

# **The Hollywood Left and McCarthyism: the Political and Aesthetic Legacy of the Red Scare**

by

**Mile Klindo, Bachelor of Media (Honors)**

**Supervisor: Dr. Noel King**

**Faculty of Arts, Department of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies**

**Macquarie University, Sydney**

This thesis is presented for the PhD in Media and Communication.

## Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	<b>i</b>
<i>Statement of Candidate</i>	<b>ii</b>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<b>iii</b>
<i>Preