, based on Raymond Chandler’s novel, featuring the iconic detective Marlowe, he makes a point that Marlowe’s crime-fighting, and romantic, exploits have become “the stuff of contemporary American Legend.”⁷⁷ It is in this context that *film gris* can be seen as a response to this apolitical neurosis of classical noir.

And, in 1947, what kind of a hero was “today’s Hero”? Aside from his rough appearance, he has “no discernable ideal to sustain him – neither ambition, nor loyalty, nor even a lust for wealth.”⁷⁸ This type of hero, in his pessimism and his lack of definitive goals, is in sharp contrast to the Garfield persona discussed earlier, with his clear-cut proletarian sensibilities. Houseman adds that this period’s gangster film is in “direct contrast to the gangster film of the thirties, which was characterised by a very high vitality and a strong moral sense.” The heroes of *Little Caesar* and, *Scarface* fell with a “sort of tragic grandeur, paying the price of his sin,” whereas the moral of the present “tough picture” is that “life in the United States of America in the year 1947 is hardly

⁷⁶ Harvery, S., “Women’s Place: The Absent Family of Film Noir”. *Women in Film Noir*. Kaplan, A., Ed. (1978), London, BFI, p. 29

⁷⁷ Houseman, J. (1947). “Today’s Hero: A Review.” *Hollywood Quarterly* 2(2): pp. 161-63.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

worth living at all.”⁷⁹

In the case of *Body and Soul*, Charley’s demise at the hands of the vengeful mob would have conformed to Houseman’s idea of the then current American Legend, as well as to Rossen’s 1930s politics. But such politics would render the archetypal Polonskian story unrealisable. The spine of this story is a working-class hero who has turned his back on his class, his community, his loved ones, in order to “pursue a goal that alienates him from them and makes him yearn for reunion.” This archetypal story then reaches a “critical point” in which the hero must make a choice, although he is not trapped by his fate. After a turning point is reached, the hero then must “recapture the conditions necessary to his humanity,” even if it kills him.⁸⁰

And the notion of death is omnipresent in the best of the late forties boxing films. Apart from *Body and Soul*, both *Champion* (1949) and *The Set-Up* (1949) offer vivid glimpses of a morally corrupt and bloodthirsty system. Nicholas Christopher, in his *Somewhere in the Night*, posits the idea of “the gamut, in compressed form, of noir boxers: from corrupt (*Champion*), to corrupt and then redeemed (*Body and Soul*), to upright and punished for his uprightness (*The Set-Up*).” Interestingly, Christopher identifies the boxers in *Champion* (Kirk Douglas) and *Body and Soul* (Garfield) as “truly emblematic of the postwar era” – graphically rotating between the “abysmal depth of their failures and the dizzying height of their triumphs. Everything about them is writ large.”⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Buhle, P., and Wagner, Dave (2001). A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Polonsky and the Hollywood Left. LA, The Regents of the UCal, p. 112

⁸¹ Christopher, N. (1997). Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City. NY, The Free Press, pp. 175-76

In a manner that recalls the triumphalism of Garfield's Morse in *Force of Evil*, exalted with his office "high in the clouds" on Wall Street, Douglas's Gekko looks out at Manhattan from the fortieth-floor window upon signing a contract that will make him rich, contemptuously observing the tiny dots of "suckers" on the street. In *Body and Soul*, Garfield feels invincible at a similar moment of triumph, having just signed with a corrupt promoter, responding to his disapproving friends and relatives with a shout of, "It's money. It doesn't think. It doesn't care who spends it. Take it while you can."⁸²

This certainly appears to be the *modus operandi* of the contemporary financial elite dominating social and political life in the US. While defending these big-business ethics was somewhat less torturous for the liberal anti-communists of the late forties than it is today, attacking the nostrums of 'free-enterprise' turned out to be literally deadly for Garfield and Canada Lee, while Rossen and Polonsky's film careers were almost terminated. Robert Ottoson, in his survey of film noir, makes perceptive comments about what distinguished Polonsky's (decisive) input into Rossen's boxing film. He writes that, like *Force of Evil*, it "not only attacks the free-enterprise system, but also the American success ethic." He correctly notes that these artistic and ideological challenges did not go unnoticed by the defenders of American capitalism and its domination by big-business ethics. Ottoson lays down "a simple and terrible 'equation'" for *Body and Soul*: "greed = money = corruption = death."⁸³

Again, it is noteworthy that Polonsky opted for showing the undefeated spirit of the proletariat,

⁸² Ibid, p. 176

⁸³ Ottoson in Ibid.

embodied in Garfield's spiritual awakening and his escaping the terminal part of Ottoson's capitalist equation. Without belabouring this point further, let us turn to Rossen in the 1930s, the time of the peak of the New-Deal stories that more often than not reinforced this terrible equation, albeit with maximum sympathy for the working-class underdog.

Rossen before *film gris*: *Marked Women* (1937) and *Racket Busters* (1938)

The 1948 collaboration between Rossen and Polonsky resulted in a highly stylized 'fable of the streets' that unmasked real class relations of corporate capitalism, under the guise of a boxing film. More than a decade earlier Rossen made his directorial debut with a dramatization of Lucky Luciano's trial and conviction by the State Supreme Court in New York, on June 7, 1936 on a charge of enforcing 'compulsory prostitution.' An early treatment co-written by Rossen and titled *Five Women* centered on five dance hostesses who became key witnesses at the trial of Luciano. The women are portrayed as caught between the corporate and legal arms of the system that degrades and exploits them, but which is still, as one of them quips, better than the "gutter." The ambitious D.A. represents the legal side of capitalism, which brings the only realistic hope for the girls, as well as a real threat to their very lives, should they defy their paymasters. The most prominent of the women, the leading agitator Mary Dwight, was assigned to Bette Davis and then the title became *Marked Woman*.

Marked Woman gave melodramatic expression to the progressivism of the late 1930s and to Rossen's own raw proletarian instincts, by tackling the issue of female workers' systematic exploitation and the accompanying social injustice without stretching the norms of the 1930s

classical Hollywood paradigm. The women in the film articulate this limited political framework in their defeatist acceptance of their hopeless future. To a large extent, the narrative limitations of *Marked Woman* stemmed from the Production Code ban on open depictions of prostitution, and, as Russell Campbell notes in his study of prostitution on film, *Marked Women*, “[g]iven these constraints, *Marked Woman*’s expose of the vice racket is necessarily blunted, and indeed Vanning is indicted on a charge of murder rather than compulsory prostitution.”⁸⁴ This gritty urban melodrama is set largely in the red-light district the women call their home and work, and the courtroom, a site of their possible redemption. They work in the way they do because the alternative, as Davis’ character Mary says, is “going hungry a couple of days a week so you can have some clothes to put on your back.” Beth Haralovich observes that for all such indications of class divisions, *Marked Woman* departs from the earlier social problem formula in that the root causes are not sufficiently explored or criticized. This is so despite the tendency of many Hollywood films of the 1930s to “position women’s narrative choices within the fragile contours of a patriarchal capitalism in which the morality of womanhood struggled with economic pressures,” which also called upon a “popular recognition of the material conditions which inform women’s gendered and class identities.” Instead, referring to Maria LaPlace’s argument about producing and consuming the woman’s film, Haralovich stresses that the central issue in any investigation of the woman’s film is the “problematic of female subjectivity, agency and desire in Hollywood cinema.”⁸⁵ Russell Campbell’s study reinforces this gendered approach to these films. Indeed, he speculates on the challenge posed by the figure of the prostitute in film to the dominant ideology from a gendered, not a class, standpoint, according to which the patriarchal society’s division of women into “respectable,” or married, and “disreputable”

⁸⁴ Campbell, R. (2006). *Marked Women: Prostitutes and Prostitution in the Cinema*. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 189-90

⁸⁵ Haralovich, B. (1990). “The Proletarian Woman’s Film of the 1930s.” *Screen* 31.2: pp. 174-187.

women, who are “free to sell their services, has been the basic class division for women.”⁸⁶

While recognizing that free-market capitalism no longer meshes as easily with traditional patriarchy, Russell maintains that the figure of the prostitute on film is “predominantly attributable to the working of the male imagination” framed by “patriarchal ideology.”⁸⁷

Nevertheless, Haralovich does allow that in the proletarian woman’s film, “this problematic is firmly tied to the social relations of power which derive from the intersection of gender and economics.”⁸⁸ It follows that the artistic success of a film about Depression-era prostitutes will hinge on its ability, to quote Charles Eckert, “to represent gangsterism and vice as capitalist practices of ownership and exchange of labour.”⁸⁹ In other words, the artistic success of Rossen’s film is tied to its ability to pose a direct challenge to American capitalism.

The film reinforces the feeling of the women that “the law isn’t for people like us.” They are not only presented as afraid of the consequences of testifying, and of breaking the “code,” but, more fundamentally, they cannot conceive of any improvement in their lot resulting from Luciano’s conviction. In the film, after the trial Mary rejects David Graham (the prosecutor), telling him that, “We both live in different worlds and that’s the way we’ve got to leave it.”⁹⁰ For all the exposures of the pitfalls of the US justice system, and a strong sense of its two-tier, class character, the political limitations of Rossen’s adherence to American democracy are manifested in the film’s resolution. After the trial, as Graham is hailed by reporters and photographers as a future governor, Mary rejoins the other women and they walk off into the night and the fog. The

⁸⁶ Gerda Lerner qt. in Campbell, R. (2006). Marked Women: Prostitutes and Prostitution in the Cinema. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, p. 3

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 21

⁸⁸ Haralovich, B. (1990). “The Proletarian Woman’s Film of the 1930s.” Screen 31.2: pp. 174-187.

⁸⁹ Eckert qt. in Ibid.

⁹⁰ Neve, B. (1984). “The Screenwriter and the Social Problem Film, 1936-38: The Case of Robert Rossen at Warner Brothers.” Film & History 14.1: pp. 2-13.

class solidarity of the unemployed women represents for them a moral victory. But the key actor in the justice system, prosecutor Graham, is tapped for a governorship. John Hill draws the general conclusion, which fully applies to *Marked Woman*, that “ideologies, inherent in character, causality, and the happy ending serve to personalize social conflict and to offer solutions which deny the complexity of social life.”⁹¹

This strategy of personalizing social conflict is embodied most graphically in the persona of the film’s star, Bette Davis. As was discussed in the previous chapter, John Garfield personified the hitherto unseen Jewish working-class of the 1930s and 40s, and his undeniable star quality served as a major pole of attraction for American movie audiences. But Haralovich argues that Davis’s tough screen persona served definite political purposes, utilising the Hollywood cult of celebrity to gloss over, rather than personify, her class identity.⁹² Straddling this tricky divide in the film’s purposes, the promotional material gives some flavour of the producers’ hopes for the film: “Women! You’ve read about those notorious “clip joints”! You’ve heard how men are robbed by their hostesses! You’ve passed such places many times without knowing it! Now you can see a side of life you’ve never known! ... Meet the Girls who got caught in the racket!”⁹³

Charles Einfield’s letter of 12 April 1937 to Jack Warner expresses in a rather blunt manner the concerns raised by this particular social problem film and their hopes for their star:

[Women at the Strand Theatre in NY] don’t talk about how beautiful she is, but how realistic she is. You hear women say, ‘There’s a gal who doesn’t need a lot of junk all over her face and who doesn’t have to put on the glamour to hold us in our seats.... She

⁹¹ Hill qt. in Haralovich, B. (1990). “The Proletarian Woman’s Film of the 1930s.” *Screen* 31.2: pp. 174-187.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ *Marked Woman* promotional material, Warner/USC

isn't afraid to let people see her as tawdry character she is supposed to represent.... Bette Davis is a female Cagney and if we give her the right parts, we are going to have a star that will pay off the interest on the bonds every year.⁹⁴

This letter highlights the central contradiction of *Marked Woman*: “the film’s exploitation of censorable material (gangsterism, violence, and prostitution) and the entertainment value of its star discourse and merchandising.”⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the shock value of these three censorable aspects of capitalist exploitation do not alter the extent to which the film endorses the sanctity of the capitalist state institutions, in particular, the D.A.’s office.

Jack Warner’s response, along with those of his political opponents, is revealing: “This is one of the best pictures of this type we ever made. There is really a sock in every foot.... Am sure we have nothing to worry about other than trying to make ten a year like this.... Anyone having anything to do with this picture deserves tremendous commendation.”⁹⁶ The Communist *Daily Worker* was also happy; their reviewer feeling that there was no happy ending, and that “as far as the girls are concerned theirs is a hopeless future.”⁹⁷ These sentiments provide a snapshot into the political and intellectual climate of the late 1930s Popular Front, in which the “marked” women’s “hopeless future” is hailed by both the capitalist-liberal and the Stalinist press. This again puts Rossen and Polonsky’s fight over the creative control of *Body and Soul*’s ending a decade later into a sharper relief. As was indicated earlier, these two men of the Hollywood left embodied not only different generations of filmmakers, but also two irreconcilable political and

⁹⁴ Einfield qt. in Haralovich, B. (1990). “The Proletarian Woman’s Film of the 1930s.” *Screen* 31.2: pp. 174-187.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Warner, J. L. (1937). Memo on “Marked Woman” to. H. Wallis. LA, Feb. 22, 1937, USC, Warner Bros. Archives.

⁹⁷ Neve, B. (2005). “The Hollywood Left: Robert Rossen and Postwar Hollywood.” *Film Studies* 7(Winter): pp. 54-65.

aesthetic paradigms, the liberal-Democratic and socialist, with Polonsky successfully utilizing the latter to undermine the former.

At the same time it is instructive to bring a feminist perspective to the representation of working women in this film, if only to provide a counterweight to the perspective offered by a class analysis. In adopting a gender-based approach a completely different outlook emerges. While in the previous chapter on Polonsky a digression into Marxist philosophy on art was necessitated by the filmmaker's own political aesthetics, a brief detour here into the feminist perspective could only benefit a study of Rossen and *Marked Women*, and not only because of the film's subject. In his review of Russell Campbell's *Marked Women*, Richard Porton points to the "immense value of this book," which "resides in its realization that celluloid prostitutes reveal the internal contradictions of male domination."⁹⁸ In other words, as discussed earlier, capitalist domination is replaced by male domination. This perspective is symptomatic of the post-McCarthy, New Hollywood-era shift away from a class-based politics towards identity (gender, sexual orientation) politics like feminism, which also signified a renunciation of the modernist preoccupations of the earlier period, with its desire to expose the class character of social problems through formal experimentation. The failure of the radical renaissance of New Hollywood cinema of the late 1960s to resurrect the political imperatives of early twentieth century modernism, aligned the stylistic evolution of American film even closer to its corporate overlords. Campbell points to one collateral effect of New Hollywood's embrace of conglomeratisation when he suggests that the success of the "re-romanticization of the prostitute in *Pretty Woman*" demonstrates "the commercial advantages that accrue on appealing to a female

⁹⁸ Porton, R. (2007). "Marked Women: Prostitutes and Prostitution in Cinema (book review)." *Cineaste* 32(Spring): pp. 86-88.

as well as male audience.”⁹⁹ For all the justifiable political limitations of Rossen’s *Marked Women*, borne largely out of an uncritical embrace of Stalinism and Popular Front liberalism, as well as the crippling censorship of the Production Code, ‘romanticisation’ of the ‘marked women’ in this 1930s social problem film was simply unthinkable. The only closure agreeable to the culture industry operating under the constraint of the Production Code could be arrived at by some form of emancipation of these working women on film (as long as this emancipation did not raise the spectre of socialism). Owing to the restrictive politics of the period between 1930 to 1967 (years of the Motion Picture Production Code), even this emancipation was at best limited to the power and goodwill of the existing institutions, personified by Bogart’s DA in *Marked Women*.¹⁰⁰

This is consistent with Bogart’s performance of a youthful idealism, which in a revised story line of November 30, 1936, comes to the fore:

When she [Bette Davis] enters his office, she discovers that Graham [Humphrey Bogart] and she are old friends. They both grew up together in the same neighborhood – in fact they had had the usual youthful romance that a boy and girl thrown together will have. They hadn’t seen each other for years, he, even in his youth an idealist, was going places. It is evident that he is fulfilling the promise of his boyhood.... Despite the fact that she still has some feeling for him, she chooses the only way possible – she refuses to tell him anything.¹⁰¹

This particular section of the story works against the “master narrative of noir” – the gender-

⁹⁹ Campbell qt. in Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Production Code was not a state or government entity, but the film industry’s regulatory body.

¹⁰¹ Rossen, R. (1936). “Marked Woman,” revised storyline, Nov. 30, 1936. LA, USC, Warner Bros. Archives.

oriented interpretation centered on the femme fatale – and instead reinforces what Dennis Broe refers to as the “class alliance between sexes” in earlier noir. (Broe interview, Feb. 16, 2010) The youthful idealism of Bogart’s D.A. also reflects the highpoint of liberal democracy in America, when this was seen as a viable substitute for the socialist, or revolutionary, politics of Marxism. This is further reflected in the narrative closure, which has Betty Davis’ character admit “that she was wrong – that kind of racket they were in you can’t be too smart for.” This was also articulated in a revised storyline of November 30, 1936, which states that “its [racket’s] ultimate end is what they are facing right now. They [five women] have but one alternative, since their fate is inevitable anyway – to take a chance with the law and hope that Manning’s power over them will be broken.”¹⁰²

Significantly, the resolution of this inner conflict in Mary’s working-class persona signifies her acquiescence to the ruling class, whose law enforcers become the only force for good. Crossing this class line in the narrative resolution of this particular social problem also becomes the emblem of the political power of the state, demonstrating its ideological hold over the working class. But a far more powerful ideological cement was needed to tie the working class of America to its Rooseveltian liberal democracy – Stalinism refashioned by the CPUSA as ‘20th century Americanism,’ to cite Earl Browder. It was no accident that Rossen joined this Stalinist organization in this very period, in 1937.

Interestingly, a revised tag of the script from December 30, 1936, added a line for Graham as Mary “struggles to be casual as Graham continues earnestly...” to plead with her: “Look, Mary – there’s no use trying to stall me. I know what’s in back of your mind.... You’re saying to

¹⁰² Ibid.

yourself – we both live in different worlds – let’s leave it that way....”¹⁰³ While this reworking of the ending leaves the fate of their relationship open, it does raise the stakes by emphasizing the “different worlds” these two inhabit.

An earlier reworking of the treatment of October 3, 1936, (“Five Women”) further emphasizes the class, or social, roots of their “questionable character.” Nevertheless, the D.A. points out that “these women are the only ones, who despite their ‘questionable characters’, have the courage to defy Luciano’s threats of reprisals.” Significantly, he “draws out from them on the stand – their life, their reason for being what they are and the system that prevents them from being anything else.”¹⁰⁴

So these earlier treatments emphasized the social conditions of the five women as the determining factors in their present circumstance. The implication is that the very system that breeds such ‘immorality’ is officially rejecting it by utilizing its own laws. But, as the treatment explains, “[i]n the main, it is the conditions that have made them so, and, if given the chance they would rise above these conditions, and ‘by giving them a chance’ he [prosecutor Dewey] means breaking up the ring that has theretofore so completely held them in its power.”¹⁰⁵

It is no surprise that very little of this ideological core of the story was retained in the final script. The ideal of ‘giving them a chance,’ initially anchored in their class character, loses its political bite. In Graham’s court summary, this is stripped to the bare essentials to fit the dramatic requirements of the crime genre: “Out of all the teeming millions of this great city – only five

¹⁰³ Rossen, R. (1936). “Marked Woman” revised tag, Dec. 30, 1936. LA, USC, Warner Bros. Archives.

¹⁰⁴ Rossen, R. (1936). “Marked Woman” treatment, Oct. 3, 1936. LA, USC, Warner Bros. Archives.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

women have had the courage to take their very lives in their hands and accuse Johnny Vanning..... Their characters are questionable – their profession unsavory and distasteful. It has not been difficult to crucify them – but it has been difficult to crucify the truth...” Graham’s vague references to undefeatable truth and the inferior morality of prostitutes is as deep into bourgeois morality as the final script was permitted to penetrate.¹⁰⁶ As is usually the case, the vetting of the social and political insight of the protagonists necessitates a compensating heightening of individual and psychological aspects in characters. In *Marked Woman*, according to Sklar, Bogart’s City Boy persona was insufficiently subtle for his final scene with Mary as the five women fade away in the fog. “Whatever attraction the lawman felt for the Davis character,” argues Sklar, “had to be suppressed, inevitably, by his political ambition.” The problem, according to Sklar, is that “neither Bogart’s voice nor his facial expression conveys any of the possible complexities of his character’s inner feelings.”¹⁰⁷ For Bogart’s antagonist, on the other hand, no subtlety was needed. To the universal ideals of truth and justice an embodiment of pure evil has to be counter-posed.

Manning, the new ‘clip-joint’ owner, personifies the ruthlessness and brutality of his criminal enterprise. His stony cold face and no-nonsense aura are truly terrifying. His message to the girls, delivered in his restrained, but menacing manner, is clear: “Maybe you like this set-up ... maybe you don’t ... but you’re going to take it. I’ve got every night club and every girl working in every night club sewed up and you work the way I tell you – or you don’t work at all! You got that straight?” Only Mary seems to have gotten the message. She kicks some sense into Estelle, who’d rather get fired than have any part of Manning’s “two-bit joints”: “What else are we

¹⁰⁶ Here the progressive *Big Heat* (1953) could provide a useful counterpoint, as the cop hero insists on investigating the death of a “B-girl.” (Correspondence with Jon Lewis, July 7, 2011)

¹⁰⁷ Sklar, R. (1992). *City Boys, Cagney, Bogart, Garfield*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, pp. 68-69

gonna do? You heard what he said. It's Manning or nothing!" Yet Manning intends to set up a "protection fund," in case the "law steps in." For an entrepreneur who possesses "every night club and every girl," this seems overcautious. It also hints at the very belief in the democratic institutions of the capitalist state that was part and parcel of the Popular Front ideology.

Yet Mary's rebuke of Graham's questioning into Manning's murder of one of the girls is indicative of the basic working-class instinct she articulates: "No! – You'd be afraid – Somebody higher up might not like it – You might loose your job! But with me – you can get tough. People like us – we don't count – we're nobodys – set-ups to get kicked around by whoever feels like it! – Well, that don't go with me – I'm not gonna stand for it. Either you let me out of here or -- !" For all the tense ambiguity over the fate of Graham and Mary's reawakened romance, *Marked Woman* leaves more than enough hope for 'people like' Mary to transcend the class barriers and join the class enemy. What was resolved 'in feeling,' to use Polonsky's term, hardly reflects the irreconcilable nature of class antagonisms contained, or hidden in the narrative.

But that was 1937, before the post-war paradigm shifts, where *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil* revived a path to high modernism, unfettered by Popular Front sensibilities, or by "a kind of political theory of American problematic democracy disguised as cheap melodrama."¹⁰⁸ The Hollywood Left's transition to high modernism, a move away from the middle-brow propriety of the studio chiefs and their overlords in Pentagon and Wall Street, was strangled by the political instrument that was HUAC.

In 1947 HUAC had focused on Hollywood content, accusing the studios of socialist sympathies.

¹⁰⁸ Rabinowitz, P. (2002). *Black & White Noir: America's Pulp Modernism*. NY, Columbia University Press, p. 18

Dennis Broe, writing on the return of the police procedurals on TV in the past two decades, argues that in the intervening years leading up to the second HUAC hearings of 1951 there was much pressure to “extinguish what was really the Popular or Cultural Front sympathy for the ‘Common Man (and Woman),’ a sympathy for the ordinary aspects of both working and middle class life.” The eschewing of the working-class concerns on screen became a de facto policy, with Jack Warner famously declaring that he was through with the stories about the ‘little man,’ following a bitter eight-month strike at his Burbank Studios. Slowly this policy was implemented, explains Broe, with “Warners’ most prominent sympathetic fugitive Humphrey Bogart transformed from an unjustly accused escaped convict who must exile himself from the country in *Dark Passage* (1947) to a DA whose toughness was now exhibited against the criminal enemy in the appropriately titled *The Enforcer* (Bretaigne Windust, U.S., 1951).”¹⁰⁹ In fact, before this transformation, Bogart played a gangster in the trucking industry, terrorising truckers, in *Racket Busters* (1938).

***Racket Busters* (1938), Rossen’s answer to the union question**

More than a decade before making *Body and Soul* with Polonsky, Rossen worked with Leonardo Bercovici¹¹⁰ on the Warners film based on the New York “rackets” trials, again convened by Thomas Dewey, in 1937. *Racket Busters* (1938) is based on a well-publicized trial of March 1937, dealing with extortion, bribery, and murder in the trucking industry. Rossen and Bercovici drew closely on the court documents to depict the brutality of the business. Alison (Walter Abel) is the Dewey-type character who is appointed by the Governor to clean up the rackets, while

¹⁰⁹ Broe, D. (2009). “Genre Regression and The New Cold War: The Return of the Police Procedural”. *Framework* 45.2: pp. 81-101.

¹¹⁰ Future blacklistee who refused to cooperate, losing his passport and not being able to find work.

Martin (Humphrey Bogart) is the gangster who is attempting to take control of the city's trucking industry. The main truckers in the story are Denny Jordan (George Brent) and his partner Skeets Wilson, and Pop, the secretary of the truckers' association. Pop strives to organize truckers in a fight against the racketeers, while the hot-tempered Denny responds to his predicament in individualistic terms of 'every man for himself.' This is an attitude that will be repeated by Terry Malloy in his conversation with Edie in *On the Waterfront*: "You wanna know my philosophy on life?... Do it to them before they do it to you."

The climactic sentencing of John Martin to twenty to thirty year's confinement prompts a closing remark in the courtroom from Denny to his wife: "You know, Nora, I've learned one thing from Pop and this whole business. People like us, we only got one way out, and that is to stick together." This is a staple of the rhetoric of 1930s unionism. A strong sense of American democracy in action, a proto-Populism, and "Capra-esque libertarianism,"¹¹¹ permeates the film. As Neve observes, there is also some attempt, in a scene in which the new mobsters' association confronts the truckers, "to get behind and beyond the 'bad man' – here represented by Martin – that is such a staple of the genre." However, as Neve argues, *Racket Busters* bears no real comparison with Raoul Walsh's 1940 film about trucking, *They Drive By Night*. He concludes that *Racket Busters* contains nothing of the analysis of the exploitation involved in the normal operation of the trucking business that is found in the later film. "While the 'problem' in *They Drive By Night* is ultimately resolved by individual means," in *Racket Busters* "the option of collective action is constantly referred to and becomes an important part of the resolution of the

¹¹¹ Correspondence with Jon Lewis, July 7, 2011

narrative in a way that clearly reflects the political concerns of the scriptwriters.”¹¹² In that sense, these narrative choices point to Rossen’s political priorities at the time: in the film unionism takes precedence over the exposure of the class origins of the ‘social problem.’ These proclivities reveal an uncritical acceptance of the established political superstructure of the time, in which both Stalinists and Democrats played decisive roles in framing (or containing) class conflicts.

Whereas in *Marked Woman* the working-class ethos is buried under layers of bourgeois morality and individual star power, in *Racket Busters*, it is the unionist ideal that frames the proletarian discourse. While it might seem contradictory to say that a pro-union perspective in a labour film may work to weaken, rather than strengthen, its working-class ethos, *They Drive By Night* could serve as a case in point. One need only contrast the jubilations of the unionised truckers, in the classic socialist realist style, at the end of *Racket Busters* to the gloomy end of Bogart’s “gypsy operator,”¹¹³ an apt term used to describe the most vulnerable and exploited truckers at the mercy of the ‘free market’ embodied in The Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), in *They Drive By Night*. The treatment for the latter script drew condemnations from The Board of the American Trucking Association, along with the ICC, prompting Harry Warner to urge his brother Jack to “immediately either change portions of the script...or take whatever steps are necessary to eliminate whatever objectionable features can be eliminated.”¹¹⁴ What was so objectionable to big trucking business? A strong hint is provided by the Trucking Association’s John V. Lawrence who, in a memo to Mr. Biow of The Biow Company, fears that the horrible fate that befalls the ‘gypsy’ trucker in Bezzerides’ story would “do untold harm to our modern transport

¹¹² Neve, B. (1984). “The Screenwriter and the Social Problem Film, 1936-38: The Case of Robert Rossen at Warner Brothers.” *Film & History* 14.1: pp. 2-13.

¹¹³ Crisler, B. R. (1940). “Bailing it through with the truckmen,” research for “Long Haul”. LA, USC, Warner Bros.

¹¹⁴ Warner, H. (1940). Memo from Harry to Jack Warner, May 21, 1940. J. Warner. LA, USC, Warner Bros. Archives.

industry.”¹¹⁵ However, Chevrolet co.’s G. J. Metzger spells out the industry’s concerns rather more bluntly, when, in a strongly worded memo to the Motion Picture Producers of America, he noted that the film “builds up the overworked and fatigued truck driver,” the gypsy trucker, to a “horrifying scene of the driver and helper burned to a crisp in an overturned truck...”¹¹⁶

Bezzerridis’ offending treatment, “The Long Haul,” based on his 1938 novel, concludes with the ‘gypsy’ trucker crashing, feeling “himself torn into darkness...lying in the field, unable to move,” managing only to “roll his eyes” and seeing his truck, “upside down, a little above him, one of the wheels still turning against the rising sun.” As he tried to get up, unsuccessfully, he told himself: “This can’t be happening to me. I’ve got to get to Cassy, she’ll never know what happened to me.” With no help in sight, “[h]e lay open-eyed, gasping for breath, and looking up, he saw the wide, blue sky, suddenly terribly wide and blue...”¹¹⁷ Bezzerridis’ ending does not live up to the graphic horror charged by his corporate accusers; if anything, it conveys a deep sense of personal tragedy in a highly poetic manner. However, a corollary of this moving imagery is a strong sense of revulsion at the capitalist free market that literally drove the protagonist to his doom. In the context of the golden years of noir, replete with such doomed heroes, it is this aspect of Nick’s tragedy that provoked the ire of the industry.

In *Racket Busters*, Denny, a trucker whose vehicle has been sabotaged by the rival union mobsters, is resigned to his fate as a politically isolated individual at the mercy of the racketeers. He responds to yet another news headline featuring more freed racketeers due to ‘insufficient evidence’ and election candidates’ promises of campaigns “against city vice rings” by saying:

¹¹⁵ Lawrence, J. V. (1940). Memo from Lawrence to Milton H. Biow, May 17, 1940. P. Milton H. Biow, The Biow Company. LA, Margaret Herrick Library.

¹¹⁶ Metzger, G. J. (1940). Memo from Metzger to David H. Palfreyman, MPPDA, June 4, 1940. LA, Margaret Herrick Library.

¹¹⁷ Bezzerrides, A. I. (1938). “The Long Haul,” treatment, March 21, 1938. LA, USC, Warner Bros. Archives.

“What’s the use? ... Those mugs have got the whole city under control. Poor slobs like us haven’t got a chance!” Nora, his wife, articulates an instinctive unionist response of the politically combative, but uneducated proletariat: “Why don’t you truckmen stick together? Why must you let racketeers run your Association? Why don’t you throw them out? If you’d all stick together, they’d be afraid!”

Racket Busters is essentially a battle between two unions: one, the racketeers’ Manhattan Trucking Association, led by Graham (Bogart), and the democratically elected truckers’ union, led by the old-time unionist Pop, a veteran of many picket battles. Rossen clearly identifies with Pop, who is the embodiment of the 1930s militancy. This fault line separates heroes from villains, and even the ambivalent Danny is swayed into action when one of the Manhattan thugs forcefully silences “Horse”: “Horse is right We’ve got to stick together. Are we kids? We’re practically an army of guys! We don’t have to take guff from nobody! Let’s elect our own officers! Be on the level with ourselves! And see whether anybody can strong-arm us into paying out dough we work so hard for!!” In the end, the Truckmen’s Association prevails, and prosecutor Dewey (Bogart) praises the courageous truckmen. He “lauds the spirit” of men like Pop and “Horse” – predicting that what they have done in the battle to “give men the right to organize as they see fit without the rule of gangsters, will give other cities and towns throughout the county the incentive and the courage to do the same thing.”¹¹⁸

All is well with the liberal democracy under Roosevelt, which presumably created the level playing field in the class warfare wracking his society in which the working men can muster a significant political victory against the businessmen. The treatment describes the last scene, the

¹¹⁸ Rossen, R. (1937). “Racket Busters” treatment, Dec. 30, 1937. LA, USC, Warner Bros. Archives.

“MARKET, alive, vibrant, trucks rolling, men shouting, working, sweating – not cringing men who look furtively over their shoulders, but free men – with the pride of free men who have won that freedom for themselves.”¹¹⁹ The social reality of the late 1930s was somewhat different. In his important study of the class conflict in Rooseveltian America, Gerald Horne provides a vivid sense of the of the “fear that Depression-influenced art” provoked in the ruling class, which felt compelled to unleash various forms of “police terrorism” against theatrical actors and directors.¹²⁰

As opposed to *Marked Women*, *Racket Busters* as a social problem film broke very little ground politically. In the case of the former, a significant sociopolitical component had to be watered down, or purged outright, paring the epic battle between Bogart’s LAW and Manning’s EVIL to its bare dramatic essentials. In the latter film, on the other hand, the ‘people like us’ – substituting prostitutes for truckmen – are natural class allies of the state forces of LAW. Even its foremost representative in the narrative, state prosecutor Allison, preaches to Denny the value of pulling together, to which Denny retorts: “You’re in the wrong racket, mister. You shoulda been a minister.” Allison’s reply, “Too bad for you I’m not,” further reinforces Rossen’s belief in the beneficial relationship between LAW and Big LABOUR under capitalism. Only in such a fictionalized political framework can the “roar of the MARKET swell” as the film concludes.¹²¹

It is not surprising then that despite the failure of the film to show, in the words of the *Daily Workers*’ David Platt, the “tie-up between the racketeers, big business and Tammany

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Horne, G. (2001). *Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950: Moguls, Mobsters, Stars, Reds & Trade Unionists*. Austin, University of Texas Press, p. 41

¹²¹ Rossen, R. (1938). “Racket Busters,” final script, Apr 22, 1938. LA, USC, Warner Bros. Archives.

politicians,” the political lines of the two factions of the Popular Front movement – liberal and Stalinist – intersect on the film’s treatment of unionism (so long as the specter of socialism is not raised). Writing during the war years about Warners as the “100% pro-New Deal studio,” David Platt praised *Racket Busters* as “strongly pro-union.” The *New York Times*’s Bosley Crowther’s review noted that “the Warners have contributed a realistic invocation to solidarity and a popular front,” and that the use of the actual court testimony gave the film “a documentary authority which is both instructive and compelling.”¹²²

What would a more probing exposure of this ‘tie-up’ lend to *Racket Busters*? Nicholas Christopher, in his discussion of the pervasive role of the city and the night in American noir, presents some useful insights into the character of the “grafters, grifters and tycoons” that inhabit this noirish landscape. He presents a vivid description of the physiognomy of a racketeer. One underplayed component of *Racket Busters* is a core characteristic of this parasitic social layer. Christopher explains that they “comprise the core of the criminal population,” and in film noir, “despite the apparently black-and-white issues of guilt and innocence that abound, the line between criminals and honest citizens can remain considerably blurred.” In fact, racketeering in the inter-war period is a “flourishing urban industry,” so much so that the “ties between criminal racketeering and political corruption become inextricable; the rackets are a pervasive force, eventually a kind of shadow government.”¹²³

What emerges from this sociological profile of the racketeer is that the sheer pervasiveness of his

¹²² Crowther & Platt qt. in Neve, B. (1992). *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition*. London, NY, Routledge, p. 25

¹²³ Christopher, N. (1997). *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City*. NY, The Free Press, pp. 158-59

practice could have, and perhaps should have, formed the axis of *Racket Busters*. Given that the film was made in the wake of some major industrial struggles of 1934-35, of hitherto unseen intensity (and this includes the Minneapolis truckers strike of 1934), and in the period of the flowering of the social problem film at Warners, one ought to look for explanations beyond the standard account of production-level suppression of dangerous ideas. After all, the Warners and other studio bosses sought to capitalize on both the commercial appeal and the cultural prestige associated with quality drama. Hence the character of internal studio censorship also changes with the times. The post-HUAC cycle of anti-communist films like *My Son John* and *I Married a Communist* corresponded to abrupt shifts in Cold War politics, as did the more liberal, or gender-driven films inflected by the identity politics of the post-Kennedy era. But in the mid to late 1930s, the liberal and radical wings of the intelligentsia were in their coziest relationship ever up to that point. This proved to be a broad enough ideological buffer for Rossen's reformist tendencies in his films of this period, when many 'dangerous' ideas could be articulated in movies without necessarily causing too much discomfort to the cultural industry and their moral gatekeepers. In Polonsky's and Losey's times, however, this ideological buffer largely evaporated under the enormous pressure of the resurgent domestic anticommunism.

So why does the social reality of crime as the "iron skeleton, camouflaged beneath the outer tissue (which grows even thinner) of the city's body politic"¹²⁴ not find the same artistic expression in Rossen's pre-war treatment as it does in his collaboration with Polonsky in *Body and Soul*? It may appear contradictory to state that the social roots of the ills of capitalism were less visible during the radicalisation of the Depression than after the post-war counteroffensive against this class consciousness. After 1945 all criminal pursuits assumed a more "corporate

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 159

business model,” featuring the “corporate pyramid at the peak of which are white-collar managers” (not unlike Joe Morse), but this does not explain the relative absence of these fundamental features of big business in pre-war social problem films. As for the post-war period, the related issues of “money-laundering, instituting ‘legitimate’ business covers, the absorption of political parties from the district clubhouse upward, and methods of creative bookkeeping” which are all “practiced with increasing sophistication”¹²⁵ certainly placed added ideological pressures on any serious artist with a developed sense of social responsibility.

The possibilities this period offered to filmmakers with a keen sense of the nature of business under capitalism can be seen in two films about big business and racketeering, *The Racket* (1951) and *Street With No Name* (1948). Christopher again provides a good sense of the political and aesthetic sophistication of these noir films which paint a more grey and complex picture of the nature of corporate and state criminality. So *The Racket* features two “noir icons,” Robert Mitchum and Robert Ryan, a police captain and a high-ranking mobster respectively, who are, “in their methods and attitudes ... often indistinguishable.” If anything, the mobster Nick Scanlon “becomes the film’s most sympathetic character.”¹²⁶ In *Street With No Name* the racketeer who controls his city, Alex Stiles (Richard Widmark) rules via state institutions—City Hall, the FBI, the local police. Moreover, “[I]n a wicked twist on the postwar celebration of military efficiency that had just subdued the Axis and was now revitalising the operations of corporate America,” Stiles boasts: “I’m building an organization along scientific lines.... That’s why I screened you [FBI undercover Cordell] ... [like a] line in the army. Only I pick my

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid, pp. 164-65

recruits.”¹²⁷

Christopher’s analysis of these two films about racketeering can serve to further emphasise the political limitations of Rossen’s 1930s work. Christopher argues that Rossen’s *Racket Busters*, and other crime thrillers of the period, “make much of the nascent F.B.I.’s heroic contributions to gang-busting.”¹²⁸ Moreover, the corporate gangsters’ invocation of scientific methods raises the necessity for a more law-governed, historical approach to their stories, as is evidenced in Polonsky’s aesthetic synthesis of the American vernacular and Marxism in *Force of Evil*. But that kind of applied dialectical materialism in modernist cinema was only possible for a brief historical period between the first and the second coming of HUAC (November 1947- May 1951). Or, to put it in a politically more precise way, this period also coincided with the first visible signs of the weakening of the Stalinist grip over the creative talent in Hollywood, one important ideological buffer for Rossen up to that point. As will be discussed later, this political process, in the final analysis, proved to be the decisive push for Rossen to resign from the Party and eventually name names. But before succumbing to political reaction, this blacklistee had more important work left in him.

Naremore provides a useful clue to the ideological roots of noir’s post-war decline, which “has formative roots in the left culture of the Roosevelt years – a culture that was repressed, marginalised, and virtually extinguished during the postwar decade, when noir took on increasingly cynical and even right-wing implications.”¹²⁹ This observation tells one part of the

¹²⁷ Ibid, pp. 167-68

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 170

¹²⁹ Naremore, J. (1998). More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts. Berkeley, LA, University of California Press, p. 104

story. Denning's thesis on the 'proletarianisation' of culture and the 'cultural front' offers a more contextualised account. Underestimating the critical role of the proletariat in American mass culture inevitably leads to the downplaying of a key social driving force behind the flowering of American noir. And this political factor is, in the final analysis, the key determinant of the richness of the mass culture, especially cinema, since it frames the public discourse on all key issues of a period. In the case of Rossen, he made the transition from a card-carrying CP member, activist and socially committed filmmaker of the Popular Front era to the period of the late forties when he was forced to find a relatively safe place in a hostile environment, and this also brought its own artistic challenges. It was a new epoch when realism in style alone would not suffice. Even behind the raw aesthetics of Italian neorealism, in influential films like *Open City* (1945) and *Bicycle Thief* (1948), the principal class divisions affecting their proletarian protagonists are hard to miss. But such class-consciousness was, in Neve's words, "off kilter" in post-war Hollywood.¹³⁰

This transformation is manifested in *Knock on Any Door* (1949). As Frank Krutnik explains, this film constitutes an interesting case for two reasons: the film star's role (Humphrey Bogart as the D.A.) and his character's working-class past. For Krutnik this film

represents a more problematic combination of 'social problem' drama and crime film. As in *Boomerang!*, there is a similar shift away from the disturbed, socially-maladjusted individual, juvenile offender Nick Romano (John Derek), who is accused of shooting a police patrolman during an armed robbery, towards the framing of crime within a social (or, more accurately in this instance, a sociological) perspective. The central protagonist of this film is not the youth himself ... but, as in *Boomerang!*, an attorney who functions

¹³⁰ Interview with Neve, Feb 19, 2010

as a model of integrity and commitment.... Like Romano, Morton [D.A. played by Bogart] was himself once a juvenile criminal, but he has been able to reclaim himself as a respectable, bourgeois professional.¹³¹

What is noteworthy is that this “imposition of the lead character of the lawman”¹³² is a central driving force of this highly sophisticated sociological study of youth delinquency.

Rossen and *film gris* after the war: *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946) and *Johnny O’Clock* (1947)

Johnny O’Clock, Rossen’s directorial debut, is clearly an example of a “recalcitrant, maladjusted” text in need of conformity. Bertrand Tavernier has argued that the film exhibits a “directorial grace,” and an invention not shown in Rossen’s subsequent films. Tavernier saw the film as reflecting Rossen’s “Jewish pessimism and idealism,” a combination that was “perfect for film noir.”¹³³ This observation strengthens the thesis that the filmmaker unfettered by the official politics of his/her times (the sanctity of American capitalism and its institutions) can advance his/her art form, in this case the crime genre, beyond the proscribed conventions of Hollywood crime melodrama. As Neve explains, *Johnny O’Clock* features a “contractual relationship between brain and muscle,” but more importantly, Rossen’s work here “plays on the broader social resonance of gambling,” as he did with Abraham Polonsky in *Body and Soul*. The film

¹³¹ Frank Krutnik, Steve Neale, Brian Neve and Peter Stanfield (1991). In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity. London and NY, Routledge, p. 212

¹³² Broe, D. (2009). “Genre Regression and The New Cold War: The Return of the Police Procedural”. Framework 45.2: pp. 81-101.

¹³³ Tavernier qt. in Neve, B. (1992). Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition. London, NY, Routledge, p. 140

also plays on the connection between gambling and American life in the post-Roosevelt era.¹³⁴

Such broadening of a filmmaker's perspective is inimical to the "sentimental contract of American labor films."¹³⁵

The division of the criminal labour in the film is evenly distributed among the casino owner O'Clock (Powell), his powerful "business associate" Guido Marchettis (Thomas Gomez), and corrupt cop Chuck Blayden. O'Clock is a successful casino manager and junior partner in a legal New York City gambling club while his senior partner Marchettis is the gangster enforcer and fixer. The trigger-happy corrupt cop Blayden is the uniformed enforcer and fixer, tasked with handling business problems that can't be handled cleanly by the elegant junior partner O'Clock. The film opens to the newspaper headlines of a gambler shot by Blayden while 'resisting arrest,' a standard line used to defend police murders. Then Blayden shows up at the casino to pressure Marchettis into becoming a partner in the casino. Soon after this Blayden is found floating in the river, and his ex-girlfriend, casino hatcheck girl Harriet is found dead in her flat and the murder is made to look like a suicide from gas fumes. However, the cops discover she's been poisoned. Needless to say, such a scenario would struggle to pass through the censors of the pre- and wartime Production Code. Even a cursory glance at the standard report form used by the Breen Office during the 1940s reveals at least several points which could have been filed as non-conformances in the film: an unsympathetic characterisation of the police; liquor and drinking shown at nightclub; gambling.¹³⁶ The most objectionable breach of the moral code is Blayden's

¹³⁴ Neve in Krutnik Frank, Neal, Steve, Neve Brian, and Stanfield Peter, Ed. (2007). "Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era. New Brunswick, New Jersey, London, Rutgers University Press, p. 192

¹³⁵ Rabinowitz, P. (2002). Black & White Noir: America's Pulp Modernism. NY, Columbia University Press, pp. 121-42

¹³⁶ Naremore, J. (1998). More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts. Berkeley, LA, University of California Press, pp. 96-97

characterisation, whose murder of a gambler at Marchettis' joint sets off a chain of events that will lead to the showdown between the two 'business associates.'

Marchettis' reply to Johnny's lament of 'Twenty years together down the drain' typifies the soulless pragmatism and ruthlessness of their business relations: 'There was nothing between us but cash.' As Nicholas Christopher puts it, "Money. In the noir city, the essential triangle ... is corruption, power and politics. And at the triangle's center is always money."¹³⁷ Tom Neal's doomed hero in *Detour* (1945), Al Roberts, eloquently sums up the source of his mores: "Money. You know what that is, the stuff you never have enough of. Little green things with George Washington's picture that men slave for, commit crimes for, die for. It's the stuff that has caused more trouble in the world than anything else we ever invented, simply because there's too little of it."¹³⁸ As Eddie Muller explains in *Dark City*, film noir "pointed toward the black core of corruption in our 'civilized' society and our primitive essence. The struggle of the individual to transcend or escape provided the emotional tension."¹³⁹ Despite the passage of time since the high point of noir, these films still resonate powerfully with contemporary audiences who are increasingly forced to cope with the primitive essence of capitalism. If anything, Muller's characterization of the political content of noir seems more contemporary now than at the time of his book's release, as world capitalism appears to be in the grips of an intensifying crisis comparable to the one that gave rise to the original noir – The Great Depression. A cursory observation of the vicissitudes of world capitalism since the advent of the talkies seems to suggest that the crisis of the political system is intrinsically tied to the growth of interest in noir. That is why "[o]f all the postures proffered by Hollywood in this century, noir has proven the

¹³⁷ Christopher, N. (1997). *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City*. NY, The Free Press, p. 151

¹³⁸ Tom Neal as Al Robert, voice over in *Detour* (1945), dir. By Edgar Ulmer.

¹³⁹ Muller, E. (1998). *Dark City: The Lost World of Film Noir*. NY, St. Martin's Press, p. 11

most prescient.” Although “we’re nowhere near as stylish anymore,” the corruption is “thicker than ever.”¹⁴⁰

Muller’s assessment of the historical role of noir raises, without emphasising it, the issue of the artistic value for an artist of assimilating the precise character of his/her epoch. There are objective reasons as to why ‘we’re nowhere near as stylish anymore,’ despite the flourishing of postmodern identity, pop-psychology and pastiche. While drawing from the same stylistic toolset as modernism, postmodernist preoccupation with the surface appearance of things is a sharp departure from the modernist project of social and political enlightenment through experimentation with form. The defeat of Brecht’s modernist project in Hollywood is more than a historical curiosity, but has some political and artistic significance. The aftermath of the Red Scare in Hollywood saw a tendency of a gradual displacement of social class in favour of sex, gender, and race identity as key political categories in film fiction. In general, rather than continuing the humanist and emancipator traditions of modernism, postmodernist approach to human and social condition in art undermines, rather than enhances, the assimilation of the precise social and political character of the artist’s epoch. A proliferation of many forms of modernisms today ought to be seen in a broader context of its historic defeat some five decades ago. As Rabinowitz puts it, “At this millennial moment,” it seems “we just cannot get enough of modernism,” proceeding to list many of its manifestations, including “Hollywood modernism,” “Afro-American modernism,” “vernacular modernism,” “low modernism and modernism of the street,” etc.¹⁴¹ In the period when corruption is ‘thicker than ever,’ a preoccupation with style and patterns devoid of the modernist synthesis with progressive politics invariably results in

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Rabinowitz, P. (2002). Black & White Noir: America's Pulp Modernism. NY, Columbia University Press, p. 6

shallower portrayals of social problems.

In 1964, discussing the decline of Hollywood, John Howard Lawson wrote that “Hollywood’s difficulties reflect and are part of a crisis in the cultural and political life of the United States. The industry is unstable because the whole culture is unstable, shaken by the growing contradiction between the democratic needs of the people and the powerful interests driving toward aggression and war.”¹⁴²

Six decades ago, for all the pressures of the Cold War discourse, the natural tendency of socially committed filmmakers like Rossen was to foreground social problems in their films. Gambling, prostitution, racketeering are all social problems Rossen treated in the films discussed so far. And he did that with a great sense of the social forces at work, even if his stories were framed by the standard trope of Hollywood crime melodrama, emphasizing the heroism of the individual representatives of the American state, such as Bogart’s D.A. Martin. What permeates these works is an acute sense of the American Dream gone wrong. As J. P. Telotte puts it, classical noir

Generally focuses on urban crime and corruption, and on sudden upwellings of violence in a culture whose fabric seems to be unraveling. Because of these typical concerns, the *film noir* seems fundamentally *about* violations: vice, corruption, unrestrained desire, and, most fundamental of all, abrogation of the American dream’s most basic promises – of hope, prosperity, and safety from persecution.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Lawson in McClure, A., Ed. (1971). The Movies: An American Idiom. Cranbury, New Jersey, Associated University Presses, p. 206

¹⁴³ Telotte, J. P. (1989). Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir. Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, p. 2

The key question here is whether the violations dramatized by the filmmakers reflect, or transcend, the personal motives of the protagonists and shed light on the underlying social pressures, borne of capitalism, that ultimately govern their actions. As will be discussed in relation to Kazan, Method acting can go only so far in sensitizing us to the broader social conditions reflected in individual performances. Before the rise of Method, and before the blacklisting, social class still provided a useful orientation to serious practitioners of noir. In his *Mean Streets and Raging Bulls*, Richard Martin provides a useful class orientation to his analysis of noir. Classical noir, he says, “tends to chronicle social rifts, on the one hand highlighting the increasing power of the wealthy at the expense of the poor, and on the other thematising male paranoia regarding female autonomy.” While the noir narrative is “in effect an exploration of the personal identity crises of its protagonists,” the social character of American capitalism is never far from the surface. “The surface nature of such crises varies from film to film, but they are frequently underpinned by issues relating to the uneven distribution of wealth and the allure of financial gain.”¹⁴⁴

For all of Rossen’s political limitations in his films, the social character of his times is never far from the surface. While social problem films of today, such as Jason Reitman’s *Up in the Air* – the first US contemporary film to deal with the GFC and the recession¹⁴⁵ – are anchored in the period of a decline of both the Stalinist and Democratic ideologies, Rossen’s entry into Hollywood filmmaking was firmly rooted in the glory days of these ideological pillars of the Hollywood left. However, by the time he made his first film, the ideological pressures of American imperialism already had begun to undermine those Popular Front foundations. Rossen

¹⁴⁴ Martin, R. (1999). *Mean Streets and Raging Bulls: The Legacy of Film Noir in Contemporary American Cinema*. Lanham, Maryland, and London, The Scarecrow Press, pp. 35-36

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Dennis Broe, Feb 12, 2010

also left the Party in 1947, and threw himself into creating stories about the unreality of the American Dream, and the eroding foundations of American democracy, which he always supported. *Johnny O'Clock* is firmly grounded in this modern condition. Little wonder then that "Rossen's world is pessimistic, and there is no explicit affirmative vision, as in Polonsky's work."¹⁴⁶

The unreality of the American Dream was powerfully reflected in Rossen's last writing assignment as a CP member, *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers*, directed by Lewis Milestone in 1946. Thom Andersen characterises this crime drama as a "film about class and capitalism, contrasting solid working-class values against the decadence of the bourgeoisie," but, referring to the murder of Martha Ivers' aunt at the film's beginning, he argues that the plot "turns on a classically Freudian primal scene and its misogyny is evident."¹⁴⁷ This is a fundamental violation typical of late 1940s noir. The pursuit of the American Dream by Martha Ivers (Barbara Stanwyck) and her business (and life and crime) partner Walter O'Neil (Kirk Douglas) leads to distortions of personality, the 'strange love,' underpinned by class and material interests of the two families in marriage.

Yet, the problem that government censors had with this anti-capitalist love story lay in secondary moral issues. Joseph Breen's refusal to approve the screen treatment for the film's precursor, *Love Lies Bleeding* in 1945 states as the key reason a lack of "proper compensating moral values" for the "elements of illicit sex." In fact, all personal and emotional issues connected with

¹⁴⁶ Neve, B. (1992). *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition*. London, NY, Routledge, p. 141

¹⁴⁷ Andersen, T. (2007). "Red Hollywood". *"Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*. F. Krutnik, Neale, Steve, Neve, Brian, and Stanfield, Peter. New Brunswick, N.J. & London, Rutgers University Press: p. 267.

sex are, under the Production Code, problematic. Breen urges the filmmakers to tread carefully around Martha's alleged unfaithfulness to her husband. Moreover, the censors deemed it necessary to "avoid any suggestion that Sam or Tony are people of unacceptable morals." But what was even more constraining is that the very logic of the narrative had to be altered. "In no event," stresses Breen, can a story be approved which indicated that the husband and wife commit suicide "directly in order to escape justice or the due process of law." 'Luckily,' the state censors had a solution: "Perhaps the motivation for the suicide could be built up in such a way as to make it appear the logical dramatic punishment for their crimes, rather than escape from justice."¹⁴⁸

The kind of justice the filmmakers and their censors are battling over is class justice, the kind of social justice aimed at the foundations of the great American success story, personified by the capitalist couple, Martha and Walter. Altering the spouses' motivation for murder-suicide would shift the axis of the story from a study of the 'psychological injuries of class' (Andersen) to their personal psychological drama of crime and punishment. Hence, the Breen Office is very keen to remove the ending's "present flavour of justification and, possibly, pity." He stresses the utmost importance of rewriting Walter's final speech in such a way as to "indicate total despair, and a kind of remorsefulness, as a punishment for their sin."¹⁴⁹

Neve raises an important point about Rossen's method, which highlights the ways in which he sought to effect his transition into the post-Rooseveltian era. He explains that Rossen "used and transformed the old Warners motifs into the evolving visual and verbal rhetoric that the French

¹⁴⁸ Breen, J. (1945). "Love Lies Bleeding" memo, Aug. 2, 1945 to. H. Wallis. LA, USC, Warner Bros. Archives.

¹⁴⁹ Breen, J. (1945). "Strange Love of Martha Ivers" memo, Sep. 6, 1945. LA, USC, Warner Bros. Archives.

would term film noir.” The issue of class is foregrounded, as is melodrama, as the young Martha strikes her aunt amid thunder and lightening. Moreover, according to Dennis Broe, the recasting of women in *Martha Ivers* “not as femme fatales but as class allies,” alluding to Sam’s relationship with his working-class lover, makes it an “exemplary” crime film of its period.¹⁵⁰ Apart from the “familiar Rossen elements, including pool halls, bus stations, and freight yards,” *Martha Ivers* reveals the “social and political origins of the political and economic power of postwar Iverstown.” Added to these elements are the family pressures brought to bear on O’Neill, “whose interests his father is trying to advance with Mrs. Ivers.” Sam Masterton (Van Heflin), the local boy with whom Martha tried to elope before becoming a capitalist, emphasises the class issue in question. In lines cut from the film Walter tells his wife and partner in crime, “You are my father’s estate. His gift to me. He brought me up to believe that it’s a son’s duty to protect his inheritance.” And later, in the film, he refers to the “power of the riches that you’d learned to love so much, and that I’d learned to love too.”¹⁵¹ As a pointed critique of the two key pillars of American capitalism, the institution of marriage and the sanctity of the private property, Rossen’s script marks an important stride in American film art. A useful point of reference to contextualise *Martha Ivers* is provided by the Oscar winner of the same year, *The Best Years of Our Lives*.

That this film was hailed as a masterpiece when it was released, acquiring a status of an instant classic, is indicative as much of its inherent qualities as the prevailing political discourse of the period. Both the liberal and radical wings of the left heaped praise upon its humanity and its serious attempts to deal with the problem of veterans’ readjustment in post-war American

¹⁵⁰ Broe, D. (2001). *Outside the Law: Labor and the crime Film 1941 - 55*, PhD thesis, New York University, p. 265

¹⁵¹ Neve in Krutnik Frank, N. S., Neve Brian, and Stanfield Peter, Ed. (2007). *“Un-American” Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, London, Rutgers University Press, pp. 190-91

society. James Agee wrote that this is “one of the very few American studio made movies in years that seem to me profoundly pleasing, moving and encouraging.”¹⁵²

However, for all its social realism and sensitivity to its subject, Quart and Auster argue that *The Best Years* was still a “carefully balanced and subtly manipulated tribute to the American way of life – to institutions such as the small town, liberal corporate capitalism, the family, and to Hollywood’s belief in the redemptive power of love.”¹⁵³ From that political perspective of anti-communist liberalism, Rossen’s *Martha Ivers* offers a more or less direct artistic challenge to these nostrums. In fact, the principal difference between the two iconic films of 1946 is their attitude towards the key social category in post-war America, social class. To Quart and Auster this is the “most glaring” evasion in the film – “to dismiss class as a factor in American society.” This ultimately finds narrative expression in defining the veteran’s problems as “purely personal rather than social.”¹⁵⁴

In Rossen’s fictional world of 1946, nothing is purely personal. As Neve puts it, the film “presents public life as a front, thinly disguising the determining material forces.” Sam’s reappearance in Iverstown some sixteen years later, 1944, seriously exposes the nature of Martha and Walter’s perverse relations, their ‘strange love.’ After he leaves, Martha and Walter are left to play out their last moments:

WALTER: Don’t cry. It’s not your fault.

MARTHA: (Sobbing) It isn’t, is it Walter?

WALTER: No, nor mine, nor my father’s nor your Aunt’s. It’s not anyone’s fault – it’s

¹⁵² Agee, J. (1966). *Agee on Film: Reviews and Comments*. Boston, Beacon Press, p. 229

¹⁵³ Auster, A., and Quart, Leonard (1984). *American Film and Society Since 1945*. London, Macmillan, p. 19

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

just the way things are – it’s what people want and how hard they want it and how hard it is for them to get it.¹⁵⁵

Walter’s comments articulate not only something essential about 20th century America, but also about the nature of its social organization. This recalls the underlying perspective of *The Grapes of Wrath*, revealed most graphically in the scene when a farmer is attempting to defend his property against imminent foreclosure by aiming his rifle at the government-commissioned bulldozer. The futility of his individualistic ‘solution’ to the bank’s takeover of his farm is driven home through his repetitions of the question, “So, who do I shoot then?”, which doesn’t seem to lead him any closer to a viable answer.

“It’s just the way things are,” is often attributed to Rossen and his 1930s sensibilities. Despite the obvious challenge to the capitalist perspective of his Breen Office censors, this line also hints at Rossen’s pessimism about the prospects of effecting a change to ‘the way things are.’ This lack of faith in the possibility of lasting social transformation, at least of meaningful reforms, was temporarily reversed during the most artistically and politically radical period of Hollywood filmmaking, in the immediate post-war period and Rosen’s collaboration with Polonsky. This was reflected in his eventual acceptance of Polonsky’s ‘fable of the streets’ narrative in *Body and Soul*, when its objective logic seemed to reflect the actual power and confidence of the working-class of the time.

Interestingly, this period coincides with, or more accurately, explains Rossen’s decision to resign

¹⁵⁵ Neve, B. (2007). “Red Hollywood in Transition: The Case of Robert Rossen.” *“Un-American” Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*. N. S. Krutnik Frank, Neve Brian, and Stanfield, Peter. London, Rutgers: p. 191.

from the Stalinist CPUSA. The ‘fable of the streets’ no longer resonated with reality, and Rossen’s deep emotional investment in American Stalinism left him vulnerable to political assault by the government. Shortly, that political buffer was swept away by HUAC. His ‘friendly’ testimony to the anticommunist witch-hunters seems the only move available for the broken man and artist, desperate to reconnect with his artistic roots. But by then the ground had shifted, and uprooted those vital connections to his working-class past.

Chapter III

From Meyerhold to Pinter: Joseph Losey's political and artistic journey

Joseph Losey's political and artistic journey into cinematic modernism should be placed in a broader historical context, sharply altered by a moment in American cultural history when it appeared that social *class* would reassert itself as a primary driver of narrative as well as a key signifier of the representation of character in the Hollywood 'social problem' film after WWII. Following the ravages of World War Two and a period of violent class conflict at home, the first postwar years brought renewed hope for refashioning mainstream cinema into a powerful medium for putting the mirror up to the society. As will be discussed later in the chapter, a key formative experience of Losey's political and artistic life occurred before this conjuncture: his educational trip to Moscow and his discussions with anti-Stalinist Vsevolod Meyerhold, a leading proponent of modernist avant-garde in Soviet Union, that began laying the basic building blocks of his political aesthetics.

Throughout his life Losey referred to himself as a 'romantic Marxist.' The fact that Losey was eventually won to the classical Marxist tendency is of great significance in assessing his potential to have helped elevate American film art to the next logical stage of its artistic evolution, of which the post-war *film gris* was a critical transitional step. In that sense, Losey's abandonment of the Communist Party soon after he joined in 1946 was more than symbolic; it was indicative

of his disillusionment with official Stalinism, which he saw as a hindrance to any meaningful progress in film art. That this renunciation of Stalinism took place in the same year Maltz was disciplined by the same forces in the Lawson-led Hollywood branch, is no accident. The failure of the Hollywood branch of the CP to inspire Losey corresponded to a period of profound transformation in postwar noir. As Broe argues, this artistic permutation of the classical noir was ready to outgrow the prevailing crime drama conventions and make inroads into a serious analysis of the class character of contemporary America.¹ These artistic and political impulses eventually were largely lost to the blacklist. But not entirely.

Joseph Losey's second feature, *The Lawless*, scripted by Daniel Mainwaring, provides an instructive case study of the central contradiction of postwar *film gris*, played out between liberal and socialist tendencies, reflecting the writer's and the director's dominant perspectives respectively.² *The Lawless* was based on real events that occurred in 1943 in Sleepy Lagoon, a coastal village in Southern California, when a white mob, many of whom served in the US Navy at the time, carried out what can only be described as a pogrom on Mexican Americans and other Hispanics. In the film, a wealthy, white liberal, Joe Ferguson, struggles to come to terms with this seemingly irrational eruption of mass racism in Sleepy Lagoon. While the immediate trigger for the riots was the death of a young Latino man, it followed the rising tensions between the predominantly white American servicemen stationed in Los Angeles and the Latino youth marked by their flashy zoot-suits, something of an affront to the patriots. Still, the actual event appeared as an aberration in wartime America, particularly since the 'ethnic' bashing was carried

¹ For a detailed analysis of postwar noir permutations see Broe, D. (2009). Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood. Gainesville, University Press of Florida.

² Mainwaring wrote *Lawless* under a pseudonym, Geoffrey Homes, the same pseudonym he used for *Out of the Past* two years earlier. He was "blacklisted, or at least distrusted at this time, which may explain the pseudonym." (Correspondence with Jon Lewis, July 7, 2011)

out by the very forces of ‘good’, the US Navy, during the period of their battle against overseas fascism. The socio-political context of the Zoot Suit riots rendered this social explosion irrational: it took place during the liberal-radical zeitgeist in America. Hearst’s *Herald-Express* branded the Mexican youths “goons of Sleepy Lagoon” while a local tabloid, *Sensations*, attacked “immoral gangsters” and “reckless madbrained young wolves.” Even the moderate, liberal *Times* ran a headline, after the riots, “Zoot Suiters Learn Lesson in Fights with Servicemen.”³ In sharp contrast to the prevailing mediascape of this time, the central theoretical axis of this chapter brings an opposite approach to social problems to the one adopted by Losey; it will place *class* before *race* as its starting point.

Andrew Ross’ detailed study of American intellectuals and popular culture in the pre- and postwar periods, *No Respect*, provides a useful historical and theoretical orientation. Losey’s class orientation is particularly significant in view of the dominant discourse of the Stalinised Hollywood Left, still deeply indebted to the faithful decision of the Comintern to adopt a Popular Front policy in 1935. This, according to Ross, meant “the abandonment of scientific socialism,”⁴ a shift that could “hardly have been more dramatic: the ‘people’ replaced the ‘workers’; nationalism replaced international socialism; reformism replaced revolution; cooperation replaced class conflict; the defense of democracy replaced the assault on capitalism.”⁵ Daniel Mainwaring, among countless other Hollywood progressives, was firmly grounded in this liberal, Popular Front perspective, as evidenced by the reformist thrust of his story that reinforces the vitality of American liberalism as the last line of defense against communal violence. But for

³ Dibbern, D. (2007). “The Violent Poerty of the Times: The Politics of HIstory in Daniel Mainwaring and Joseph Losey’s *The Lawless*. “Un-American” Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era. N. S. Krutnik Frank, Neve Brian, and Stanfield Peter. New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press; pp. 98-99.

⁴ Ross, A. (1989). *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture*. New York, Routledge, p.49

⁵ Ibid, p. 21

Losey, it wasn't just the liberal politics of the screenplay that stood in the way of his class-oriented aesthetics.

By the time *Lawless* was produced, the political terrain had already shifted sharply to the Republican right, reflecting the imperialist objectives of the White House. As Neve explains, in his study of the blacklist diaspora, this shift provided a key impetus for viewing Europe as “providing a means of fighting back for silenced artists,” whose penchant for mixing “black and white expressionism with proletarian melodrama”⁶ was no longer tolerated by the establishment. But for all the political pressures this wrought on Losey, this paradigm shift did not alter his core political beliefs. Indeed, as he famously put it, class was “*the* major problem. Almost everything else stems from it.”⁷ Losey's escape to England should be viewed in this political light. It should also be remembered that Losey said of his adopted country, “I know of no other country in the world where the class system is as rigid as that in England.”⁸

In the US in the period leading up to the Red Scare, the *class* perspective seemed to take the upper hand over *race* in the daily life of ordinary people, that is, before the anticommunist ideological offensive reestablished a classless political consensus, based largely on the material strength of the US. This was reflected in the political superstructure, in which, according to Albert Fried, “Anti-Communist or Cold War liberals saw the 1948 presidential election as their vindication.” For a brief period, adds Fried, their “Popular Front rivals were routed, and the New

⁶ Neve, B. (2010). “Cases in European Film Culture and the Hollywood Blacklist Diaspora”. The Lost Decade: the 1950s in European History, Politics, Society and Culture. F. H. Corarra Claire, and Passmore Kevin. NY, Palgrave MacMillan: pp. 219-231.

⁷ Losey qt. in Cauter, D. (1994). *Joseph Losey: A Revenge on Life*, Oxford University Press, p. 284

⁸ Ciment, M. (1985). Conversations with Losey. London, Methuen, p. 178

Deal was reaffirmed.”⁹ But that was before the American economy regained its footing, and effected a profound shakeup, in Denning’s words, of the working class culture which, after the crash of 1929, “was marked by a sustained sense of class consciousness, and a new rhetoric of class, by a new moral economy, and by the emergence of a working-class ethnic Americanism.”¹⁰ The war years, again, profoundly shook up the US body politic, creating a context which rendered the conventional Hollywood melodrama too narrow a platform for exploring qualitatively more complex social problems in Cold War America. The “sentimental contract of American labour films,”¹¹ to again use Rabinowitz’s phrase, was aesthetically ill-equipped for such a complex undertaking. A vastly radicalized home front, now coping with a large influx of no less radicalized, battle-hardened GIs, no longer responded to bland police procedurals with the same enthusiasm as before the myth of the American Way was shattered by the war abroad and the class war at home. Almost overnight, a conventional liberal approach to the social problem film, where specific sociological symptoms of capitalism could be explored – provided that the sanctity of the system itself was not questioned – no longer gripped the postwar audiences as it did at the time of the Zoot Suit riots.

Therefore, the shocks generated by the *Sleepy Lagoon* event to its national body politic could serve as an illustrative case study of the timelessness of Losey’s core philosophical approach to such inexplicable social phenomena, too complex to be rendered in a linear, melodramatic fashion. This tradition voiced by social conscience in *Lawless*, Joe, is an embodiment of amorphous liberalism in the film, representing the very antithesis to Losey’s Marxism. Joe

⁹ Fried, A. (1997). *McCarthyism, the Great American Scare: A Documentary History*, Oxford, p. 50

¹⁰ Denning, M. (1996). *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London, NY, Verso, p. 8

¹¹ Rabinowitz, P. (2002). *Black & White Noir: America's Pulp Modernism*. NY, Columbia University Press.

betrays a certain idealism, or wishful thinking, when he states: “I don’t like what happened today. I didn’t think it could happen here.” Neither did Mainwaring, the screenwriter, who speaks his liberal humanist mind through Mr. Ferguson.

But why was this prospect so inconceivable? The underlying assumption of this line of dialogue is that all is well with American democracy, and, by implication, that the wartime patriotism of ordinary Americans should subsume class antagonisms. To gain a sense of the magnitude of the political backsliding contained in this post-war liberal perspective, it is pertinent to place it in the broader historical context of the global struggle between the classical Marxist and liberal-Stalinist ideologies, much of it, as will be discussed, waged in the Soviet Union.

Pre-blacklist politics that shaped Losey’s aesthetics

Caute provides a much needed, broader historical perspective on Losey’s political and artistic evolution when he summarises Losey’s aesthetic journey: “Losey’s life embraces a major crisis in political commitment (the 1930s) and public tolerance (the blacklist); his career, his *oeuvre*, spans the most fundamental cultural confrontation of the century – between Marxism and Modernism, between progressive ‘realism’ and the avant-garde subversion of optimism.”¹² Losey’s forced travails in and out of America, and throughout Europe, only reinforced the importance of assimilating the theoretical lessons of these epoch defining movements. In an intellectual climate inimical to these monuments of Enlightenment, Losey naturally adopted, in the words of Brad Stevens, “the stance of an outsider, rejecting the dominant cultural trends.” After his exile he became a “more literal outsider, dissecting with the precision of a surgeon the

¹² Caute, D. (1994). Joseph Losey: A Revenge on Life, Oxford University Press, p. xiii

various societies through which he restlessly moved.” He aptly extracts Losey’s motto: “We could go further.”¹³ ‘Going further,’ in his native America, however, meant fighting the two-headed beast of the Popular Front: the ‘American Way’ of the Democrats and a particularly intransigent Stalinism of the CPUSA.

Despite the unchallenged domination by the Stalinist CP of the American workers’ movement, there existed a genuine Marxist alternative, which was, despite its small numbers, still considered dangerous enough to be subjected to the full wrath of the Smith Act. The case of James P. Cannon, then leader of the Trotskyist SWP, mirrors to a surprising degree in the sphere of revolutionary politics Losey’s quest to revolutionize American drama. As Andrew Ross explains, the anti-Stalinist, and “especially the Trotskyist left was the natural home for intellectuals with a penchant for high culture and cosmopolitan taste.” To these high, avant-gardist, and modernist tastes Ross counter-poses the Popular Front agenda for a people’s culture, “a middlebrow version of cultural nationalism that seemed second-rate when set beside the impressive pantheon of high modernists espoused by the anti-Stalinist left.”¹⁴ Losey’s socialist perspective was firmly grounded in this milieu. As Ross further elaborates, while the Popular Front organizations won widespread support from progressive artists, “the more glorified trajectory of cultural critics was one of apostasy, or involvement with the various Trotskyist opposition groups and parties, and thus of critical and increasingly hostile independence from the Communist [read Stalinist] core of the radical movements.”¹⁵ A founding member of the Trotskyist – anti-Stalinist – movement in the US, Cannon, like Losey, acquired an essential theoretical ingredient in the Soviet Union to help bring his comrades at home up to speed with the latest theoretical conquests in his field of

¹³ Stevens, B. (2009). “The Infiltrator.” *Sight & Sound* 19.6: 37.

¹⁴ Ross, A. (1989). *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture*. New York, Routledge, p. 218

¹⁵ Ibid.

endeavor, that of revolutionary politics. At a great deal of risk to his own safety, in 1925 he smuggled a copy of Trotsky's critique of Stalin's program for the Comintern, *Third International After Lenin*, into the United States, which was virtually the only lifeline for classical Marxism outside the Soviet Union.

In an article entitled "American Stalinism and Anti-Stalinism," published in 1947, James P. Cannon explained his organisation's independent position:

We Trotskyists, as everybody knows, are also against Stalinism and have fought it unceasingly and consistently for a very long time. But we have no place in the present 'all-inclusive' united front against American Stalinism. The reason for this is that we are anti-capitalist. Consequently, we can find no point of agreement with the campaign conducted by the political representatives of American capitalism in Washington, with the support of its agents in the labor movement and its lackeys in the literary and academic world. We fight Stalinism from a different standpoint.... We fight Stalinism, not because it is another name for communism, but precisely because of its betrayal of communism and of the interests of the workers in the class struggle...¹⁶

This statement elucidates, perhaps more clearly than even Losey, or Polonsky for that matter, could grasp at the time, their organic aversion to the Stalinist CPs' policy on theories of art and realism. The 'Maltz affair' of 1946 solidified the division between Stalinism and Marxism

¹⁶ Cannon, J. P. (1977). The Struggle for Socialism in the American Century: Writings and Speeches, 1945-47. NY, Pathfinder, p. 353

among the Hollywood Left.¹⁷ It is in this historical and political context that Losey's fidelity to Meyerhold and Brecht assumes great significance. Losey said of his approach to Brecht, "I had interpreted it as significant for Brecht not that truth is absolute but that it is precise, that there is a good manner of having access to it: justice of observation, economy of means of expression."¹⁸ Citing Losey's article on Brecht, Fereydoun Hoyveda's review of *Eva*, is also illuminating in this context: "For the first time in cinema, meaning is found entirely in form. Losey's precise use of form," in Hoyveda's words, results in "an impeccable distancing which refuses all possibility of identification to the spectator and leaves him, to participate in the work, only the free exercise of his intelligence, beyond case of constraint."¹⁹ While Losey could not give full expression to his *educative endeavor* until he was exiled, it is during his educational trip to the Moscow Art Theatre in 1935, that he began his lifelong relationship with this Brechtian method. However, it was not Brecht himself that imparted to Losey his modernist fundamentals, but his genuine artistic counterpart, the Soviet dramatist Vsevolod Meyerhold – discussed below. Meyerhold posed a similar degree of political threat to Stalin's bureaucracy as Losey did to his 'own' Hollywood branch at home and their cozy relationship with the Democratic establishment.

It is within this historical context, therefore, that the guiding principle of this chapter, more than any other, argues that any serious assessment of the impact of McCarthyism must consider first and foremost the criminal role played by the Stalinist Communist Party, which, by associating socialism with terrible crimes against the working class, helped create the political climate in

¹⁷ In 1946, Albert Maltz was attacked by the leadership of the Hollywood branch of the CP for challenging the Party's doctrine of 'art as a weapon' and advocating genuine social realism as opposed to "political novels;" see Maltz, A. (1946). What Shall We Ask of Writers? *New Masses*. 58.7 (Feb 12), pp. 19-22.

¹⁸ Leahy, J. (1967). *The Cinema of Joseph Losey*. London, A. Zwemmer Ltd, p. 22

¹⁹ Hoyveda qt. in Weber, B. N. (1980). *Bertolt Brecht, Political Theory and Literary Practice*. Athens, GE, University of Georgia Press, pp. 133-34

which red-baiting could flourish. Yet this remains an under-researched aspect of blacklisting. To get a sense of the prevailing perspective on the left opposition to McCarthyism, it is instructive to again turn to one of the foremost authorities on McCarthyism, Ellen Schrecker. The scope and depth of her research render her work invaluable, made even more so by the range of ideological perspectives covered in her volumes. It is therefore, revealing that Schrecker's recent book, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, distinguishes itself principally by its apologetic attitude toward Stalinism. Schrecker's sympathy for Stalinism is expressed in her thesis that the socialist opponents of Stalinism, in the first place Leon Trotsky and his supporters, were part and parcel of the McCarthyist attack on democratic rights. In the introduction Schrecker asserts that there were "many McCarthyisms, each with its own agenda and modus operandi." She asserts that there was "even a left wing version composed of left wing radicals who attacked Communists as traitors to socialist ideals." With regard to the attitude of the CP leadership at the time, Schrecker simply says, "Their wartime loyalty to FDR and hostility to Trotskyism kept them from speaking out against the Minneapolis prosecution."²⁰ To put this bluntly, in an act of ultimate political opportunism, the CPUSA supported the persecution of genuine communists in order to preserve its alliance with the capitalists.

Indeed, it was the official, not the genuine, American communism that was scrutinized by one of the foremost cultural critics of the blacklist era, Robert Warshow. To him, the attempt to imbue American culture with socialist ideals was the "center of the problem" of the American intellectual. Warshow traces the origins of the problem in "the political-intellectual movement of the 30s," and even though it did not "suddenly spring into being in the 30s," it, nevertheless,

²⁰ Schrecker, E. (1998). Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America. New Jersey, Princeton University Press, p. 88

“*happened* in the 30s.”²¹ For Denning, as has been elaborated, this constellation of intellectual and proletarian forces in the 30s was a cause for optimistic belief in the vitality of American culture. Warshow, on the other hand, raised as “our central intellectual task to evolve some method of assimilating the experience of those years, if only in order to perfect our understanding of our cultural failure.”²²

In one sense, this thesis adopts both Warshow’s problematisation of US 1930s left culture, as well as Denning’s promotion of the artistic potential of this culture, even if still unrealized. However, from the political perspective of this thesis’s reevaluation of Losey, both these scholars offer a variation on Schrecker’s theme of sympathy to Stalinism and ‘hostility to Trotskyism.’ So, while in full agreement with the revitalizing potential of the proletarian surge in Denning’s discussion of the cultural front, the ‘center of the problem’ of the American intellectual as posited by Warshow is also a critical component of imagining any long-term regeneration of American cinema, and its healing from the crippling impact of Stalinism. As opposed to other Hollywood Left figures studied in this thesis – in particular ‘friendly witnesses’ Kazan and Rossen – Losey derived completely different historical lessons from the paradigm shifts in American post-war culture: he sought to resolve this ‘central intellectual task’ not by eschewing the heritage of the 1930s, but by refashioning it through modernist, and Marxist, means.

This classical Marxist take on Americanism raises questions pertinent to Losey’s conception of cinematic art, or rather, those elements which most raised the ire of the anticommunist witch-

²¹ Warshow, R. (1971). “The Legacy of the 30s” (1947). The immediate experience : movies, comics, theatre and other aspects of popular culture. R. Warshow. NY, Atheneum: 40.

²² Ibid.

hunters. Could Cannon's Marxist perspective have enriched the pre-blacklist Hollywood Left? Was it really too far-fetched to demand of the serious filmmakers, then and now, that they 'rediscover' America by anchoring their stories not only in reality, but in a Marxist assessment of it? If Losey were allowed to continue working in America, his Meyerholdian/Brechtian aesthetics could have been a suitable vehicle for delivering Marx to Hollywood. As Denning convincingly argues, the 'proletarianization' of American culture was reaching its apogee by the time Losey began immersing himself in this milieu. Furthermore, Broe's elaboration of the cinematic expressions of this left culture in its postwar noir transmutations lend further credence to this analogy.²³ If Marx was 'most at home in the United States,' then his shadow was never far from the surface of the bleak, angst-ridden noir landscape. Notwithstanding the 1950s reassessments of *film noir* dominated by the *Cahiers*'s perspective, which focused primarily on the cinematic verisimilitude of this style, the presence of the artistic and political sensibilities of cinematic modernism was palpable, as evidenced in the political aesthetics of the *film gris*. In fact this artistic potential is the very center of this study.

It is clear that Losey (and Polonsky) approached this question with the utmost conscientiousness and seriousness, albeit curbed by the prevailing anticommunist climate. It is in such a climate, in which the democratic ideal of pluralism in art occupied the 'vital center' of mass culture, to apply Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s term, that both fascism and communism were, and still are, seen as equally extreme deviations from this healthy center. Justifying President Truman's domestic anticommunism, Schlesinger warned against the "lingering power in cultural circles" exerted by the CPUSA, a party that "Leninism sanctioned" for use "of all methods in their war for survival

²³ For further elaboration see Broe, D. (2009). *Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood*. Gainesville, University Press of Florida.

against the American business classes...”²⁴ In other words, a defense of pluralism under the domination of the ‘business classes.’ The most consummate expression of this burgeoning American ideology in film criticism was from French critic Bazin. In *What is Cinema*, Bazin urged filmmakers to “Take a close look at the world, keep on doing so.”²⁵ However, under the guise of presenting audiences with a democratic choice over which aspect of the mise-en-scene they direct their gaze upon, Bazin favoured deep focus and long takes over the ‘autocratic’ practice of Soviet Montage, which left audiences little choice other than the sequencing of highly didactic close-ups.

In the American post-war scene, it was Robert Warshow who played Bazin’s role in “reinforcing American liberalism in its Eisenhower phase,”²⁶ as Annette Michelson acutely observed. However, James Agee, of the ‘old’ school of the Popular Front variety, regarded Eisenstein as both a great artist and victim of Stalinism. When Eisenstein died in 1947, Agee wrote, “For years, as everyone knows, Eisenstein has been working as if in a prison, under the supervision of jailers who are...peculiarly dangerous and merciless.... Everything that is meant by creative genius and its performance, and everything that that signifies about freedom and potentiality in general, is crucified in Eisenstein, more meaningfully and abominably, than in any other man I can think of...”²⁷

²⁴ Arthur Schlesinger, J. (1949). *The Vital Center*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, p. 126

²⁵ Bazin, A. (1967). *What is Cinema?* (Hugh Gray, trans.). Berkeley, University of California Press, p. 27

²⁶ Annette Michelson qt. in Crowdus, G., Ed. (1994). *Political Companion to American Film*. Chicago, Lakeview Press, p. 18

²⁷ Agee, J. (1966). *Agee on Film: Reviews and Comments*. Boston, Beacon Press, p. 250

While Warshow derided Eisenstein as a “skilled hack and philistine,”²⁸ Agee praised his antirealist stylization in *Ivan the Terrible*, for going “boldly and successfully against naturalism.”²⁹ These contrasting perspectives, arising out of the still heavily contested Hollywood Left political landscape, can only strengthen the contention that there existed a real potential for anti-Stalinist, anti-naturalist realism in American film. But even more relevant to this study of Losey, Agee’s appreciation of higher aesthetics over crude realism in style lends further credence to the contention that Losey’s pursuit of avant-gardist and modernist ideals, starting in Moscow, could have been rewarded in his native country.

Interestingly, these sharp divisions on contested issues such as cinematic realism and sociology among the American Left mirrored, on a smaller scale, the internecine conflicts raging in the Soviet Union between two main, but irreconcilable, political tendencies: Stalinism and Trotskyism. This left an indelible mark on the young Losey, who described the atmosphere in the 1930s Soviet Union as “one of struggle which increased as the 1930s went on between the Stalinist and Trotskyist groups, and unless you were part of one or the other, you found yourself caught in the kind of perplexing destructive atmosphere in which people who ought to have been on the same side were fighting each other instead of fighting the real enemy.”³⁰

Despite harbouring illusions that the two deadly political enemies in the Soviet leadership, Stalin and Trotsky, could ‘have been on the same side’ and be ‘fighting the real enemy,’ Losey could be regarded as Polonsky’s (and Meyerhold’s) political kin. In fact, both these men of the left

²⁸ Warshow, R. (1971). “Re-Viewing Russian Movies” (unfinished, 1956). The immediate experience : movies, comics, theatre and other aspects of popular culture. R. Warshow. NY, Atheneum: 281.

²⁹ Agee, J. (1966). Agee on Film: Reviews and Comments. Boston, Beacon Press, p. 250

³⁰ Losey qt. in Ciment, M. (1985). Conversations with Losey. London, Methuen, p. 38

were in a small minority in their utterly Stalinised milieu – which was acting as a critical linchpin of US foreign policy under the guise of the Popular Front – and not only for their patriotic films like *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943), *Mission to Moscow* (1943) and other cinematic promotions of the war effort. The Hollywood Left more or less suspended class criticism of American society for the duration of the war, in line with its Faustian bargain with the liberals and Democrats, in the false hope that such critique would continue unabated where it left off, after their patriotic duty was completed. Even Andrew Sarris, known for his sharp attacks on ‘sociological’ film practices and criticism, recognized Losey and Polonsky as two of the “greatest casualties of the blacklist.”³¹

Therefore, to this Stalinised political milieu, this thesis will counter-pose the still under-researched classical Marxist alternative, embodied by the defendants under the Smith Act. While these persecuted Trotskyist revolutionaries played no direct role in Losey’s political and artistic upbringing in his Hollywood years, in the sphere of revolutionary politics they articulated the very aspirations Losey harbored for his film art. Indeed, his key artistic inspiration before his stint in Hollywood, Russian avant-garde dramatist Vsevolod Meyerhold, was a close supporter of Trotsky and a staunch opponent of Stalin. As shall be demonstrated, Meyerhold’s opposition to Stalin did not signify anticommunism on his part; rather, this key figure of the Soviet theatre was committed to a new proletarian culture, imbued with Marxist consciousness. In the context of the first half of the twentieth century in America, where the battle between the two contesting ideologies of the left, the genuine Marxist and the anti-Marxist Popular Front liberalism was far from resolved, Losey’s subjective factor assumed greater objective significance, especially since

³¹ Sarris, A. (1973). The Primal Screen: Essays on Film and Related Subjects. NY, Simon and Schuster, p. 61

he consciously strove to integrate the theoretical conquests of the Soviet avant-garde theatre into mainstream cinema.

More than anywhere else in America, it was the New York socialist milieu of the 1930s that nourished such impulses in these film artists. However, for all the promise held by a high concentration of the radical left artists and dramatists in this crucible of socialist thought in America, the political confusion and limitations of this milieu, once it moved to Hollywood, was vividly described by Losey when he recalled why he joined the CP:

[i]t was kind of Hollywood guilt that led me into that kind of commitment. And I think that the work I did on a much freer, more personal and independent basis for the political left in New York, before going to Hollywood, was much more valuable socially than anything I did in Hollywood with a commitment that only involved a lot of meaningless so-called Marxist classes which were a bore and which never had any practical result either in terms of the films that were being made or the films that weren't being made or anything else. The Hollywood left had no influence on Hollywood excepting possibly in the Writers' Guild and I was not a writer.³²

His recollections alone strengthen the contention that as radicalized and proletarianized as the American cultural front was at the time, this milieu still lacked those essential theoretical foundations to fully realize its artistic, or modernist, potential. The only way to redress this issue was to bring it in from without. This was more necessary in America than anywhere else at the time, owing to the unparalleled strength of the US economy, which laid the material basis for the ceaseless promotion of American exceptionalism; and, crucially, it seemed to render any

³² Losey qt. in Ciment, M. (1985). Conversations with Losey. London, Methuen, pp. 108-09

revolutionary perspective redundant. As the historian Richard Pells observed, the postwar boom seemed to purge *class* from the American political lexicon forever.³³

The persecuted avant-gardists: Losey and Meyerhold

Long before the questions of revolution and the new drama and society entered theatrical discourse, two opposing dramatic tendencies in Russian theatre were on full display in 1898, at the opening night of Chekhov's *The Sea Gull* at the Moscow Art Theatre. On stage, in one of those historical coincidences, or premonitions, that reveal more about future than could possibly be gleaned from the actual event, the two main antagonists facing each other were played by actors who would become key representatives of diametrically opposing tendencies in dramatic art and theory: Meyerhold and Stanislavsky. Playing the roles of the opposing playwrights Treplyov and Trigorin respectively, both these men of the theatrical left articulated what kind of new theatre was needed. Treplyov (Meyerhold) argued that in the pursuit of the new forms, "I don't want to show life as it is, or the way it should be, but the way it is in dreams." But Nina, the object of both men's desires, rejects Treplyov and becomes Trigorin's (Stanislavsky's) lover, who tells her: "I'd like to be in your shoes just for an hour, to see through your eyes and find out what you're thinking and what kind of person you are."³⁴ In this historical instance, art did imitate life, as the triumph of Stanislavsky's 'Method' on American stage and film – as will be discussed in relation to Brando and Kazan – seemed to revive a bare naturalism, forever displacing Meyerhold's ideal of showing life 'the way it is in dreams.'

³³ Pells, R. H. (1985). *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s*. NY, Harper and Row, p. ix

³⁴ Schmidt, P. (1981). *Meyerhold At Work*. Manchester, Carcanet New Press, p. xi

However, if one proceeds from a modernist approach to drama, clearly grasped by Losey, of the need for formal experimentation that reflects the essential social and class foundations of the society, the legacy of Meyerhold looms even larger for not only the 20th century Russian theater, but also for cinematic art in America. This is underscored by the subsequent tension in American film art between the naturalistic approach of the social problem film, exemplified by Rossen and Kazan, among others, and the aesthetic progression into the more sophisticated political aesthetics of post-war *film gris*. As was discussed earlier, Rossen managed to break artistically from the former into the latter during his post-war transitional period, no doubt helped by his collaboration (and conflicts) with Polonsky. But that was only a temporary victory of the fledgling modernism over conventional melodrama.

Still, such theoretical and aesthetic potential for American film would have been unlikely without the critical groundwork being laid in the American radical theatre, particularly in 1930s New York. In fact, all the blacklisted filmmakers discussed in this thesis formed their stylistic and thematic identities in this crucible of American socialism. And the Living Newspaper series, staged in this period, only underscores the radical political character and intent of its producers. Living Newspaper was a Federal Theatre Project initiative, begun in 1935, in which playwrights dramatized urgent, controversial social and political issues of the day, often drawing criticism from Congress for taking an overtly left-wing perspective. Importantly, writes John Casson in *The Theatre Review*, the historical development of Living Newspapers can be traced “from the ideas of the futurists in the early part of the century, through experimental theatres in the Soviet Union and Vienna, to the worldwide development of a theatre form.”³⁵ Russian Futurism

³⁵ Casson, J. (2000). “Living Newspaper: Theatre and Therapy.” *The Drama Review* 44.2 (Summer): pp. 107-22.

endowed the Soviet drama with a critical advantage over its international counterparts, for it emerged in a far richer intellectual climate dominated by revolutionary fervor. In other words, only Russian dramatists had the benefit of experiencing the only completed revolutionary cycle in their lifetime. In that sense Losey's educational trip to Moscow, before the Stalinists eradicated that heritage, was invaluable.

Leon Trotsky, a co-leader with Lenin of the 1917 revolution, did suggest that the interrevolutionary period (1905 to 1917) which had given birth to Russian Futurism had provided it with certain advantages: "It caught rhythms of movement, of action, of attack, and of destruction which were as yet vague."³⁶ And the decisive event in Futurism's evolution was not a literary or artistic one, but the "workers' Revolution in Russia" which "broke loose before Futurism had time to free itself from its childish habits, from its yellow blouses, and from its excessive excitement, and before it could be officially recognized, that is, made into a politically harmless artistic school whose style is acceptable."³⁷ This revolutionary political character of Futurism also 'infected' American drama. Moreover, the more radical and sensitive of the Hollywood filmmakers caught the bug, among them, Albert Maltz. In one of the more revealing episodes in the history of internecine factional struggles in the Hollywood branch of the CP, Maltz was put on notice by his Party's cultural overseers, led by Lawson, for proposing a 'heretical' revision of the Party line on art and social realism. In his 1946 *New Masses* article, Maltz aligned himself, however consciously, with the anti-Stalinist left, or, to put this in Andrew Ross' terms, he aligned himself with Trotskyism when he went against the Stalinist doctrine of 'art as a weapon' and advocated "social novel" which is primarily concerned with "revealing

³⁶ Trotsky, L. (1957). Literature and Revolution. (trans. Rose Strunsky) NY, Russell and Russell, p. 129

³⁷ Ibid.

men and society as they are.”³⁸ Seemingly, this was not much to ask of writers. Even Bernhard Stern privately told Maltz that he didn’t agree with his Party critics over his ‘heretical’ article in *The Masses*; however, he felt that Maltz was “suffering from [sic] an occupational disease of left-wing writers,” being, apparently, “infected with that virus...”³⁹ That this impulse was subsequently contained within the harmless generic conventions of the classical ‘social problem’ film, or what Rabinowitz called the ‘sentimental contract of the American labour film,’ each befitting the Popular Front paradigm, does not alter the powerful impact of socialist ideas in Hollywood left milieu. If anything, the theatrical equivalent to the ‘social problem’ film, particularly in the 1930s New York scene, hinted at the artistic possibilities of American film.

Although Polonsky was regarded as an intellectual heavyweight among radical filmmakers, Losey’s case better supports the classical Marxist contention that the most important theoretical advances to the proletarian cause are brought in from without, that is, from the higher, educated classes, the layer with an intellectual predisposition to grasp the social contradictions necessary to advance any art form. In that sense the upper-middle class forebears of Marxism themselves are a case in point. The central argument pursued in this section is precisely that classical Marxism laid the theoretical foundations for Losey’s film art. Owing to Losey’s superior grasp of Marxist theory (compared to most of his proletarian peers), it was at this stage of his artistic development that he was most receptive to the revolutionizing potential of Russian avant-garde drama. While Polonsky, discussed in chapter I, was also in possession of sophisticated political

³⁸ Maltz, A. (1946). “What Shall We Ask of Writers?” *New Masses*. **58.7** (Feb 12): pp. 19-22.

³⁹ Horne, G. (2001). *Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950: Moguls, Mobsters, Stars, Reds & Trade Unionists*. Austin, University of Texas Press, p. 82

aesthetics, Losey's relatively privileged upbringing in Wisconsin⁴⁰ conferred on him advantages not available to his working-class peer, providing him with material conditions to meet the key figures in the fields of revolutionary politics and avant-garde drama in the Soviet Union.

In support of the contention that theoretical conquests in the field of dramatic art, even if accomplished in an alien culture exhibiting few commonalities with America, John Fuegi's study of the Soviet influence on American drama is highly relevant. Referring to *Waiting for Lefty* and other Federal Theatre productions of the 1930s, Fuegi asserts that "it would be fairer historically, as Losey himself indirectly indicates, to speak of the style of the Living Newspaper as being Okhlopkovian or Meyerholdian theatre, for it was these two men who had the largest verifiable influence on the style of these magnificent creations of the American stage."⁴¹ And it is true that his early introduction to a Meyerholdian theory and practice of drama elevated Losey's aesthetics to a higher theoretical plane. However limited, or suppressed, the presence of the Meyerholdian impulse in Losey's early Hollywood years, the seeds of these avant-garde ideals were planted during his educational trip to Moscow, and further fertilized by the 'proletarianization' of American culture. Viewed from a Marxist perspective, this 'cultural front' of the American working class drew from the same wellspring as the Soviet Proletkult. As shall be discussed later, this intellectual climate harmonized Losey's Marxist politics with a Meyerholdian (later also identified as Brechtian) detached, objective style, manifested in high levels of psychological realism without the trappings of a naturalist style.

⁴⁰ Losey, along with Orson Welles and Nicholas Ray, also raised in Wisconsin, are sometimes branded as members of the 'midwestern business class.' (see Denning, p. 368)

⁴¹ John Fuegi qt. in Gardner, C. (2004). *Joseph Losey*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, pp. 212-13

Losey's attraction to Meyerhold, and aversion to the official Proletkult, suggests that he saw Stalinism as a deadly enemy of genuine proletarian art, in particular, of the avant-garde art he sought to assimilate. Just as Stalin's art censors and enforcers in the Proletkult movement cut off the lifeline to its most sensitive and innovative artists – Meyerhold's admirer Mayakovsky is the most prominent victim – anticommunist witch-hunting McCarthyism ruptured the connection between radical and liberal Hollywood, thus eliminating the possibility, however tentative, of opening up a line of dialogue between Hollywood mainstream cinema and Soviet avant-garde drama. Just as Soviet montage aesthetics, according to Miriam Hansen's study of vernacular modernism, underwent a profound transformation from the encounter with Hollywood-style continuity editing,⁴² so a proposition that this dialectical relationship between the Soviet and American cinemas could have imparted to the latter more heightened forms of modernism is not an entirely utopian proposition. As for the Soviet avant-garde cinema, according to Hansen, "it is unthinkable without the new avant-garde movements in art and theater, without Constructivism, Suprematism, Productivism, Futurism – unthinkable without a politics of radical transformation."⁴³ Moreover, if Hansen's proposition that "Russian cinema became Soviet cinema by going through a process of Americanisation,"⁴⁴ what prevented classical Hollywood from undergoing its own process of internationalization, and, one might add, radicalization along more defined anticapitalist lines?

The intellectual inability to move beyond the 1930s liberal paradigm, or, to accept that there is an alternative to capitalism, is particularly significant in estimating the long-term political and

⁴² Hansen, M. (1999). "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism." *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2: pp. 59-77.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

aesthetic legacy of the blacklist, because its most artistically developed victims strove to break from precisely this mindset. It is through this prism that the creative relationship between Losey and Meyerhold should be viewed: Losey's rejection of the Stalinist approach to drama, through his cooperation with Meyerhold, enabled the former to express his politics cinematically without being bogged down in the message, manifested in "the didactic qualities of his first two Hollywood features, *The Boy with Green Hair* and *The Lawless*."⁴⁵ As discussed in relation to Polonsky and Rossen, the former made significant strides in his cinematic undermining of this paradigm, providing a key impetus for the latter to eschew his entrenched liberalism. Their collaboration on *Body and Soul* is a case in point. Rossen's conventional melodrama eventually evolved into Polonsky's proletarian 'fable of the streets.'

The far-reaching impact of the Moscow Art Theatre in the 1930s was not confined to intellectually curious artists like Losey. The theoretical battles between contending approaches to dramatic art and realism within the Proletkult movement had major repercussions internationally. A radicalized American theatre of the 1930s, giving voice to mass disillusionment in American capitalism, certainly followed its Soviet counterpart with the utmost seriousness. In fact, such was the impact of factional fights over art policy in the Soviet Union that even the American left-wing theater was torn, as Gorelik, a Group Theatre designer put it, between "the school of naturalism as exemplified by Stanislavsky and that of Theatricalism led by Meyerhold."⁴⁶ The ideological rupture between two opposing artistic tendencies in Soviet drama had a direct bearing on the radical American stage. Denning correlates this ideological warfare within the Soviet theatre to the one raging in the American cultural front:

⁴⁵ Palmer, J. (1993). *The Films of Joseph Losey*, Cambridge University Press, p. 6

⁴⁶ Gorelik qt. in Denning, M. (1996). *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London, NY, Verso, p. 368

If the Group was the American incarnation of Stanislavsky, a second theatrical formation around Joseph Losey and Nicholas Ray is the Federal Theatre Project's Living Newspaper that was drawn to the work of Meyerhold, the Soviet director whose theatrical spectacles broke down the naturalist illusions of the prescenum stage and brought the theatre directly into the audience.... Like Welles, they were drawn less to the psychological realism of the Group than to the magic and machinery of the theater itself.⁴⁷

But more importantly for cinema art and Losey himself, it is the cinema masters of his, and Eisenstein's, generation that are indebted to Meyerhold. As Grigory Kozintsev claimed in 1936, "... the real pupils of Meyerhold are working not in the theatre but in the cinema.... The Soviet cinematography has learnt far more than the Soviet theatre from the inspired work of Meyerhold."⁴⁸ In fact, some critics explain Eisenstein's theatricality – most notably in *Ivan the Terrible* – by his assimilation of Meyerhold's theatre.⁴⁹ Brawn poses an important question about Meyerhold's legacy, entirely applicable to Losey, when he asks whether there is "one particular quality that serves to define Meyerhold's theatre and the theatre of those who have responded most creatively to his legacy?"⁵⁰ Losey, along with Gorelik and the Mercury's Marc Blitzstein, was one of the few Americans interested in Brecht's epic theater.⁵¹ While many attribute Losey's fondness in his cinema for theatricality and objective detachment to Brecht's influence, Buhle and Wagner contend that it would be more accurate to say that "Brecht and Losey shared the

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Grigory Kozintsev qt. in Brown, E. (1969). Meyerhold On Theatre. NY, Hill and Wang, p. 312

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 310

⁵¹ Denning, M. (1996). The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century. London, NY, Verso, p. 368

same Russian radical theatre tradition, which they applied independently to the stage and film arts, respectively.”⁵² And it was Meyerhold’s theory of “the grotesque” that provided “the wellspring” for Losey’s cinema.⁵³ This is how Meyerhold characterized his theory:

It is the style that reveals the most wonderful horizons to the creative artist. ‘I’, my personal attitude to life, precedes all else.... The grotesque does not recognize the *purely* debased or the *purely* exalted. The grotesque mixes opposites, consciously creating harsh incongruity, *playing entirely on its own originality*.... The grotesque deepens life’s outward appearance to the point it ceases to appear merely natural.... The basis of the grotesque is the artist’s constant desire to switch the spectator from the plane he has just reached to another that is totally unforeseen.⁵⁴

The tragic case of Vsevolod Meyerhold provides a surprising degree of clarification on the political and aesthetic issues at stake two decades later, in the American anticommunist purges. Meyerhold’s ideal of a ‘grotesque’ mixing of opposites amounts to applied Marxist dialectics on stage. Naturalism in style, on the other hand, does not negate itself by ‘deepening life’s outward appearance to the point it ceases to appear merely natural,’ to again cite Meyerhold. Critics such as Warshow were acutely aware of the intellectually debilitating effect of the Stalinist impulse on American proletarian fiction of the 1930s and 1940s. On the brand of radicalism that arose out of the ‘proletarianised’ cultural front of the 1930s, Warshow does not share Denning’s faith in the recuperative power of the American working class on its radicalized mass culture, describing it as “an age of organized mass disingenuousness, when every act and every idea had behind it

⁵² Buhle, P., and Wagner, Dave (2003). Hide in Plain Sight: The Hollywood Blacklistees in Film and Television, 1950-2002. NY, Palgrave MacMillan, p. 216

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Meyerhold qt. in Brown, E. (1998). Meyerhold: A Revolution in Theatre. London, Methuen, pp. 66-67

some ‘larger consideration’ which destroyed its honesty and its meaning.” This is because the “half-truth was elevated to the position of a principle, and in the end the half-truth, in itself, became more desirable than the whole-truth.”⁵⁵

Losey too was very mindful of the debilitating impact of Stalinism. He said:

One of the main problems raised by Stalinism had been the relation of art and politics, and the absolute stifling of art in the USSR. Trotsky, on the contrary, at least in his evolution had a more fruitful attitude. Total control of art by Stalin and the sterilization of it played a very large role in my turning away from Stalinism although I, at one point, functioned on a Communist Cultural Committee that was grotesque. We all had the conviction that what we were doing was correct but it was a parody.⁵⁶

As Trotsky wrote in an obituary for Mayakovsky, Stalin’s officially sanctioned cultural regime had “become simply a system of bureaucratic command over art and a way of impoverishing it.”⁵⁷ This level of differentiation between Marxism and Stalinism should not be underestimated. This theoretical conquest, no doubt facilitated by Meyerhold and other anti-Stalinists, strengthened Losey’s resistance to the sentimentality and psychological simplicity of the mainstream melodrama. Moreover, Losey’s anti-Stalinism, however consciously assimilated, went a long way towards immunizing his political and artistic being from the McCarthyist onslaught, which only gathered strength with each instance of the Fifth Amendment line of defense of its victims, still steeped in Popular Front Stalinism.

⁵⁵ Warshow, R. (1971). “The Legacy of the 30s” (1947). The immediate experience : movies, comics, theatre and other aspects of popular culture. New York, Atheneum: 34.

⁵⁶ Losey qt. in Ciment, M. (1985). Conversations with Losey. London, Methuen, p. 323

⁵⁷ Leon Trotsky, “The Suicide of Vladimir Mayakovsky,” in Siegel, P., Ed. (1992). Art and Revolution. NY, Pathfinder, p. 176

However, Losey's political clarity did not entirely eliminate the danger of falling into the trap of artistic 'utilitarianism,' which was always following him on his journey to forge a higher form of film art. This warning is sounded in a profound letter by Malevich, written to Meyerhold in April 1932, in which Malevich urged the director to disengage from Constructivism which "raises not one artistic issue except for pure utilitarianism and in theater simple agitation, which may be one hundred percent consistent ideologically but is completely castrated as far as regards artistic problems, and forfeits half its value." Unless Meyerhold changed his course, warned Malevich, "Stanislavski will emerge as the winner in the theater and the old forms will survive."⁵⁸

Of course, something far worse than Stanislavsky's old naturalism triumphed. Asked whether he was interested in Stanislavsky's method at any time, Losey responded that he was not, and that he found the Moscow Art Theatre "completely disappointing," resulting in "very conventional, very old fashioned" work onstage.⁵⁹ This legacy will be explored further in the following section on Kazan and Brando.

For the moment, it is useful to delve further into the legacy of the Moscow Art Theatre, in order to discern the aesthetic elements adopted by the 'social problem' film in post-HUAC Hollywood. Schmidt usefully observes that the triumph of the Moscow Art Theatre and the Stanislavsky method was a "triumph of culmination, not of innovation." Crucially, it also "marked the end of the nineteenth century, not the beginning of the twentieth." It was Meyerhold, explains Schmidt,

⁵⁸ Malevich qt. in Wood, P. (1992). The Politics of the Avant-Garde. The Great Utopia, Russian and Soviet Art, 1915-32, Guggenheim Museum, NY, p. 24

⁵⁹ Losey qt. in Ciment, M. (1985). Conversations with Losey. London, Methuen, p. 40

“who brought theater into the twentieth century, yet he and his theater were obliterated...”⁶⁰ By whom, and for what political purposes? The importance of this question lies not so much in identifying the Stalinist persecutors of avant-garde and radical art in the Soviet Union itself – the resulting Socialist Realist caricatures of the ‘new man’ are well known – but in drawing out the political and aesthetic balance sheet for the subsequent development of the radical Hollywood. By the time Losey observed Meyerhold at work in 1935, Socialist Realism was already an official policy on art in the Soviet Union. Meyerhold was already swimming against the tide. In that context Stanislavsky’s triumph over Meyerhold was not merely a reflection of the artistic prestige one enjoyed over the other; rather, it represented a fundamental shift in the balance of ideological forces governing the development of socially progressive drama. The adverse impact this would have on the American ‘cultural front’ and progressive drama was unavoidable. And this is not an insignificant matter for students of classical Hollywood and/or American film art.

In this political context, the subsequent blacklisting of Brecht and Losey is not a minor episode in the larger, sordid blacklisting saga, but an indication of a profound shift in the cinematic terrain of the 1950s, which, it can be safely said, also manifested itself in the triumph of the ‘old’ Hollywood over Brecht. In that sense, Brecht’s escape from the US is more than symbolic. And this is a matter of serious concern for the scholars of McCarthyism. The fact that Joseph McCarthy did not directly investigate the Hollywood film industry itself does not in any way diminish the political and aesthetic significance of these conflicts and transformations in dramatic art, largely played out abroad and on the highest theoretical levels, well beyond the intellectual grasp of the witch-hunters. The embarrassingly uneven levels of intellectual and artistic capacity in the sparring duel between Brecht and his HUAC accusers, who had to

⁶⁰ Schmidt, P. (1981). Meyerhold At Work. Manchester, Carcanet New Press, pp. xi-xii

abandon their interrogation for that very reason, is a case in point. In Losey's account, Brecht's testimony had such a powerful impact on his HUAC inquisitors "that the committee adjourned for two years as a direct result of his appearance."⁶¹

As a Marxist review of the 1992 Proletkult exhibition at the Gugenheim Museum explains,

Stalinism cut off the political development of the most serious Russian artists and critics, as it did to layers of the intelligentsia attracted to the October Revolution throughout the world, including the US. The bureaucracy crushed out of existence the social atmosphere in which both a Marxist-scientific intelligentsia and a community of bold artistic experimenters could exist and fertilize one another's work.⁶²

A similar charge can be leveled at Congress and its political instrument, HUAC and their impact on Hollywood. In that sense, the latter represents a logical continuation of the former's anti-Marxist onslaught. This is the political standpoint from which this thesis proceeds, it provides a fundamental departure from the liberal, or consensus, history of blacklisting, most prominently exemplified in Schrecker's sympathy for Stalinism and corresponding anti-Trotskyism. As Maltby argues, the hysteria surrounding the Red Scare "provided its historians with a perspective too narrow to encompass the implications of the Committee's significance." Moreover, this history, writes Maltby, is not "sufficiently described by an account which discusses only the conventional political."⁶³

⁶¹ Phillips, G. D. (1976). "The Blacklisting Era: Three Cases." *America* **18** (Dec): pp. 443-444.

⁶² Walsh, D. (1994). "Bolshevism and the Avant-Garde Artists." *The Fourth International* **20.1** (Winter-Spring): pp. 110-149.

⁶³ Maltby, R. (1981). "Made for Each Other: The Melodrama of Hollywood and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1947." *Cinema, Politics and Society in America*. P. Davies, & Neve, Brian. Manchester, Manchester University Press: 76.

As was discussed in relation to Rossen and Polonsky, it was not until the late 1940s and the advent of *film gris* that the American social problem and crime film managed to tear itself away, at least temporarily, from the entrenched liberal capitalist and Stalinist discourses which, at least in Rossen's 1930s work, could, at best, dramatise reforms *within* the system. Polonsky progressed further with his protagonists, such as those played by Garfield, providing glimpses of resolutions *outside* the capitalist system. But Losey went still further in the logical progression of the American art film: as Buhle and Wagner put it, Losey, more than any other filmmaker on the left, "overthrew the melodrama as the preferred narrative form for communicating with popular audiences," a task, when eventually accomplished by collaborating with Harold Pinter, gave expression to "film as avant-garde, radical theater."⁶⁴ But things are not as clear cut as that. In his influential study of the permutations of classical Hollywood melodrama, "Tales of Sound and Fury," Thomas Elsaesser assigns to melodrama a far more sophisticated and progressive content. Referring to a "dynamisation of space" practised by German expressionists, to whom Losey was indebted, Hollywood melodrama, as an "expressive mode," is described by Elsaesser as a "particular form of dramatic mise-en-scene, characterised by a dynamic use of spatial and musical categories, as opposed to intellectual and special ones." Since Elsaesser's interpretation of melodrama recognizes that dramatic situations can be given an "orchestration that will allow for complex aesthetic patterns,"⁶⁵ it follows that Losey's mastery of mise-en-scene, also allows for a greater sophistication in political content arising out of greater plasticity of form.

⁶⁴ Buhle, P., and Wagner, Dave (2003). Hide in Plain Sight: The Hollywood Blacklistees in Film and Television, 1950-2002. NY, Palgrave MacMillan, p. 215

⁶⁵ Elsaesser, T. (1986). "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama." *Gilm Genre Reader*. B. K. Grant. Austin, University of Texas: pp. 278-308.

Therefore, the Losey – Meyerhold connection should provide a clarifying view of the next logical, and probable, step in the aesthetic and political progression of the Hollywood Left, personified in Hollywood Marxists such as Losey. This key figure of the American art film served as a living link, a conduit, between the Russian avant-garde drama and Hollywood social problem film, which he strove to elevate artistically to its next logical plain, to the level of the former – sophisticated form, rather than appealing to the sloganistic message as a principal narrative driver of ideas. This more formalist, and modernist, standpoint was articulated by one ‘extreme’ group of *Cahiers* critics, the MacMahonists, to whom, simply, *mise-en-scene* equals ideas. This also finds a corollary in the sphere of performance. As Feyerdoun Hoyveda explains, “their emphasis on an approach to film structured on the physical gestures of the actor is a relevant parallel to Brecht’s preoccupation with the social gest as a building block of drama.”⁶⁶ Again, even radical ideas can be communicated through formal experimentation, in a true modernist fashion, without a recourse to delivering messages in an agit-prop style.

However, this aesthetic strategy was going against the stream of Popular Front drama in the US, which was governed by naturalist realism, and overwhelming didacticism. This conflict between irreconcilable approaches to art and realism lend critic Lionel Trilling’s arguments in *The Liberal Imagination* (1950) additional relevance. He anticipated that the future historian of the 1950s “will surely discover that the word reality is of central importance in his understanding of us.”⁶⁷ A principal manifestation of this aesthetic approach to realism involves an eschewing of the intellect in favor of raw emotion. It is, therefore, no accident that in an art form driven by the

⁶⁶ Feyerdoun Hoyveda qt. in Weber, B. N. (1980). *Bertolt Brecht, Political Theory and Literary Practice*. Athens, GE, University of Georgia Press, pp. 133-34

⁶⁷ Lionel Trilling qt. in Crowds, G., Ed. (1994). *Political Companion to American Film*. Chicago, Lakeview Press, pp. 18-19

emotionalism of the actors, the reconstitution of broader, objective, social patterns will take second place to the subjective emotional journey of the actor. It is no historical accident that the actor's persona, for example Brando's, overshadows much of the historical, cultural and political context that gave rise to his iconic characters, such as Terry Malloy in *On the Waterfront*. To this day the critical consensus on this essentially anticommunist film is dominated by analysis of Brando's performance, and its relation to Method acting.

Meyerhold, on the other hand, wanted his actors to "express emotion, but he needed them also to fit into a larger pattern."⁶⁸ This perspective is in sharp contrast to Stanislavsky's idea of the "super-objective," which essentially aligns actors' intuitive, or subjective, powers to the fiction of the narrative spine, rather than the real, objective social factors, independent of actors' motivations.⁶⁹ According to Schmidt, Meyerhold was the "first director to insist on the primacy of the director's role.... The role of the director is here perceived as an extension of the Romantic notion of the Interpreter, shifted away from the actor and the idea of character, from the mimetic impulse merely, to more complicated impulses."⁷⁰

This thesis contends that elevating drama to the next interpretative level, in the spirit of *educational endeavor*, requires a highly conscious Interpreter, one versed in Marxist dialectics.

The triumph of McCarthyism signified the defeat of this conception. This, perhaps, is manifested most spectacularly in Kazan's direction of Brando, towards the end of the period of anticommunist hysteria. It is beneficial for this study to identify some key aesthetic

⁶⁸ Schmidt, P. (1981). *Meyerhold At Work*. Manchester, Carcanet New Press, p. xv

⁶⁹ Stanislavsky, C. (2010). *An Actor Prepares*, Methuen Drama, p. 271

⁷⁰ Schmidt, P. (1981). *Meyerhold At Work*. Manchester, Carcanet New Press, pp. xv-xvi

transmutations in the theoretical sphere, which later seep into the day-to-day filmmaking practices. Jon Lewis, in his critical studies of the transitional period, from the era of classical studio system run by the moguls to an era of vertically-integrated multinational corporations, has problematised the orthodox, ideologically driven approach to the study of the blacklist. Lewis has demonstrated strong links between the historic defeat of organized labor in Hollywood and the subsequent streamlining of the movie-making business, which indeed cleared the way, aesthetically and economically, for such things as the high-concept blockbuster. While, as Lewis argues, ideology took a back seat to long-term business strategies in the battle between the old moguls and east coast financial capital, McCarthyism nevertheless performed the essential political function of clearing the way for an apoliticisation of American cinema.⁷¹

Citing Mayakovsky, Schmidt provides a very apt description of Meyerhold, and, by implication, his protégé, Losey: theater was “not a mirror but a magnifying glass.”⁷² The concept of magnification implies all kinds of formal experimentations, i.e., expressionism, which could involve all manner of artistic distortion, exaggeration, and tweaking of aspects of the human condition. And the increasing complexities, and irrationality, of the human condition that gives rise to the most inexplicable real life events, such as the Sleepy Lagoon incident of 1943, that could not be scripted within the normal Hollywood melodramatic framework, demand just such a ‘magnifying glass.’ But such political expressionism has to fit broader ‘patterns’ in the evolution of the capitalist system, which, ultimately, inflicts the ‘psychological injuries of class.’ If common sense combined with the linear cause-effect structure of old Hollywood is too shallow a narrative base for rationalizing the irrational manifestations of modern capitalism, then film

⁷¹ This is elaborated in Lewis, J. (2002). *How the Blacklist Saved Hollywood. Hollywood v. Hardcore: How the Struggle Over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry*. J. Lewis. NY, NY University Press: pp. 11-49.

⁷² Mayakovsky qt. in Schmidt, P. (1981). *Meyerhold At Work*. Manchester, Carcanet New Press, p. xvi

artists are compelled to elucidate the root social causes of such events that do not accord with common sense.

Socialist Realism permitted no room for the complexities of dialectical materialism, the opposing and conflicting processes working away under the surface appearance of things. Obviously Hollywood filmmakers did not face Stalinist-style persecution after the collapse of the Popular Front alliance, but the blacklisting certainly can be credited with stifling any dramatic tendency to put a ‘magnifying glass’ on American society. The end result of that process could be seen in the advent of the blockbuster and the accompanying shifts in mass culture, gradually effecting a shift from ‘magnifying’ to a ‘keyhole’ perspective of the rawness and grittiness that stands for reality. Or, in Warshow’s parlance, this *mise-en-scene* “destroys the detachment” by striving to get “too close” to the action.⁷³ This is a huge step backward from the Meyerholdian, and Losey’s, ideal of developing ‘patterns’ that interpret objective social reality and effortlessly integrate with the text to transform everyday drama into Mayakovsky’s idea of an ‘extraordinary spectacle.’ Director as the Interpreter is yet to realise its full cinematic potential.

Losey’s characters’ individual heroism and other subjective qualities were never intended as substitutes for the complex integration of objective social patterns into his narratives. Apart from putting a mirror up to the American society, Losey’s cinema, in a purely formal and aesthetic sense, represented a major advance in classical Hollywood filmmaking in the period when blacklisting stunted Hollywood’s artistic development. But this process was not straightforward. As Buhle and Wagner write, Losey’s early Hollywood films bear the mark of an “impatient but

⁷³ Warshow, R. (1971). “The Legacy of the 30s” (1947). The immediate experience : movies, comics, theatre and other aspects of popular culture. R. Warshow. New York, Atheneum: 38.

highly skilled artist who badly wanted to break out of the popular formalism of the Hollywood melodrama and connect with something closer to the avant-garde.”⁷⁴ Losey himself confirmed this artistic trajectory: “I was working in, knew only, the Hollywood mould and didn’t know that very well. I protested, within myself, against certain aspects of it, but this is what I used...up to and including *Blind Date*, at which point, I think, I left it entirely.”⁷⁵

The period between the outbreak of the ‘Maltz affair’ in the Hollywood Left in 1946 and the consummate cinematic expression of its victorious faction, *Salt of the Earth* in 1954 – discussed in a separate chapter – could be taken as the final stage in the decline of the classical Hollywood ‘social problem’ film. Losey’s loftier, modernist goals could not be accommodated within this framework. His protest against the prevailing liberal, anticommunist discourse and the cinematic conventions of Hollywood melodrama of necessity had to be carried on away from this environment, lest it become completely extinguished. At this period, it was the British tradition of class conscious social drama that held a promise for Losey’s reattachment with his Meyerholdian past. As Tom Sutpen explains, the so-called ‘kitchen sink’ phenomenon

intensely informed by issues of *class*, emerging in more or less enraged response to a postwar climate when notions of a truly classless British society were promoted with a straight face by many of its leaders. The movies militated against this sophistry more vividly than their literary antecedents ever could, directly rubbing the world’s nose in stark, incriminating, black-and-white evidence of rigidly enforced *class* structures, dreary

⁷⁴ Buhle, P., and Wagner, Dave (2003). Hide in Plain Sight: The Hollywood Blacklistees in Film and Television, 1950-2002. NY, Palgrave MacMillan, p. 219

⁷⁵ Leahy, J. (1967). The Cinema of Joseph Losey. London, A. Zwemmer Ltd, p. 29

factories, bombed-out ruins, stultifying housing developments, and numberless other visions of a ruinously dull and decaying Britain.⁷⁶

It is in the person of the British playwright Harold Pinter that Losey found a living embodiment of this tradition. Of all subjects the British class system fascinated him most, and Pinter, having been brought up in Hackney, had his own reasons for viewing the class system with what Michael Billington called “a mixture of moral disapproval and grudging fascination.”⁷⁷ The eventual loss of this Brechtian, or Meyerholdian, impulse to interpret social contradictions visually and aurally, i.e., cinematically, could be one of the lasting legacies of McCarthyism, notwithstanding the temporary resistance offered by European, and world, art cinema of the 1960s. Losey and Pinter’s film dramas endowed film art with political aesthetics well in excess of the more fashionable art film’s preoccupations with subjective identities and psychology, as evidenced in *Eve*, that is, before Losey found his way back on the road to class-conscious modernism through his collaborations with Pinter.

But before realizing his modernist potential on the Continent, Losey completed his pre-blacklist Hollywood apprenticeship in melodrama, while waging a day-to-day struggle with studio head philistinism. As he recalls in a 1979 seminar in New York on his work, “I learned very early, and it’s one of the few valuable lessons I got from Hollywood, to shoot in such a way that very few people can monkey with my films, because there isn’t any material to do it with. I shoot the way

⁷⁶ Sutpen, T. (2005). “Class Dismissed: Revisiting Losey and Pinter’s Misunderstood Masterpiece, *The Servant: They Also Serve Who Only Stand and Annihilate*.” *Bright Light Film Journal* 48 (May): pp. 111-115.

⁷⁷ Michael Billington qt. in Nick James, Ian Christie, Brad Stevens, Dylan Cave (2009). “Joseph Losey Harlod Pinter in Search of Poshlust Times.” *Sight & Sound* 19.6: pp. 30-40.

I want it cut, more or less.”⁷⁸ The following section will assess whether this strategy provided this Marxist filmmaker with sufficient defenses against the dominant discourse of ‘the vital center.’

Losey’s Hollywood years

Losey’s actual beginning in Hollywood, writes Richard Combs, “looks like nothing else in his career: a parable, a children’s story, a moral fable.”⁷⁹ Here Combs is alluding to *The Boy With Green Hair* (1948), a fable that remains one of Losey’s most explicitly antiwar pictures.

However, one could only hazard a guess at the intended political depth had it not been for Howard Hughes, the studio boss who “tried to cross its pacifist message with lines declaring the need for readiness for war against the Russians.”⁸⁰ The inexplicable change in the young boy’s hair color provides simple but powerful visual metaphors for the psychologically devastating impact of war. *The Boy with Green Hair* is an allegory about war and discrimination produced by Dore Schary, known for his passion for such ‘message’ pictures (as evidenced in his production of *Crossfire*). According to Dan Callahan of *Sight & Sound*, although *The Boy* “takes a bit too much on its shoulders, it survives well.” What is to account for its longevity? Callahan provides a partial answer in his comparison of Losey with Fritz Lang. Whilst Lang “undoubtedly influenced his handling of mob scenes,” Losey differs from the master expressionist “in his volatile identification with his characters.”⁸¹ Although atypical of Losey’s subsequent work,

⁷⁸ Losey, J. (1979). “Dialogue on Film: Joseph Losey.” *American Film* 6.2: pp. 53-60.

⁷⁹ Combs, R. (2004). “Double Play.” *Film Comment* 40.2 (Mar-Apr): pp. 44-49.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Callahan, D. 2003. ‘Joseph Losey’ *Senses of Cinema* 58 (February) <<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2003/great-directors/losey/>> at 12 July 2010.

“which is firmly rooted in realism rather than in fantasy,” *Green Hair* nevertheless, as Gene Phillips explains, “sounded a thematic cord that would reverberate through his subsequent films.”⁸² Phillips quotes Losey saying, “if I have one theme, it is the question of hypocrisy: the people who condemn others without looking at themselves.”⁸³ Coupled with this humanist content, another key element of Losey’s *mise-en-scene* is on display in the film’s opening image. In this scene, described by Combs as “Edward Hopper-esque,” the three cops, grouped at the centre, shoot questions at the boy, visually creating a stifling sense of the sheer weight of society falling on boy’s vulnerable shoulders.⁸⁴ According to Losey, “It was not an antiwar picture as a concept, as a device—it was anti-racist.”⁸⁵ Given Losey’s efforts to merge Marxism and modernism with his film art, this concession could be interpreted as an understandable political compromise in Hollywood. Years later, Losey lamented the aesthetic concessions he gave to RKO regarding *Green Hair* as “a bit too sentimental.”⁸⁶

While *Green Hair* aggressively tackles aspects of discrimination and social divisions during the war, it is, paradoxically, his other, less derivative, or message-driven, noirs of his Hollywood period that hinted at the real possibilities of American film art. *The Criminal* (1960), which Losey made in England, and which owed its underplayed ‘message’ to Jules Dassin’s *Rififi* (1955), nevertheless demonstrated the aesthetic value of this approach. As Robin Wood saw it, the opening scene of prison gambling acted as a “complex metaphor for the modern world of materialism, where crime is big business and big business crime.”⁸⁷ This scene, as is true of the

⁸² Phillips, G. D. (1999). *Major Film Directors of the American and British Cinema*. London & Toronto, Lehigh University Press, pp: 193-208

⁸³ Losey qt. in Ibid.

⁸⁴ Combs, R. (2004). “Double Play.” *Film Comment* 40.2 (Mar-Apr): pp. 44-49.

⁸⁵ Losey qt. in Ibid.

⁸⁶ Houston, P. (1961). “Conversations with Nicholas Ray and Joseph Losey.” *Sight and Sound* 38.4: pp. 182-187.

⁸⁷ Wood, R. (1963). “*The Criminal* [review].” *Motion* 4: pp. 7-10.

whole film, is stripped of its ‘message’ and reduced to its bare dramatic essentials. It bears the mark of a politically conscious author, and demonstrated the ability of the intended ‘message’ to somehow reveal itself in a work of true film art. Losey confirmed as much when he said that his “primary purpose was to bring home something about prison conditions,” while measuring the “film’s success partly in these terms.”⁸⁸ In an implicit endorsement of *auteurism*, he declared that “a film must bear a director’s stamp, or it’s nothing.”⁸⁹ However, the MacMahonist critics declared that Losey ought to be lionized “less as a true *auteur* than as a *metteur-en-scene*.” The critics tended to focus on Losey’s

baroque *mise-en-scene* (specifically the long takes and deep focus that punctuate films as narratively wide-ranging as *Time Without Pity* and *Blind Date*), for it is these stylistic characteristics which transform the raw material of the studio- or producer-imposed text into something approaching a personal (and, by extension, ideological) statement through purely *visual* means.⁹⁰

In one of the paradoxes of the critical assessments of classical Hollywood cinema, it was one of its least prestigious, most vernacular manifestations, the lowly crime/gangster “B” movie that for the MacMahonists shone the path to a distinctively American film art. “The upshot is,” as Gardner explains, that “Losey the modernist European *auteur* of *Eve*, *Accident* and *The Go-Between* is far less interesting to these [*Cahiers*] critics than Losey the radical American *metteur-en-scene* of *The Lawless*, *The Prowler*, *M* and *The Big Night*.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ Houston, P. (1961). “Conversations with Nicholas Ray and Joseph Losey.” *Sight and Sound* 38.4: pp. 182-187.

⁸⁹ Phillips, G. D. (1999). *Major Film Directors of the American and British Cinema*. London & Toronto, Lehigh University Press, p. 193

⁹⁰ Gardner, C. (2004). *Joseph Losey*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, p. 274

⁹¹ Ibid.

Richard Combs of *Film Comment* places *Eve* as “Losey’s watershed, or Waterloo,” the film where he tried to “break with his past” and produce “both a personal testament” and his “most elaborate exercise in style.”⁹² This was also seen as Losey’s version of Alain Resnais’s *Muriel*. As a recent study of Losey the émigré put it, the film’s “ambitious, symbolic shots and its fragmentary gestures towards high culture” paved the way for the art cinema that flourished in the 1960s and 70s.⁹³ With *Eve* Losey did indulge in excessive high-culture quotations, utilizing all the art and architecture that Venice, the film’s setting, allowed. In particular, Eve’s biblical role as a temptress is cinematically related to Jean Moreau’s Eve. One of the cruder examples of this ‘intertextuality’ occurs when Stanley Baker’s fiancé finds him in bed with Eve, her shocked expression echoing Masaccio’s Eve banished From Eden, next to which she ends up posing.⁹⁴

But this obsession with ‘poshlust,’ defined by Nabokov as “vulgar clichés ... imitations of imitations, bogus profundities” found in “Freudian symbolism, moth-eaten mythologies, social comment, humanistic messages...”⁹⁵ is, according to James, simply a phase in Losey’s evolution towards the cultural status of a genuine film artist. As James observes, “pretentiousness is just a rehearsal for brilliance,”⁹⁶ which will be vindicated in Losey’s fruitful years of collaboration with Pinter.

It now seems clear that it was the working class ethos behind his highly praised Hollywood *metteur-en-scene* work that endowed Losey’s Hollywood noirs with a depth and richness that

⁹² Combs, R. (2004). “Double Play.” *Film Comment* 40.2 (Mar-Apr): pp. 44-49.

⁹³ James, N., Christie, Ian, Stevens, Brad, and Cave, Dylan (2009). “Joseph Losey Harold Pinter in Search of Poshlust Times.” *Sight & Sound* 19.6: pp. 30-40.

⁹⁴ Nick James, I. C., Brad Stevens, Dylan Cave Ibid. “Joseph Losey Harold Pinter in Search of Poshlust Times.”

⁹⁵ Nabokov qt. in Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

resonated with mass audiences – who were themselves predominantly working class – while also providing the kind of ‘primal,’ or ‘immediate experience’ advocated by Sarris and Warshaw, and required by the entertainment industry. *The Lawless*, *The Prowler* and his adaptation of Lang’s *M*, offer to both his, and our contemporary audiences, a probing critique of American capitalist relations utilizing, in a highly conscious and sophisticated way, the generic elements of noir. So how could Losey’s Marxist proclivities become a principal narrative feature of his Hollywood films, when a liberal compromise was the most he could hope to extract from the pre-blacklist Hollywood?

The Lawless, for all its understandable adaptations to a predominant liberalism, nevertheless cinematically subverts some of its assumptions. More than any other Losey film, it can be seen as a site of contestation between the liberal and socialist thought in Hollywood, not least because of the presence of Mainwaring’s liberal mind behind the script. As Dan Callahan puts it, *The Lawless* is the kind of work “he might have staged in the ‘30s,” a story about Mexican workers falsely accused of a crime.⁹⁷ Vindicating the views of the MacMahonists, Callahan says the “high point” of *The Lawless* occurs when “Losey ditches the dull script and lacklustre acting and makes a purely visual point.” This, according to Callahan, is exemplified in the gathering of an angry mob, which is portrayed “abstractly,” when the “feet invade the top of the empty frame and gradually fill it up to the bursting point.” This shot, concludes Callahan, “effectively illustrates the fact that a mob is a large clump of enraged energy that obliterates the individuality of its various members.” This is because Losey “disliked naturalism and was always striving for

⁹⁷ Callahan, D. 2003. ‘Joseph Losey’ *Senses of Cinema* 58 (February) <<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2003/great-directors/losey/>> at 12 July 2010.

symbolic effects such as this.”⁹⁸ Losey’s proclivity to an abstract depiction of reality, rather than a passive photographing of it, represents his assimilation of a Meyerholdian anti-naturalist way of looking at life ‘as in a dream.’ It also ran against the stream in postwar Hollywood. As Gene Phillips elaborates, because of the “trend toward realism in postwar cinema,” Losey’s Hollywood work following *Green Hair*, of necessity had to be “firmly rooted in realism rather than fantasy,” seeking to “explore problems rather than solve them.”⁹⁹ In the spirit of Hollywood’s new found penchant for naturalism, *Lawless* was shot entirely on location.

As mentioned earlier, Losey shared with Meyerhold an organic aversion to Stalinist Socialist Realism. As with Polonsky, Marxism flowed through Losey’s veins, however distorted by the prevailing Popular Front tendency of American “democratic modernism” to “minimis[e] class, racial, and ethnic differences within the American populace.”¹⁰⁰ A simple yet effective strategy to push the ideological boundaries of liberalism was to accentuate the class aspect, and align its narrative spine to the class divisions wracking the broader American society. In the classical studio system, even its most radical war films were limited to critiquing the *impact*, rather than the *imperialist motives* behind US foreign interventions. *Home of the Brave* (1949), *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943), *Sahara* (1943), for all their psychological realism, fell short of exposing the imperialist motives of the White House. At the height of the patriotic fervor during WWII, the Hollywood Left, understandably, was enlisted into the war effort, creating the patriotic war films cited above. But after the military defeat of America’s imperialist rivals, Germany and Japan, the prevailing optimism of radical Hollywood that the class-oriented critique of American

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Phillips, G. D. (1999). *Major Film Directors of the American and British Cinema*. London & Toronto, Lehigh University Press, p. 194

¹⁰⁰ Rabinowitz, P. (2002). “Hollywood Modernism (book review).” *Cineaste* 27.2: pp. 54-55.

capitalism would resume unabated was soon crushed, emasculated by subservience to the CPUSA. This is the political context of *The Lawless*.

The issue of American imperialism in WWII is never far from the surface of *Lawless*. Wilder, the journalist of *The Union* newspaper, covered this war. He is now confronted with warlike conditions at home in a sleepy coastal village of California. Even Lopo Chavez, a young Latino who fought on the 'right' side in the overseas war, somehow finds himself on the wrong side of the tracks back in his home town. Forced to defend the very ideals he fought for in Europe, in his last stance of a defence of *The Union*, he confronts the encroaching mob by yelling, "In the army, they paid me to kill people like you!"

It is within this contextual framework that *Cahiers'* critic Pierre Rissient's flamboyant praise of *The Lawless* as "the greatest Western and the only Western ever made"¹⁰¹ seems misplaced. For all its characteristic *Cahiers'* excesses, this statement contains an element of truth about Losey as artist. That a loaded 'message' film like *The Lawless* can be effective as a western in its own right already suggests a strong command of film language, that indefinable presence of an artist who is using inherited codes and conventions in a distinctive manner. Losey's artistry was also underpinned by the film's unmistakably 'un-American' message. The government censor of Hollywood, Joseph Breen, was acutely aware of the film's ideological dangers:

The story itself is a shocking indictment of America and its people and, indeed, is a sad commentary on 'democracy at work,' which the enemies of our system of government like to point to. The shocking manner in which the several gross injustices are heaped upon the confused, but innocent, young American of Mexican extraction, and the

¹⁰¹ Pierre Rissient qt. in Cauter, D. (1994). *Joseph Losey: A Revenge on Life*, Oxford University Press, p. 391

willingness of so many of the people in your story to be a part of, and to endorse, these injustices, is, we think, a damning portrayal of our American social system.

The manner in which certain of the newspapers are portrayed in this story, with their eagerness to dishonestly present the news, and thus inflame their readers, is also, we think, a part of a pattern which is not good.¹⁰²

In times of the anti-fascist and patriotic fervor of the Popular Front, perhaps most aptly symbolized by Roosevelt's enthusiastic rallying of Hollywood talent at a 1943 Writers' Congress, formal political logic alone could not explain the eruption of race violence in *Sleepy Lagoon*. One indication of how the classical Marxist perspective was subsumed by the anti-Marxist discourse of the official left circles was the left interpretation of the Zoot Suit riots in 1943. Doug Dibbern groups these into the two dominant, anti-Marxist, tendencies: that of Stalinism and the liberal-Democratic press.¹⁰³ Dibbern, nevertheless, observes two very different handlings of the Zoot Suit Riots by the liberal and the communist press. "The *Sleepy Lagoon* Case," written by Alice Greenfield McGrath, a liberal non-Communist, and "*Sleepy Lagoon* Mystery" by Guy Endore, a Communist screenwriter, later blacklisted. According to Dibbern, "McGrath spends most of her essay attacking the racist declarations of one Los Angeles police officer. Endore, on the other hand, ties the convictions to a larger conspiratorial web that included the press, the police, and the court system, all manipulated by William Randolph Hearst at the bidding of every Communist's worst enemy, Adolf Hitler."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Breen, J. (1949). Joseph Breen to Luigi Lurashi, Oct 5, 1949. LA, PCA file on *The Lawless*, Margaret Herrick Library.

¹⁰³ Dibbern, D. (2007). "The Violent Poerty of the Times: The Politics of Hlstory in Daniel Mainwaring and Joseph Losey's *The Lawless*." *"Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*. N. S. Krutnik Frank, Neve Brian, and Stanfield Peter. New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press: 99.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Both these essays arose out of the early 1940s US liberal and Democratic zeitgeist. The film, on the other hand, was produced seven years later when the Popular Front marriage of convenience was well and truly on the rocks, and when the political preconditions emerged for the possible resurgence of a classical Marxist take on these events. Yet the classical Marxist interpretation of this social explosion is the white elephant in the room. While Dibbern clearly draws out the critical differences within the progressive movement between the official liberal and Communist perspectives, with the latter representing a theoretically higher level of the same political outlook, the omissions in this comparative analysis are of far greater significance than relating the vast media-government conspiracy uncovered by Guy Endore. True enough, Endore's exposure of the systemic roots of the Sleepy Lagoon case are a significant theoretical leap from McGrath's perspective of individual culpability, namely a few rotten apples in the police force. However, in classical liberal fashion, both these interpretations of the root causes of the riots are anchored in *racial* rather than *class* divisions in 1940s America.

In the heyday of the CPUSA, the ideological grip of Stalinism over the progressive movement was such that very few Hollywood Leftists made that distinction. Indeed, Mainwaring's script for *The Lawless* reinforces the liberal-Democratic outlook in which the principal ideological fault line separates the liberal, Wilder's *Morning Union* and Sunny Garcia's Spanish weekly *La Luz* (The Light) on one side, and the conservative *Stockton Express* of Jan Dawson on the other (no doubt modeled on Hearst's yellow press). Before anticommunism went viral in the US, the flame of classical Marxism was not entirely extinguished from the most sensitive and serious

filmmakers. Rather, this revolutionary impulse was smothered in a cozy relationship with liberalism, primarily to the benefit of the latter.

Hence, the fact that Losey could not effect a shift in the narrative axis of Mainwaring's script from a race-centered to a class-centered conflict did not necessarily signify a renunciation of his avant-gardist, Marxian preoccupation with class divisions. Rather, the dominant Popular Front discourse did not permit anything more radical. What Losey compromised with politically, he compensated for by his exemplary attention to detail. As Tom Milne wrote, "What gives it an edge of brilliance is Losey's eye for small-town locations: the shabby dance hall in the Mexican quarter, the sleepy high street, the one-horse newspaper office, the cosy front porches and the churchgoers, all swept away in sudden primitive starkness as the fugitive is relentlessly hunted over a fantastic wasteland of rocks and rubble."¹⁰⁵ This authenticity in style, according to Dibbern, means *The Lawless* "has more in common with his theatre work than the films he directed in the sixties and seventies."¹⁰⁶ Losey himself explained that, "Certainly, *The Lawless* belongs to a very early period for me.... I was still trying to get out of my system, I suppose, some things which were very much a part of me in the thirties and early forties."¹⁰⁷

It is in this broader socio-political context that *The Lawless*, being only Losey's second Hollywood feature, should be appreciated, even more so under the gathering storm of anticommunism. The response of this aspiring Marxist was to settle for the most radical artistic compromise in his portrayal of the class divisions in the Sleepy Lagoon. Without shifting the

¹⁰⁵ Milne, T., Ed. (1993). *Time Out Film Guide*. NY, Penguin Books, p. 393

¹⁰⁶ Dibbern, D. (2007). "The Violent Poerty of the Times: The Politics of History in Daniel Mainwaring and Joseph Losey's *The Lawless*." *"Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*. N. S. Krutnik Frank, Neve Brian, and Stanfield Peter. New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press; p. 104.

¹⁰⁷ Leahy, J. (1967). *The Cinema of Joseph Losey*. London, A. Zwemmer Ltd, p. 35

narrative axis from race to class, both these social categories were given full expression in Losey's political aesthetics, albeit without expressing their causal interdependence. In one of the most illustrative sequences in the film, Pablo and Joe are grooming themselves for Saturday night, in their own homes, immediately after their initial altercation. In the parallel scenes of this key sequence, it is telling that the boys' racial or cultural *identity* is the primary visual parallel, rather than the vast chasm of social *class* that separates them.

This approach to social conflict is in line with Mainwaring's liberalism. As Dibbern points out, the writer indeed "eschewed the conspiratorial ruminations of the Communist discourse on the events of 1943 and instead took up the liberal anti-Communist line." But because the film "reflects the position of a progressive yearning for the idealism of the World War II era," it doesn't end with the white mob attacking the innocent Mexican kids. Rather, according to Dibbern, they attack the newspaper office, "the very symbol of the First Amendment."¹⁰⁸ The liberals' nostalgia for the Roosevelt era, when it enjoyed its coziest relationship with the Democratic establishment, was naturally most acute when it was suddenly deprived of this comfort. This is an important aspect of the intellectual climate that should also be borne in mind when assessing the political pressures Losey was placed under. Philip Dunne wrote that in 1948 "the entire industry became demoralized as almost everyone scrambled for cover."¹⁰⁹ By 1948 Dunne had become a "tired liberal.... 1948 marked a sort of watershed in my political career. I

¹⁰⁸ Dibbern, D. (2007). "The Violent Poerty of the Times: The Politics of Hlstory in Daniel Mainwaring and Joseph Losey's *The Lawless*." *"Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*. N. S. Krutnik Frank, Neve Brian, and Stanfield Peter. New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press; p. 106.

¹⁰⁹ Dunne, P. (1980). *Take Two: A Life in Movies and Politics*. NY, Limelight Editions, p. 212

never again became heavily involved in organizational politics.”¹¹⁰ The chronic ‘tiredness’ of the post-war liberals was aptly characterized by Pells as follows:

Many of them were too eager to embrace established political and economic practices, too reluctant to reevaluate the diplomacy of the Cold War, too enamored with the role of leaders and experts, too cooperative with McCarthyism, and too obsessed with the psychological and moral agonies of the middle class – a preoccupation that led them to neglect the systemic diseases of urban decay, racism, and poverty.¹¹¹

Pells’ characterization of the post-war liberals reveals their class character. The tired liberal in *The Lawless* is Wilder, spurred on by the passionate Mexican American Sunny, still filled with the hope and promise of the Popular Front. As Dibbern puts it, Sunny and Wilder are “the living embodiments of the First Amendment, active and passive sides of the same coin.”¹¹² These are quintessential liberals, with an aversion to revolutionary politics, albeit passionate about social justice and the excesses of their capitalist society. *The Lawless* retains much of Mainwaring’s spirit of class reconciliation between what would become, in Losey’s collaboration with Pinter, the irreconcilable classes. The wealthy white Mr. Ferguson is the embodiment of this reconciliation, the most sensitive and progressive character in the movie. He shares Mainwaring’s liberal sensitivities, and “his more mainstream liberal position has produced a story in which open-minded people from various racial and class backgrounds can work together to make the world a better place.”¹¹³ The last thought encapsulates the elementary difference

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 221

¹¹¹ Pells, R. H. (1985). *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s*. NY, Harper and Row, p. ix

¹¹² Dibbern, D. (2007). “The Violent Poerty of the Times: The Politics of History in Daniel Mainwaring and Joseph Losey’s *The Lawless*.” *“Un-American” Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*. N. S. Krutnik Frank, Neve Brian, and Stanfield Peter. New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press: p. 106

¹¹³ Ibid.

between the Marxist and liberal approaches to social problems on film: the former strives to accentuate, rather than diminish, the class divisions between different ethnic groups.

Mainwaring's approach, however reluctantly adopted by Losey, emphasises similarities between races, even if the subjects inhabited vastly different social positions, as indicated in the parallel cutting of the Pablo and Joe shower scenes. Dibbern argues that while the economic and political constraints of Hollywood precluded a more radical aesthetic choice in the treatment of the social ills addressed in *The Lawless*, both Losey and Mainwaring quite deliberately adopted a liberal, rather than a Communist, approach. He aptly concludes that the movie was "a kind of apostrophe to the liberal anti-Communists themselves."¹¹⁴

Moreover, in line with his liberal class perspective, however progressive it may have appeared at the time, Mainwaring evades the responsibility of depicting the urban immigrant working class, far outnumbering the fruit pickers he chose to represent this vast section of the proletariat. Also, reflecting his amorphous liberalism, Mainwaring depicts Mexican characters, for the most part, as noble, patriotic Americans. But his Mexicans, writes Dibbern, are "a touch more complex than the ones depicted in the left-wing pamphlets of 1943..."¹¹⁵ Pablo does commit crimes, punching a cop, stealing a car and an ice-cream truck, while Lopo wields a wrench at the white mob with relish. In another expression of Mainwaring's conciliatory liberalism, most policemen are decent, but the other characters are far from the evil conspirators driven by anti-Latino racism.

Such artistic compromises with the prevailing Hollywood mode of melodrama clashed with the dormant avant-garde impulse of Losey in the 1940s. A telling indication of the magnitude of this

¹¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 111-12

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 107

compromise can be seen in the glowing reviews spanning the entire political spectrum of the progressive media – from the Communist *Daily Worker* to the liberal *New York Times* and the trade publication *Variety*, and even the more scholarly *Cahiers* critics. The entire political spectrum of official anti-communism saw eye-to-eye on this essentially conventional, if progressive, melodrama. The unanimity of the critical response to *The Lawless* suggests something more than the intrinsic qualities and emotional impact of the film; as Dibbern reveals, no reviewer made any mention of the Sleepy Lagoon murder and the HUAC.¹¹⁶

Let us turn to the riots and paradigm shifts in the ‘cultural front’ by posing a question relevant to Losey’s philosophy on film: Is a high naturalist style, framed in terms of conventional melodrama, sufficient to uncover the root causes of this ‘unforeseen’ incident? This thesis contends that Losey’s class-oriented, materialist dialectics, even when underpinned by Mainwaring’s liberalism, did more to sensitize audiences to the *class*, before *racial*, divisions wracking their society than any of the contemporary ‘message’ films cited earlier. When Losey made *The Lawless*, Hollywood was not ready to move beyond the conventional Hollywood realism and into Brechtian *educative endeavor*, as the primary means to make sense of complex social events.

This thesis proceeds from an understanding that the class consciousness underpinning modernism, as it originally arose in European capitals like Vienna and Moscow, offered American film artists a possibility of reconnecting with some of the theoretical gains of the modernist movement in art, a process begun by Losey. After HUAC criminalized even these

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 109

limited inroads into depicting the class character of American society, what was actually eliminated from cinema was a certain political and critical depth that could have equipped mainstream cinema with the ability to transcend generic limitations in order to reveal, or at least hint at, the politics behind the primal rage exhibited in places like *Sleepy Lagoon* in 1943, the Western front in 1944, or the Pacific in 1945. At the time of the production of *The Lawless*, the outcome of the ideological battle between the then ascendant Republican right and the demoralized Hollywood Left was far from certain. This is despite the presence of ‘tired liberals’ like Dunne who were increasingly compelled to switch sides. It took a decisive blow of the second HUAC hearings to finally put the nail in the coffin of the short-lived marriage of Stalinism and liberalism.

We recall that Mr. Ferguson, a community leader and a voice of progress, articulates something of his illusive belief in Roosevelt’s New Deal and liberalism in general when he ruminates: “I don’t like what happened today. I didn’t think it could happen here.” But it did, and it was not entirely unforeseen. The mass media played its usual treacherous role and ruthlessly cut through the class unity between the white and Latino workers. A measure of Losey’s grasp of the politics of his time and his developed sense of the appropriate aesthetic choices is what Leahy terms an “incident of great complexity” in *The Lawless*.¹¹⁷ He points to a defining twist that occurs in the character of Jan Dawson, an unscrupulous news reporter who, after sympathizing with Mrs. Rodriguez, proceeds to phone in her news report in which she dirties Mrs. Rodriguez’s son: “Rodriguez stood there. Mud-covered. Sullen. Cruel. A trapped animal if ever I saw one.... I looked for some sign of remorse; all I could see was cruelty.”

¹¹⁷ Leahy, J. (1967). *The Cinema of Joseph Losey*. London, A. Zwemmer Ltd, p. 22

This simple scene captures more than Jan's two-faced and cold-hearted character. Her effortless synthesis of charm and ruthlessness, is a simple and powerful personification of key agents of the ruling establishment. Sixty years on, it is difficult to imagine filmmakers attempting, consciously, to use such characterization to expose the essential features of a key institution of the establishment. Dennis Broe's valuable study of the "return of the police procedural" in today's film and TV reinforces one's sense of a bewildering combination of the unwillingness and inability of contemporary filmmakers to critique capitalist state agencies – all levels of law enforcement and the military/intelligence apparatus.¹¹⁸ Yet Losey's political aesthetics point to the possibility, and desirability, of placing the core ideological imperatives of the capitalist class as the narrative axis of stories that seek to penetrate the driving forces behind inexplicable and spontaneous mass movements, such as that of *Sleepy Lagoon* of 1943.

The Prowler, in pursuit of the American dream

The values of this approach are demonstrated in what Losey regard as his favorite Hollywood picture, *The Prowler*. As Penelope Houston commented in 1961, "With its integration of décor and camera style into the narrative,"¹¹⁹ Losey, along with his screenwriters Hugo Buttler and Dulton Trumbo (uncredited), "used this conventional genre to deliver a subversive attack on the barrenness of the 'American Dream' with its blind allegiance to materialism and traditional marital roles during the postwar economic and baby booms" of the early 1950s.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Broe, D. (2009). "Genre Regression and The New Cold War: The Return of the Police Procedural". *Framework* 45.2: pp. 81-101.

¹¹⁹ Houston, P. (1961). "Conversations with Nicholas Ray and Joseph Losey." *Sight and Sound* 38.4: pp. 182-187.

¹²⁰ Weedman, C. (2010). "*The Prowler* [review essay]." *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 27.5: pp. 365-367.

In his reevaluation of film gris, Charles Maland notes that *The Prowler* (along with Berry's *He Ran All the Way*) offers a particularly interesting case study because it was made when the political climate was becoming increasingly hostile to the Hollywood Left.¹²¹ This was due in no small part to its implicitly 'un-American' message. Losey explains in an interview with Michel Ciment that "*The Prowler* to me is, and always has been, a film about false values. About the means justifying the end and the end justifying the means. '100,000 bucks, a Cadillac, and a blonde' were the *sine qua non* of American life at that time and it didn't matter how you got them..."¹²²

So far, nothing out of the acceptable, but Losey's characterization of Webb Garwood (Van Heflin), a lonely cop, did attack a core institution of the system, and this would have constituted a primary non-compliance with the formerly powerful Production Code censors. Webb, unhappy with his job, falls in love with a failed actress Susan Gilvray (Evelyn Keyes). They begin an affair and he shoots her husband, gets away with it, and marries her. To add to the unfavourable portrayal, Webb's "dominating obsession – money – counterbalances any emotional attachment he has had to Susan; she becomes a pawn in the game he is to play with society in his quest for affluence...."¹²³ According to Christopher Weedman, the policeman's obsession is visually foreshadowed in the second scene by having him framed through the outside window, situated between Susan, "emblematic of wealth and risk taking" and Crocker "emblematic of law and pedestrianism," suggesting that capitalism "serves as a cage entrapping those of all class strata."

¹²¹ Maland, C. J. (2002). "Film Gris: Crime, Critique and Cold War Culture in 1951." *Film Criticism* 26.3: pp. 1-30.

¹²² Losey qt. in Ciment, M. (1985). *Conversations with Losey*. London, Methuen, p. 100

¹²³ Leahy, J. (1967). *The Cinema of Joseph Losey*. London, A. Zwemmer Ltd, p. 44

Webb is agonizing over which of the two he should align himself, aggravated by his “insatiable desire to transcend his class boundaries.”¹²⁴

Before the HUAC went on an offensive, the postwar Hollywood Left experienced a brief window of opportunity to create similar characterizations, most notably in film gris. In *The Strange Loves of Martha Ivers*, for example, the preeminent reality of the class boundaries gradually drives Martha Ivers apart from both her desired partner, and her actual husband (Sam and Walter). Even what normally should be a joyous occasion between two lovers in a free, democratic society, Susan’s unplanned pregnancy and the resulting baby in *The Prowler* provokes the pathological reaction in Webb, whose anger leads to his rejection of love and warmth, which is a powerful comment on the prevailing social values. Here Losey’s mastery of *mise-en-scene*, praised by *Cahiers*, eloquently combines his art and his politics. He mounts an attack on a core institution of American capitalism, the police, then, “Wickedly, Losey shoots their wedding in one take, on a crane, with a funeral taking place across the street.”¹²⁵ This ideology is expressed explicitly in the final scene, when Susan learns that Web knew of her husband’s life insurance before eliminating him. While he admits his murder, he also defends himself. “So I’m no good, but I’m no worse than anybody else.... I did it for \$62,000!”¹²⁶ What could more aptly and symbolically capture the futility and despair of a couple doomed by the lure of the American Dream? As Charles Maland observes, *The Prowler* expresses “pessimism about the American dream’s perception that the tension between the promises of materialism and

¹²⁴ Weedman, C. “*The Prowler* [review essay].” *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 27.5: pp. 365-367.

¹²⁵ Callahan, D. 2003. ‘Joseph Losey’ *Senses of Cinema* 58 (February)
<<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2003/great-directors/losey/>> at 12 July 2010.

¹²⁶ Maland, C. J. (2002). “Film Gris: Crime, Critique and Cold War Culture in 1951.” *Film Criticism* 26.3: pp. 1-30.

the realities of economic inequality results in American tragedies of working-class protagonists.”¹²⁷

A new DVD of the film has now been released, restored by the UCLA Film Archive in conjunction with the Film Noir Foundation. Also, the new release contains extra features dealing with the film’s uncredited writer Dulton Trumbo.¹²⁸ While *The Prowler*, in Weedman’s assessment, “is still in need of proper reevaluation,” unjustly “overshadowed” by films like *Brute Force* and *Force of Evil*, as an example of how “noir was often used transgressively by dissenting filmmakers to indict dominant American ideology,”¹²⁹ the new DVD could go a long way towards helping a long-overdue reevaluation and recognition of this ‘bad cop’ noir. Maland also contributes to restoring this noir masterpiece in the canon of *film gris* by reevaluating it as “a hallmark of *film gris*,” where “class and crime are inextricably linked with social critique.”¹³⁰ Ida Lupino’s *Not Wanted* (1949) also used the arrival of an unwanted baby as a powerful indictment on the official values of the American Way. Thom Anderson called *Not Wanted* “the great masterpiece of Hollywood Freudian-Marxist neorealism,” likening it to Rossellini’s films of the early fifties, as a “drama of perception.” In the end, while Andersen bemoans the failure of an American version of neorealism to materialize, “prematurely cut off by the blacklist,”¹³¹ Losey’s formal excellence opened other artistic possibilities for American film art. Losey’s adaptation of Fritz Lang’s *M* demonstrated again that his Marxist sensibilities could be expressed

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Maltin, L. (2011). DVD Watch: From Vaudeville to Film Noir. blog.indiewire.com/leonardmaltin. (Accessed on March 4, 2011)

¹²⁹ Weedman, C. “*The Prowler* [review essay].” *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 27.5: pp. 365-367.

¹³⁰ Maland, C. J. (2002). “Film Gris: Crime, Critique and Cold War Culture in 1951.” *Film Criticism* 26.3: 1-30.

¹³¹ Andersen, T. (2007). “Red Hollywood”. “*Un-American*” Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era. F. Krutnik, Neale, Steve, Neve, Brian, and Stanfield, Peter. New Brunswick, N.J. & London, Rutgers University Press: 267.

visually.¹³² In an interview, Losey pinpointed the wedding scene in *The Prowler* as the beginning of his so-called “baroque style” in film. He said that the “element of theatricality is called ‘baroque’ or ‘overplaying’ or ‘exaggeration’ by the people who don’t like it. I would say that its emphasis and its use of a theatrical instrument in cinema [serves] to make the points more inescapable. Art for me has never been the exact reproduction of life.”¹³³ This ‘baroque style’ can be traced to Meyerhold, whose influence held Losey in good stead in the politically hostile environment of Hollywood, immunizing him against Stalinism. This is not an insignificant factor in Losey’s qualitative leap forward in this, his third Hollywood noir. As Weedman asserts, while it “mirrors his previous two features,” with *The Prowler* he “found the perfect balance between melodrama and politics.”¹³⁴

This was evident in Losey’s adaptation of Lang’s *M*. Pierre Rissient admired Losey’s urban *mise-en-scene* in *M*, which ensured that “for the first time a city exists on the screen. It’s this expansion of the action in the world which allows us to call Joseph Losey a cosmic director.”¹³⁵ In his rendition of *M*, Losey again attacks the core institutions of the ruling class, its political servants along with its police. The political establishment and its enforcers in the police in San Francisco are, according to Callahan, “viewed with a jaundiced eye, and the civilians aren’t so appealing either.”¹³⁶ The respectable citizen’s pettiness is graphically illustrated in a following scene: “The child was wearing a red dress,” reports one woman. “What are you, a Communist?” asks another lady.” A comparison with Lang’s *M* vindicated Rissient’s emphatic reception of

¹³² Leahy, J. (1967). *The Cinema of Joseph Losey*. London, A. Zwemmer Ltd, p. 105

¹³³ Losey qt. in Ibid.

¹³⁴ Weedman, C. “*The Prowler* [review essay].” *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 27.5: pp. 365-367.

¹³⁵ Rissient qt. in Caute, D. (1994). *Joseph Losey: A Revenge on Life*, Oxford University Press, p. 391

¹³⁶ Callahan, D. 2003. ‘Joseph Losey’ *Senses of Cinema* 58 (February)
<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2003/great-directors/losey/> at 12 July 2010.

Losey's remake. It reveals fundamental differences in the directors' approaches to issues of social and psychological realism on film: Lang's preoccupation with the authentic underworld overrides the underlying social and historical causes of the psychopath's actions. In other words, Lang's commitment to a visual style of perceptible realism precludes any possibility of using 'Brechtian detachment' as a dramatic tool for uncovering these objective causes. Or, for that matter, any use of the 'Meyerholdian grotesque.' This absence of 'detachment' rendered, paradoxically, a less tellable, or psychologically authentic, underworld by the time Losey adapted the story. In other words, Lang's underworld became dated. Conversely, and paradoxically, Losey's anti-naturalist style enhanced the psychological realism that later became associated with film gris.

However, in discussing his greatest handicap in remaking Lang's *M*, Losey comments that

Obviously, there was never any American underworld like that. Particularly at that time. It made a kind of *mélange* of contemporary Los Angeles, 1920s Beggar's Opera, middle Europe which just couldn't mix. Certain scenes are very American and work very well – like the taxi-driver scenes, the scene in the barber's shop, the scene in the bar. But the meetings of the gang just didn't work at all. What I tried to suggest was the American Mafia Italians and big business, but I don't think it worked well.¹³⁷

Despite these shortcomings, Losey's underworld is more able to be related to than Lang's. In the original *M*, the underworld was "so completely separate a community, one is more willing to accept that the manhunt for the child-killer is a real threat to it."¹³⁸ Losey, on the other hand,

¹³⁷ Losey qt. in Ciment, M. (1985). *Conversations with Losey*. London, Methuen, p. 110

¹³⁸ Leahy, J. (1967). *The Cinema of Joseph Losey*. London, A. Zwemmer Ltd, p. 50

approaches the manhunt in a more Marxist manner. As indicated above, Losey's remake of *M* presented the underworld pursuing the murdered child as a combination of "American Mafia ... and big business."¹³⁹ *M*'s defense lawyer Langley is a voice of compassion as well as class conscience. He turns on his underworld boss, to whom he points the essential social question, "Who killed our children's hopes?" This is a thinly veiled attack on both the leaders of the underworld, and their legitimate business partners, who have a vested interest in maintaining society as it is. This is consistent with Losey's Marxist perspective, and possibly was as far as he could take it within the confines of the Hollywood studio system. Losey's point of view was that "society was responsible for him [M] and he was sick. And he was not to be judged by anybody excepting qualified medical people and in due process of law."¹⁴⁰ This innocuous 'message' soon became out of bounds for Hollywood 'message' films. It is unlikely that even such a limited indictment of the American Way could have been made a year later, after the second coming of HUAC. As William Wyler wryly observed, "bankers are out. Anyone holding a mortgage is out. Crooked public officials are out." This "scarcity of roles for villains" had "become a serious problem..."¹⁴¹

By this point, 1951, the era of liberal anticommunism was upon 'Red Hollywood.' Apart from capitalist villains, socialist film artists and critics were out. Perhaps the most devastating critique of the latter grouping comes from Andrew Sarris, who savaged its most prominent exponent in film art: "The totalitarians of the Left embraced Eisenstein and montage as the first step toward brainwashing humanity, but the cinema quickly lent its manipulative social powers to television.

¹³⁹ Ciment, M. (1985). *Conversations with Losey*. London, Methuen, p. 110

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Wyler qt. in Horne, G. (2006). *The Final Victim of the Blacklist: John Howard Lawson, Dean of the Hollywood Ten*. Berkeley, LA, University of California Press, p. 10

The cinema returned to formal excellence, abandoning the salvation of mankind as the criterion of cinema.”¹⁴² But then a Sarris-led (counter-)revolution in criticism arose out of the ruins of radical Hollywood, which also destroyed Eisenstein’s prestige. If Eisenstein is credited with resurrecting Meyerholdian avant-garde theatre and harmonizing it with cinematic art, then Losey should be credited with elevating American film art, or at least laying the initial theoretical groundwork for the aesthetic and political rejuvenation of American film, suppressed by the blacklist. Most of all, what Losey’s case demonstrates, is that the intellectual conditions existed in postwar American cinema for a decisive break from the dominant capitalist ideology as well as for an impetus to lend cinematic voice to the working-class majority, already a central preoccupation of postwar film gris. Such ‘proletarianised’ cinema would have fertilized any modernist and avant-garde seed, creating a renaissance of hybrid forms of American cinematic idiom, by now bogged down in the naturalism of police procedurals and other cinematic manifestations of an outdated style. The decisive impact of German expressionist émigrés is well documented. How the anti-Stalinist, Meyerholdian avant-garde could have enriched American film is anybody’s guess, but the simple fact that the world’s most dominant cinema, Hollywood, effectively exiled two of the foremost embodiments of cinematic modernism, Losey and Brecht, suggests precise political targeting by the witch-hunters. Even more than the cases of Polonsky and Rossen, discussed earlier, Losey and Brecht as left intellectuals and artists were the two principal bearers of modernism amid a context of sagging prospects of cinematic renaissance in Cold War America. The symbiotic relationship between Stalinism and McCarthyism was manifested in their specific division of labor: after the avant-garde, or Meyerholdian, impulse

¹⁴² Andrew Sarris qt. in Blauvelt, C. (2010). “*Battleship Potemkin* - Review.” Slant (April 19).

was extinguished by Stalin, it was left to the liberal (and non-liberal) anticommunists in the American Congress to sweep all of its other practitioners into the dustbin of history.¹⁴³

But unresolved historical issues are hard to bury, they always find a way to torment the living descendants of past wrongdoers. The cultural crimes of the anticommunist witch-hunters have left a lasting legacy in contemporary cinema. Losey's film art, however curtailed by the conservatism of the old studio system, preserves something of a counter-legacy of Meyerhold, a dialectical and materialist approach to storytelling. The irrationality of the events that occurred at Sleepy Lagoon only highlighted the need for filmmakers to view their complex world with a 'magnifying glass,' to again cite Mayakovsky, or as 'in a dream,' as Meyerhold's character Treplyev said on stage. Any innovation in artistic form that proceeds organically from this *educative endeavour* has a potential to bring film art up to speed with the social and political complexities of its time. Even in the late 1940s, an amorphous liberal approach to the representation of social problems on film was already lagging behind the rapid socio-political shifts in America. As evidenced in *The Lawless*, as contemporary as Mainwaring's scripts felt in the war years, it was only a few short years later, when the movie was shot, that these rapid shifts reinserted class as a dominant preoccupation of the mass audience. It took HUAC to reverse this trend forever.

Now Losey was forced into exile in the UK, there to realize his penchant for dramatizing the 'psychological injuries of class,' eventually finding in his collaborations with Harold Pinter someone of political and artistic kin. The results of their collaboration, *The Servant* (1963),

¹⁴³ Jon Lewis downplays the importance of Congress here and instead argues that the MPAA played a more critical role in this. (Correspondence with Jon Lewis, July 7, 2011)

Accident (1967), and *The Go-Between* (1970), have raised the prospect of a truly modernist cinema. An illustrative example is provided by Losey, when commenting on the game of tennis in *Accident*. As Losey said, referring to a social game of tennis, “This is a sort of Sunday afternoon brothel where nobody is pretending to play tennis – they’re playing sex.”¹⁴⁴ This is another Losey-esque instance of a ‘drama of perception,’ to redeploy Andersen’s phrase, a perspective which allows for surface layers of the appearance of things to be peeled back gradually, one by one, until the viewer is confronted with nothing but naked class relations between Bogard’s Stephen and the hapless Anna. Commenting on Losey and Pinter’s first film collaboration, *The Servant*, Buhle and Wagner said that the film “raised for the first time the prospect of an art cinema at once intelligent and uncompromising and as political as it needed be. *The Servant* was, then, “correctly seen as a hammer blow to the class system and would place it among the most memorable Marxist films ever made.”¹⁴⁵ Could one then link the film’s enigma to its director’s Marxist intelligence? Such an argument has enormous implications not only for assessing the legacy of the Red Scare which sought systematically to eliminate such intelligence, but also for the general ontology of cinema, the study of which increasingly gravitated towards the philosophical sphere of subjectivity, dominated by theories of spectatorship and race-, sex-, and gender-oriented identity politics. The Marxist politics, or intelligence, of Losey’s films, on the other hand, cut through these identities and subjectivities, foregrounding the material basis of modern society, defined by social class.

¹⁴⁴ Losey qt. in Nick James, I. C., Brad Stevens, Dylan Cave (2009). “Joseph Losey Harlod Pinter in Search of Poshluxe Times.” *Sight & Sound* 19.6: pp. 30-40.

¹⁴⁵ Buhle, P., and Wagner, Dave (2003). *Hide in Plain Sight: The Hollywood Blacklistees in Film and Television, 1950-2002*. NY, Palgrave MacMillan, p. 228

The final Pinter – Losey collaboration, *The Go-Between*, seems to confirm this suggestion. The generational conflict set off by the illicit love affair between Marian (Julie Christie) and a farmer (Alan Bates) is to be ended by her intended marriage to an aristocrat, the Viscount Trimingham (Edward Fox). These events take place in 1900, when the narrator of the story is 13, and is acting as the ‘go-between’ or a messenger, for the lovers in this affair. The cruelty of bourgeois morality is depicted at its most monstrous. The psychological effect of the film is fully harmonized with the director’s rather broad humanist intent. Losey felt, as he told a 1979 seminar on his work, that the “most important thing about *The Go-Between* was what became of the boy, what kind of man he became, and why and how he was destroyed.”¹⁴⁶ The film was, astoundingly, nearly twenty years in making,¹⁴⁷ and Losey’s Marxist perspective was decisive in how the film conducted its class critique. Taken as a whole, the three films of Losey and Pinter represent the highpoint of Marxian filmmaking during the blacklist and the most seamless marriage of high modernism and radical theatre possible at the time.

This summation of the final stage of Losey’s journey from Meyerhold to Pinter brings this chapter back to its opening, at the beginning of Losey’s artistic project of a ‘reconciliation of high modernism with radical theatre.’ Notwithstanding the fact that this artistic objective was never fully realized in New Hollywood, a brief window of opportunity opened up towards the end of the classical Hollywood era when it appeared that social *class* would reassert itself as a principal driver of social problem narratives, modeled on the 1930s radical theatre and, in rare cases such as Losey’s, the advances of the avant-garde movement in European drama. However, Losey’s anti-Stalinist brand of modernism was confronted with a double challenge from both the

¹⁴⁶ Losey, J. (1979). “Dialogue on Film: Joseph Losey.” *American Film* 6.2: pp. 53-60.

¹⁴⁷ Roud, R. (1979). “The Reluctant Exile: Joseph Losey.” *Sight and Sound* 48.3: pp. 145-153.

Stalinist and liberal-Democratic wings of the Popular Front fraternity, itself forced on a defensive footing by the encroaching Red Scare. The implications for serious cinematic exploration of the root social and historical causes of any complex mass phenomena related to American capitalism were quite grave. The social explosion at the center of the story of *The Lawless* was, for the socialist-minded Losey, as well as his liberal collaborator Mainwaring, a fairly routine cinematic exercise in the context of the pre-blacklist social problem film. Despite some irreconcilable political differences between the writer and director of this film, Losey's cinematic treatment of the Sleepy Lagoon incident highlights the timelessness of his core philosophical approach to such inexplicable social eruptions, an approach which places *class* above any other social category. And it is social *class* that served as powerful aesthetic cement that bound 'high modernism and radical theatre.' This project remains a lost possibility for American film art, its continued absence a lasting legacy of McCarthyism.

Chapter IV

Two Diametrically Opposed Responses to the Blacklist in Films About ‘Big Labour’: *On the Waterfront* and *Salt of the Earth*

March 21, 1999 saw another annual Oscar awards ceremony begin that should have unfolded like the industry’s previous extravaganzas, showcasing the best Hollywood achievements from the previous year. That year, however, two keynote awards presenters, Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro, looked anything but delighted and comfortable. Inside the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, according to even conservative estimates, well over half the audience refused to stand and applaud the recipient of the lifetime achievement award, Elia Kazan. Outside the venue some six to seven hundred people protested the award. This was without precedent in Hollywood Academy Awards history. Despite the fact that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences decision was announced on January 7, months before the ceremony, few could have foreseen the public relations fiasco that played out in Hollywood on that night. The striking feature of this historic gala evening is an obvious discord between the dominant sentiment inside the board of the Academy and the fiercely divided public opinion on the outside. The unanimous vote by the members of the Academy was a strong indication of a decisive ideological shift in their ranks, reflecting the broader sentiment in the film industry among those wealthy layers in the liberal milieu who felt that the time for ‘rethinking McCarthyism’ had finally arrived.

This was signalled by the foremost mouthpiece of liberal thought in America, *The New York Times*. Its October 18, 1998 issue included this comment by Ethan Bronner, “Witching Hour: Rethinking McCarthyism, if Not McCarthy,” indicating it was in favour of rehabilitating the witch-hunters. Citing “a flood of scholarship” on McCarthyism after the declassification of Soviet spy cables in 1995-6, the *Times* columnist favourably cites selected anticommunist historians – Ronald Radosh, Harvey Klehr, William F. Buckley, Jr. – who, for all the differences in their historical method, share the basic contention that the Soviet peril was real and the McCarthyist counteroffensive a necessary evil in American politics.¹ Bronner’s article cited a 1996 quotation from the UK’s *The Observer* which typified this Cold War liberal line of argument: “McCarthy has gone down as one of the most reviled men in U.S. history, but historians are now facing the unpleasant truth that he was right.”²

The revisionist bug seemed to have infected the entire political spectrum of the mass media, a few exceptions notwithstanding. For the most part, they warmly received the Academy board’s unanimous vote to give Kazan his lifetime award. David Freeman in the *Los Angeles Times* January 19, in a piece entitled “Kazan's Works May Now Outweigh His Transgressions,” reveals some underlying material considerations. He writes: “This award would have been unlikely without the end of the Cold War. Communism as an international force is spent. HUAC itself seems out of a black-and-white past. Though there are divisive issues today, the economy is good; Hollywood’s dominion in popular entertainment has never been stronger. It’s a good time

¹ Bronner, E. (1999). “Witching Hour: Rethinking McCarthyism, if Not McCarthy,” October 18, 1999. New York Times.

² Nicholas von Hoffman qt. in Ibid.

to set the house in order.”³ Indeed it was, as Wall Street was recording record levels of profit. Citing a study by New York University economist Edward N. Wolff, the *New York Times* reported that “Rarely in history has there been such a rapid minting of rich people.... Make the wealth cutoff \$10 million or more, and 275,000 households qualified in 1998, up from 190,000 in 1995, a 44.7 percent increase.” The other side of this process was the deterioration of the economic position of the overwhelming majority of the American people during the same period. “From his analysis of Federal Reserve data,” continues the *Times*, “Mr. Wolff gleans another insight: While net worth grew for the richest 10 percent of the nation’s households in recent years, the remaining 90 percent lost ground.”⁴ In other words, the social base of liberal anticommunism, or what Arthur Schlesinger Jr. would call the ‘vital center’ had, by the end of the century, shrunk to a mere 10%. In that context, Charles Maland’s concluding remark about the 1955 Oscars, in his 1982 reevaluation of *On the Waterfront*, would have certainly hit the mark in 1999: “It seems no surprise that the film was showered with Academy Awards in 1955: the film industry was merely welcoming another Prodigal Son back into the home of true Americanism.”⁵

However, at roughly the mid-point of the twentieth century, the anticommunist liberal constituency was in ascendance. It is, therefore, instructive to revisit the historical moment of the blacklist era when various strands of liberal anti-communism coalesced in Schlesinger’s 1955 manifesto of liberalism, *The Vital Center*. After the passage of four and a half decades, well after the dust settled over the ruins of a Soviet state which effectively had ceased acting as an

³ Freeman, D. (1999). “Kazan’s Work May Outweigh His Transgressions,” January 19, 1999. *Los Angeles Times*.

⁴ Uchitelle, L. (1999). “More Wealth, More Stately Mansions,” Jan 6, 1999. *New York Times*.

⁵ Maland, C. J. (1982). “*On the Waterfront* (1954): Film and the Dilemmas of American Liberalism in the McCarthy Era.” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 14.2: pp. 107-127.

ideological counterweight to the US, Schlesinger's perspective remained relevant, against the backdrop of the 1990s stock market boom fuelled by an unprecedented speculative orgy that seemed to reinforce the material foundations of the 'vital center.' By the 'vital centre' Schlesinger meant the centrist political perspective that acted as a buffer against both the communist and fascistic extremes.⁶

Schlesinger defended Kazan in a February 28, 1999 *NY Times* op-ed piece entitled "Hollywood Hypocrisy." He said that Kazan's "true offense in the minds of the Hollywood protesters is *that he informed on the Communist Party.*"⁷ Schlesinger, like many anti-communist liberals, failed to account for the *left* anti-Stalinists like Losey and Polonsky, whose Hollywood careers were destroyed by HUAC. Equating Stalinism with Socialism remains a basic feature of liberal thought. In his prologue to his 2005 biography of Kazan, Richard Schickel accuses the Communist Left in Hollywood of "illiberal behaviour" for allegedly failing to "own up to Stalin's crimes in a timely fashion." He extends this branding to the entire American left milieu for failing to "allude to it during the course of the Kazan controversy."⁸

But the American Left milieu was never homogenous. Figures such as Losey and Polonsky achieved a level of theoretical clarification sufficient to differentiate them from both capitalist and Stalinist ideologies. So for a talent like Polonsky, who shared Schlesinger's and Kazan's aversion to Stalinism, Kazan's lifetime award naturally provoked a sense of betrayal and disgust. This is what Polonsky told Patrick Goldstein of the *LA Times*: "I don't like Kazan, but I try not to

⁶ For further elaboration see Schlesinger Arthur, J. (1949). *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin.

⁷ Arthur Schlesinger, J. (1999). "Hollywood Hypocrisy," February 28, 1999. *New York Times*.

⁸ Schickel, R. (2005). *Elia Kazan: A Biography*. NY, Harper Collins, p. xxvi

confuse my moral hatreds with my aesthetic hatreds. He made a lot of good pictures, so you could say he deserves an award for his work—I just wouldn't want to give it to him. He was a creep. I wouldn't want to be wrecked on a desert island with him because if he was hungry, he would eat me alive.”⁹ This sense of betrayal was articulated more politely by an anti-Kazan writer, Michael Atkinson of *The Village Voice*, who stated an obvious fact that “there's no getting around the fact that somebody's getting a Lifetime Achievement Oscar this year for a long career they had during and after the blacklist, and somebody isn't getting one for a long career they didn't have *because* of the blacklist.”¹⁰ The right-wing was, as usual, not pulling punches. In a piece published in the *Weekly Standard* (“The Rehabilitation of Elia Kazan”) Stephen Schwartz wrote that “a long-standing and bitter injustice will be rectified.” He continues: “Now, what amounts to Kazan's rehabilitation after decades of blackballing and smears marks a notable breach of the Iron Curtain that has long surrounded Hollywood's collective memory.”¹¹ However, the controversy surrounding the 1999 Oscars did not reset ‘Hollywood's collective memory.’ Rather, like any unresolved and suppressed historical issue, it had to resurface, sooner or later, with a renewed force corresponding to the historical weight of its contradictions, sufficient to break through the polite façade of the established discourse. During the Red Scare hysteria, which in itself was a reflection of the perceived material and ideological strength of the Soviet Union at the time, the suppression of a social-realist docudrama *Salt of the Earth* was deemed objectively necessary in the early stages of a Cold War propaganda war waged in defence of the American Way. That same year, 1954, *On the Waterfront* conquered the Oscars, rubberstamping the prevailing Hollywood discourse of the time. Forty-five years

⁹ Goldstein, P. (1999). “Film Director Elia Kazan to Receive Oscar, Forgiveness,” January 10, 1999. Los Angeles Times.

¹⁰ Atkinson, M. (1999). “The Anti-Kazan.” The Village Voice (Mar 16).

¹¹ Schwartz, S. (1999). “The Rehabilitation of Elia Kazan.” Weekly Standard. 4.20 (8 February)

later, with sufficient time elapsed since the demise of the ‘evil empire,’ ‘The Prodigal Son’ is back again, hailed by the cultural and political establishment.

Kazan’s rehabilitation reflects far broader socio-political shifts, manifested in the erosion of proletarian culture in American film. Since this protracted process can be attributed directly to McCarthyism, this elemental shift in the ‘social problem’ film will form the central preoccupation of this chapter. Also, this major theme of necessity draws some attention to what was “[l]argely forgotten in the flurry of protest over Kazan’s award,” that is, the movie that “exists in striking counterpoint to *Waterfront* and that illustrates what happened to those whose names are named, *Salt of the Earth*.”¹² Although *Salt* will be discussed in the next chapter, its brief appearance in this chapter is intended as a ‘striking counterpoint’ calculated to put *Waterfront* into a sharper relief. As Dennis Broe put it, “One of the starkest ways” to describe *Waterfront* is to “set it off in contrast” with *Salt*. Here Broe relates the reactions to these Hollywood classics, “both of which purported to deal in an almost documentary way with American labour,” and which “could not have been more strikingly opposite,” to their relative positions on labour: Kazan’s film promotes an “accommodationist view of labour as passive, corrupt and needing to be regulated,” while Biberman, Jarrico and Wilson allow a “strong Cultural Front view” of organised and radicalised labour to emerge.¹³ Or, rephrased in the language of official Hollywood union politics of the time, “*Salt of the Earth* is the fulfillment both in its content and its means of production of Herb Sorrell’s vision of the CSU as leading a radical crafts and creative union alliance whereas *On The Waterfront* is the fulfilment of Roy Brewer’s vision of a fractured, divided, union, paralyzed by investigation while the owners, a

¹² Sefcovic, E. (2002). “Cultural Memory and the Cultural Legacy of Individualism and Community in Two Classic Films about Labor Unions.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19.3 (Sep): 330.

¹³ Broe, D. (2001). *Outside the Law: Labor and the crime Film 1941 - 55*, PhD Thesis, New York University, p. 528

nonentity in the film, sit back silently and smirk.”¹⁴ Brewer, International Representative of IATSE, was instrumental in shifting the narrative axis of Schulberg’s screenplay for *Waterfront* from gangsterism to anticommunism.

Brewer’s political interventions can serve to further crystallise the historical perspective adopted by this chapter, which argues that it is only within a broad sweep of history that the two highlights of Kazan’s career discussed above could fit into the objective logic of the post-war Hollywood narrative. But an even clearer perspective is afforded by a present day context. More than a decade after Kazan’s lifetime award, one can discern that in the broader historical context of the evolution of post-Cold War capitalism, the period around 1999 represented a fairly short window of opportunity to do away with, once and for all, the ideological remnants of the Soviet-era, before the cracks in the ‘vital centre’ of American democracy became gaping holes. A mere decade later, the US media widely acknowledges that the first decade of the 21st century was a disastrous one for American society. *Time* magazine’s headline read, “Goodbye (at Last) to the Decade from Hell.”¹⁵ But in 1999, the broad layers of the ex-Stalinists and/or liberals, many of whom now comprise the Hollywood elite, no doubt felt liberated from the decades-long ideological grip of the Soviet Union. The counteroffensive in film criticism against the sociological imperative, began by figures like Sarris and Kael in the aftermath of the blacklist, is experiencing a revival. Today this is manifested in what a socialist film critic David Walsh, speaking on “Socialism and Cinema,” describes as a certain tendency among filmmakers to “avoid economic conditions, the conditions of everyday life, changes in social life” when dealing

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 530

¹⁵ Serwer, A. (2009). “The 00s: Goodbye (At Last) to the Decade From Hell,” *Time*. Nov 24.

with individual issues.¹⁶ Charles Maland describes a similar process of subjectivist adaptation within the newly established discipline of film studies manifested in the emergence of the essentially anti-Marxist “New Criticism,” along with a plethora of “structuralist” and American-oriented theories.¹⁷ Nora Sayre, in her influential study of the blacklist cinema, *Running Time*, recalls the intellectual impact of New Criticism during her college days in the 1960s, a period which she describes as a “synthetic safety zone,” equally “inaccessible to the remnants of the Left or the evangelists of the Right.”¹⁸ As for the “[a]political aspects of the Fifties,” Sayre emphasises “New Criticism,” which “seemed to imply that history itself was not significant, that a poem or a novel or a play should be read ‘apart from its time,’ detached from its era.”¹⁹ In his essay, “The Idealism of American Criticism,” Terry Eagleton provides a useful historical and theoretical context for this embrace of artistic detachment by the proponents of New Criticism. While Eagleton is referring to American literary criticism, his ideas seem very applicable to film art. “New Criticism couched its anti-scientism in toughly ‘objectivist’ terms,” writes Eagleton, in which poems had a “structure of complex tensions cut loose from the flux of history and authorial intention.” This means that critical analysis “mimed the reifying habits of industrial capitalism even as it resisted them,” promising to “scoop up a contemplative space within the Cold War.”²⁰ Few passages could so aptly describe attempts to separate Kazan’s art and politics, effectively depoliticizing his actions.

¹⁶ Walsh, D. 2010. ‘*Socialism and Cinema: Screens and Meditations*’. University of Salford, Manchester, 25 October. (talk delivered at a meeting <<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/nov2010/cine-n10.shtml>> at 10 November 2010).

¹⁷ Maland, C. J. (1982). “*On the Waterfront* (1954): Film and the Dilemmas of American Liberalism in the McCarthy Era.” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 14.2: pp. 107-127.

¹⁸ Sayre, N. (1978). *Running Time: The Films of the Cold War*. NY: The Dial Press, p. 4

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 24

²⁰ Eagleton, T. (1986). “The Idealism of American Criticism.” *Against the Grain: Essays 1975-1985*. London, Verso: pp. 49-64.

This core liberal position was articulated by some prominent commentators who suggested that Kazan's filmmaking was being honoured by the Academy, not his politics. Ellen Schrecker, an authority on McCarthyism, told the *Times*' Weinraub: "Although I certainly don't approve of what Kazan did during the McCarthy period ... one can maybe learn a lesson from Bill Clinton and compartmentalize, and separate Kazan, the informer, and Kazan, the artist." Victor Navasky, author of *Naming Names*, commented: "First of all, it's a human thing.... He's not physically well and he made this great cinematic contribution. Second is, with the passage of time, some of the passions have cooled and things are being put in a different perspective."²¹ While the "quotation suggests less that Navasky forgives and forgets than is willing to understand why (though it may be wrong) to honor Kazan before he dies,"²² that was not how Navasky read the HUAC controversy surrounding *On the Waterfront* in 1980, when he published *Naming Names*, and when the political and ideological presence of the USSR was still a central feature of popular discourse: "[*Waterfront*] makes the definitive case for the HUAC informer or at least is – among its considerable other achievements – a valiant attempt to complicate the public perception of the issue.... Whatever else it may be, *Waterfront* seems an allegory for 1950s anti-Communism, with the Waterfront Crime Commission an analog for HUAC..."²³

It is therefore no accident that at this particular historical conjuncture between the high point of the anti-Soviet triumphalism and the ideological rock-bottom of Stalinism, the board of the Academy chose Kazan, a perfect embodiment of its own political orientation in the late 1990s, as the recipient of the 1999 lifetime achievement award. Indeed, Kazan's own method – as the

²¹ Ellen Schrecker and Victory Navasky in Weinraub, B. (1999). "The Nation: Testimonial; Time Frees the Hollywood One". *New York Times*, Jan 22.

²² Correspondence with Jon Lewis, July 15, 2011

²³ Navasky, V. (1980). *Naming Names*. NY, Hill and Wang, pp. 209-10

‘actors director’ or the ‘Method’ director, with his fidelity to the ‘American style’ of realism – coupled with his organic anticommunism gradually estranged him from the traditional ‘social problem’ paradigm of the Popular Front era and drew him into the Freudian orbit. Within the context of the broader post-war political shifts, Kazan’s aversion to Marxism and attraction to Freudian psychology expressed in aesthetic terms the objective needs of American capitalism at the time. Geoffrey Hodgson articulated the liberal foundations of these shifting post-war objectives when he labelled it “the Ideology of Liberal Consensus,” that rested on sound economic foundations, where all the social problems could be solved by experts and managers, thus eliminating the need for the class struggle of the pre-war years.²⁴ Interestingly, notes Maland, Kazan’s directing career after *Waterfront* reflects this shift: before *Waterfront* his films are “generally more concerned with political and social conflict,” whereas the films afterwards “tend to be more overtly psychological,” with the exception of *Face in the Crowd* (1957).²⁵

In that film, Andy Griffith is a country singer and huckster who becomes a huge television star and the agent of a fascistic US senator. This bold synthesis of modernist reflexivity and Brechtian *educative endeavour* was, nevertheless, tamed by the melodramatic mode of the film. However, in *Waterfront* the melodrama performs a far more central role in shaping the morality of the narrative. This is echoed in Penelope Houston’s 1954 review of *Waterfront*, which she saw as an “example of a type of film which traditionally finds Hollywood at its most expert: the melodrama with a stiffening of serious ideas, the journalistic expose of crime and corruption.” However, Kazan’s ‘journalistic expose,’ “seem[s] to have reached a point halfway between the

²⁴ Hodgson, G. (1976). *America in Our Time*. NY, Doubleday, p. 75

²⁵ Maland, C. J. (1982). “*On the Waterfront* (1954): Film and the Dilemmas of American Liberalism in the McCarthy Era.” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 14.2: pp. 107-127.

studio and the real,” evident in the carefully set up mise-en-scene of Johnny’s bar, for instance. But to the reviewer the symptomatic problem of Kazan’s surface realism was displayed in the scene where Terry has to tell Eddie about his role in her brother’s murder: at the crucial moment, Terry’s voice is drowned by a bellowing ship’s siren. If the film was “presented as no more than melodrama, the trick would seem acceptable enough,” argues Houston, adding that “in building up his subject as he has, Kazan has foregone his right to evade so crucial a stage in this particular relationship.” To Houston this scene sums up the film: “excitement is whipped up, attitudes are struck, but the incidental detail blots out the human situation and - though it is not for want of trying – the transition from melodrama to drama is never made.”²⁶

Did Kazan make that transition after being freed from the constraints of the traditional Hollywood social problem film? Denise Mann describes *A Face in the Crowd* as an exercise in “pursuing an effective balance of avant-garde and pulp,” which seemed to offer audiences the best of both worlds, i.e., “a comfortable position of identification with Marcia’s romantic angst...and to accept their implications in...the ideological forces at work in postwar capitalism.”²⁷ However, this interpretation seems to read a little too much into Kazan’s strenuous efforts, sometimes bordering on the semi-hysterical, to prove his progressive views through Andy Griffith’s heightened emotionalism. This method of directing is consistent with Kazan’s modernist reflexivity that targets *visible* aspects of capitalism. Losey’s reflexivity, on the other hand, especially the applied Marxism evident in his psycho-sexual dramas made with Pinter, is probingly applied to dissect the *invisible* web of British class relations. In America, Polonsky

²⁶ Houston, P. (2003)[1954]. “*On the Waterfront*: A Review.” *On the Waterfront*. J. E. Rapf, Cambridge University Press: pp. 158-161.

²⁷ Mann, D. (2008). *Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, p. 191

makes full use of the generic noir conventions to perform ‘an autopsy on capitalism’ (Andersen op cit). Kazan espoused an essentially liberal perspective, preventing him, in Mann’s words, from “replicating the type of countercultural aesthetic adopted by Brecht” or aspiring to emulate these modernists within acceptable liberal boundaries, “unwilling to jettison the last vestiges of commerciality.”²⁸ This compromised political aesthetic is manifested in *Waterfront* which is, according to Maland, “less than ‘progressive,’ in the late 1930s sense of the term,” but which nevertheless, allowed the director to “fulfil the liberal commitment to topical art of a significant social problem.”²⁹ Indeed, one obvious American film tradition that *On the Waterfront* recalls, according to Neve, is that of the “topicals,” films such as *Marked Woman* and *Racket Busters* made by Robert Rossen at Warners in the 1930s. Neve notes that “both were turned out quickly while exploiting interest in working class stories that were making headline news.”³⁰ As Braudy aptly surmises, “Kazan’s desire to make an ‘Eastern’ dealing with a social problem, like Schulberg’s immersion in the conflicts down at the Manhattan waterfront, have the air of an effort to return to those concerns that had animated their politics, and their art, from the beginning.”³¹ Michael Denning also goes so far as to see *On the Waterfront* in terms of the continuing impact of the traditions of what he calls “ghetto pastorals and proletarian thrillers, a combination of the proletarian avant-garde and the Hollywood Popular Front of Schulberg.”³²

In Chapter One I discussed how Paula Rabinowitz problematises Denning’s uncritical acceptance of a broad cultural “forcefield,” or proletarian ‘cultural front,’ often at the expense of

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Maland, C. J. (1982). “*On the Waterfront* (1954): Film and the Dilemmas of American Liberalism in the McCarthy Era.” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 14.2: pp. 107-127.

³⁰ Neve, B. (2003). “The Personal and the Political: Elia Kazan and *On the Waterfront*.” *On the Waterfront*. J. E. Rapf. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: pp. 20-39.

³¹ Braudy, L. (2005). *On the Waterfront*. London, BFI, p. 22

³² Denning, M. (1996). *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London, NY, Verso, p. 257

“the class analysis” central to avant-gardists like Losey or Polonsky.³³ Kazan’s progressivism, on the other hand, was flexible enough to serve his *auteurist* vision without pushing the political boundaries of the day.

For his part, Kazan has spoken his aesthetic and political mind frankly in numerous interviews. In summing up his philosophy of directing, Kazan said in 1962 that “The important thing is that you be truthful, that you put on the screen what you feel.”³⁴ A revealing exchange took place in a 1976 American Film Institute symposium on Kazan’s work. Asked whether “the more personal you get in your films, the more you lose your dramatic objectivity,” the director replied, “I guess so. I don’t give a damn, though.” Kazan continued: “The unwritten premise of every director, in my opinion, is this: If it moves me, it’s going to move a lot of other people. Sometimes a lot of other people; sometimes a few other people. If you finally are saying, whom do you make them for, you make them for yourself. I think that’s the same reason painters paint.”³⁵ The significance of this exchange is not so much Kazan’s open championing of his individualism and intuition and the eschewing of his past sense of social responsibility – Kazan never concealed his anticommunism after his past principles became criminalised – but the aesthetic implications of anchoring actors in their subjectivities rather than their objective circumstances. Such recourse to individualism was sharply at odds with his early theatrical days in the crucible of American Stalinism, the Group Theatre. Bearing a unique honour at the time of being the most sought-after director in both film and theatre, his testimony helped consolidate the Hollywood blacklist.

Kazan’s collaboration with the HUAC inquisitors was a logical culmination of the Faustian

³³ Rabinowitz, P. (2002). “Hollywood Modernism (book review).” *Cineaste* 27.2: pp. 54-55.

³⁴ Bean, R. (1962). “Elia Kazan on ‘The Young Agony’”. in Baer, W., ed. 2000. *Elia Kazan: Interviews*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, pp. 43-50.

³⁵ Kazan, E. (1976). “The American Film Institute ‘Dialogue on Film: Elia Kazan’”. *American Film* 1.5 (March): pp. 33-45.

bargain that he, along with his Communist comrades in the 1930s and 40s, entered into during the Popular Front years. After the death of Roosevelt and the virtual extinction of the New Deal, and suddenly deprived of their Stalinist sense of purpose, Kazan and a significant section of the filmmaking community and the American liberal intelligentsia, chose to strike a 'devil's bargain' with anti-Communism. That this filmmaker could immortalise his newly adopted life principle of ratting on one's comrades in his 1954 working-class drama, *On the Waterfront*, is significant not only for its seamless marriage of a proletarian milieu with overt anticommunism, but more crucially for reorienting the axis of American 'social problem' drama from the social to the individual sphere, something spectacularly manifested in Brando's acting.

But Brando's extraordinary intuition was a by-product of his times, and nurtured by a completely different culture steeped in a predominantly working-class ethos. This was articulated by Kazan himself, when he discussed the new generation of 1960s actors, after the cultural shift. Kazan complained that "It is very difficult to work with actors. Because the life that most of them live is a life of cafes. There is the school, the café, the stage, the studios.... Life cannot leave its mark on their faces. They do not live the despairing life that human beings live. They are for the most part childish, spoiled, plump, their faces have not been distorted or illuminated...in short, they do not bear on them the marks of life lived." That is why Brando, at the time of *Waterfront*, "was a much better actor than he is now" because "one felt that nothing protected him from life, that he was in the midst of it."³⁶ These fascinating insights into the lost working-class soul of American drama go a long way towards explaining the apparent inability of contemporary American cinema to recapture the Common Man the way its classical Hollywood predecessors managed to

³⁶ Delahaye, M. (1967). "Interview with Elia Kazan, 1966." *Cahiers du Cinema in English* 9 (March): pp. 13-35.

so routinely and seamlessly, so much so that it incurred the full wrath of the anticommunist inquisition.

While *Salt* and *Waterfront* share a commitment to authenticity in their efforts to capture the Common Man, creatively these labour films expressed two diametrically opposed conceptions of Big Labour. This was manifested most dramatically in the political establishment's two totally different reactions to these seminal American films, which reflected in the political sphere their key strategic considerations. As Enid Sefcovic explains,

The commemoration of Kazan's aesthetic achievements, the ties between Kazan's political life and his aesthetic work, and the suppression of *Salt of the Earth* and those who worked on it, constitute not only a representative anecdote providing a window on crucial components of the cultural memory of the U.S., but also an instructive example for generating theoretical insight into the production of cultural memory through our national cinema.³⁷

The drama surrounding the 1999 Oscars showed that the 'cultural memory' produced by these two 1954 classics was back with a vengeance.

Before the social class was consigned to American 'cultural memory,' Arthur Miller learned about the political pitfalls of fictionalising American class relations when his rendition of the New York waterfront troubles, *The Hook*, was eschewed in favour of Schulberg's *Waterfront*, which was far more attuned to American individualism. Stuart Hall, writing in 1979, identifies individualism as one of "a whole set of theories, images, representations, and discourses" which

³⁷ Sefcovic, E. (2002). "Cultural Memory and the Cultural Legacy of Individualism and Community in Two Classic Films about Labor Unions." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19.3 (Sep): 330.

form the last line of defence of the inequitable status quo. Individualism, he argues, is predicated upon a myth that “anyone can make it”, when, in fact, the evidently increasing social inequality ensures that only select individuals ‘can make it.’³⁸ Terry, a classical Cold War hero, fits perfectly into this setup.

It is in this political context that Kazan’s rise to directorial preeminence should be viewed. As John Lahr, in his foreword to *Kazan on Directing*, argues, high demand for Kazan also

coincided with a crucial psychic shift in American culture. Between 1945 and 1955, the per capita American income nearly tripled, the greatest increase in individual wealth in the history of Western civilization.... The hegemony of America’s political and economic power was also played out on an individual level. The kingdom of self, not society, became the nation’s obsession. Public discourse shifted from the external to the internal: from social realism to abstract expressionism; from stage naturalism to Williams’s personal lyricism, from Marxism to Freudianism. This mutation in the collective imagination suited Kazan’s particular directorial skill set, which understood about the subconscious and the power of the subtext.... In his actors and in the stories he told, Kazan’s particular gift was to highlight and to release the interior drama of conflicting desires. Kazan’s great contribution was to discover a theatrical vocabulary that turned psychology into behaviour. ‘My work would be to turn the inner events of the psyche into a choreography of external life,’ he said. He brought a new dynamism to the winded, baggy American theatre.³⁹

³⁸ Stewart Hall in Curran, M. G. J., Woollacot, J. (1979). “Culture, the media and the ‘ideological effect’”. *Mass Communication and Society*. Beverly Hills, Sage: 324.

³⁹ Foreword, John Lahr Kazan, E. (2009). *Kazan on Directing*. NY, Alfred A. Knoph, pp. x-xi

As important as the director's personal impulses and motivations are, the contention of this thesis is that sharp shifts in the political and cultural discourse were of a more decisive character. The most crucial political component of the early Cold War Hollywood Left was its relationship to Stalinism in general and Big Labour in particular. The blacklisted creators of *Salt* learned the hard way the consequences of straying from the prescribed Stalinist line. This is what Paul Jarrico told Rosenfelt: "The Mine, Mill, and Smelters Workers Union was constantly under attack for being a left wing union. It was kicked out of the CIO in 1949 for being a left wing union. We were kicked out of Hollywood for the same reasons. So if there was some similarity in the thinking, it was no accident."⁴⁰ While Jarrico's clash with Big Labour did not repel him from his Stalinist adversaries, in Kazan's case it caused something of an identity crisis. As he said in a 1976 interview: "I was bewildered. I was anti-Stalinist and anti-McCarthy at the same time. It was difficult to reconcile the two."⁴¹ But he did reconcile the two ideologies. As this thesis contends, the two antagonistic ideologies represented two sides of the same anti-Marxist coin. (That is largely why the two Marxist—oriented subjects of this study, Polonsky and Losey, could never *reconcile* the antidemocratic tendencies inimical to their socialist being.) The stories behind the stories of the two classic Big Labour films clearly position their creators in two completely different anti-Stalinist camps of the early Cold War America. While Biberman's and Jarrico's anti-Stalinism led them to a choice of a 'lesser evil' in Big Labour, Kazan renounced all levels of its organisation. However, the core proletarian impulses that animated his early work were still inseparable from his creative being, and they remained in an uneasy coexistence with his newly adopted anticommunist liberalism.

⁴⁰ Rosenfelt in Rosenfelt, D. S., & Wilson, M., Ed. (1978). *Commentary in Salt of the Earth [screenplay with commentary by Rosenfelt]*. NY, Feminist Press, p. 96

⁴¹ Vanderwood, P. (1979). "An American Cold Warrior: *Viva Zapata!*". *American History/American Film*. J. O'Connor, & Jackson, Martin. NY, Ungar: pp. 189-190.

Just as Jarrico, Biberman, Lazarus and other Popular Front radicals committed their career-ending ‘crime to fit the punishment,’ Kazan proved that his old radicalism still formed at least a kernel of his artistic being before being suppressed by HUAC. *Viva Zapata!* was Kazan's personal equivalent of Biberman's ‘last hurrah’ of the Communist Party principles, soon to be renounced by the filmmaker. Yet, in terms of Kazan’s politics, Neve reads *Zapata* as the filmmaker’s “most revealing” film, presenting Fernando as a “Stalinist heavy.”⁴² In that sense, Kazan fully conforms to his writer Schulberg’s characterisation of a ‘premature anti-Stalinist.’ In regard to the figure and the historical issues surrounding Zapata, Kazan found in the person of John Steinbeck a kindred spirit who was also inspired by this Mexican revolutionary. Both were “reaching for some way to express our feelings of being Left and progressive, but at the same time anti-Stalinist.” Kazan continued, “We were interested in his tragic dilemma: after you get power, after you make revolution, what do you do with the power and what kind of structure do you build?”⁴³ The paramount importance of this dilemma should not be underestimated when dealing with any serious artist growing up in the shadow of the Russian Revolution. The vexing question of who takes political power after revolution presented the left intelligentsia with its toughest psychological and political barrier to full commitment to the revolutionary cause. What will become of the revolutionary leaders after taking power largely determined whether a politically conscious intellectual threw him/herself into the good cause or remained an armchair revolutionary.

⁴² Neve, B. (2003). “The Personal and the Political: Elia Kazan and *On the Waterfront*.” *On the Waterfront*. J. E. Rapf. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: pp. 20-39.

⁴³ Ciment, M. (1974). The Political Issues; The HUAC: *Viva Zapata!* (1951), *Man on a Tightrope* (1952). *Kazan on Kazan*. M. Ciment, Viking, p. 163

Zapata therefore provides an instructive snapshot into the final moments of American Cold War discourse where revolutionary idealism still formed an integral, and subversive, aspect. Kazan stated that

Zapata was the first film I made which was autobiographical...my self-questioning was beginning.... He felt about things as I was beginning to feel about my own situation. So all these three things – the fact that he was externally colorful and interesting, the fact that he represented a Left position that was anti-authoritarian, and the fact that in some way he was related to my life story, at that point in my life – were reasons why I became so interested in the subject.⁴⁴

Kazan's fascinating elaboration of his attraction to Zapata brings up a revealing comparison with the subject of the previous chapter, Losey, whose anti-Stalinism drew him, eventually, in the opposite direction, towards the anti-Stalinist-in-chief, Trotsky. In that basic sense it is not accidental that Losey embraced Marx through Meyerhold while Kazan became immured in Freud through Stanislavsky. While a significant period of time separates Kazan's and Losey's personal filmic essays on anti-Stalinism – *Zapata* was made in 1952 and *The Assassination of Trotsky* in 1973 – in both cases the filmmakers were allowed creative period for their definitive political statements to percolate and synthesise. (Kazan had the benefit of almost three decades of strategic historical lessons since the outbreak of the decisive power struggle in the first workers' state, while Losey had a little over that same period of time to think over the central event of his film, the 1940 assassination of its co-leader.) However, these tales of two anti-Stalinisms reflected two completely different political discourses. While Losey had to flee anti-communist America, Kazan was enjoying life in the spotlight. He emphatically reassured the

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 163-64

film's producer Darryl Zanuck that *Zapata's* politics were quite safe for domestic consumption, emphasising its "pro-democratic, but [sic] specifically, strongly, and incontrovertibly anti-Communist" stance, embodied in the treacherous figure of Zapata's slayer, Fernando Aguerro.⁴⁵

In this period 'anti-Communist' equalled anti-Stalinist. Here, Andrew Ross's history of intellectualism and populism in America is as relevant as it was for Losey's cinema, discussed in previous chapter. This is particularly so, since, according to his characterisation of American left intellectuals in the early Cold War years, "Anti-Stalinism mutated into Stalinophobia."⁴⁶ In *Zapata*, it is Aguerro that personifies this phobia. However, for all its 'pro-democratic' and 'anti-Communist' pretences, the tragic fate of Brando's Zapata did more to align Kazan's film to the objective logic of the Russian Revolution than the 'American Way.' Hence *Zapata* is as close as Kazan got to Trotsky. In *Zapata*, whether Kazan was conscious of it or not, in his great moment of artistic candour, he was articulating Trotsky's concept of the permanent revolution, naturally, framed through the prism of a liberal outlook. He explains that

We were very conscious that it could be taken to be saying that the revolution was futile. But we tried very definitely to avoid that by saying, at the end, 'The people still think of him, he's still alive,' that at the end he was trying to create the revolution again, that he did educate himself to a point – in other words, we tried to say that there *is* a next step, that he was beginning to find it, and that he didn't. We had that in mind, anyway. And, at the end, the ritualistic Leftist becomes a murderer and kills Zapata.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Gadg's letter to Zanuck, Jan 29, 1952, qt. in Kazan, E. (2009). *Kazan on Directing*. NY, Alfred A. Knoph, pp. 170-71

⁴⁶ Ross, A. (1989). *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture*. New York, Routledge, p. 220

⁴⁷ Ciment, M. (1974). The Political Issues; The HUAC: *Viva Zapata!* (1951), *Man on a Tightrope* (1952). *Kazan on Kazan*. M. Ciment, Viking, p. 167

However consciously the theory of the ‘permanent revolution’ infused *Zapata*, the dramatization of its erosion by Stalinist opportunism was powerfully personified in Brando’s Zapata, his moment of triumph unleashing the full weight of the political reaction that eventually eliminated him. Just as Trotsky and other Bolshevik leaders died at the hands of their erstwhile collaborator, Stalin, so did Zapata’s right-hand man Fernando Aguirre eliminate his revolutionary leader. And Kazan confirms his intention to allow the outer historical forces to be thrust upon Brando. He said in an interview that “Brando’s character is not elaborated, and it’s not interesting qua psychology. My interest in that picture was in the sweep of the events.”⁴⁸ In other words, *Zapata* represents Kazan in his relatively brief Marxian rather than Freudian period. But the political pressures of the early fifties proved decisive. Discussing the “long gestation period of *Zapata*,” Neve argues that “[d]espite Kazan’s greater cinematic self-confidence, the political pressures of the time led to a shift in interest from Zapatismo to Stalinism.”⁴⁹ In other words, Kazan’s anti-Communism was driven less and less by anti-Stalinism, as will be spectacularly manifested in *Waterfront*, where gangsters seem interchangeable with Stalinist bureaucracy. As Jeffrey Chown observes, in *Waterfront* the source of “the most vivid exploitation” of the dockers is the workers’ leadership – Johnny Friendly too rose through the ranks of the apparatus.⁵⁰ Ironically, Kazan’s protracted shift ‘from Zapatismo to Stalinism’ began during the realisation of *Zapata* which, paradoxically, brought up some of Kazan’s most deeply buried revolutionary sentiments – for the final time, as it turned out, before his political makeover. In that sense it is worth reiterating the message that Kazan intended to be contained in the death of Zapata, that ‘there is a next step.’ Or, viewed through the prism of the historical events that inspired *Zapata*, even if Stalin’s regime

⁴⁸ Kazan, E. (2009). *Kazan on Directing*. NY, Alfred A. Knoph, p. 168

⁴⁹ Neve, B. (1981). “The 1950s: The Case of Elia Kazan and *On the Waterfront*.” *Cinema, Politics and Society in America*. P. Davies, & Neve, Brian. Manchester, Manchester University Press: 97-118.

⁵⁰ Chown, J. (2003). “Visual Coding and Social Class in *On the Waterfront*.” *On the Waterfront*. J. E. Rapf. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: pp. 106-123.

‘became reactionary and repressive,’ there were ‘forward thinking and progressive’ Bolsheviks who could have mustered sufficient political force to rectify the situation. Such wishful thinking persisted during the Popular Front period, an era which gave rise to federally funded cultural projects, such as the Group Theatre.

Kazan’s politics and aesthetics were intimately bound up with the legacy of his time with the Group Theatre. He recalled being instructed, as an elected representative of the Group actors, to urge the “‘democratisation’ of the way the Group made decisions.” V.J. Jerome, a CP official in charge of cultural affairs, also issued “instructions” in the actors’ committee, which Kazan alone opposed, and for his dissent was summoned to a meeting with the “Man from Detroit,” an Auto Workers Union boss. Kazan saw this as “part of the Communist Party’s general interference with the arts in America.”⁵¹ It is telling that the very same process of ‘democratisation’ was ruthlessly suppressed in the Mine-Mill, the union behind *Salt of the Earth*. In the production and distribution saga of this pro-union film, the part of the ‘Man from Detroit’ was played to great acclaim by IATSE’s Roy Brewer. The clash with the UAW’s ‘Man from Detroit’ pushed Kazan further into the welcoming arms of the liberal anticommunist intelligentsia. Kazan found intellectual and ideological support for his actions in two of the foremost anti-communist liberals, Sidney Hook and Bertram D. Wolfe. Hook’s early fifties anti-Stalinist manifesto, “Heresy No, Conspiracy Yes,” was published as a pamphlet by the American Committee for Cultural Freedom (ACCF).⁵² Interestingly, this organisation was a CIA front, which, according to Philip French’s recent study of Cold War cinema, which was “not concerned with intelligence and espionage,” but brought together the “New England Wasp establishment and the largely

⁵¹ Smith, W. (1990). *Real Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1933-1940*. NY, Alfred A. Knoph, p. 253

⁵² Neve, B. (2009). *Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider*. London, NY, I. B. Tauris, p. 66

Jewish New York intelligentsia” that had experienced “both Stalinism and Trotskyism and elected to be anti-communist liberals.” Their aim was to “rally left-wing and liberal opinion” towards anticommunism and “a positive but not uncritical pro-Americanism.”⁵³ This seemed tailor-suited to Kazan’s political needs at the time. He wrote to Hook that “The very fact that there are liberals and leftists who are actively anticommunist makes some sense of the chaos for me. (You may well ask: Where the hell have you been all this time? My answer wouldn’t be satisfactory.)”⁵⁴ In fact, to ease Kazan’s, and one suspects his own, conscience, Wolfe sent his friend a paper that he presented at the Waldorf Conference in Defense of Free Culture in New York, in March 1952, under the auspices of the ACCF. Wolfe’s paper referred to Shostakovich, Meyerhold and Eisenstein, among others, as “the long and tragic list of heroes of culture that the total[itarian] state has martyred.”⁵⁵

Such liberal anti-communism endowed Kazan with a sufficiently strong moral shield against attacks on *Waterfront* as a defence of informing.⁵⁶ Cloaking this in his artistic objective of authenticity and realism, he said that

it’s not the main thing in the film. To say that we made the film as a defence of that just isn’t so. Because that’s exactly what happened on the waterfront. The story is based on the experiences of a real person: I used to have dinner with him all the time. Schulberg and I went over there while the inquest was going on. And it happens again and again. It

⁵³ French, P. (2011). “I Found It at the Movies: Reflections of a Cinephile”. The Cold War and the American Cinema. London, Carcanet: pp. 257-275.

⁵⁴ Radosh, R., & Radosh, Allis (2005). Red Star Over Hollywood: The Film Colony's Long Romance with the Left. San Francisco, Encounter Books, p. 187.

⁵⁵ Neve, B. (2009). Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider. London, NY, I. B. Tauris, pp. 71-72

⁵⁶ Kazan’s anticommunism does not contradict his liberal outlook. As Jon Lewis observes, “these are not just labels. Kazan was pro-civil rights (Pinky), for example, and, he would have been at almost any other time a good Hollywood liberal (like George Clooney) – but we can’t choose when we’re born nor when we work.” (Correspondence with Lewis, July 15, 2011)

happens at all these mafia trials. Silence, silence, silence.... That's a very characteristic and very genuine inner conflict of a man.⁵⁷

In other words, the brutal class conflicts of the 1950s dockyards became personalised, and humanised, in the character of Terry Malloy. The value of this aesthetic strategy is explored in Joan Mellon's 1973 article in *Antioch Review*, where she remarks that when fictionalised documentaries are most successful, they "render the relationship of personal experience to the social order so subtly that the work reproduces at once a milieu and the individuals whose values typify it."⁵⁸ *Salt* advances boldly towards this aesthetic goal in a politically conscious manner, while *Waterfront* draws most of its social character from the individual brilliance of Brando, who indeed 'reproduces at once a milieu and the individual whose values typify it.' Brando's performance of a flawed humanity unleashed, is, perhaps, why other sections of the official Communist fraternity, far more deeply steeped in their history than their American comrades, could read Kazan's public proclamations and political posturing with less jaundiced eyes. Asked why the French cultural milieu favours him so greatly, Kazan replied that "They look at me humanely and not schematically. Also, they distinguish between the American Communist party of that time and their own Communist party, which had great differences with Stalinism."⁵⁹ As hinted by Kazan, the American CP's infatuation with Stalinism persisted well after its Popular Front glory days. Kazan felt that the attitudes of the Thirties "flavoured some of the negative criticism of the movie." He claimed that the Left "glamorised trade unions, whereas we were the first to say that there was such a thing as a corrupt trade union, and that it could be a force of

⁵⁷ Kazan in Kantor, B. R., Blacker, Irwin, R., Kramer Ann, Ed. (1970). *Directors at Word: Interviews with American Film-Makers*, Funk & Wagnalls, p. 139

⁵⁸ Mellen, J. (1972). "Film and Style: The Fictional Documentary." *Antioch Review* 32.3 (June): pp. 403-25.

⁵⁹ Lloyd Michaels "Interview with Elia Kazan," Nov 20, 1981 in Baer, W., Ed. (2000). *Elia Kazan: Interviews*. Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, p. 224

reaction.”⁶⁰ And, as Sayre points out, the film is constructed in such a way “that it’s almost impossible to disagree with it: the audience does want Brando to inform against the mobsters...”⁶¹

Perhaps part of *Waterfront*’s appeal for the French New Left is hinted at by Brian Neve who argues that the film has “much in common with early New Left thought.” Neve links Terry’s “philosophy of life” to the 1962 manifesto of individualism drawn up by Students for a Democratic Society, which argues that “the object is not to have one’s way so much as it is to have a way that is one’s own.”⁶² From that standpoint, Brando’s Terry could be seen as the personification of an anti-Stalinist moulded by Kazan’s politics. Such a reading could suggest a conscious attempt at setting the record straight. This notion was not lost on his former comrades and other left artists, including Brando, who, after a long period of hostility to Kazan, recalled that he finally decided to do *Waterfront*, but “what I didn’t realise then was that *On the Waterfront* was really a metaphorical argument by Gadg [Kazan’s nickname] and Budd Schulberg; they made the film to justify finking on their friends.”⁶³ Whether Brando got any closer to the truth about the essential content of *Waterfront*, the film displays the inner force of an uncompromising personal statement from a true auteur. Indeed, as Biskind wrote, “It would be hard to think of a film that more suggests an autobiographical reading than *On the Waterfront* which, after all, concerns informing, an issue which in reality marked Kazan’s own life.”⁶⁴

Kazan never denied using his personal experience of testifying as a creative impetus in his

⁶⁰ Kazan in Sayre, N. (1978). *Running Time: The Films of the Cold War*. NY: The Dial Press, p. 160

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Neve, B. (1981). The 1950s: The Case of Elia Kazan and *On the Waterfront*. *Cinema, Politics and Society in America*. P. Davies, & Neve, Brian. Manchester, Manchester University Press: pp. 97-118.

⁶³ Brando, M., with Lindsay Robert (1994). *Songs My Mother Taught Me*. NY, Random House, p. 195

⁶⁴ Biskind, P. (1975). “The Politics of Power in *On the Waterfront*.” *Film Quarterly* 29.1 (Fall): 26.

directing of *Waterfront*: “as I worked more and more on it, the fuel for it, the energy for it, came from the feeling that I was talking about myself.”⁶⁵

Despite Kazan’s repeated proclamations that *Waterfront* was his own story, Joanna Rapf argues that “the primary importance of the film is *not* that it’s a reflection of the political turmoil of postwar America,” but that it is, “simply, a great film, a work of art.”⁶⁶ What is the artistic value of *Waterfront*? According to Rapf, the film’s status of “personal catharsis for one of its authors...in no way detracts from its ‘universal value,’ from its stature as an American ‘classic,’ and as a great work of art, ‘mysterious’ in its ways.” Rapf enlists the poets Keats, (‘the excellence of any art is in its intensity’) and Rainer Maria Rilke, (for whom a work of art ‘tells us that, in some way, we must change our lives’) to her argument before concluding that *Waterfront* “fulfils both these criteria.”⁶⁷ By way of explaining *Waterfront*’s longevity, and the successful making of any “ideal motion picture,” Schulberg employs a horse-racing analogy in which “all the entries get their noses to the finish line in a dead heat.” Describing the moment when every element is there “at the wire,” a “*Lord of the Rings* miracle,” Schulberg added that “it’s a small miracle when two of them make it,” but in the case of *Waterfront* he felt that all the horses ended in a “dead heat.”⁶⁸

Which ‘horses’ in *Waterfront*’s race to the line are key to its longevity? What separated *Waterfront* from most movies of the period, according to Nora Sayre, was that it “made the daily experience and the interior lives of labourers tangible to a middle-class audience,” to the extent

⁶⁵ Neve, B. (2009). *Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider*. London, NY, I. B. Tauris, p. 83; Kazan, E. (1988). *A Life*. NY, Alfred A. Knoph, p. 500

⁶⁶ Rapf, J. E., Ed. (2003). *On the Waterfront*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 7

⁶⁷ Keats and Rilke in Ibid, p. 17

⁶⁸ Foreword by Budd Schulberg in Ibid, pp. xix-xx

that it “shames a film like *Grapes of Wrath*” whose sentimentality she felt made their protagonists’ plight “unreal.”⁶⁹ In *Waterfront*, the stark reality of the 1950s New York docklands was inspired by the visual style of Ben Shahn, whose political aesthetics matched those of Kazan’s youth. Shahn was a New York artist “committed to the use of art as a social instrument,” remaining a “champion of the poor and oppressed” in the changing political currents of the fifties. The influence of Shahn’s “stark and simple graphic design to make a social point” is, according to Neve, “perhaps evident in the shape-up scene, shot from behind the all-powerful hiring boss, and in the added scene (designed to indicate a broader and corporate web of corruption) in which a Mr Big figure (based on William J. McCormick, President of the Penn Stevedoring Co.) watches Terry’s testimony on television and distances himself from Johnny Friendly.”⁷⁰ Moreover, as Neve explains, “Kazan pioneered with Schulberg a respectful association between director and writer, while also working closely and cooperatively with actors to emphasise sub-textual feelings, the space *between* words.”⁷¹ Kazan actively encouraged spontaneous expression of the raw, instinctive, or even the irrational aspects of his actors’ psyches, in order to elicit maximum emotional authenticity. This also created what Braudy describes as “The tension between the social problem film with its semi-documentary detail and the poetic exploration of character” that “remains an unresolved and therefore energizing element in *On the Waterfront*.” An example cited by Braudy is Terry’s strolling and daydreaming of Edie, unaware of the encroaching danger of a car containing Johnny Friendly and his thugs, about to accost him. “His unconscious feeling that there may be a bigger picture is signalled almost subliminally to us (and perhaps to him) by Bernstein’s score.”⁷² To this

⁶⁹ Sayre, N. (1978). *Running Time: The Films of the Cold War*. NY: The Dial Press, p. 158

⁷⁰ Neve, B. (2009). *Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider*. London, NY, I. B. Tauris, p. 89

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 91

⁷² Braudy, L. (2005). *On the Waterfront*. London, BFI, p. 52

energizing poetry of the subtext is added a level of psychological authenticity. This is crystallized in another one of Kazan's principles, his turning of psychology into behaviour: "You don't even talk about the emotion [with actors]. All that does is tense an actor up. What you talk about is what they want out of a scene – why they are going into it.... If you talk about what their character is feeling, you get nothing but simulated emotions."⁷³

In other words, authentic acting springs out of authentic emotions. These dramatic fundamentals could safely be shared between the liberal and communists wings of the American Left, as far as it went, before its rupture. However, the more radical of the two perspectives, which also formed the core of Kazan's *auteurist* identity, was his increased reliance on actors' subjectivity. This exposed him to the danger of narrowing the social field of his explorations. So, as rare as Kazan's approach to waterfront troubles was at the height of the Red Scare, his fidelity to the spirit of Ben Shahn and a Popular Front sense of protest was no guarantee against his auteurism lagging behind the rapidly shifting socio-political terrain at home. Kazan sought to bridge this gap by developing as visceral a sense of place as possible, or at least to the extent that his chosen locations would permit.

Therefore, from Kazan's point of view, as a director on location, *Waterfront* was a perfect picture. As he put it: "I was trained to work with people on location and I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the longshoremen.... I liked them a lot. It was a great experience for me because I was on my feet all the time in the city and I think from that point of view it's as close as I ever came to making a film exactly the way I wanted."⁷⁴ Discussing the palpable sense of reality which he is

⁷³ Young, J. (1999). *Kazan: The Master Director Discusses His Films*. NY, New Market Press, p. 50

⁷⁴ Schickel, R. (2005). *Elia Kazan: A Biography*. NY, Harper Collins, p. 299

inspired by, and confronts in, New York City, Kazan said that *Waterfront* was a “good example of this contact with reality because it is about living issues. And furthermore, it’s about an issue that was being decided as we made the picture.”⁷⁵ The immediacy of this brush with the brutal reality of class conflict is an integral element of Kazan’s filmmaking. Reportedly Kazan narrowly escaped a vicious beating by a rival union thug, saved only by a timely intervention from a friendly (read ‘democratic’) unionist.⁷⁶

Did authentic locations, coupled with photographic naturalism and the psychological naturalism of Method, infuse *Waterfront* with the working-class ethos comparable to his early, pre-blacklist work, such as *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, or *Streetcar Named Desire*? Kazan, as suggested earlier, strove to extract this proletarian ethos from his performers. His aesthetic shift from ‘Marx to Freud’ was taxing on his actors. In his relentless pursuit of ultimate realism on screen, Kazan expected nothing less from his actors:

If they’ve got something – the shine and shiver for life, you could call it, a certain wildness, a genuineness – I grab them. That’s precious. That’s gold to me. I’ve always been crazy for life. As a young kid I wanted to live as much of it as possible, and now I want to show it – the smell of it, the sound of it, the leap of it. ‘Poetic realism,’ I call it when I’m in an egghead mood.⁷⁷

Still, this type of ‘poetic realism’ is sourced from a deep historical knowledge of the kind that enabled Polonsky’s ‘autopsy on capitalism,’ or Losey’s penetrating dissections of the class

⁷⁵ Ciment, M. (1974). Working with Schulberg: *On the Waterfront* (1954), *A Face in the Crowd* (1957). Kazan on Kazan. M. Ciment, Viking, pp. 175-76

⁷⁶ Braudy, L. (2005). *On the Waterfront*. London, BFI, p. 49

⁷⁷ Morton, F. (1957). “Gadg!” *Esquire* 47(February) in Baer, W., Ed. (2000). *Elia Kazan: Interviews*. Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, p. 33

system – it is realised on an intuitive, subjective level. Hence the paramount importance of accentuating the *visible* signifiers of authenticity, in Kazan's cinema, such as sense of place.

It is precisely because of a strong sense of place in *Panic in the Streets* (1950), in which Richard Widmark's character, who works for the US Health Services races against time to find two carriers of the bubonic plague (Jack Palance and Zero Mostel), that this film proved to be a cornerstone in Kazan's filmmaking. As he recounts, filming *Panic* was the "first time he really emphasised a *place*.... New Orleans wasn't John Ford's Monument Valley, but Kazan was explicitly following Ford's lead and uniting it with a Method acting sense of space – the need to know that actions happen *somewhere* – and that in order to do a scene an action has to know where he was before he came in."⁷⁸ The strong sense of place in *Waterfront* was presaged in a crucial scene, added by Kazan, where Terry and Edie are chased down a dark alley by a truck. Stressing the importance of the extent to which the location gave Kazan the inspiration for this scene, Neve argues that it "reflects the broadening of the director's range during his New Orleans work on *Panic in the Streets*," while Terry's point-of-view shot of his brother's body hanging up on a wall "allows the audiences to experience Terry's shock."⁷⁹ Kaufman's lighting and camerawork in the scene turn a wide back street "into a noir nightmare,"⁸⁰ as the truck's headlights reveal the body of Charley, hooked on the wall, riddled with bullets. This is visual expressionism par excellence, evoking a strong sense of physical place as well as mood as Terry moves inexorably closer to a showdown with Johnny Friendly. Kazan fully utilises the claustrophobic, meshed space of Terry's rooftop sanctuary in the scene of Terry's confession to

⁷⁸ Braudy, L. (2005). *On the Waterfront*. London, BFI, pp. 28-29

⁷⁹ Neve, B. (2003). "The Personal and the Political: Elia Kazan and *On the Waterfront*." *On the Waterfront*. J. E. Rapf. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: pp. 20-39.

⁸⁰ Braudy, L. (2005). *On the Waterfront*. London, BFI, p. 34

Edie, in which a passing ship's whistle drowns his articulations of his terrible truth, even though he speaks in close-up. This moment is described by Braudy as a moment "where poetry and realism come together to give a mythic aura to the otherwise semi-documentary tone of gangster plot." This is supported by Neve's analysis. For all the film's "force of nature," often "ascribed to its documentary aspects," Neve argues that "the depiction of the locality is relatively limited..." Instead, "The emphasis on closely framed shots of two or three central characters, designed to intensify the drama of these key relationships, often flattens the image in a way that reduces the sense of the immediate environment." Even the "look" of the film, according to Neve, is "most distinctive" in the rooftop scenes. As an example Neve refers to the feeling of "entrapment" that is suggested by the pigeon coup fence separating Terry from Tommy. Terry is the one who is enclosed, but at the same time, notes Neve, "this is balanced by the sense of freedom associated with the deep background vistas of the waterfront."⁸¹ So Kazan was not a straightforward naturalist. With this "mingled commitment to the realistic and the mythic," argues Braudy, Kazan "might be seen as standing between or combining the social preoccupations of Arthur Miller with the individual psychology of Tennessee Williams." As Braudy aptly surmises, Kazan's "dramatic imagination is divided between Miller's common-man realism and Williams's common-man fantasy,"⁸² and it is to the former that this chapter now turns.

Arthur Miller versus Spiegel-Kazan: the naturalism of *Waterfront*

The political drama surrounding Arthur Miller's unrealized screenplay *The Hook* is an

⁸¹ Neve, B. (2003). "The Personal and the Political: Elia Kazan and *On the Waterfront*." *On the Waterfront*. J. E. Rapf. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 20-39.

⁸² Braudy, L. (2005). *On the Waterfront*. London, BFI, p. 49

illustrative case for the study of the rapidly shifting ideological terrain of Cold War America. As Robert Shulman explains, in his essay on their complex relationship, two distinctly differing responses to witch-hunting emerged out of their first, unsuccessful attempt to realise Miller's waterfront story: *The Crucible* and *Waterfront*.⁸³ In his autobiography *Timebends*, Miller relates how while "frequenting the Red Hook section of Brooklyn doing research for a script that would deal with crime and corruption on the waterfront," "he had been inspired by the tales of a rebel leader named Pete Panto who had battled the gang-run unions." Panto was a "young union activist who had been murdered in 1939 but whose name was still written in graffiti on neighbourhood walls: *Dov'e Pete Panto? Where is Pete Panto?*" As Miller writes, "The idea of a young man defying evil and ending in a cement block at the bottom of the river drew me on."⁸⁴

However, Miller learned an important political lesson about handling such controversial material in the course of his struggle to realise his screenplay *The Hook*. Putting 'on the screen what you feel,' to again cite Kazan's basic directing philosophy, is acceptable as long as your feelings are not deemed too 'un-American.' Jim Kitses perhaps most eloquently summed up Kazan's political and aesthetic elasticity when he stated that "No Hollywood filmmaker more clearly reflected shifts in the post-war American mind than Kazan."⁸⁵ Unfortunately for Miller, his script was, in the eyes of his inquisitors, a variation on the same theme dramatised by *Salt of the Earth*, which will be dealt with in the next chapter. Budd Schulberg's *Waterfront*, on the other hand, was tailor-made for Cold War America. The two writers' differing relationships to Stalinism was the key to vastly different responses to their work by the official censors. It is not surprising that, in

⁸³ Shulman, R. (2003). "The Cold War on the Waterfront: Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* and Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront*." *American Studies in Scandinavia* 35.1: pp. 23-37.

⁸⁴ Miller, A. (1987). *Timebends: A Life*. NY, Grove Press, p. 147

⁸⁵ Kitses, J. (1973). "Elia Kazan: A Structural Analysis." *Cinema* 7.3 (Winter 1972-3): 26.

Braudy's words, *Waterfront* and *Hook* "have little in common in either plot or atmosphere." *The Hook*, explains Braudy, "with its focus on meetings and family conclaves, is reminiscent of the agit-prop plays of the 1930s." For Braudy, while *On the Waterfront* focuses on the daily struggles around the kickbacks and shape-ups, *The Hook* focuses "almost entirely on the corrupt union situation and the efforts of Marty Ferrara, the central character, to change it by organizing his fellow workers." "As a radical unionist," concludes Braudy, Ferrara is a very different kind of hero from Terry Malloy.⁸⁶

Even in the periods of relative capitalist equilibrium, such a politically radical hero is a little too hard a pill to swallow for Hollywood. As Neve points out, "The emphasis in the Miller script on meetings and votes would have been difficult to dramatise in a Hollywood system for which collective action was rarely a narrative option."⁸⁷ This was especially the case after Stalinism ceased to serve the ideological purposes of the liberal and Democrat establishment. Stephen Schwartz, writing in *Film History*, reads *The Hook* as a "quintessentially Stalinist composition" which offers more of the 'thirties' feel, something in the spirit of *Waiting for Lefty*.⁸⁸ It is, therefore, not surprising that it was turned down by Fox and Warners. On the other hand, Kazan's unionist sentiments in *Waterfront* are, at best, ambivalent, in the words of Maland, who concludes that such ambivalence "reflect[s] the culture's stress on corruption in unions in the 1940s and early 1950s."⁸⁹ Miller's script, nevertheless, found its way to Harry Cohn, the head of Columbia, who told Miller and Kazan that, even though he liked the script, he would do it only

⁸⁶ Braudy, L. (2005). *On the Waterfront*. London, BFI, pp. 17-18

⁸⁷ Neve, B. (2009). *Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider*. London, NY, I. B. Tauris, p. 79

⁸⁸ Schwartz, S. (2004). "Arthur Miller's Proletariat: The True Stories of *On the Waterfront*, *Pietro Panto*, and *Vincenzo Longhi*." *Film History* 16: p. 380.

⁸⁹ Maland, C. J. (1982). "*On the Waterfront* (1954): Film and the Dilemmas of American Liberalism in the McCarthy Era." *American Studies in Scandinavia* 14.2: pp. 107-127.

with FBI approval. In Kazan's account, it was in a meeting with the head of the IATSE Roy Brewer that both he and Miller as well as Cohn were told in no uncertain terms that it was not the gangsters that were a problem in the unions, rather it was the Communists, and the hero should at some point make a complete break with them.⁹⁰

In 1949 Schulberg was commissioned by Cohn to write a script based on Malcolm Johnson's series of New York *Sun* articles, "Crime on the Waterfront", which would eventually receive the Pulitzer Prize for Journalism in 1950. His "chief guide among the 'insogients,'" according to Braudy, was "the feisty Arthur Brown," who had survived several attacks by ILA mobsters. 'Brownie' "finally coalesced in 'Kayo' Dugan," the longshoreman who is murdered after testifying.⁹¹ Such deadly violence on the New York waterfront was all too real, and in both *Waterfront* and *The Hook*, its main source was not the inter-class conflict between Big Labor and Big Business. Instead, the main fault line in both these dramatizations of American class struggle was lodged deep within the workers' movement itself. As Peter Biskind aptly observes, the main struggle in *Waterfront* is between the two elements of Big Labor: "the crooked and the frightened." He argues that the movie is a "heavily coded endorsement of, to borrow Arthur Schlesinger's phrase 'The Vital Center.'" To Biskind, therefore, Terry's "informing" becomes not just a sign of "maturity," but of support of "pluralism," that is, the belief that state capitalist "instruments of control" can be transformed into forces of social good.⁹² This is, paradoxically, only reinforced by Biskind's sharpest critic, Schickel, who critiques his colleague's reading of *Waterfront* as "not merely as an endorsement of informing, but as an endorsement of a sort of

⁹⁰ Kazan, E. (1988). *A Life*. NY, Alfred A. Knoph, p. 412

⁹¹ Braudy, L. (2005). *On the Waterfront*. London, BFI, pp. 15-16

⁹² Biskind, P. (1983). *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties*. NY, Pantheon Books, p. 182

state-corporate liberalism, placing a new reliance on large institutions to defend individual rights, an unthinkable idea to thirties and forties radicals.” Although Schickel emphatically rejects the idea that *Waterfront* is “a hidden plea for this viewpoint,” the self evident objective circumstances back him into a corner, forcing him to acknowledge that “this strain entered liberal thought in this period.”⁹³

However, Biskind traces the objective logic of Kazan’s underlying political aesthetics much further, famously arguing that *Waterfront* “tries to turn informing into ‘a greater good’ by ‘the construction of sympathy: the creation of good guys and bad guys.’”⁹⁴ It is noteworthy that this dichotomy was at best ambiguous in film noir’s most radical period, the years immediately leading up to the blacklist. The danger contained in this simple division of labour into good and bad is that, unless synthesized to such a degree as to incorporate all facets and nuances of the social in an individual’s life on film, the ‘good’ can easily be transformed into a sounding board for reactionary positions. This possibility was played out strangely, and with great force, in the political superstructure. Richard Maltby relates the melodramatic qualities of classical Hollywood narrative to Washington’s political imperatives. “For Washington,” argues Maltby, “the Committee and Hollywood shared a political importance that was based not on the realities of political practice but on the power of suggestion.” This is where the melodramatic qualities of this encounter lie, and for Washington, argues Maltby, the political benefits of “melodramatic oversimplification of political debate” served their interests well.⁹⁵ Art abhors such simplifications of life, and the politically controversial ending of *Waterfront* testifies to the

⁹³ Schickel, R. (2005). *Elia Kazan: A Biography*. NY, Harper Collins, p. 283

⁹⁴ Biskind, R. in Braudy, L. (2005). *On the Waterfront*. London, BFI, p. 60

⁹⁵ Maltby, R. (1981). “Made for Each Other: The Melodrama of Hollywood and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1947.” *Cinema, Politics and Society in America*. P. Davies, & Neve, Brian. Manchester, Manchester University Press: 79.

pitfalls of social commitment in the social problem film, when melodramatic qualities alone will not suffice to carry the necessary complications and contradictions of the story.

It was Lindsay Anderson who famously interpreted the ending of *Waterfront* as “implicitly (if unconsciously) Fascist.”⁹⁶ This charge is emphatically rejected by the film’s writer, Schulberg, who turns “180 degrees from ‘fascism.’” He stresses that the *Waterfront* ending was “influenced by the courageous behaviour of Johnny Dwyer who dared stand up to the ‘pistols’ of Local 895,” and his workmates simply supported this whistleblower by “vot[ing] with their feet,” hence following him to work.⁹⁷ Brian Neve offers a more politically defined rebuttal of Anderson’s famous ‘leaderless sheep’ analogy used to describe the ending when the dockers acquiesce in getting back to work. Given the “individualist basis of American culture,” argues Neve, to suggest that “union solidarity more traditionally associated with Britain” is “easily achieved in adverse conditions is not to make a socialist film.” For Neve, there is more to the ambiguity of the ending. He also points to Pop Doyle’s resistance to Mr. Friendly as he attempts to push him back to work, when this most “acquiescent and defeated” of longshoremen nudges his union boss aside. One longshoreman comments that if ‘Terry walks in, *we* will walk in with him.’ To suggest that the rank-and-filers are not merely a “passive herd,” Neve emphasises that “They *are* waiting for him [Terry] to walk in.”⁹⁸ To Biskind, however, the vision of community offered by *Waterfront* does not, affirm democratic values. “Kazan’s view of reform is as elitist as his conception of democracy” because all the workers can do is follow a leader, merely switching allegiance from Johnny Friendly to Terry. “Both social reform and individual salvation are top-

⁹⁶ Anderson, L. (1955). “The Last Sequence of *On the Waterfront*.” *Sight and Sound* 24.3 (Jan-Mar): pp. 127-31.

⁹⁷ Schulberg’s Foreword in Rapf, J. E., Ed. (2003). *On the Waterfront*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. xxi

⁹⁸ Neve, B. (1981). The 1950s: The Case of Elia Kazan and *On the Waterfront*. *Cinema, Politics and Society in America*. P. Davies, & Neve, Brian. Manchester, Manchester University Press: pp. 97-118.

down affairs, conducted by experts, the Crime Commission in one case and the priest in the other.”⁹⁹ The implication of this textual analysis is that Terry in no way represents a rise in working-class consciousness and power. Despite surviving a vicious beating at the hands of union thugs, he does not embody the ‘undefeated proletariat’ in the Polonskyan sense in which a figure such as Garfield could emerge from a comparable situation with his working-class dignity intact, reintegrated into his proletarian community. Terry Malloy remains a lone Cold War hero.

Asked in a 1962 interview about the extent to which the author’s feelings are represented on screen in his films, Kazan replied that “by an understanding of the nature, temperament and feelings of the author, I try to put him on the screen. The French have a wonderful word for a director, they call him *realisateur*. And I try to *realize* the author.”¹⁰⁰ Did Kazan *realize* Schulberg’s, or his own, vision? Or, did he adapt to the political aesthetics of Cold War Hollywood?

By way of answering these questions, it is instructive to compare Schulberg’s untainted personal vision in his novel to the vision contained in Kazan’s film. The extent to which Kazan *realized* Schulberg’s vision can be gauged from reading the novel. It was published after the film, and thus represented a ‘novelisation’ of the screenplay, essentially Schulberg’s response to his Hollywood film, punctuated by an overtly anti-Hollywood ending. Braudy elaborates on the essential political content of the novel: “By wanting to supply the larger context for the waterfront story,” Schulberg “consciously or unconsciously seeks to right a balance that the film’s focus on Terry and his emotions – as conveyed by Brando’s performance – has upset.” He

⁹⁹ Biskind, P. (1975). “The Politics of Power in *On the Waterfront*.” *Film Quarterly* 29.1 (Fall): 31.

¹⁰⁰ Bean, R. (1962). “Elia Kazan on ‘The Young Agony’.” in Baer, W., Ed. (2000). *Elia Kazan: Interviews*. Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, pp.: 43-50.

concludes that Schulberg's story is "the intellectual emerging from isolation and engaging with the world, Kazan's the physical unreflective person who finds a conscience and love – an inner self."¹⁰¹ Reportedly, under pressure from Spiegel, who pushed for a happy Hollywood ending, Schulberg remembers Kazan suggesting a workable compromise in which Terry is near death. As the director said, "Schulberg didn't like my ending either."¹⁰² Indeed, the writer went on to publish his novel with an anti-Hollywood ending, which kills Terry. Schulberg was reportedly bothered by the shot of Karl Malden and Eva Marie Saint, with their "self –satisfied smiles" as they watch Malloy "lead" men to work. Schulberg reminisced: "I think that is one of the few mistakes that Gadg made in the film, because if you accept that fact that he was dreadfully beaten up, and could even die, obviously they would be concerned. The look on their faces is what Spiegel wanted. Spiegel wanted a happy ending."¹⁰³ That said, the line from the longshoreman-observer during the final fight – "that boy fights the way he used to" – suggests other forms of redemption are also at work. In this sense, we could see the final fight as a 'reply' to the famous cab scene between Brando and Steiger ("I coudda been somebody... a contender.").

The effect of Spiegel-Kazan suggestions, which, according to Schulberg, sacrificed some of the "broader canvas" for more "relentless storytelling,"¹⁰⁴ was "certainly to diminish the roles of some of the other insurgent longshoremen (including Joey Doyle, and the rebel black longshoreman, Luke), and to focus more and more on the particular experience of Terry Malloy."¹⁰⁵ Kazan's emphasis on the subjective psychology of Terry Malloy at the expense of

¹⁰¹ Braudy, L. (2005). *On the Waterfront*. London, BFI, p. 55

¹⁰² Pauly, T. H. (1983). *An American Odyssey: Elia Kazan and American Culture*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, p. 213

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Schulberg qt. in Raph, J. E., Ed. (2003). *On the Waterfront*, Cambridge University Press, p. 11

¹⁰⁵ Neve, B. (2009). *Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider*. London, NY, I. B. Tauris, p. 82

the broader canvas of the waterfront, are spelled out in its production notebook:

PHOTOGRAPH

the Inner Experience

Of TERRY

Don't be objective! This is not a

Documentary

Be Subjective, Be Terry

He adds: "Photograph the inner experience of Terry & that's all!"¹⁰⁶

This raises a critical question of whether Kazan was short-changed in his bargain with the anticommunist 'devil' in his transition from New York theatre to Hollywood. Did Kazan compromise, to his own detriment, or sacrifice, the core tenets of his political aesthetics from his Group days?

What Broadway imparted to Kazan theoretically and politically

Following his damaging testimony against Johnny Friendly, Terry defiantly shouts that "I'm glad what I done!" after confronting the mobster. Commenting on this famous 'Method' moment, visually anticipated by the boy's slaughter of Terry's pigeons, ("a pigeon for a pigeon") Kazan notes that the "transference of emotion from my own experience to the screen is the merit of those scenes."¹⁰⁷ If 'transference of emotion' is a key to the cultural longevity of Kazan's most

¹⁰⁶ Production notebook, *Golden Warriors*, June 1953, Kazan Collection, WUCA, qt. in Ibid, p. 83

¹⁰⁷ Kazan, E. (1988). *A Life*. NY, Alfred A. Knoph, p. 529

memorable scenes, then it is also useful to trace some key objective factors that shaped the director's emotional memory. And the most dominant of those was the Great Depression, which gave rise to the ensemble spirit that flourished in the Group Theatre. These Group dynamics, according to Kazan, stemmed from "[t]he unity of the Group, to the extent that it was achieved," which "came from years of work together." More importantly, it also came from the "circumstances in which the theatre evolved: the Depression. And the emergence of what used to be called the Common Man."¹⁰⁸

But for all the potentially radical circumstances, in the words of Kazan, "It wasn't protest theatre in the political sense," even though it "had an underlying spirit of protest. 'Humanity's being pinched and squashed down,' the Group said, 'and the aspirations of people are important. And the social system that's produced this state of affairs is intolerable.'"¹⁰⁹ This atmosphere had a profound effect on a radicalized, if conflicted, Kazan. In a 1935 letter he wrote to Cheryl Crawford and Lee Strasberg Kazan recalled "swarming" over the "whole organism" of the Group Theatre "like Lupe Velez," a Mexican-born actress at the summit of her Hollywood career. He also wrote of the importance of politics to him at that time, explaining how he was finding out "what it means to belong to a collective," and that he now found "active meaning" in the slogan "The Theatre is a weapon in the class struggle."¹¹⁰

Six decades on, with the powerful reemergence of the 'Common Man' onto the political scene following the Wall Street crash of 2008, Hollywood is showing tentative signs of a similarly

¹⁰⁸ Schechner, R., and Hoffman, Theodore (1964). "Look, There's the American Theatre." Tulane Drama Review 2 (Winter): pp. 61-83.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Kazan to Crawford and Strasberg qt. in Neve, B. (2009). Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider. London, NY, I. B. Tauris, p. 3

profound political shift. However, the anticommunist paradigm that was reconstituted in the blacklisting period is still a major factor in the apparent lack of a genuine, alternative political discourse in the contemporary US context. The Popular Front-era slogan of American drama as ‘a weapon in the class struggle’ has long been displaced by an unwritten, but binding, norm that cinema is a pacifier in the class struggle. Hence, there are few, if any, Hollywood films that are driven by Common Man leads, including such recent, ostensibly ‘social problem,’ films such as *Up In the Air*, discussed in Chapter 1. Such preoccupations are today relegated to the documentary domain, most famously in Michael Moore’s various explorations of the rise and fall of GM (*Roger and Me*), of US democracy and warmongering (*Fahrenheit 9/11*), and of the US financial system (*Anti-Capitalism: A Love Story*).

However, back in the thirties, recalled Kazan, “there prevailed in our milieu a kind of Puritanism,” which manifested itself in the belief that socialism was the only way forward. “Now this Puritanism,” continued Kazan, “whether under its Soviet or its American form – has broken down.”¹¹¹ But the crass opportunism of the Stalinist CPUSA took its toll on Kazan. With the collapse of the Popular Front perspective in Cold War America, Kazan’s political aesthetics underwent a corresponding shift, or rather, were force-fitted into the acceptable ideological parameters. While Losey, for example, deepened his engagement with objective social processes, Kazan began shifting in the opposite direction. This first clear expression of Kazan’s new guiding principle was on show in his 1947 stage production of *Streetcar*, where he furthered his engagement with representing emotional realism, at the expense of broader social reality. This was manifested in an increased recourse to physicality in Kazan’s directing. As Jones observes, “To an important extent, ‘realistic meaning’ meant ‘physical meaning,’ and Kazan started

¹¹¹ Delahaye, M. (1967). “Interview with Elia Kazan, 1966.” *Cahiers du Cinema in English* 9 (March): pp. 13-35.

working out physical truths by putting props into actors hands.”¹¹² This is a rather crude substitute for Meyerholdian ‘bio-dynamics,’ which encompasses the whole of the physical and emotional being of the performers. In other words, Meyerhold advanced a type of applied psychology aimed at raising the level of mass consciousness even if the resulting social insights did not sit well with the established powers.

However, as suggested earlier, Kazan’s ‘applied psychology’ had a far narrower social base. The director’s engagement with ‘emotional realism’ rarely broached the bounds of what was politically acceptable. This was manifested in “the rather parochial teaching of the Actors’ Studio,” where, according to Naremore, “Stanislavsky’s approach had been narrowed down to quasi-Freudian ‘inner work’ fuelled by an obsession with the ‘self.’” Moreover, in distinguishing between the Studio and the earlier Group Theatre, “a case could be made that [Strasberg and the Studio] impoverished the theatre – feeding the star system, promoting the conventional at the expense of the avant-garde, and giving American drama a less forceful social purpose.” Furthermore, Strasberg “de-emphasised the political basis of the Method,” and “his rather analytical approach to the actor’s ‘self’” was in sharp contrast to the Group Theatre’s “stress on the ensemble and on the relationship between individual players and society as a whole,” advocated by teachers such as Adler.¹¹³ Unlike Polonsky and Losey, whose pursuit of artistic truth was heavily mediated by their Marxist consciousness, Kazan’s directing philosophy initially was driven primarily by a desire to uncover as much unmediated social reality as the medium would permit. Therefore, just as he embraced the 1930s Popular Front’s obsession with the physical authenticity of settings and characters, he later went with the flow when the domains

¹¹² Jones, D. R. (1986). *Great Directors at Work: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Kazan, Brook*. LA, University of California Press, p. 186

¹¹³ Naremore, J. (1988). *Acting in the Cinema*. LA, University of California Press, p. 199

of the psychological and the subjective became key cultural preoccupations in the 1950s. Hence the changing Cold War winds automatically affected changes in Kazan's directing philosophy, the flowering of which he experienced in 1956, after he had wrapped up the shooting of *Baby Doll*. He described his directing as an effort to find "a handful of truth...that little human thing...that little moisture in the girl's eye, the way she lifts her hand, or the funny kind of laugh she's got in her throat." This was, he continued, "the shine and shiver of life...a certain wildness, a genuineness." He ended (as was mentioned earlier): "I've always been crazy for life. As a young kid I wanted to live as much as possible, and now I want to show it – the smell of it, the sound of it, the leap of it. 'Poetic realism' I call it when I'm in an egghead mood."¹¹⁴

Kazan's idea of poetic realism is of an entirely different kind from the one shared by the two unfriendly HUAC witnesses discussed in this thesis, Polonsky and Losey: their realism proceeded from the objective contradictions of American society, not the subjective inner conflicts of its victims. To further emphasise the differences between Kazan's sensory approach to poetic realism and how his French film critical contemporaries, such as Mitry and Bazin, conceived of this mode of filmmaking, it is useful to refer to Dudley Andrew's exhaustive study of poetic realism, *Mists of Regret*. The French film's "quietness and poverty of incident," according to Andrew, delivers perfect poetic realism in its depiction of "the incredible pressure underneath the sad routine of ordinary life." (Andrew is referring to films such as *Hotel du Nord* (1938) and *Le Jour se leve* (1938).) "Such calculated repose," says Andrew, "in even the most violent and exotic films identifies the poetic realist sensibility." American cinema, on the other hand, "has always invested in maximum shock effects, in bursts of song, violence, eros, or

¹¹⁴ Jones, D. R. (1986). Great Directors at Work: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Kazan, Brook. LA, University of California Press, p. 199

language.” Poetic realism, as Andrew eloquently puts it, “diffuses such energy in a warm mist of style that mutes the sound and brightness of every effect, even as it washes over us and seeps down to the roots of feelings.”¹¹⁵ Here, the question in relation to Kazan’s filmmaking is, how does Andrew’s characterisation of poetic realism square up with an ‘actor’s director’s’ use of Method? Kazan brought the best out of the extraordinary actor, Brando, but there are also some out-of-tune performances in his films by some remarkable performers. For example, Andy Griffith in *A Face in the Crowd* is no Brando, and Kazan’s ‘GO, GO, GO’ direction of the actor makes him bellow at the top of his voice for much of the film. Zero Mostel and Jack Palance simply overwhelm the scenery in *Panic in the Streets*, as does Vivien Leigh with a great deal of noisy thrashing about, scenery-chewing in *Streetcar*.

Kazan’s passion for artistic truth bears comparison with that of his political opponents in the Hollywood Left, Polonsky and Losey, even though Kazan approached this task from an opposing standpoint, one which promoted ‘subjectivity.’ These basic creative impulses are expressed in some words from the aging Sidney Castleman, Kazan’s alter ego from his 1975 novel *The Understudy*, who reflects on the importance of expressing fundamental truths, which could well have been penned by Polonsky:

It’s not cleverness that gets to people, Sonny. The great plays were not great because of cleverness. Today it’s all experiments in style. What counts and what endures is meaning, theme. What you have to touch in an audience is their fundamental concerns, what’s worrying them now and always will, even if they don’t know it, the mind’s despair, the

¹¹⁵ Andrew, D. (1995). *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, p. 6

heart's hope.¹¹⁶

In his biography, Kazan succinctly sums up his application of the Group's philosophy of directing, which would become almost his motto: "to turn the inner events of the psyche into a choreography of external life."¹¹⁷ Given that the director's clearly defined artistic objectives were increasingly running into sharp conflict with a dialectical modernism exemplified in the works of Brecht and Meyerhold, it was inevitable that, sooner or later, his dramatic sensibilities would find a sanctuary within the American national ethos, in opposition to the internationalist perspective of the avant-garde modernists. He found a kindred spirit in the playwright Tennessee Williams, who 'tamed' some modernist excesses for the American theatre scene. Just as the collaboration between Pinter and Losey expressed their shared political aesthetics, Kazan and Williams were drawn together into the American national orbit. However, Williams strove to embrace the aesthetic essence of the avant-garde, if not its political content. For his part, Kazan was compelled to do to Williams as Williams did to the Russian avant-garde: 'tame' its (modernist) excesses. Brenda Murphy, in her valuable study of this collaboration, captures perhaps its most lasting legacy: They "brought together a nexus of aesthetic values from their varied training and experience that they combined with the visual aesthetics of Jo Mielziner to create the unique theatrical idiom that came to be known throughout the world in the fifties as 'the American style.'"¹¹⁸

Here it is important to stress that this thesis rejects the notion that the flowering of the American

¹¹⁶ Kazan, E. (1975). *The Understudy*. NY, Stein & Day, p. 339

¹¹⁷ Kazan, E. (1988). *A Life*. NY, Alfred A. Knoph, p. 90

¹¹⁸ Murphy, B. (1992). *Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan: A Collaboration in the Theatre*. NY, Cambridge University Press, p. 9

idiom negates the value of the avant-gardist modernism of Meyerhold, or Brecht. Rather, this thesis contends that the 'American style' could have entered into a mutually beneficial dialogue with international drama, and supported, rather than clashed with, the persecuted avant-garde modernists. Murphy identifies critic Esther Jackson, who has indeed located the artistic strength of Williams's "theatrical language in his American contemporaries and their immediate precursors." Following Jackson's lead, Murphy notes that "something uniquely American had developed from the work of playwrights as disparate as Eugene O'Neill, Thornton Wilder, Clifford Odets, Elmer Rice, and William Saroyan."¹¹⁹ As Jackson described it, "a system of communication with its own themes, types of character, modes of speech, styles of acting, and patterns of staging."¹²⁰

But the 'American idiom' did not preclude a use of European-style expressionism. In his memoirs, Williams declared that

Expressionism and all other unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth. When a play employs unconventional techniques, it is not, or certainly shouldn't be, trying to escape its responsibility of dealing with reality, or interpreting experience, but is actually or should be attempting to find a closer approach, a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are.¹²¹

Most importantly for Williams, and a point which also has greater relevance for this study of

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Jackson, E. (1965). The Broken World of Tennessee Williams. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 103-04

¹²¹ Williams, T. (1975). Memoirs. Garden City, NY, Double Day, pp. 134-35

American film, “this poetic language had a parallel in an emerging art of the *mise-en-scene*.”¹²² This plasticity and fluidity of *mise-en-scene* was powerfully manifested in *The Glass Menagerie*: “The particular mode of drama in *The Glass Menagerie*, a fundamentally realistic aesthetic subverted by suggestions of a mediating consciousness, is more accurately described as ‘subjective realism.’” To Murphy this term is useful “for describing not only *Menagerie*, but the whole theatrical world as being in ‘the American Style’ during the fifties. Subjective realism was the aesthetic base for Williams’s collaboration with Elia Kazan and designer Jo Mielziner.”¹²³ ‘Subjective realism’ was not only ‘the aesthetic base’ for Kazan’s collaboration with Williams, it also laid the dramatic groundwork for Kazan’s revolutionising of his direction of actors, most notably Brando, in what would become known as Method acting. Here it is interesting to note that the collaboration between Losey and Pinter was animated by completely different realist aesthetics, grounded on objective class relations. At this point it is useful to refer to Thomas Elsaesser’s seminal work on the permutations of postwar American melodrama, “Tales of Sound and Fury,” in order to bring these filmmakers’ aesthetic and political differences into a sharper relief.

While neither Losey nor Kazan could be classed as practitioners of conventional Hollywood melodrama, Elsaesser nevertheless elaborates on some of the essential features of this quintessential American cinematic form, applicable to these filmmakers, albeit in different ways, which is determined primarily “by an ideology of the spectacle and the spectacular,” and is “not conceptual.” In other words, argues Elsaesser, Hollywood melodrama depends on how “melos”

¹²² Downer, A. (1967). *The American Theatre Today*. NY, Basic Books, p. 79

¹²³ Murphy, B. (1992). *Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan: A Collaboration in the Theatre*. NY, Cambridge University Press, p. 10

is given to “drama,” by the “ways mise-en-scene translates character into action.”¹²⁴ This is a slight variation on Kazan’s directing philosophy, ‘turning behaviour into action.’ His ‘Method’ was grounded in subjective psychology, and relied heavily on intuition. Or, to apply Elsaesser’s analysis of American melodrama, the “deficiencies” of the classical Hollywood movie were made up by “focusing to the point of exaggeration on the drive, the obsession, the *idée fixe* – that is to say, by a concentration on purely kinetic-mechanical elements of human motivation.” Here Elsaesser has in mind primarily Kazan’s classical Hollywood melodramas such as *East of Eden* (1955) and *Splendor in the Grass* (1961),¹²⁵ however, Brando’s Terry Malloy could also be seen as a classical example of a star’s internalisation of the “structures of experience” in the service of another “endemic” characteristic of the melodramatic mode: the ways in which popular culture has “resolutely refused to understand social change in other than private contexts and emotional terms.”¹²⁶

However, it is Losey’s highly conscious use of classical melodramatic conventions that gives fullest and most concrete expression to the author’s oppositional politics. This is not surprising since, as Elsaesser argues, melodrama is “iconographically fixed by the claustrophobic atmosphere of the bourgeois home,” and other oppressive settings. Among few other directors, observes Elsaesser, it is Losey who excels in “reinforc[ing] stylistically” an emotional pattern of “panic and latent hysteria,” by a “complex handling of space in interiors ... to the point where the world seems totally predetermined and pervaded by ‘meaning’ and interpretable signs.”¹²⁷ Such

¹²⁴ Elsaesser, T. (1986). “Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama.” Gilm Genre Reader. B. K. Grant. Austin, University of Texas: pp. 278-308.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

emotionally crippling effects of oppressive bourgeois spaces are depicted particularly vividly in Losey's collaborations with Pinter, discussed in the previous chapter. One need only recall James Fox's hapless aristocrat in *The Servant*, psychologically terrorised by both his nominal servant (Dirk Bogarde) and his own claustrophobic bourgeois home.

On the Waterfront burst onto the scene at a perfect historical moment not only for the practitioners of Hollywood melodrama, but also for the adherents of 'Method,' when cinematic realism was 'ripe' for another change of direction in its quest to bridge the gap between art and the increasingly complex post-war human condition. Method acting marked a radical break with Hollywood protocols and previous theories of acting. As Richard Maltby explains, the Method "seeks to abolish the distinction between the actor and the role." Therefore, while not necessarily a technique per se, its approach to acting was marked by "obsession with the 'self' of the actor."¹²⁸ In other words, psychology increasingly displaced experimentation with cinematic form as a means to explore the human condition. In the period of intensified anticommunist reaction, Freud displaced Marx as a beacon for makers of 'social problem' films during the Red Scare. As Thomas Elsaesser put it, "There can be little doubt that the postwar popularity of the family melodrama in Hollywood is partly connected with the fact that in those years America discovered Freud."¹²⁹ 'Inner psychology' was one of the few sanctuaries for socially conscious filmmakers who strove for both social and psychological realism. Kazan, who in the words of Neve, is "best viewed as a director with a strong commitment to the social and social psychological – rather than political – implications of drama,"¹³⁰ was in the right time and place

¹²⁸ Maltby, R. (1995). Performance. *Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*. London: Blackwell, pp. 258-59.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Neve, B. (2003). "The Personal and the Political: Elia Kazan and *On the Waterfront*." *On the Waterfront*. J. E. Rapf. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: pp. 20-39.

for realising the *auteurist* vision for which he will always be famous (or infamous), *On the Waterfront*.

From Marx to Freud: what did Kazan's immersion in the performative signify?

As Braudy explains, it was *Waterfront* that brought Stanislavsky to the masses. "Its showcasing of Method acting had a tremendous influence on both American and European performance styles as well as plots."¹³¹ And the passage of time has not lessened its legacy which reverberates in contemporary cinema. In his valuable book and TV series, *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies*, the director identified a "breakthrough" in *Waterfront*: "Kazan was forging a new acting style. It had the appearance of realism. But actually it revealed something in the natural behavior of people that I hadn't seen on screen before: the truth behind the posture."¹³² Raymond Williams identifies *Waterfront* as a turning point in the direction of American film toward "authentic naturalism" and away from what he termed "bourgeois physical representation." "Naturalism," writes Williams, "was always a critical movement, in which the relation between men and their environments was not merely represented but actively explored ... it is quite evidently a bourgeois form, [but] it is also, on its record, part of the critical and self-critical wing of the bourgeoisie."¹³³

Such enthusiasm for 'the natural behaviour of people' is remarkable for its persistence and consistency over the changing historical contexts. Even back in 1954, reviewer Lee Rogow

¹³¹ Braudy, L. (2005). *On the Waterfront*. London, BFI, p. 49

¹³² Scorsese, M., and Wilson, Michael (1997). *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies*. NY, Hyperion Books, p. 148

¹³³ Williams in Naremore, J. (1988). *Acting in the Cinema*. LA, University of California Press, pp. 200-01

referred to *Waterfront* as a “documentary on the docks,” and saw the film as breaking through “the subtle filter which has previously shielded American lenses from the harsh light of reality.”¹³⁴ This raises a critical issue for the Cold War crusaders: allowing artists to let off steam by wallowing in the ‘harsh light of reality’ could have been preferable to the sanitized apolitical cinema as long as the sanctity of Big Capital was not tarnished. In fact, such ‘social problem’ films would strengthen the ‘Common Man’ creed of the establishment in proportion to the permitted level of cinematic depiction of ‘harshness.’ Or, to again cite *Harper’s* 1954 comment, *Waterfront* offered “a decadently sophisticated underworld travelogue,”¹³⁵ relatively safe for domestic consumption. It follows then that the only way to ‘beat the system’ is to do it according to the proscribed rules, by operating ‘within it.’ As Neve explains, Kazan and Schulberg had, indeed, “both beaten the system and, in the sweep of Academy Awards for their film in 1955, been victorious within it.”¹³⁶ So much so that, according to Spiegel, the Venice Film Festival chairman told him that *Waterfront* was the “first Italian film made in America.”¹³⁷ In any case, it went on to claim a Silver Prize. Do these accolades signify a beaten system, or simply show it being swept up in its anti-communist phase? Was Kazan’s and Schulberg’s Hollywood triumph a pyrrhic victory, or did *Waterfront* blaze a path of glory for the American film art?

One of the most prominent advocates of such ‘Italian’ style of film, who also happens to be Italian, is Martin Scorsese. But Scorsese’s ethnicity and proletarian past is less significant than the Hollywood liberal outlook he espouses, and shares with Kazan. Judging by Scorsese’s fulsome response, *Waterfront* certainly left a lasting legacy on Hollywood liberals. In an

¹³⁴ Rogow, L. (1954). “Brando on the Waterfront.” *Saturday Review* 37 (24 July): pp. 25-26.

¹³⁵ Harper, M. (1954). The Big Sell: A Review (*Harper’s*, Aug 1954). *On the Waterfront*. J. E. Rapf, Cambridge University Press: pp. 153-156.

¹³⁶ Neve, B. (2009). *Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider*. London, NY, I. B. Tauris, p. 92

¹³⁷ Spiegel qt. in *Ibid*, p. 90

interview with Schickel, Scorsese further elaborates on the new realist and authentic qualities he experienced in watching *Waterfront*'s depiction of working class "people I knew." He said that despite the fact that they were Irish and he was Italian, it was "simply that they were street people and I got to tell you that that is what it was like. Those were people I was around.... It was like it was part of my blood."¹³⁸ But in view of the earlier examination of the inroads into modernist avant-garde drama made by Losey (and Polonsky) - prematurely cut off by the blacklist - is realism and authenticity in a photographic sense a sufficient end in itself? Italian neorealism overcame its inherent aesthetic limitations fairly quickly in order to lay the groundwork for what became known as the European art film. In any case, as Thom Andersen concludes in his Afterword to "Red Hollywood," neorealism in American cinema was a major casualty of the blacklist. "Neorealism went underground," asserts Andersen, most notably with *Salt of the Earth*,¹³⁹ the banning of which heralded a new paradigm shift in American culture. Kazan, like many American filmmakers in the shadow of McCarthyism, adapted to a particularly 'American style' of realism, to again borrow Brenda Murphy's phrase, that emphasised the depiction of character over social class.

In this sense, Kazan's elevation to a permanent place in the pantheon of American cinema shows an elemental fact of American cinema practice: it rejected the process of 'modernisation' and hounded its chief 'moderniser,' Losey, out of the country. At this historical crossroad between the pre- and post-war orders, a moment which firmly positioned the US at the helm of world capitalism, Marxist modernism could not spread its roots in such infertile ground. The European

¹³⁸ Scorsese, M., and Wilson, Michael (1995). *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies*; Schickel, R. (2005). *Elia Kazan: A Biography*. NY, Harper Collins, p. 311

¹³⁹ Andersen, Thom "Afterword" in Krutnik Frank, N. S., Neve Brian, and Stanfield Peter, Ed. (2007). *"Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, London, Rutgers University Press, p. 275

scene, on the other hand, proved fertile enough to spawn the art film, sufficiently ‘modernised’ to preserve at least a limited legacy of the early 20th century avant-garde. This is not necessarily alluding to film artists and modernists such as Godard, nor his ‘Marxist’ period in the 1970s, or the resulting collateral artistic damage (didacticism, later recognised by Godard), but to the strong intellectual undercurrents breaking up what *Cahiers* often referred to as the ‘old tradition of quality.’ As discussed in the previous chapter, Losey’s battle against the American version of the ‘old tradition,’ as well as Stalinist conceptions of art, had far-reaching implications.

Kazan strode the divide between Stanislavsky and Meyerhold before being captured by the former. Taking sides in the ideological battle between these two giants of the Russian theatrical avant-garde, meant choosing between swimming against the stream or adapting to the post-war liberal climate sufficiently readied for the celebration of deep-focus cinematic realism, as famously elaborated by Bazin. But in terms of performance, embracing Stanislavsky’s ‘Method’ of necessity refocused filmmakers’ gaze from the objective circumstances of the plot to the subjective driving forces of the actors. The significance of the emphasis on the individual’s affective memory may not have been appreciated during the period when for actors like Brando, as well as Garfield and other City Boys, the working-class milieu formed an integral part of their character. Rather, it is only in the wake of the Red Scare, after institutionalized anti-communism began purging actors’ psyches of this class instinct that the full extent of the damage may be gauged. Paradoxically, the reality of this danger was perhaps best articulated by Kazan himself, who, in commenting on Method acting, described it as the “Jack Daniels School of Acting.” This jocular description, containing more truth than intended by its author, was made in reference to getting some of his stars, such as James Dean and Andy Griffith, when drunk, or, for that matter,

Kazan's whipping them into any emotional state in order to express the right emotions for their scenes.¹⁴⁰

Brando's arrival onto the film scene could not have happened at a more opportune moment for Kazan. In 1973, he described his creative process with Brando to Ciment:

You had a feeling of 'Good, that's better than what I had told him!' You had a feeling 'Oh, I'm so grateful to him for doing that!' He was, like, giving you a gift. It was essentially what you'd asked him, but in feeling so *true*, so re-experienced through his own artistic mechanism. It's almost like directing a genius animal.... Part of it is intuition, part of it is real intelligence, part of it is ability to be empathic—that he connects with the people.¹⁴¹

Brando's extraordinarily high level of artistic intuition was tailor-made for Stanislavsky, and Kazan's forays into Method and subjective psychology. But the inherent danger in overreliance on the subjective factor is that unless the actors have the natural ability to 're-experience' their character with sufficient emotional precision, or, to put it in political terms, are in possession of a developed class consciousness, then the goal-oriented Method could backfire by oversimplifying the motivation. Indeed, to film scholar David Thompson, "the most worrying thing" about *Waterfront* is the overuse of the Strasberg method, which, reined in by melodrama, causes the intensified emotions to "go stale." He explains this aging by way of "melodrama [that] has pushed its way through the truthfulness, and thus we watch not just Terry but the enormous skills of Brando in the role." One manifestation of the conventional melodramatic "sentimentalities" is,

¹⁴⁰ Case, B. (1988). "Elia Kazan: Method and Madness." *Time Out* (4 May).

¹⁴¹ Ciment, M., Ed. (1973). *Kazan on Kazan*. London, Secker & Warburg, pp. 106-7

concludes Thompson, a result of the “failings in the script,” itself expressing overreliance on Strasberg’s ideas of emotionality. This is expressed in what Thompson calls the “masochistic hysteria” of the ending, which “today it looks like incoherence.” Thompson wonders what was achieved by going back to work.¹⁴² This is where the inherent political limitations of Method, at least from a Marxist viewpoint, could punish any filmmaker who is too reliant on actors’ subjectivities. Even though this problem can be alleviated by the increased level of the actor’s political consciousness, not even a ‘genius animal,’ (Kazan’s famous compliment of Brando’s abilities, mentioned earlier) can overcome this inherent limitation of the Method. The most a ‘genius’ actor can hope to achieve through Method is to allow his *existing* emotional content to surface. That is why the past political experiences of actors are paramount for Kazan’s directing. As the director aptly put it, “The material of my profession is the lives the actors have led up till now.”¹⁴³

Theatre critic Irwin Shaw, writing for *New Republic* in 1947, following Brando’s stage performance as Stanley Kowalski in *Streetcar*, further expands on Kazan’s view of his star as a ‘genius animal’:

Marlon Brando arrives as the best young actor on the American stage. Most young men in our theatre seem hardly violent enough to complain to a waiter who has brought them cream instead of lemon. Brando seems always on the verge of tearing down the proscenium with his bare hands.... By a slouching and apelike posture, by a curious, submerged and almost inarticulate manner of speech, by an explosive quickness of

¹⁴² Thompson, D. (2003). An Actor Prepares. *On the Waterfront*. J. E. Rapf. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: pp. 85-105.

¹⁴³ Ciment, M., Ed. (1973). *Kazan on Kazan*. London, Secker & Warburg, p. 42

movement, Brando documents a terrifying characterization.¹⁴⁴

This is the most powerful manifestation of Method, and brought a kind of natural force hitherto unseen on American stage, and, a quality, however terrifying, that could have been harnessed to show more of the social reality of the American working-class. To again stress this political point, the use of Method can illuminate characters' truths only to the extent to which the actor has assimilated the historical experiences of his character's epoch. So, a legitimate question arises as to whether Kazan's immersion in the performative, or the psychological, is an escape route from his earlier, more socially responsible cinema? In a recent public lecture in New York, "The Crisis of American Filmmaking", film critic David Walsh reinforced the vast chasm separating the tough working-class actors of the Golden Years of Hollywood from their contemporary leading men, and women. A contemporary star with a vast following, George Clooney, is "capable of showing a darker, tougher side," said Walsh. But "his persona is far less defined so far, in social terms," unlike the Jewish working-class stars Robinson and Garfield, or Bogart and Brando. Among female performers, according to Walsh, "there are even fewer figures who have been given the opportunity to represent something substantial." Walsh is comparing them to "Women who are intelligent, quick-witted, no pushovers, like the population itself: Bette Davis, Carole Lombard, Mary Astor, Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, etc."¹⁴⁵ If we recall that for a director exploring the Method, the building blocks of his directing are the actors' personal and political experiences, and, if we recognise that a major political component of that life – socialist culture, however distorted by Stalinism – effectively has been criminalized, what then could the latter-day Method actor draw on to re-experience the dreams and the hopes of the

¹⁴⁴ Shaw, I. (1947). "Theater: Masterpiece." *New Republic* (December 22): pp. 34-35.

¹⁴⁵ Walsh, D. (2010). *The Crisis of American Filmmaking & Cultural Life*, Feb 21, Roosevelt Hotel, NY, www.wsw.org/articles/2010/mar2010/nyca-m18.shtml (accessed on 18 Sep 2010).

vast majority of his audience? If one is to draw on the dominant discourse in the post-Soviet world, it would have to be the worship of the stock market.

Placing the primary focus on the actor's individual 'spine' inevitably clashes with his/her efforts to incorporate a broader social outlook. This is aptly summed up by Cornfield who explains that Kazan "cast 'to type' – requiring that the role be within the emotional and imaginative range of the performer..."¹⁴⁶ The result of such fine-tuning of intuition and the sensory apparatus is evident in perhaps the most discussed 'Method' scene, when Edie drops a glove and Terry, perched on a swing, plays with it and tries it on, "suggesting both an intimacy and an awkward experimentation – the glove is too tight –with a different view of life."¹⁴⁷ The use of such objects in American cinema was not a novelty. However, as Naremore observes, the glove in *Waterfront* "also has a purpose, but one that seems relatively unmotivated, more like an actor's than a writer's choice." Brando's handling of this object seems accidental, and for that reason, argues Naremore, "it looks spontaneous, contributing to the naturalistic cinema's love of verisimilitude."¹⁴⁸ This is, perhaps, as far as the psychologically driven cinema is expected to go towards fulfilling this basic naturalist potential.

Also, by all accounts, it was Brando's imagination that hugely contributed to that basic cinematic lure of verisimilitude in the famous cab scene. Brando allegedly invented the 'caressing' gesture with which he pushes away the gun that his brother draws on him. To Naremore, it is Brando's "naturalistic rhetoric" and the "feeling of power and nobility hidden beneath a vulnerable,

¹⁴⁶ Introduction by Cornfield, Kazan, E. (2009). *Kazan on Directing*. NY, Alfred A. Knoph, pp. xx-xxi

¹⁴⁷ Neve, B. (2009). *Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider*. London, NY, I. B. Tauris, p. 86

¹⁴⁸ Naremore, J. (1988). *Acting in the Cinema*. LA, University of California Press, p. 204

inarticulate surface,” that help to account for Brando’s impact in this celebrated scene.¹⁴⁹ The cinematic ‘magic’ of this classic scene could have only been enhanced by what Neve describes as “improvisation in the face of budgetary limitations.” The back seat of the cab, continues Neve, “seems more oppressively enclosed, with Boris Kaufman’s lighting serving both realism and the heightened state of the brothers’ relationship, as Terry reveals both the depth of his resentment (his failed American dream) and his awareness of the implications of his ‘decision’ for his brother.”¹⁵⁰ Importantly, according to Naremore, the taxi scene “encapsulates the film’s major themes in a single, virtually self-contained, episode” that “forever establishes one definition of the Method.” This scene can serve as a textbook example of a Method scene, in which Steiger’s character is faced with a choice “between saving himself and saving his brother.” Brando, on the other hand, is “largely *reacting* to events.” This scene even involves a classic Stanislavskian device, “beat change,” powerfully and subtly expressed on Brando’s shocked face when he realises his brother is “taking him for a ride.”¹⁵¹ “I coulda had class! I coulda been a contender! I coulda been somebody!” derives its impact precisely from the emotional depth tapped by skilful application of Method. However, even Kazan’s effective plumbing of the emotional depths of his star could not overcome inherent political limitations borne of the demands of Hollywood melodrama, and Kazan’s pragmatic acquiescence to these limitations.

This is brought out in Thompson’s analysis of a “critical flaw” in the story: sacrificing Charley instead of Terry. To Thompson this is a classical manifestation of conventional melodramatic sentimentality, that also “explains the untied end.” Why sacrifice Charley, wonders Thompson? The author suggests a “more poignant redirecting of the story,” eliminating Terry rather than

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 208

¹⁵⁰ Neve, B. (2009). Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider. London, NY, I. B. Tauris, p. 87

¹⁵¹ Naremore, J. (1988). Acting in the Cinema. LA, University of California Press, p. 208

Charley. Why? Unlike Terry, who is likely to talk, “a Charley confronted with Terry’s death would likely submit – a born careerist, one who speaks in ‘even and hopeless tones,’ utterly aware of how far his own weakness has trapped him.” This reworking of the plot would open up artistic possibilities of the kind Polonsky grappled with in the character of Joe Morse, also torn psychologically by the gravitational pull of the capitalist ‘force of evil.’¹⁵²

To his credit, Kazan provided a frank assessment of Brando’s contribution to the famous cab scene between himself and his brother Charley:

That scene was Brando’s doing. I don’t think I contributed much. The really touching thing was something Brando put in – he just said, ‘Oh, Charley,’ in a certain way.... The tone of his voice at that instant was what made that scene. And what was on his face. No director could have told an actor to do that.... I mean, I get a lot of credit for that scene, but I don’t deserve it.¹⁵³

But Brando’s brilliance alone cannot account for the evident emotional grip of the film. Perhaps Nicholas Ray grasped the essential reasons for the film’s reception when he declared that *Waterfront* was “Kazan’s translation of ‘to be or not to be.’”¹⁵⁴ This is echoed in Schulberg’s recent comment that “this is essentially a theme that will be relevant as long as the human mind is a hive of conflicting passions, loyalties, ideals.” It is because “The conflict is universal, to be

¹⁵² Thompson, D. (2003). An Actor Prepares. *On the Waterfront*. J. E. Rapf. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: pp. 85-105.

¹⁵³ Kantor, B. R., Blacker, Irwin, R., Kramer Ann, Ed. (1970). *Directors at Word: Interviews with American Film-Makers*, Funk & Wagnalls; Baer, W., Ed. (2000). *Elia Kazan: Interviews*. Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, p. 118

¹⁵⁴ Ray, N., and Ray, Susan, Ed. (1995). *I Was Interrupted: Nicholas Ray On Making Movies*. Berkeley, University of California Press, p. 30

or not to be, to do or not to do.”¹⁵⁵ Raising dramatic stakes to such existential, life and death heights, can certainly account for some of *Waterfront*’s timelessness. Also, Kazan’s own heavy emotional investment in the story lends the film some of its lasting resonance. But Kazan himself sees the film’s intrinsic value as residing in something more basic. In an interview with Schickel, he went beyond his star actor in searching for a source of *Waterfront*’s longevity. He found it in the central love story between Brando and Eva Marie Saint, declaring that “something in that basic story is what stirs people. Not the social-political thing so much as the human element in it.”¹⁵⁶ In fact, the love story constitutes “one of the few elements not based on actual events or persons,” according to Dan Georgakas, who adds that it was “the imposition by the writer of his sense of how the story must be told.”¹⁵⁷ As will be discussed in the next chapter in relation to *Salt of the Earth*, it was the very ‘social-political thing’ in the central relationship of the story that struck a chord with mass audiences.

Kazan’s apolitical assessment of the love story in *Waterfront* is entirely consistent with his creative trajectory from Marx to Freud, for better or worse, over a prolonged period. This is, in turn, entirely in line with a liberal Hollywood outlook. Martin Scorsese has written of Kazan’s films as extending “the limits of what was emotionally and psychologically possible,” leading the way to John Cassavetes and the independent movement.¹⁵⁸ But Cassavetes’ artistic independence grew out of a far narrower political base than that of his pre-HUAC counterparts, in what historian Ellen Schrecker aptly sums up as a ‘silent generation,’ a generation which, in

¹⁵⁵ Schulberg’s Foreword in Rapf, J. E., Ed. (2003). *On the Waterfront*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. xx

¹⁵⁶ Schickel, R. (2005). *Elia Kazan: A Biography*. NY, Harper Collins, pp. 296-97

¹⁵⁷ Georgakas, D. (2003). Schulberg on the Waterfront. *On the Waterfront*. J. E. Rapf. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: pp. 40-60.

¹⁵⁸ Scorsese, M. (2003). Farewell: Martin Scorsese Pays Tribute to Elia Kazan, Dec 26. *Entertainment Weekly*.

Nora Sayre's words, inhabited a 'synthetic safety zone.' This is satirised by Biskind, who projects Terry and Edie's future together after an alternative happy ending: "Their children will grow up breathing clean air from the smell of the docks. By the sixties Edie will be teaching English at Forrest Hills High and in her spare time will tidy up Terry's diction so he can become a professional commentator on working-class and urban problems...a regular on late-night talk shows."¹⁵⁹ This vision is as antithetical to the historical context of *Waterfront* as one could get.

¹⁵⁹ Biskind, P. (1983). *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties*. NY, Pantheon Books, p. 179

Chapter V

The ‘un-American’ take on ‘Big Labour’: *Salt of the Earth* and democratic unionism

As discussed in previous chapters, the post-war mutation of film noir into its (allegedly) more psychologically and socially sophisticated mode, often referred to as film gris, seemed to herald the dawn of the political and artistic independence of American film art, embodied in a select sub-group of the Hollywood Left, when it appeared that the tide of history was turning their way. However, the political and artistic independence of the Hollywood Left was short lived, and when the tide turned against these ‘subversives,’ it set in motion a chain of events that eventually led to the case of the only film officially banned in US history, *Salt of the Earth*, often referred to as the ‘last hurrah’ of Popular Front culture on the American cinema screen. So, the left paradigm to which the Hollywood Left had been attuned since the Great Depression was, to all intents and purposes, crushed out of existence by McCarthyism around the year of *Salt*’s release. It is primarily the film’s historical context that invests it with a far greater political significance than would otherwise be expected from this minor message film. However, the film’s unambiguous political message, which celebrated genuine democratic unionism, threatened to catapult it to the status of a cause celebre of the left well above its lowly B-grade status. As far as the Big Business and Big Labour were concerned, *Salt* resurrected a 1930s CIO-style perspective they thought was buried by the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947.

Indeed, *Salt* explicitly criticizes the anti-union Taft-Hartley. According to Broe, in this film the law is “almost directly beholden to the capitalist class, and the workers by striking feel the full brunt of it as a weapon that is wielded against them. They are outside the law. Their solution is that of the mass action as in the final scene, men and women, Anglo and Mexican, now united stave off the sheriff’s eviction of Juan and Esperanza.” Broe notes that this class action is in sharp contrast to the conformity of the protagonists of *Waterfront*. However, in *Salt*, the workers “by their mass action instead force the law to adjust to their needs; they define the law.”¹ The power of the organized workers was resoundingly demonstrated by the miners’ and their families’ successful fight-back against the Sheriff’s and his henchmen’s attempted eviction of the Quintero family from their house. It is telling that this fictional feat could not be dramatised even in that other seminal anti-capitalist film of the Popular Front that somehow slipped through the cracks of the anticommunist gate-keepers, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940). While the evicted farmers of *Grapes* seek salvation in the green fields of California, the New Mexico miners at the centre of *Salt* stand their ground. When Ramon returns from an ill-conceived hunt, he is heartened to observe the community’s defiance in the face of state power. As opposed to the uncertain, albeit hopeful, future of the Joad family in *Grapes*, the triumph of the miners and their families seems complete. This turnaround against the odds in the David and Goliath battle between the Zinc company and miners is a shot in the arm for the demoralised Ramon, who also undergoes something of a class and gender epiphany: he thanks Esperanza for her leadership and strength in this class struggle. As Lorence observes, “To film viewers, successful resistance to

¹ Broe, D. (2001). *Outside the Law: Labor and the crime Film 1941 - 55*, PhD thesis, New York University, p. 540

the eviction and the apparent acquiescence of company officials translated as victory in the union's battle against the company.”²

Directed by Herbert Biberman from a screenplay by Michael Wilson, *Salt of the Earth* concerns a strike which took place in a New Mexico mining town in 1951-2. At the centre of the action was the Bayard (New Mexico) Local 890 of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (IUMMSW) who struck against the Empire Zinc Corporation over several economic, social and safety issues. But this was no ordinary strike. As James Lorence, writing in *Film History* explains, Mine-Mill “took steps that influenced the definition of community, the pattern of gender relations, and the sanctity of free speech in ways that challenged the social structure and distribution of power in modern America.”³ Enid Sefcovic contrasts this potentially profound impact of *Salt* with the other seminal Big Labour film of 1954, *On the Waterfront*. His central thesis is that these labour classics were “epideictics for Kazan’s and Biberman’s experiences with the HUAC investigation, self-conscious studies of the directors’ principles. Union struggles serve as the vehicle in narrative analogies that express different philosophies about a key tension in the American identity – that between individualism and community.”⁴ A central argument of this chapter, not necessarily in contradistinction to Sefcovic, concretises his analysis of ‘a key tension in the American identity – that between individualism and community’ expressed in these films by a more historical and materialist approach that focuses on the key ideological obsession of the witch-hunters: the suppression of working class consciousness. As mentioned

² Lorence, J. J. (1998). “The Suppression of *Salt of the Earth* in Midwest America: The underside of Cold War culture in Detroit and Chicago.” *Film History* 10: pp. 346-358.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Sefcovic, E. (2002). “Cultural Memory and the Cultural Legacy of Individualism and Community in Two Classic Films about Labor Unions.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19.3 (Sep): 330.

earlier, it was this pro-union film's championing of 'democratic unionism' that made it so 'dangerous' to the powers-that-be. Although Sefcovic's emphasis on a vague notion of community takes the edge out of the class analysis of the films, his comparative study of the two American Big Labour classics enormously enriches the scholarship on the complex dialectical relationship between American capitalism and its cinematic storytellers, compelled by the profit imperative of their industry to rein in their proletarian instincts. Stories about organised labour put this tension into far sharper relief, particularly at a critical historical conjuncture where the ideological battle between socialism and capitalism still formed a central item on the political agenda. And managing, or pacifying, 'Big Labour' was the most urgent political task of the 'military-industrial complex' as it struggled to regain its footing after an ideologically devastating war.

While the systematic suppression of Big Labour on screen during the Red Scare did not grind American social problem cinema to a halt, one could, nevertheless, trace the far-reaching transformations in the way Hollywood started doing business in its 1970s renaissance to this dark period in its history. Film historian Jon Lewis has made significant advances in this field. His work on the symbiotic relationship between the blacklist and censorship in Hollywood, in particular on the resultant fundamental transformation of its business model, examines the impact of McCarthyism from an unorthodox, i.e., non-ideological standpoint: the business model run by the old mogul entrepreneurs, the 'horizontal' model, had run its course, and its operations had to be aligned to the objective shifts in the increasingly globalised capitalist economy, that is, become conglomerised and 'vertically integrated' operations. Blacklisting therefore performed an historically necessary role in sweeping away all the political impediments to the survival of

the film industry in America. Lewis' methodology provides a counterbalance, and supplement, to the nostalgia surrounding Roosevelt-era liberalism and Stalinism of their glory days. The pragmatism of the studio moguls, who sought to emasculate the troublesome 'Big Labour' in their film productions, at least partially fitted into the long-term perspective of the political establishment set on annihilating it ideologically.⁵

Six decades ago, a politically conscious storyteller could, without fear of contradicting the reality of class struggle in America, make a union's victory in the 'battle against the company' a plausible dramatic scenario. Not surprisingly, six decades ago, the makers of *Salt* sought to promote their story of a victorious union in the heartland of militant unionism, the thriving auto city of Detroit. In fact, Detroit was one of the main areas identified by the creators of *Salt* during their bitter struggle to screen their banned film to the broader sections of the working class. *Salt*'s blacklisted screenwriter Michael Wilson had worked closely with John Clark and Maurice Travis of IUMMSW to identify more target cities, including Detroit, Chicago, Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Vancouver, B.C., St. Louis, Phoenix and Tucson.⁶ Again, this is not surprising since UAW still represented a viable avenue of class struggle, at least in the minds of the working class.

The political significance of Biberman's fight for the hearts and minds of Detroit and Chicago extends well beyond their immediate narrative concerns of *Salt*, and again exposes the

⁵ For further discussion, see Lewis, J. (2001). "The End of Cinema As We Know It and I Feel...: An Introduction to a Book on Nineties American Film." *The End of Cinema As We Know It: American Film in the Nineties*. J. Lewis. NY, NY University Press: pp. 1-10; and Lewis, J. (2002). *How the Blacklist Saved Hollywood. Hollywood v. Hardcore: How the Struggle Over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry*. J. Lewis. NY, NY University Press: pp. 11-49.

⁶ Lorence, J. J. (1998). "The Suppression of *Salt of the Earth* in Midwest America: The underside of Cold War culture in Detroit and Chicago." *Film History* 10: pp. 346-358.

historically conditioned limitations of American progressivism in Hollywood. Comparing the identity crisis borne of Kazan's 'premature anti-Stalinism' that wrought havoc in his personal and professional life to Biberman's uncritical embrace of this perspective, two typical responses emerge: Kazan's renunciation of the totality of a communist perspective on the one hand, and the fostering of illusions in the ability of American Stalinism to reform under the rank-and-file pressure on the other. The latter, reformist perspective was the one clearly chosen by the makers of *Salt*. While *Waterfront* carried out a frontal assault on the CPUSA from the right, *Salt of the Earth* attempted to rekindle the Party's sagging political credibility from the left. It took a direct corporate-government intervention to eliminate any politically gray remnants separating the two perspectives. As Sefcovic explains, "HUAC was the crucible in which the principles of the directors were calcinated; the facts of the Congressional investigation were oxidised in the artistic process. *On the Waterfront* and *Salt of the Earth* transfigure the past by using narrative analogy to look into the soul of the era."⁷ The key to capturing the 'soul' of the 1950s progressive artists and filmmakers was their relationship to Stalinism. At this point it is useful to reintroduce *On the Waterfront* as a counterpoint to *Salt* since, from a classical Marxist standpoint, the two Big Labour films of 1954 could be seen as flip sides of the same political coin.

The political aesthetics of the two Big Labour films – the story of two Stalinisms

Biberman's, Jarrico's, and Wilson's inability or unwillingness to cut the umbilical cord that tied them to Stalinism resulted in *Salt*'s redefinition of the working-class community in a manner that

⁷ Sefcovic, E. (2002). "Cultural Memory and the Cultural Legacy of Individualism and Community in Two Classic Films about Labor Unions." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19.3 (Sep): 345.

was sharply at odds with *Waterfront*'s portrayal of that same working-class milieu, albeit on the New York waterfront. Father Berry (Karl Malden) exemplifies these differences most eloquently when, during a commemoration of a murdered, dissident docker, he proclaims that "No other union in America would stand for this sort of thing." He is answered by a docker who says, "The waterfront's different, Father, tougher, like it ain't part of America." The 'otherness' of the "working-class culture and identity so 'different' from consensus America as to require reform" is the central preoccupation of Will Watson's study of *Waterfront*.⁸ Watson argues that Kazan's portrayal of the working-class culture of the New York waterfront is one in which the film envisions the history of workers as "the history of trade unions and *only* as the history of trade unions." In the context of the great CIO-AFL merger – after the troublesome 'reds' have been purged – Kazan's pro-union orientation bespeaks, in Watson's view, endorsement of the "politically conservative post-Hartley-Taft union" as the only "legitimate worker culture."⁹ *Salt of the Earth*, on the other hand, is a direct attack on Taft-Hartley,¹⁰ and it champions a diametrically opposed kind of union: the democratic, rank-and-file dominated Mill and Mine, which was expelled from the CIO.

Hence, even though Kazan's film has become "a classic work in the cultural lexicon," writes Sefcovic, "*Waterfront* exemplifies a myth of individualism that naturalises acceptance of a divisive cultural ideology." *Salt of the Earth*, on the other hand, "elaborates values of community and solidarity that are rarely depicted by the prevailing mythos of individualism. It works toward

⁸ Watson, W. (1997). "'The Waterfront's Different': *On the Waterfront*, the AFL-CIO Merger and the Making of the American Working Class." *Borderlines Swansea* 4.3: pp. 234-250.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Broe, D. (2001). *Outside the Law: Labor and the crime Film 1941 - 55*, PhD thesis, New York University, p. 539

an integration of individual empowerment within the community.”¹¹ To put this in blunt political terms, *Salt* championed the very perspective ruthlessly suppressed by the political establishment, while *Waterfront* expressed its strategic objectives. The criminalisation of the most militant sections of the working class was essential ideological preparatory work for the pacification of the whole workforce. Will Watson’s textual analysis of some key scenes in *Waterfront* testifies to such a “negation of working class culture.” For all its claims to naturalism and authenticity, the underlying aesthetic strategy of Kazan “labours long and hard” to this end by making a “working-class barroom,” or Johnny Friendly’s bar, a critical dramatic setting.¹² The turning points Watson has in mind concern Terry’s initial feelings of revenge over the murder of his brother, and his realisation that Edie will capture his heart. In the former instance, Terry vents his anger at a strategically placed, framed photo of Johnny Friendly, which refuses to be dislodged from the wall. Watson notes that the “rock hard permanence of this icon of criminality, its refusal to disappear from the visual field, marks working-class culture with the indelible stigma of crime.”¹³ This criticism is echoed by Mr. Harper in his 1954 review of the film, in which he charges *Waterfront* with possessing “every virtue except the one which would have redeemed it even had it lacked others, which is justice.” By justice the *Harper’s* writer implies precisely the stigmatisation of the workers, or the “responsible judgement,” which is eschewed “[f]or the sake of a hollow fidelity to the brooding atmosphere of violence and venality around the New York docks.” Finally, *Harpers* advises the filmmakers that had they “chosen to have it merely a decadently sophisticated underworld travelogue – a kind of American “*Quai des Brumes*” – they

¹¹ Sefcovic, E. (2002). “Cultural Memory and the Cultural Legacy of Individualism and Community in Two Classic Films about Labor Unions.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19.3 (Sep): pp. 329-351.

¹² Watson, W. (1997). “‘The Waterfront’s Different’: *On the Waterfront*, the AFL-CIO Merger and the Making of the American Working Class.” *Borderlines Swansea* 4.3: pp. 234-250.

¹³ Ibid.

would have been truer to themselves, their subject, and their art.”¹⁴ In a social problem film like *Waterfront*, which centred on one of the hot domestic topics of the day, unions and organised crime, artistic truth is indeed inseparable from truth to its political subject.

In this political context it is critical to stress the diametrically opposed class interests of the union bureaucracy and its members. For all its ambivalence towards unionism, *Waterfront* differentiates between the two antagonistic classes within Big Labour, as evidenced in the sympathetic portrayal of the rank-and-filers like K.O. Dugan and Edie’s father.¹⁵ Biberman, on the other hand, had not made the critical differentiation between the instinctive, if not fully conscious, anti-Stalinism of the rank-and-file unionists and the entrenched, and highly conscious, Stalinism of their union bosses. This is most graphically manifested in Biberman’s impassioned plea to Big Labour:

Is there nowhere within the greater body of the largest aggregation of trade unions in the United States, one voice strong enough to register moral objection and moral suasion in respect to such a situation? Is it possible that of the scores of influential leaders who have seen this film, and loved it, there is not one whose emotions, whose preacceptance of the honest, public, artistic effort, will rise above the small fears and petty ‘political’ undertakings of less representative individuals? Is there no one who has sufficient love for our laws, not to speak of our traditions, who will be impelled to create sanctuary for a union film within our country?... Are the responsible leaders of the working people in the United States determined that this silly game of surreptitious maneuvering continue to be

¹⁴ Harper, M. (1954). The Big Sell: A Review (*Harper's*, Aug 1954). *On the Waterfront*. J. E. Rapf, Cambridge University Press: pp. 153-156.

¹⁵ Maland, C. J. (1982). “*On the Waterfront* (1954): Film and the Dilemmas of American Liberalism in the McCarthy Era.” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 14.2: pp. 107-127.

imposed upon us? Are they satisfied that the millions of members of their organisations shall be deprived the opportunity which they themselves wish might be afforded them of profiting from a viewing of this film because a few obstinate, unreasoning individuals are seeking dark satisfactions which will not stand discussion?¹⁶

The saga of the suppression of *Salt* in this most industrial and militant of regions of the US offers instructive lessons on the historically-derived political limitations of the American left. Also, the essential content of the only officially banned film in America could be matched to the political motivations behind the unprecedented total war waged against *Salt* by HUAC, and by extension the entire US establishment. James Lorence argues that the “sanitizing” of the Hollywood unions and destruction of the CSU were “part and parcel of the larger process through which organised labour accommodated itself to the demands of the Cold War and made its peace with the corporate state.” After a purging of the radical elements, “the once militant industrial unionists would quietly accept merger with, if not absorption by, the AFL and adopt the tenets of business unionism that the Federation represented.”¹⁷ It is in this political context that the unprecedented assault by the Cold Warriors on one particular pro-union film could be appreciated. The following section attempts to pinpoint the sore spot of the American political establishment touched off by *Salt of the Earth*.

The ‘democratic unionism’ of *Salt*

¹⁶ Biberman qt. in Jarrico, P. (1953). *Salt of the Earth Chronology*, in Lorence, J. (2006). Screening America: United States History Through Film Since 1900. NY, Pearson Longman, p. 30.

¹⁷ Lorence, J. (1999). The Suppression of *Salt of the Earth*: How Hollywood, big labor, and politicians blacklisted a movie in Cold War America. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico, p. 7

The concept of ‘democratic unionism’ complicates somewhat a simple equation between anticommunism and capitalism. The political circumstances that gave rise to the censorship of *Salt* is a fairly complicated matter even in a localised setting of the film. As Ellen Baker explains, in order to understand the local political economy, it is important to “reject any easy or apparent symmetry between communism and anticommunism; both were present in Grant County in the late 1940s, but they do not line up evenly in opposing columns.” Instead, argues Baker, we find a “confusing political terrain in which one version of communism – an especially democratic one – influenced Local 890’s structure and actions but could not be openly acknowledged,” while “anticommunism was used by management as one tool among many in what was essentially an economic contest.”¹⁸ What did the Local 890 create? They built an organisation that was “more than a labour union.” They had created a “worker community that coalesced during the Empire strike and the *Salt* struggle to challenge the social, racial, and political values of their time.” Furthermore, the Grant County proletariat “pioneered a new brand of unionism that opened opportunity to talented leaders regardless of ethnicity or sex, which established a model the union movement has yet to replicate as it strives to modernise in response to new demands in a new era.”¹⁹ In other words, a genuine ‘democratic unionism.’ The swift response by the establishment to this burgeoning union democracy accords with Jon Lewis’ stress on the underlying material interests, or the bottom line, of a big business intent on carrying out the attack on labour militancy as a long-term perspective, even at the cost of some short term profitability.²⁰ And the key to the big business long-term viability was purging Big Labour of its

¹⁸ Baker, E. (2007). *On Strike and on Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America*, The University of N. Carolina Press, p. 8

¹⁹ Walsh, F. R. (1986). “The Films We Never Saw: American Movies View Organised Labour, 1934-1954.” *Labor History*(27): 580.

²⁰ “How the Blacklist Saved Hollywood” in Lewis, J. (2002). *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How The Struggle Over Censorship Created The Modern Film Industry*, New York University Press; also interview with the author, Feb 9, 2010

troublesome elements. The purging of the left unions from the CIO was a step in that direction.

As Steve Rosswurm elaborates in his historical study of the CIO, “Side by side with the attack on the Hollywood Left, the mainstream labour movement was engaged in its own family quarrel.” He cites the growing influence of anticommunist liberals like the Steelworkers’ Philip Murray and the Autoworkers’ Walter Reuther which meant that the “once militant and politically progressive Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) turned on its Left-led unions in order to rid its ranks of Communist and radical unionists.”²¹ Rosswurm traces the roots of the split to the decision in 1948 by many leftist unionists to break ranks with the Democratic Party and endorse the presidential candidacy of liberal Henry A. Wallace. The split ended in the expulsion of 11 unions from the CIO due to the presence of Communists in their leadership ranks. According to Rosswurm, some scholars have noted that “the CIO purge deprived the organization of its most militant activists and democratic unions.”²² Larry Ceplair also emphasises this internecine struggle within Big Labour that was vividly expressed in *Salt*: “Still another unique aspect of the saga of *Salt* is that it symbolises the polarity of the labour movement in the Cold War United States: One union working so hard to prevent the story of another from reaching the screen.”²³ The uniqueness of this polarity manifested during the making of *Salt* hints at the real and present danger feared by the American ruling elite, which, as suggested earlier, had no moral and legal qualms about killing off this cinematic celebration of democratic unionism. While it is obvious enough why a rise in rank-and-file democracy in the American workplace could put more downward pressure on the profitability of Wall Street investors and Big Business in general, the

²¹ Rosswurm, S. (1992). *The CIO's Left-Led Unions*. New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, pp. 13-15

²² Ibid.

²³ Ceplair, L. (2004). "The Many 50th Anniversaries of *Salt of the Earth*." *Cineaste* 29.2 (Spring): pp. 8-9.

ire provoked among the CIO union bureaucracy by the fictional account of this process in *Salt* made less sense at a time when unions still attracted mass working-class allegiance. However, the long-term material interests of the unions were always tied to capitalism, and purging it of the troublesome militants was seen as a necessary prerequisite for the mutually beneficial relationship between the leaders of Big Labour and Big Business. So, it is not surprising that, as Lorence argues, “It is clear that the catalyst in Hollywood’s offensive against *Salt* was Roy Brewer, International Representative of IATSE.”²⁴ As has been discussed earlier in relation to Kazan, Brewer was instrumental in shifting the narrative axis of Schulberg’s screenplay for *Waterfront* from gangsterism to anticommunism.

But this elemental lesson of American class politics was not fully grasped by the makers of a pro-union film that promotes class unity above gender, rather than the polarity of the labour movement in the US, as proscribed by Brewer in *Waterfront*. Once settled in Detroit, Biberman arranged a preview of *Salt* for Paul Broder, who owned and operated a chain of thirteen Detroit-area theatres. Lorence cites the *Federated Press* news bureau which reported that the preview had been a “universal hit with union people, as well as some of their enemies.” According to this account, “One CIO veteran compared the *Salt* story to the GM sitdown strike of 1937, while a UAW Local 600 committee member asserted that ‘Old Henry Ford couldn’t teach that company nothing.’” Even *Ford Facts*, the voice of Local 600, according to Lorence, “pined in the praise. Even an AFL building trades representative pronounced it a ‘good film.’”²⁵ Once again, as Lorence aptly observes, *Salt* had “confounded its detractors and deeply impressed a sceptical

²⁴ Lorence, J. J. (1998). “The Suppression of *Salt of the Earth* in Midwest America: The underside of Cold War culture in Detroit and Chicago.” *Film History* 10: 348.

²⁵ *Federated Press* and *Ford Facts* qt. in Ibid, p. 351

audience.”²⁶ Such heartfelt reception from all ranks of the union movement would have solidified the filmmakers’ belief about the Stalinists’ capacity to self-reform. Therefore, following this rapturous reception, and unaware of the increasingly anticommunist and corporatist orientation of UAW, Biberman naturally saw the UAW heartland of the Midwest as the “mobilising centre” for the screening of his movie. Biberman’s assumption that a union dominated by the Reuthers and “their brand of anti-Communist liberalism could become ‘the heart of the operation’” in Detroit demonstrated, according to Lorence, “his limited grasp of the impact of Cold War politics on the internal struggle for control of the UAW.”²⁷

Here again one encounters the tendency to engage in wishful thinking about reuniting two antagonistic wings of Big Labour – the democratic unionism represented by the Mine-Mill, and the antidemocratic, and openly anticommunist, CIO. As was discussed in relation to *Waterfront*, such reunification with the AFL, was forged only after the self-imposed ‘loyalty oaths’ cleansed their ranks of socialist-minded activists. In fact, Will Watson asserts that only in the context of the “imminent AFL-CIO merger” and the “national ‘labour troubles’” could *Waterfront* be fully appreciated as part of a dialogue on “what it meant to be a worker in the USA.”²⁸ *Salt of the Earth* also should be viewed in that light of the life-and-death struggle of Big Labour to remove its ‘cancerous’ communist outgrowth. As mentioned earlier, IATSE actually spearheaded the attack on *Salt*. Even more crucially, Mine-Mill’s ideal of democratic unionism was, from the US establishment’s perspective, the most un-American scenario imaginable – it was tantamount to establishing soviets in America. In that sense, there is a great deal of truth in jokes by the union’s

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Watson, W. (1997). “‘The Waterfront’s Different’: *On the Waterfront*, the AFL-CIO Merger and the Making of the American Working Class.” *Borderlines Swansea* 4.3: pp. 234-250.

International officers that Mine-Mill's Clinton Jencks was "trying to build socialism in one county" – Grant County – and should ease up on the rank-and-file activism, referring in particular to Jencks's emphasis on women's rights.²⁹ (This is a quip on Stalin's actual policy of building socialism in one country.)

But building 'socialism,' or any form of rank-and-file democracy, in the Grant County of New Mexico was conceived of as part of the Popular Front alliance between classes. As Lorence contends, "the effort to promote *Salt's* exhibition in the Midwest dramatises the difficulties encountered in the creation of a cross-class alliance among progressives as 'cultural workers,' unionists, and civil libertarians who fought together for creative freedom."³⁰ But the blacklisted filmmakers' efforts to forge a 'cross-class alliance' is another clear sign of their lack of the kind of political sophistication possessed by Hollywood Marxists such as Polonsky and Losey.

As documented in Chapter Two, Polonsky's creative conflict in *Body and Soul* with Rossen's adherence to what was essentially a Popular Front perspective was nothing less than a struggle to win the liberal Rossen to his socialist perspective. Rossen's natural Popular Front inclinations are manifested in the films he created at the zenith of the alliance between the pro-capitalist Democrats and Stalinists in the late 1930s. Films such as *Marked Woman* only reinforced this cross-class solidarity between the DA's office and the working-class women they police, in particular Bette Davis' character. By the time Biberman told his 1930s story, the triumphant Cold War consensus already had ruptured the inter-class alliance between the communists and

²⁹ Baker, E. (2007). *On Strike and on Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America*, The University of N. Carolina Press, p. 242

³⁰ Lorence, J. J. (1998). "The Suppression of *Salt of the Earth* in Midwest America: The underside of Cold War culture in Detroit and Chicago." *Film History* 10: 347.

the liberals. So, naturally, as Lorence elaborates, “confronted by insurmountable obstacles, ‘cultural workers’ and unionists failed in their effort to forge a cross-class link in support of a film that, by telling a workers’ story, challenged the prevailing consensus behind corporate values and business unionism.”³¹ But the UAW, along with its entire CIO leadership, fully adopted ‘business unionism’ in direct opposition to the ‘democratic unionism’ promoted by its Mine-Mill rank-and-filers, led by Clinton Jencks. By the time *Salt* was completed, the UAW was well and truly on the road to corporatism. But the UAW degeneration was a protracted process, as Kazan’s unpleasant encounter with the ‘Man from Detroit’ demonstrated, which quickly dispelled any illusions Kazan held for the UAW, and Stalinism in general. Lorence concludes that Biberman was right about one thing, at least. He understood that Detroit was significant because it represented the “critical jump from New York.”³² However, “What he failed to grasp,” argues Lorence, “was the size of the gap to be breached.”³³

While the gap between the union members and bureaucrats could not be breached in reality, that was precisely what the makers of *Salt of the Earth* managed in fiction by presenting a united front between miners and union officials. This unity is symbolised by Juan Chacon, the Union Local’s president in both fiction and in real life. He said that *Salt*’s creators had “the responsibility of ensuring our picture ran true to life from start to finish.” Importantly, he stressed that the film was “not intended as a documentary record of that particular strike but ... it is a true account of our people’s lives and struggles.”³⁴ While such passion for artistic truth may have clashed with the class interests of the CIO bureaucracy, Chacon’s stated artistic objectives did

³¹ Ibid, p. 355

³² Biberman qt. in Ibid, p. 351

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Chacon qt. in Platt, D. (1992). *Celluloid Power: Social Film Criticism from The Birth of a Nation to Judgement at Nuremberg*. Metuchen, N.J. & London, The Scarecrow Press, p. 486

reflect the Local 890's united class perspective. In a review of Lorence's book *The Suppression of "Salt of the Earth"*, Miller asserts that the author, "clarifies how the Grant County mining community practically eliminated the racial divide among workers and turned the labor action into a class struggle."³⁵ Here the critic touches on a critical issue in the book's subject, and not only for historians, but for American capitalism itself: solidarity across class, not gender, lines as the main prerequisite for the political independence of the miners. That 'Such collectivist vision on screen has not been matched since *Salt*' – to again cite Ceplair – is not a historical accident in the post-HUAC evolution of American culture. The story of, and behind *Salt* is, to recall Broe's usage of a basic Marxist doctrine, when 'class-in-itself' becomes 'class-for-itself.' HUAC effectively put a stop to such a 'collectivist vision.' But before that was an accomplished fact of American cinema, film gris and its typical dissections of capitalism, most notably in *The Strange Loves of Martha Ivers*, it was social class, rather than gender, that was the key determinant of character. Broe observes an instance of anti-Hollywood axial realignment in narrative logic, from gender to class perspective in *Martha Ivers*, in which capitalist and proletarian characters (Walter and Martha, and Sam and his pregnant girlfriend) are compelled to find succour in their own class, and are severely damaged when they try to cross that invisible line.³⁶

The relationship between class and gender in *Salt of the Earth*

This subtle shift in the gender-class coaxial in no way invalidates the critical role of the miners' women in the strike. On the contrary, the blacklisted Hollywood filmmakers were so enchanted by the story of the women's picket, that they enlisted the mining families in an alliance to

³⁵ Miller, T. (2000). "The Suppression of *Salt of the Earth*: How Hollywood, Big Labor, and Politicians Blacklisted a Movie in Cold War America [book review]." *Cineaste* 25.3: 59.

³⁶ Interview with Broe, Feb 12, 2010

translate strike experiences into a dramatic film that could open cinema to realistic portrayals of working-class life.³⁷ In any case, the leading lady Rosaria Revueltas did not share her contemporary's feminist interpretations of her film. In a 1992 interview, the actress explained, "What the women were asking for was indoor plumbing for their homes, and because of that everybody thinks that the film is feminist. But everything sprang up spontaneously."³⁸ In other words, the political essence of *Salt* is directed to a proletarian, rather than gendered identity.

While the makers of *Salt* clearly misjudged the relationship of class forces in Big Labour, their political hopes were also pinned to a narrative strategy that involved telling this union story through the "simplest story form of motion picture: a love story."³⁹ But this love story between the key figures of the strike, Ramon and Esperanza, was a qualitative departure from melodramatic conventions, in which *gender*, rather than *class*, is foregrounded. In the case of *Salt*, owing to the very democratic process of scripting the film, in which both men and women fully participated, the usual generic conventions were eschewed and unmediated *class* instincts came to the fore. Importantly, this process also gave full expression to a female proletarian perspective. Biberman recalled the reaction of the female section of the audience at one preview as nothing short of inspirational:

Women, how wonderful are women...the wives of the distinguished personages who came were not hesitant in speaking of their tremendous enjoyment of the picture.... The [theatre] owner's wife was there and was very, very moved. And she was giving it to her

³⁷ Baker, E. (2007). *On Strike and on Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America*. The University of N. Carolina Press, p. 5

³⁸ Rimbau, E., and Torreiro, Casimiro (1992). "'This film is going to make history': An Interview with Rosaria Revueltas." *Cineaste* 19.2/3 (Dec): p. 50.

³⁹ Jarrico, P., & Biberman, Herbert (1953/92). "Breaking Ground: The Making of *Salt of the Earth*." *Celluloid Power: Social Film Criticism from The Birth of a Nation to Judgement at Nuremberg*. ed. Platt, D. Metuchen, N.J. & London, The Scarecrow Press: 479.

husband.... And good.⁴⁰

This sentiment is echoed by Nora Sayre, who argues that *Salt*'s "vigour springs from its emphasis on the conflicts and bitter tensions between men and women, among those working on the same side...." Sayre concludes that *Salt* "concentrates even more on sexual oppression than class oppression."⁴¹ This gender-oriented perspective places the main fault-line of the film's conflict within the rank-and-filers of opposite sexes rather than in opposing class interests within Big Labour. However, the feminism of *Salt* is anticapitalist in character, effortlessly integrated into this love story and historical narrative. The leading lady, Rosaria Revueltas's, ambivalence towards feminism, cited earlier, could be seen through such an anticapitalist perspective, animated less by gender identity politics than the basic class interests they happen to share with their husbands. Nevertheless, the class oppression of these mining families does not lessen the intensity of the battle of the sexes at home. After the women have assumed political leadership in the strike, the men's resentment and uncertainty over the role reversal are brought out in the drinking scenes and the hunting episode. The dramatic reversal in the gender relations is powerfully dramatised in the confrontation between Ramon and Esperanza, in which she reproaches him for his threat to hit her as something belonging to the "old way." This is, in fact, a turning point in *Salt of the Earth* that takes place in the Quinteros' kitchen, with Ramon and Esperanza fighting over the "new way" that her strike activism seems to be charting for their family. "The Anglo bosses look down on you," she reminds him, "and you hate them for it. 'Stay in your place, you dirty Mexican' – that's what they tell you. But why must you say to me, 'Stay in *your* place'? Do you feel better having someone lower than you?... Whose neck shall I stand

⁴⁰ Biberman, H. (1965). *Salt of the Earth: The Story of a Film*. Boston, Beacon, p. 151

⁴¹ Sayre, N. (1978). *Running Time: The Films of the Cold War*. NY: The Dial Press, p. 175

on, to make me feel superior? And what will I get out of it? I don't want anything lower than I am." Ramon is stunned by Esperanza's defiance against his show of force. "That would be the old way," she tells him. "Never try it on me again." While Ramon does display signs of entrenched male chauvinism when put under the pressure of the 'new way,' he is no monster. Instead, according to Baker, he is allowed to change in a way that affirms the dignity of men and women alike.⁴²

Such political aesthetics originated in the most unlikely of places. Somewhere in the remote backwaters of New Mexico, in 1949, a young married couple, Jenny and Craig Vincent opened the San Cristobal ranch as a vacation spot, "left-wing dude ranch,"⁴³ for progressives as far afield as California to New York. It was in San Cristobal that the Mine-Mill leader Clinton Jencks and his wife Virginia met the Jarricos. Paul Jarrico, in describing the blacklist, explained how he and his friends "were really feeling a sense of freedom that now they could really make some films that they really wanted to make, and they were looking for stories to tell." Clinton told them, "We've got a story to tell, let me tell you. You know, we're down in the Continental Divide in the southwestern corner of New Mexico and nobody knows we're on the planet. And we're engaged in what for us is a life and death struggle for ourselves and the existence of our union and nobody knows about it." Sylvia Jarrico recalled that she was attracted by "everything about it.... It was irresistible motion picture material."⁴⁴ Even after the eventual suppression of the completed film, Jencks remained deeply committed to the revival of *Salt*, commenting that it

⁴² Baker, E. (2007). On Strike and on Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America, The University of N. Carolina Press, p. 122

⁴³ Ibid, p. 178

⁴⁴ Ibid.

reminded modern viewers of “a side of America a lot of people have not seen.”⁴⁵ As an addendum to the story of the ravages of McCarthyism, the full cinematic exposure of this social aspect remains the unfulfilled potential of American film art.

But before the decisive defeat at the hands of the anticommunist reaction, the makers of *Salt* strove to create a cinematic celebration of working class spirit. This is articulated in Biberman’s praise of the enormous potential of the working class as manifested in *Salt*:

The fantastic aspect of this work is that it makes so real what we have believed for so long ... that the talents hidden in the vast majority of the world’s people is monumental beyond estimation and that as it is exploded into life we will have a world beyond all the calculations of men and women. This is the inspiriting aspect of this work. This is the great reward. Surely when this picture has been completed ... it will be they more than all others put together who will have endowed this work with its impact. That they have been helped, even, is of less importance. It is they who inherit the stored energy and spirit of countless generations ... and who now, in a small moment of opportunity, almost unknowingly ooze out of themselves the beginning of the vast and unmeasured power and dignity of the working multitudes of this earth.⁴⁶

For Jarrico and his collaborator Biberman the perfect narrative vehicle to capture the best of the proletarian spirit was the life and death struggle for their union. Such a dramatic premise represented the “best embodiment of the elements for which we have been striving,” that is, an

⁴⁵ Schrecker, E. (1998). Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America. New Jersey, Princeton University Press, pp. 354-55

⁴⁶ Biberman qt. in Lorence, J. (1999). The Suppression of *Salt of the Earth*: How Hollywood, big labor, and politicians blacklisted a movie in Cold War America. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico, p. 77

“artful realism” drawn from the “living experiences of people long ignored by Hollywood – the working men and women of America.”⁴⁷

The ‘artful realism’ of *Salt*

The blacklisted creators of *Salt of the Earth*, Jarrico and Biberman, set themselves the artistic challenge to “by-pass the pitfalls of naturalism” and “emerge with an imaginative work of art that was still true in detail.” This objective boiled down to a central aesthetic problem: “How could we make the amazing heroism of these people not only stirring, but *believable* and *inevitable*?” As Jarrico and Biberman recall in 1953/1978, when they made their decision to portray the mine workers strike, it “was not the many abuses and hardships suffered by these people that loomed so significantly out of the material – it was their humanity, their courage and accomplishment.” They continued, “[w]e do think we have broken new ground. If our film can illuminate the truth that the lives and struggles of ordinary people are the richest untapped source of contemporary American art, and if it can demonstrate that such films can be made by these people themselves, it will have achieved a basic purpose.”⁴⁸ Such an ‘untapped source’ of cinematic vitality had by this time already revolutionised Italian cinema, inspiring the neorealist style in landmark films such as *Rome Open City* and *Bicycle Thief*. Although neo-realism as a film movement was short lived, these classics stand as enduring testimony to the power of art immersed in social reality. As Peter Morris asserts, *Salt* reveals “more than a hint of the influence of Italian neo-realism.” Morris makes a sweeping assertion that “in both theme and

⁴⁷ Jarrico, P., & Biberman, Herbert (1992)[1953]. *Breaking Ground: The Making of Salt of the Earth*. *Celluloid Power: Social Film Criticism from The Birth of a Nation to Judgement at Nuremberg*. D. Platt. Metuchen, N.J. & London, The Scarecrow Press: pp. 478-484.

⁴⁸ Ibid. in Rosenfelt, D. S., & Wilson, M., Ed. (1978). *Commentary in Salt of the Earth [screenplay with commentary by Rosenfelt]*. NY, Feminist Press.

style, *Salt of the Earth* could be described as the first – if not the only – American film to participate in the neo-realist movement.”⁴⁹ Decades later, Thom Andersen concurs in his recent addendum to his influential “Red Hollywood,” claiming that “Neorealism went underground” with *Salt*, the notable “last hurrah of the Hollywood Communists.”⁵⁰ But as the chief hegemon of world capitalism, yet to fully regain ideological ground lost in WWII, the US establishment was determined to keep this ‘untapped source’ of American film firmly under the lid. Therefore, any cinematic vision of 1950s America anchored in the ‘untapped source’ of proletarian creativity could not roll out of the big studios’ production line. The clearest expression of this fundamental conflict of class interests was spelled out by the industry’s association itself. In an extraordinarily blunt attack on the basic rights of their members, the Motion Picture Industry Council (MPIC) threw the makers of *Salt* to the lions by emphatically denying any connection between the legitimate movie industry and IPC’s picture, which, it insisted, had “nothing to do with Hollywood.”⁵¹

Michael Wilson’s, Paul Jarrico’s, and Adrian Scott’s visions of aligning their politics with their film craft could now come to fruition, but only outside the classical Hollywood system. As Jarrico put it, “It wasn’t until 1951, when we were good and dead professionally, that we could get involved in movies that packed a real social and political wallop.”⁵² Now they could finally

⁴⁹ Morris, P. (1976/92). *Salt of the Earth*. Celluloid Power: Social Film Criticism from *The Birth of a Nation* to *Judgement at Nuremberg*. D. Platt. Metuchen, N.J. & London, The Scarecrow Press: pp. 485-490.

⁵⁰ Andersen’s “Afterword” in Krutnik Frank, N. S., Neve Brian, and Stanfield Peter, Ed. (2007). “Un-American” Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era. New Brunswick, New Jersey, London, Rutgers University Press, p. 275; Andersen also produces a French language book/film with Noel Burch in 1985.

⁵¹ Jarrico, P. (1953). *Salt of the Earth Chronology*. in Lorence, J. (2006). Screening America: United States History Through Film Since 1900. NY, Pearson Longman.

⁵² Jarrico qt. in Ceplair, L., & Englund, Steven (1979). The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community 1930 - 1960. Chicago, University of Illinois Press, pp. 416-17

commit “a crime to fit the punishment.”⁵³ In this context, Jarrico and co’s “crime” was a portrayal of the “dignity of women, labour and a racial minority.”⁵⁴

But not all sections of Capital were prepared to forgo short-term profit for long-term ideological gains of the capitalist class as a whole. One pragmatic entrepreneur, Simon Lazarus, the chief investor, reportedly welcomed Biberman’s exile from Hollywood, saying, “You must never be afraid of independence. But I guess there’s no danger for you anymore. You got independence the hard way. But you got it. O.K. Let’s go.” Lazarus further encouraged the filmmakers: “The blacklisted! They’re like gold laying in the streets. We’ll make good pictures and we’ll make money.”⁵⁵ There is perhaps a little more than a hint of an entrepreneurial opportunism contained in Lazarus’ words. The vast, untapped working-class potential of American cinema, could be equally profitable to investors as well as to the hearts and minds of the working-class majority of moviegoers, and not only as evidenced by the enthusiastic reception to *Salt* previews shown by the UAW rank and filers; or, for that matter, the rapturous response to the production in the 1930s of the proletarian plays of Odets, like *Waiting for Lefty*, in which Kazan himself made a mark. (This whole thesis is predicated upon the notion of an as yet unfulfilled potential of US film art, the possibility of which was abruptly, albeit temporarily, ended by HUAC.)

A foretaste of what could have been, a vivid historical counter-factual, could be gleaned from a remark by *Salt*’s screenwriter, Michael Wilson. Wilson believed that the humanist writer “did not meekly deliver what the philistine ordered, but struggled tenaciously to preserve human values in

⁵³ Jarrico’s comment in documentary *Crime to Fit the Punishment*

⁵⁴ Lorence, J. (1999). The Suppression of *Salt of the Earth*: How Hollywood, big labor, and politicians blacklisted a movie in Cold War America. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico, p. 7

⁵⁵ Lazarus in Biberman, H. (1965). *Salt of the Earth: The Story of a Film*. Boston, Beacon, p. 32

all his work....” Hollywood writers in particular, “dealing like all their kind in the radioactive commodity of ideas, were accountable to the peoples of the world for the effects of their ideas.”⁵⁶

Wilson certainly practised what he preached. *Salt*’s director credits Wilson with moving the project further as a cooperative venture. “Fellows, we’ve got to give up trying to write stories about real people from our point of view,” Biberman quotes him as saying. “If I do this story, I want to do a story from the point of view of the people of Local 890. And if I do the story, they are going to be the censors of it and the real producers of it ... in point of view of its content.”⁵⁷

This was confirmed in a 1992 *Cineaste* interview with the deported leading lady of the film, Rosaura Revueltas, who related an example of the scene in which the sheriff calls one of the miners a “Mexican greaser.” Since that term “belonged to the past,” explained the actress, and the miners exercised their final edit rights by changing it, since, “If somebody calls us that now, we kill him.”⁵⁸

Baker observes that in speaking of “humanism,” Wilson was asserting the legitimacy of artistic work that would otherwise have been dismissed by Marxists as “bourgeois.”⁵⁹ But which ‘Marxists’ is the author referring to? Wilson’s comment addresses the same Stalinists who suppressed his film, as well as the realm of classical Marxist art and theory. The description in the previous chapters of Polonsky’s and Losey’s rise as serious film artists and modernists took as its starting point these blacklistees’ lifelong struggle against Stalinism. Therefore, as Baker

⁵⁶ Wilson speech delivered at “A Salute to John Howard Lawson,” Nov 12, 1955, qt. in Ceplair, L., & Englund, Steven (1979). *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community 1930 - 1960*. Chicago, University of Illinois Press, p. 299

⁵⁷ Wilson qt. in Biberman, H. (1965). *Salt of the Earth: The Story of a Film*. Boston, Beacon, p. 38

⁵⁸ Rimbau, E., and Torreiro, Casimiro (1992). “‘This film is going to make history’: An Interview with Rosaria Revueltas.” *Cineaste* 19.2/3 (Dec): p. 50.

⁵⁹ Baker, E. (2007). *On Strike and on Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America*. The University of N. Carolina Press, p. 200

explains, Wilson's humanist position was seen, (naturally, in these circles) as the "right-wing opportunist" position, as opposed to the "left sectarian" position. But this could not dent the writer's humanism. To Wilson, the title, *Salt of the Earth*, meant "the sweat of the miner, and the ground of the mines" – powerful images of working-class strength and the force of nature.⁶⁰

Mine-Mill's Clinton Jencks saw in the movie a chance to affirm the heroism of ordinary people and to make connections with audiences. Making *Salt* was a high point in their lives precisely because, as he put it, "we were reaching out, and we were making ourselves naked in all our weaknesses, and our strengths. And we weren't trying to cover up the problems. But we also wanted to say we've learned how to overcome some of those problems.... And we found people that were willing to help us say it. And that was beautiful."⁶¹

Salt of the Earth brought workers and artists together in what Ellen Baker aptly termed the "most unusual worker-artist alliance."⁶² As fraught as it was, it had the potential to connect both groups to American audiences more broadly. And the entire creative process of the story's construction testified to this collaboration, in which the film's subjects had a de facto last editing right of the script. This was most powerfully manifested in the excised scenes: adultery subplot; liberal white man – modeled on Clinton Jencks – saving the Mexican masses; Esperanca wiping beer spill with her dress. Wilson explained to Biberman that these were

perfectly legitimate dramatic scenes and illustrations. In a script in which you're after drama for its own sake, they'd be perfectly acceptable. But we're dealing with something else. Not just people. A people. And you don't necessarily express them in naturalistic detail. You have to really synthesize them, all of them; the weaknesses and the virtues, until the individual expresses a real element of the whole and not something untypical of

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ OHALC interview with Jencks qt. in Ibid, p. 222

⁶² Ibid, p. 198

the whole, even though a variant of it.⁶³

In other words, Wilson's political aesthetics recall some classical Marxist tendencies exemplified in Polonsky's and Losey's work, but eventually suffocated in the liberal anti-communist climate: Polonsky's 'synthesis' of capitalist tendencies tears Garfield's character asunder. Or, an illustrative example of Losey's 'synthesis' of the brutality of the British class system that wreaks havoc on young Leo's sensitive soul in *The Go-Between*, which won the Palme D'Or at Cannes in 1971, a "masterpiece,"⁶⁴ in Gene Phillips' assessment.

Even though the 1930s Popular Front perspective, to which the makers of *Salt* clung doggedly when the tide turned against them, represented an aesthetic step back from the modernist ideals advanced by Losey and Polonsky, the IPC effectively hoped to fight McCarthyism by employing the blacklisted artists. But even more importantly, "it would contribute to a democratic culture, its entertainment presenting," as Biberman described it, "people to people in such a way as to give them their own experience clarified, organized, enriched – to such a degree that it gives confidence and faith and direction." Without an alternative medium, Biberman believed, American cultural values would deteriorate. People would become inured to violence and brutality "until, little by little, the horrible finality of official brutality, which yesterday they would have called fascism and resisted, tomorrow they accept only because they yielded little by ever so little all along the way."⁶⁵ This vision of cultural politics provided the ideological foundations for *Salt of the Earth*. Did these foundations enable *Salt* to withstand the test of time? Or, viewed through the 'artful realist' prism set by its makers, has their film "broken new

⁶³ Wilson qt. in Biberman, H. (1965). *Salt of the Earth: The Story of a Film*. Boston, Beacon, pp. 40-41

⁶⁴ Phillips, G. D. (1999). *Major Film Directors of the American and British Cinema*. London & Toronto, Lehigh University Press, p. 202

⁶⁵ Biberman report to IPC, 1951, in Biberman, H. (1965). *Salt of the Earth: The Story of a Film*. Boston, Beacon, p. 196

ground” and “achieved a basic purpose,” of “illuminat[ing] the truth that the lives and struggles of ordinary people are the richest untapped source of contemporary American art...”⁶⁶

While it was savagely attacked in its native country, in France, *Cahiers*, fittingly, described *Salt* as “by far the best film made in the USA in the past ten years.”⁶⁷ In the issue of *Cineaste* devoted to the 50th anniversary of *Salt* Larry Ceplair explains that *Salt* “is unique on several counts: the only film to bear the full brunt of the domestic Cold War suppression apparatus; the only film whose makers had to file and litigate a massive conspiracy suit; and the only film that provides a coherent vision of the working class ethnic minorities, their wives, and their union.” Hollywood before the blacklist, according to Ceplair, “did not make many films about any aspect of America’s working classes, so *Salt*, when it was made, had no competition. After the blacklist,” concludes Ceplair, “there have been more such projects, but they lack the intelligent overview that Wilson, Jarrico, and Biberman, all Marxists and members of the Communist Party, brought to this subject. For all its technical problems, the vision behind *Salt* has not been matched.”⁶⁸

Tom Miller, in his review of *The Suppression of “Salt of the Earth,”* reserves for *Salt* the same canonical position in the history of cinema as he does for Charles Darwin in the natural sciences. This is how he places *Salt* in the history of American film: “No movie made before or since has attempted to reflect such honourable and progressive sensibilities while simultaneously attracting the venom of its own industry, the United States Congress, and our government’s agents overseas. In short, it accomplished what every filmmaker should aspire to do at least once in his

⁶⁶ Jarrico, P., & Biberman, Herbert (1992)[1953]. *Breaking Ground: The Making of Salt of the Earth*. *Celluloid Power: Social Film Criticism from The Birth of a Nation to Judgement at Nuremberg*. D. Platt. Metuchen, N.J. & London, The Scarecrow Press: 480.

⁶⁷ *Cahiers* qt. in Morris, P. (1976/92). *Salt of the Earth* Ibid.: 485.

⁶⁸ Ceplair, L. (2004). “The Many 50th Anniversaries of *Salt of the Earth*.” *Cineaste* 29.2 (Spring): pp. 8-9.

or her career.”⁶⁹ This ‘venom’ was brought into the open by the political establishment, with its hysterical response to this proletarian saga. Howard Hughes responded to the request by the California Congressman Donald L. Jackson to shut down the production of *Salt of the Earth* by saying:

Dear Congressman Jackson: In your telegram you asked the question, “Is there any action that industry and labor in motion picture field can take to stop completion and release of picture to prevent showing of film here and abroad?”

My answer is “Yes.” There is action which the industry can take to stop completion of this motion picture in the United States. And if the Government will act immediately to prevent the export of the film to some other country where it can be completed, then this picture will not be completed and disseminated throughout the world where the United States will be judged by its content.⁷⁰

And the industry body that nominally represents its filmmaking talent, happily obliged. Roy M. Brewer wrote to Donald L. Jackson that on March 18, 1953 that “The Hollywood AFL Film Council assures you that everything which it can do to prevent the showing of the Mexican picture, *Salt of the Earth* will be done.”⁷¹

And everything possible was done. For all the shared experience of Cold War repression and similar antiracist class politics, a reasonable assumption would be that a close alliance existed between the miners and the filmmakers. But these two groups, according to Baker, had little else in common: class background, work experiences, and ethnicity divided them. These divisions

⁶⁹ Miller, T. (2000). “The Suppression of *Salt of the Earth*: How Hollywood, Big Labor, and Politicians Blacklisted a Movie in Cold War America [book review].” Ibid. 25.3: 59.

⁷⁰ *Congressional Record*, 83rd Cong., 1st Sess., March 19, 1953, qt. in Lorence, J. (2006). Screening America: United States History Through Film Since 1900. NY, Pearson Longman, p. 127

⁷¹ *Congressional Record*, 83rd Cong., 1st Sess., March 19, 1953, qt. in Ibid.

were exposed, for instance, in the filmmakers' tendency to romanticize "the workers," "the Mexican Americans," "the people."⁷² As was discussed in Chapter Three, similar charges could be levelled at the makers of *The Lawless*. The collaboration on *Salt of the Earth* offers an unusual window on the Left during this period precisely because of these differences. From a classical Marxist standpoint, this was a fraught alliance: class lines are not easily breached. As was argued in relation to Losey's educational trip to Moscow in the 1930s, this alliance, even in the epicentre of world socialist revolution (before it was strangled by Stalin), presented artists like Mayakovsky with enormous artistic challenges in trying to bridge the class divide and capture the soul of the worker. Therefore, it is not surprising that Biberman could lose patience with proletarians deprived of middle-class sensibilities and culture. As Lorence acutely observes, his "unwarranted tirade against union organisers revealed a gap between 'cultural workers' like himself and local unionists and their leaders, some of whom worked energetically to bring *Salt* to Chicago audiences."⁷³ Only slowly did it dawn on Biberman that "as Chicago went, so would go the entire Midwest."⁷⁴

Notwithstanding this economic loss, Lorence concludes that *Salt* has a place in the "iconography of the left" that inspired later radical filmmakers, arguing:

Moreover, it remains one of the few feature films to portray American labour and worker culture in a strongly positive light. Minority workers and women are endowed with agency and intelligence.... And finally, the hollowness of the 'anti-communist consensus' of the 1950s is exposed by a film that dignified labour and working people,

⁷² Baker, E. (2007). *On Strike and on Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America*, The University of N. Carolina Press, pp. 11-12

⁷³ Lorence, J. J. (1998). "The Suppression of *Salt of the Earth* in Midwest America: The underside of Cold War culture in Detroit and Chicago." *Film History* 10: 352.

⁷⁴ Biberman, H. (1965). *Salt of the Earth: The Story of a Film*. Boston, Beacon, p. 191

only to be reviled by powerful forces in American society and culture. *Salt of the Earth* provides a window into the past, a prism through which a new generation of viewers may glimpse the dark side of American life in the age of the great fear. Moreover, its suppression underscores the fragility of civil liberties in an open, democratic society. *Salt's* message contains a lesson for all seasons.⁷⁵

Equally significant was the film's exploration of agency on the part of working men and women liberated by democratic unionism.⁷⁶ Thus we come full circle to the major threat for the capitalist establishment in America - democratic unionism. The gentlemen of the Congress rightly perceived the severity of the threat to capitalism in the US by the politically independent workforce able to resist through democratic unionism the Wall Street attacks on wages and conditions. It took the anticommunist CIO to smash this workers' democracy. Six decades on, this remains an unfulfilled dream of rank and filers in America, evidenced most dramatically in the afore-mentioned UAW's recent hoodwinking of their members into accepting a 50% wage cut. But in its time, *Salt of the Earth* realised, creatively, these instinctive democratic aspirations of the miners. While, as James Wood argues, it was the decision of the Projectionists' Union to refuse to screen it that "ensured" that *Salt* was "effectively banned in America,"⁷⁷ the persistence of the Big Labour anti-labour tactics hints at a larger truth behind the ban. It is then highly appropriate to recall Esperanza's final thoughts: "Then I knew," Esperanza reflects in a voice-over, "we had won something they could never take away – something I could leave to our

⁷⁵ Lorence, J. (1999). The Suppression of *Salt of the Earth*: How Hollywood, big labor, and politicians blacklisted a movie in Cold War America. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico, p. 194

⁷⁶ Puette, W. (1992). Through Jaundiced Eyes: How the Media Viewed Organised Labour. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, p. 21; Walsh, F. R. (1986). "The Films We Never Saw: American Movies View Organised Labour, 1934-1954." Labor History(27): 580.

⁷⁷ Wood, J. (2004). *Salt of the Earth*. 100 American Independent Films. London, BFI: pp. 174-175.

children – and they, the salt of the earth, would inherit it.” That is why, in the final analysis, *Salt of the Earth* became one of the most important targets of HUAC, and became, and remains, the only American film to have been officially banned. The political instruments used by the establishment are, in this instance, a secondary issue.

One of those ‘instruments,’ liberal anticommunist critic Pauline Kael, one of *Salt*’s harshest critics, called the film “as clear a piece of Communist propaganda as we have had for many years ... extremely shrewd propaganda for the urgent business of the U.S.S.R.” Quoting a scene beginning with Esperanza saying, “They tried to turn people against us...,” Kael points to “[t]his pedagogical tone, so reminiscent of the thirties, [which] is maintained throughout much of this film.”⁷⁸ While Jarrico demolishes much of the evidential basis of Kael’s claims of *Salt*’s overly didactic pedagogy, through a simple listing of the scenes and bits omitted from the film, Kael’s ideological attack could, nevertheless be reoriented to its opposite target, without sacrificing any of its sharpness. One could merely substitute the U.S.S.R. for the U.S. and Communist for capitalist, and, without lessening its effect, criticise the politics of *Waterfront* as an instance of ‘extremely shrewd propaganda for the urgent business of the U.S.’ Especially at the height of the Red Scare.

However, as the fate of world and American capitalism becomes increasingly uncertain in the wake of the crash of 2008, this political business of the U.S. becomes even more urgent. This story then may yet produce another twist and epilogue. The optimism of *Salt*’s blacklisted and deported Mexican leading lady, Rosaria Revueltas, may yet become a self-fulfilling prophecy: “I

⁷⁸ Pauline Kael in Ceplair, L. 2007. “Righting a wrong: Paul Jarrico and the correction of blacklist-era screen credits: demanding credit where credit is due: an excerpt from Larry Ceplairs' new biography shows how producer and screenwriter Paul Jarrico continued to fight the blacklist decades after the fact.” *Cineaste* 32.4: 30-34.

don't know how, but the film will be finished, and it is going to be seen all over the world. This film is going to make history.”⁷⁹ For that to happen, all the strategic lessons of McCarthyism would have to be assimilated by filmmakers in order to eliminate once and for all its crippling legacy on film and broader culture. Fifty six years after Kazan closed his competition out of the Oscars with his anticommunist *Waterfront*, and eleven years after he received his lifetime achievement award, the socio-political terrain that gave rise to these career highlights is shifting rapidly. Anti-capitalism, even in a distorted form, has already begun to displace anticommunism as an elemental ideological cement of the broad mass of Americans. Even Big Labour, the last ideological buffer separating Big Business and Main Street, has to all intents and purposes relocated to Wall Street. A recent small but telling event graphically demonstrated the real class character of Big Labour: the image of UAW's President Bob King standing behind GM CEO Dan Akerson as he enthusiastically rang the trading bell on the New York Stock Exchange.⁸⁰ Not since the 1930s – let us reiterate that *Salt* is widely regarded as a 1930s film – could the collective spirit of ‘democratic unionism’ animate Hollywood melodrama, in a way that, for example, Rossen's 1938 *Racket Busters* did. Even the most subversive of the contemporary American documentarists, Michael Moore – who has courageously exposed the criminality and gangsterism of the corporate, military and political leadership of his country – is yet to aim his satire at union bureaucracy.

It is perhaps understandable that John Howard Lawson, writing at the height of the Stalinist political prestige in the 1950s, was similarly incapable of aiming his critical pen at Big Labour.

⁷⁹ Riambau, E., and Torreiro, Casimiro (1992). “‘This film is going to make history’: An Interview with Rosaria Revueltas.” Ibid. **19**.2/3 (Dec): p. 50.

⁸⁰ Shepardson, D. (2010). “GM takes over the NYSE.” The Detroit News, Nov 18.

From his Stalinist political standpoint, the CP-sponsored *Salt of the Earth* film was a complete antithesis to the “anti-democratic, anti-labor and anti-human propaganda” of *On the Waterfront*.⁸¹ But here Lawson captures, perhaps without intending to, the central problem of the Hollywood Left intellectual at the time: his/her inability to break from Stalinism. Unlike the members of the Hollywood anti-Stalinist Left discussed in this thesis – primarily Polonsky and Losey – Lawson’s and Kazan’s attitudes to the CPUSA essentially are the flip sides of the same anti-Marxist coin.

In the final analysis, it is clear that McCarthyism would have been politically impotent without the critical support of Stalinism, in the form of its smashing of the rank-and-file democracy, or of ‘democratic unionism’ in the case of *Salt* at the hands of the CIO bureaucracy. While the American film industry has, since the Red Scare, produced numerous films featuring villains from military, intelligence, big business, even Wall Street – Oliver Stone’s film of that name and its sequel have been discussed earlier – these dramas usually counter-pose an equally powerful individual hero to the bad guys. If Moore’s *Roger and Me* were remade as a fictional film, still featuring the characters based on the GM CEO Roger Smith and the everyday Joe, Mike Moore, who engage in a conventional Hollywood struggle between the good and the bad, such an event, even if successful, would not necessarily signify the historic defeat of McCarthyism. A far more reliable barometer of such a paradigm shift in American film art and politics would be called something like *Bob and Me*, featuring the UAW boss Bob King being pursued by not just one working-class Joe, but an organised rank-and-file collective of his union, recently reduced to half their previous wage. And ‘democratic unionism’ in action is, in the final analysis, what both

⁸¹ Lawson, J. H. (1954). “Hollywood on the Waterfront: Union Leaders are Gangsters, Workers are Helpless.” *Hollywood Review* 1.6 (Nov/Dec): 13-14.

McCarthyism and Stalinism feared most.

Conclusion

Notes on Perspectives and Contexts: Many are McCarthyist

This thesis has focused on a select group of socially and politically committed practitioners of film noir and film gris: Polonsky, Rossen, Losey, Kazan, Biberman and some of their collaborators. It has stressed the historical context of their artistic maturation at an epochal crossroad between the end of the last great period of wars and revolutions (1945) and the period of political reaction that followed. Rossen, who forged his cinematic style in the preceding Popular Front era of the 1930s, was the exception on this distinguished list, but nevertheless was included to emphasise the revitalising impact on his art occasioned by his encounter with Polonsky's Marxian aesthetics. The historical moment in question, 'when all the rules changed,' to use Jon Lewis' characterisation of the crucial year of 1947, was marked by, above all, the breakup of the symbiotic relationship between the forces of political repression within both contending superpowers. The fierce ideological rivalry between the American Way and the misnamed Communism of the Stalinist Thermidor re-emerged onto the historical scene with a ferocity that corresponded to the years of its suppression during the reluctant wartime alliance between the US and the Soviet Union compelled by the imperialist threat of Nazi Germany.

Far from endorsing either of the parties in this Popular Front marriage of convenience, this thesis has sought to direct the reader's attention to the possibility of the political and artistic independence of American film art, embodied in a select sub-group of the Hollywood Left, when

it appeared that the tide of history was turning their way. These favourable conditions were most powerfully manifested in the successes of John Garfield's independent Enterprise Studios, which created such film noir/film gris classics as *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil*. However, the political and artistic independence of the Hollywood Left was short lived, and when the tide turned against these 'subversives,' it set in motion a chain of events that eventually led to the case of the only officially banned film in US history, *Salt of the Earth*, often referred to as the 'last hurrah' of Popular Front culture on the American cinema screen. So, the left paradigm to which the Hollywood Left had been attuned since the Great Depression was, to all intents and purposes, crushed out of existence by McCarthyism around the year of *Salt*'s release. But that is only a part of this story. The other, less noted, but, for the purposes of this thesis, more crucial part concerned the ideological cement of the 1930s social realist paradigm, Stalinism.

More specifically, the combined legacy of McCarthyism and Stalinism – even if not usually attributed to these political antagonists – was the cultural triumph of Stanislavsky over Brecht, and Meyerhold. Once personal and psychological imperatives began subsuming the traditional social and political preoccupations of the social problem film, a shift most spectacularly expressed by Marlon Brando's overwhelming, but controlled, screen persona, Brecht and Meyerhold appeared destined for the dustbin of history. The triumph of Stanislavsky appeared complete, with his legacy still dominating the theory and practice of acting. Stanislavsky's 'Method' also left an indelible impression on this author, who underwent rigorous training in 'Method' acting at Sydney's Ensemble Studios from 1990 to 1993, under the tutelage of the late Gordon Hayes.

But an even more significant experience is contained in the historical period from when the thesis was begun, in 2005, to its completion, in 2011. Across the years of its writing, we have witnessed the Global Financial Crisis, the suppression of WikiLeaks' press freedoms, even the outbreak of mass antigovernment protests in Joseph McCarthy's home state of Wisconsin. As I watched and re-watched many of the films analysed in this thesis I was struck by how timely to *this* moment of financial and political crisis so many of them seemed. So, *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil* seemed even more contemporary now than at the period of their release in the late 1940s. One measure of what was lost artistically and politically to McCarthyism is the absence in contemporary Hollywood of film artists comparable to Polonsky, artists not only willing, but able, to perform, in his words, an 'autopsy on capitalism.' This artistic vacuum is particularly pronounced in the period of a re-emergence of new forms of McCarthyism.

Part of this chapter's subtitle is a variation on the title of Ellen Schrecker's *Many are the Crimes*, in which she gives a detailed account of the impact of McCarthyism on all spheres of cultural, political and economic life in America. It was published in 1998, at roughly the half-way point of a historical epoch, both ends of which were marked by 'dangerous' men: Dr. Daniel Ellsberg in 1971 and the persecuted editor of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange in 2010-11. In the light of the contemporary 'historical moment when all the rules have changed,' Schrecker's historical document seems more a product of the broader US post-9/11 narrative than of the time of its publication. Indeed, numerous studies have drawn historical parallels between the 'classical' and 'new' McCarthyism. One such analysis, Jonathan R. Cole's "The New McCarthyism," focuses on the intellectual climate at universities in the US, where a "rising tide of anti-intellectualism and intolerance of university research and teaching that offends ideologues and today's ruling

princes is putting academic freedom ... under more sustained and subtle attack than at any time since the dark days of McCarthyism in the 1950s.”¹

There is nothing subtle about the attacks on WikiLeaks and its editor Assange, orchestrated from the highest levels of the American state, and characterized by open repudiation of the First Amendment Freedom of Speech rights. In reviewing the long-term legacy of McCarthyism, it has proved almost impossible to separate the two ‘historic moments’ when ‘all the rules have changed’ to such a degree that basic constitutional protections are swept aside. At roughly the mid-point between the ‘historic moments’ – 1947 and the first decade of the 21st century – such core democratic rights were successfully defended by the liberals of *The New York Times* in their legal battle for their First Amendment right to publish the Pentagon Papers. In 1971, Dr. Daniel Ellsberg was declared “the most dangerous man in America” by Henry Kissinger, as documented in the recent documentary by that title, *The Most Dangerous Man in America*, (Judith Ehlrich & Rick Goldsmith, 2009). And John Pilger’s recent documentary, *The War You Don’t See* (2010) powerfully expresses a growing sense of mass radicalisation.

For Abraham Polonsky, declared by the FBI in 1951 as ‘a very dangerous citizen,’ the other two periods marked by ‘dangerous’ men cited above were in stark contrast to the period encompassing the Great Depression and WWII, which saw a definitive ‘collection’ of left artistic figures and ideas. In a 1974 interview, Polonsky gives a vivid sense of the ‘collection’ criteria in the Hollywood Left surrounding *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil*:

What was going on was a peculiar event. It was the combination of enterprise and the fact

¹ Cole, J. R. (2005). “The New McCarthyism.” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 52.3: pp. 7-8.

that a major nucleus of the left wing was associated with these projects and they had a tendency to be very innovative in looking around for people. And by the left wing, I don't mean Communist Party bureaucracy.... I'm talking about people, who without being aesthetically interested in films the way people now talk about them, in their attitude towards the role and relationship between reality and art, became innovative, in the sense of attracting people who would be different.... And it starts to collect.... Bob Rossen himself was already a good screenplay writer.... No one would have picked him; we picked him. Why did we pick him? Because we know about his politics. I think he was a Communist. We knew that. But we know about his general attitudes, to get into this kind of stuff, so it would be good. So we picked him for *Body and Soul*.²

However, the blacklisting put a stop to that kind of natural 'collecting' of Hollywood radicals. After the witch-hunting hysteria had subsided, the blacklisted filmmakers were forced to operate in a fundamentally altered intellectual environment, where the 'cultural front' was dominated by a 'silent generation,' a world and an epoch away from the *film gris* generation. Polonsky has said that, "of course, you can't make a picture if you can't deal with people and with yourself. And when I came to the studios in 1968...the studios were different."³ (Polonsky here is referring to his return to directing, *Tell Them Willie Boy is Here*). Polonsky and his collaborators discussed in this thesis, Rossen and Garfield, were only allowed a truly free reign in places like their Enterprise Studios. As Brinckmann points out, it was only after Polonsky had moved to Enterprise Studios that "his career as a creative screen artist finally got under way, and it was

² Polonsky, A. (1974). "Abraham Polonsky: The Effects of the 'Blacklist' on a Writer". New York Times Oral History Program. Beverly Hills, American Film Institute/Louis B. Mayer.

³ Ibid.

only then that he could combine his political and artistic identities in his film work.”⁴

While film gris marked a definite progress from the ‘Doris Day’ and ‘WASP-oriented’ (Quart and Auster)⁵ perspective of the old studios, and offered a closer alignment with the objective social conditions in America, this step forward in the synthesis of the working-class, ethnic and ghetto cultures on screen was also accompanied by two steps backward, at least in terms of the classical Marxist criteria of good art discussed earlier in the thesis. If Hollywood, in the aftermath of the McCarthyist purges, is aesthetically less equipped to dramatise ‘the psychological injuries of class,’ then it is not only the Marxist purists who will feel shortchanged by the ‘loss’ of a generation of the blacklisted. Following the crash of 2008, when more people than ever in living memory are vulnerable to these psychological injuries, filmmakers who are incapable of grasping the true nature of the class system will also prove incapable of anchoring this objective reality in their genres and characters. Unless the lessons of McCarthyism are assimilated by contemporary filmmakers, they run a real risk of disenfranchising their mass audience, who themselves are subjected to the irrational and berserk gyrations of the capitalist market. In times of an increasingly bizarre and frightening everyday reality, the dramatic limits of fiction are ever more pronounced. In 1953, a group of blacklisted filmmakers committed their ‘crime to fit the punishment’ by rejecting “fictions invented by us” and instead relying on “stories drawn from the living experiences of people long ignored by Hollywood – the working men and women of America.”⁶

⁴ Brinckmann, C. N. (1981). “The Politics of *Force of Evil*: An Analysis of Abraham Polonsky's Preblacklist Film.” *Prospects: The Annual of American Cultural Studies* **no. 6**: 359.

⁵ Auster, A., & Quart, Leonard (1981). *The Working Class Goes to Hollywood. Cinema, Politics and Society in America*. P. Davies, & Neve, Brian, Manchester University Press: pp. 163-175.

⁶ Jarrico, P., & Biberman, Herbert (1992)[1953]. *Breaking Ground: The Making of Salt of the Earth. Celluloid Power: Social Film Criticism from The Birth of a Nation to Judgement at Nuremberg*. D. Platt. Metuchen, N.J. & London, The Scarecrow Press: pp. 478-484.

But the Red Scare forced the exodus of the Hollywood Left from its working class roots into the political orbit of Wall Street and the White House. As Lewis aptly puts it, the blacklist ‘offered a convenient way out’ of left politics for the finance capital that controlled cinema. But this exodus came at a high price. James Naremore, in *More Than Night*, further concretises this paradigmatic shift in the themes and preoccupations of the Hollywood Left. He cites an emblematic example, *Crossfire*, as marking the end of an era in Classical Hollywood. By way of drawing out some essential strategic lessons of McCarthyism, this concluding chapter will turn briefly to the political aesthetics of this emblematic manifestation of left liberalism in film noir. This will then be counter-posed to the other noir classic from this period, *Naked City*, a representative of the opposing approach on offer in Hollywood for depicting realism and social problems. Before *On the Waterfront* and *Salt of the Earth* became symbols of two antagonistic camps in the war on communism, *Crossfire* and *Naked City* similarly came to represent polar opposites in the political spectrum of pre-HUAC liberalism.

Crossfire, according to Lewis, “proved to be the film that most interested” HUAC, because it was a “provocative and political movie.”⁷ However, for all its political sophistication, *Crossfire*’s documentary-style rendition of a police procedural was too narrow an aesthetic platform for the artistic aspirations of *film gris* practitioners who aimed for higher social and psychological realism. Yet, “*Crossfire* became *the* film”, comments Dennis Broe, because it reflected “industry politics and economics” while introducing “social content.” To Broe, this key film pointed to a way forward, offering a kind of “blueprint for a different kind of cinema... a kind of American

⁷ Interview with Lewis, Feb 9, 2010

Open City.’’⁸

But heightened realism in cinematic style was only part of this film’s aesthetic legacy. In their 1978 analysis of *Crossfire*, Keith Kelly and Clay Steinman stress the significance of *Citizen Kane*’s influence, which finds its strongest expression in the “evolving concern with the problem of narrative point of view as it culminated in *Crossfire*.” However, as opposed to *Kane*’s “viewpoint of an omniscient narrator,” where, in Dmytryk’s words, “each narrator should be seen as a *different Kane*,” *Crossfire* “constructed a system of contradictory narrators that marked a comparatively radical break with conventional narrative cinema.”⁹ That is why *Crossfire* also became a significant film for film criticism in the 1970s. For example, Nora Sayre, also writing in 1978, argues that *Crossfire* examined anti-Semitism “far more thoughtfully” than its much more expensive competitor, Elia Kazan’s *Gentleman’s Agreement*. Part of the reason, according to Sayre, was that *Crossfire* “skillfully imparts the postwar mood” of those still caught up in war frenzy, as well as tapping into the anxieties of those fearing a possible continuation of the war. But the key to *Crossfire*’s longevity, concludes Sayre, is the raw authenticity which is lodged in the word ‘stinking,’ used by Robert Ryan’s character “with a savagery of an old-fashioned obscenity.” To Sayre, this “conveys the fury of the racist in a way that was new to the screen.”¹⁰ This is in large part attributable to the power and authenticity of Robert Ryan’s performance in this role. Ryan’s authenticity perfectly complements ‘a kind of American *Open City*,’ to which the creators of *Crossfire* aspired.

At the other end of the social realist spectrum, the other seminal film of the period, *Naked City*,

⁸ Interview with Dennis Broe, Feb 12, 2010

⁹ Kelly, K., & Steinman, Clay (1978). “*Crossfire*: A Dialectical Attack.” *Film Reader* 3 (Feb): pp. 106-130.

¹⁰ Sayre, N. (1978). *Running Time: The Films of the Cold War*. NY: The Dial Press.

according to Broe, demonstrated a “regressive bringing in of the neo-realist tropes” without engaging in deep social explorations. Rossen’s first draft screenplay stressed class and social issues in New York, but by the time of the working script, cops and surveillance dominate, watching over the very issues Dassin sought to explore – reportedly, he was disgusted by the final draft. According to Broe, the blacklist “removed the ideas of working-class mentality.” This “no longer is a working-class culture,” but “just an effect,” concludes Broe.¹¹ In other words, the groundbreaking police procedural *Naked City* abandoned the working-class ethos and compensated by offering a heightened realism in style.

This charge could be leveled against another seminal work of American social realism, *On the Waterfront*, which was assessed as a counterpoint to *Salt of the Earth* in Chapter IV. As was noted there of these two US cinema labour classics, both films are among the best exponents of American neorealism at the time, but Kazan’s film is, in the words of Brian Neve, more “Hollywoodish,” concerned with the “autonomy of the individual,” and concentrating blame on the union apparatus. That, according to Neve, separates *Waterfront* “from the ethos of the Party.”¹² In *Salt*, on the other hand, the realism of the working-class culture enhances the ‘ethos of the Party’ and the entire union movement. Such an ethos, a remnant of the 1930s Popular Front idealism of the Hollywood Left, was directly proportional to the level of ‘proletarianisation’ of American culture. More crucially, it reflected the inability of ‘radical’ Hollywood to break with Stalinist conceptions of the relations between art and the proletariat.

¹¹ Interview with Dennis Broe, Feb 12, 2010.

¹² Interview with Brian Neve, Feb 19, 2010

But any significant advances in American film art could not be driven solely by the strength in numbers alone that ‘proletarianisation’ provided. The two noir classics, *Crossfire* and *Naked City*, although not included in Thom Anderson’s list of film gris, could serve to demarcate the political and aesthetic outer limits of conventional realism in the Hollywood crime film. These films, by virtue of their permanent place in the classical Hollywood canon, only reinforce the consensus view of the function of realism in the social problem film, shared by both the Stalinist and the liberal wings of the Popular Front. The case of *The Best Years of Our Lives*, mentioned in Chapter I in terms of Polonsky’s critique of that film, further reinforces this consensus on a safe, outer realism. This outlook is even more significant since it relates to two completely different ideological functions of realism: *Crossfire* is seen as an American *Open City*, while *Naked City* is seen as a semi-documentary police procedural, with a distinct right-wing undertone. Even the more politically differentiated (Hollywood and non-Hollywood) classics explored in other chapters, *On the Waterfront* and *Salt of the Earth*, did not avoid the melodramatic pitfalls of classical Hollywood’s cinematic conventions.

This brief digression into the permissible political and aesthetic limits of the pre-blacklist Hollywood, reached by *Crossfire*, puts into even sharper relief another Hollywood Left figure, Joseph Losey, regarded by many as a great casualty of the blacklist. This cinematic dialectician looms even larger now than he did in the period when his unique synthesis of progressive aesthetics and American idiom made a critical contribution to what Buhle and Wagner term “the only fully realised American ‘art film’ genre.”¹³ A complete antithesis to conventional melodrama, the vital theoretical component Losey assimilated in the Soviet Union in the 1930s

¹³ Wagner, D. and Buhle, P. (2002). Radical Hollywood: The Untold Story Behind America's Favourite Films. New York, The New Press, p. 323

during his collaboration with Vsevolod Meyerhold, dialectic and materialist modernism, was only beginning to be realized cinematically by the time of his 1960s and 70s collaborations with Harold Pinter. However, Hollywood film noir, a post-war mutation of noir said by Andersen to be characterized by ‘higher social and psychological realism,’ could have provided a fertile ground for the aesthetic seeds of an avant-garde modernism, in a native American film style with highly developed archetypes, begging to be cultivated politically.

However, this missed opportunity (represented here by Losey’s exile) is only part of the historical lesson suggested by this thesis. If the term ‘film art’ has any real meaning, it should be practised by committed artists unafraid to confront all the ills of this social order, and all those responsible for these ills, and should do so in his/her chosen personal style. Asked what the duty of the artist is, Polonsky replied in his typical, irreverent manner: “It is to have his way. Yes. Of course, if you’re wrong, or you’re not making it, you get hurt. But that’s part of it.”¹⁴

In concluding, we can see that even Polonsky’s conception of the duty of an artist, along with *Salt of the Earth*’s wholehearted turn to the working class, do not of themselves exhaust the artistic and political potential of the kind of film art crushed by McCarthyism. As this thesis has attempted to argue, perhaps the most critical lesson contained in this story of blacklisting is the need to expose the crippling effect of the witch-hunters’ nominal target – the Stalinists organized in and around the CPUSA – on the artistic promise contained in the *left* anti-Stalinists. Only a very few of the Hollywood Left, like Losey and Polonsky, had the political capacity to differentiate between socialist and Stalinist ideologies. As discussed in relation to Losey’s

¹⁴ Polonsky, A. (1974). Seminar With Abraham Polonsky held November 13, 1974. Film History Program, Center For Advanced Film Studies. Beverly Hills, California, American Film institute.

collaboration with Daniel Mainwaring on *The Lawless*, it was Losey's ability to transcend his screenwriter's entrenched social democratic outlook that enabled their film to produce a greater impact than it had the right to expect. Similarly, Polonsky's class consciousness endowed Rossen's *Body and Soul* with greater contemporaneity than the director's original idea of a doomed proletarian hero would have permitted. It took Rossen a reviewing of both the alternative endings to Garfield's Charley Davies to acknowledge his collaborator's political sophistication. This sophistication, a core aspect of the *left* anti-Stalinist's creative beings, aligned their masterful synthesis of noir elements to objective social processes, and the true class nature of their contemporary society. In other words, they were attuned not only to the left paradigm, but to the objective processes of capitalism. This accounts for the enduring impact of their films. It is not an accident that some of the most perceptive authors regard Losey and Polonsky as great losses to McCarthyism. David Thompson provides a sober assessment of the blacklist: "[T]here were many forces in America, business and political, that felt the danger of too many open, critical movies. We have not yet reversed that trend."¹⁵

However, one thing this thesis anticipates, or at least hopes, is that Losey's masterful dissection of the class system, and Polonsky's effortless conducting of an 'autopsy on capitalism' via his noir films will resonate with, and inspire, contemporary film artists and cinephiles in an upcoming period that seems to me comparable to the one that nourished the blacklisted generation. It has to be noted that the legacy of McCarthyism on film art, in America and internationally, will persist until the artist can 'have his way,' especially if he/she seeks to challenge the capitalist status quo. This relates to the most current case of witch-hunting: as long

¹⁵ Thompson, D. (2005). The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood. NY, Alfred A. Knoph, p. 274

as the ‘most dangerous citizen’ of today, Assange, cannot ‘have his way’ while exercising his First Amendment rights as a member of the Fourth Estate, then David Thompson’s assessment of the original blacklist could apply now with even greater force. Just as the big studios in the 1940s “fell in line once their bankers warned them of the consequences of not cooperating” with HUAC, today the voice of American liberalism, *The New York Times*, seems to be succumbing to the same kind of pressure exerted on the Fourth Estate by The Bank of America and other financial institutions. Justifying their measures against Wikileaks, its Christmas Day editorial, “Banks and Wikileaks,” states:

The Federal Reserve, the banking regulator, allows this. Like other companies, banks can choose whom they do business with. Refusing to open an account for some undesirable entity is seen as reasonable risk management. The government even requires banks to keep an eye out for some shady businesses – like drug dealing and money laundering – and refuse to do business with those who engage in them.¹⁶

The next, unstated, logical step could be a reconstitution of a loyalty oath. It is in just such a convulsive period that Polonsky’s cinematic ‘autopsy on capitalism’ could assume an even greater objective significance than at the time of his films’ releases in the late 1940s.

This qualitative shift to the right in our contemporary culture is a byproduct of a protracted process that led to the conglomeratised and vertically integrated movie industry, run under the dictates of global financial capital. It may appear utopian to imagine a new renaissance of film art in America based on an honest and uncompromising portrayal of its working classes, coupled with aesthetic breakthroughs that would illuminate the class nature of its society, of the kind pioneered by Losey, Polonsky, Brecht and other artistic dialecticians. While socialist-minded

¹⁶ Editorial (2010). “Banks and Wikileaks.” *The New York Times*. Dec 25.

filmmakers comparable to these figures are nowhere on the Hollywood horizon, the emergence of, and the hunger for, the ‘dangerous’ alternatives to the official media indicate the tectonic shifts deep in contemporary mass consciousness. Coupled with the coming of the second Depression, as forecast by many economists, these tectonic shifts deep below the surface might cause an eruption of working-class creativity of a kind which has not been seen since the 1930s. If, or when, this social and political eruption occurs, then the “structuring absence” of the working class in Hollywood, which Dennis Broe contextualized in the period between 1940 and 1955, may further alienate American film from the vast majority of its audience. To Broe, representation of class “in its most class conscious form, that is, as labor involved in a strike, is one of the most profound absences in Hollywood film.”¹⁷ Moreover, he concludes, “One primary legacy of the 1941-55 era for labor was the continued enforcement of the principle of state interference in union activity, promulgated by HUAC and promoted on the screen by *On the Waterfront* and the series of films about corrupt unions that followed it.”¹⁸ However, and more importantly, the next wave of radicalized truth-seekers in film art will not be compelled to grapple with what Warshow called the “central task of the American intellectual in the 1930s,” Stalinism.¹⁹ Or, to adapt Warshow’s critique of Stalinism to the present situation: the new American film artist will of necessity face a completely different ‘central task’ to that of his/her Popular Front-era counterpart, without the impediments of Stalinism, and with the other pillar of that cultural front, American capitalism, resting on shaky ground.

This leads us to the final ironic twist in this story of McCarthyism and Stalinism. Even as these

¹⁷ Broe, D. (2001). *Outside the Law: Labor and the crime Film 1941 - 55*, PhD thesis, New York University, p. 9

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 666

¹⁹ Warshow, R. (1971). “The Legacy of the 30s” (1947). The immediate experience : movies, comics, theatre and other aspects of popular culture. R. Warshow. New York, Atheneum: 35.

lines are being written, it is McCarthy's home state of Wisconsin that is being profoundly shaken by the kind of mass movement to the left that would make its most (in)famous son turn in his grave. These mass protests against the attacks on workers' living standards and democratic rights carried out by the Republican governor Scott Walker are a demonstration of the political power of the American working class. But their even more critical characteristic is that they are not led by discredited Stalinists and their ilk, therefore depriving the new-age McCarthyists of a red herring. Could this powerful new mass movement to the left herald the beginning of a new cultural front? Or, perhaps indicate a context from which a new American film art might emerge? Only time will tell, and depending on the outcome of the new period of class reawakening in America, one ought to be able to give a more definitive answer to the question of whether or not the legacy of McCarthyism finally has been reversed.

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Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps. 2010. Oliver Stone. USA

Way We Were (The). 1973. Sydney Pollack. USA



31 October 2012

Reference: 5200903536 (D)

Dear Mile and Noel,

FINAL APPROVAL

Title of project: The impact of McCarthyism on American Film Art

Thank you for your responses to the Faculty of Arts Ethics Review Committee (Human Research) conditions of approval, as outlined in our email dated 16th December 2009. Your responses have been reviewed by the Chair of the Committee and approval of the above application is granted effective 4th January 2010, and you may now proceed with your research.

Please note the following extra requirement of approval:

1. The interviewees must be provided with formal feedback regarding the results of the research (either a copy of the thesis or a copy of a journal article arising from the research).

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is **conditional** upon your continuing compliance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*.
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports. **Your first progress report is due on 4th January 2011.**

If you complete the work earlier than you had planned, you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report on the project.

Progress Reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:

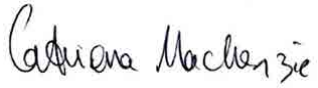
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/forms

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years, you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).
4. Please notify the Committee of any amendment to the project.

5. Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at:
<http://www.research.mq.edu.au/policy>

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project, it is your responsibility to provide Macquarie University's Research Grants Officer with a copy of this letter as soon as possible. The Research Grants Officer will not inform external funding agencies that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Officer has received a copy of this final approval letter.

Yours sincerely



Catriona Mackenzie
Associate Professor
Chair, Faculty of Arts Ethics Review Committee (Human Research)

Copy: [Supervisor](#)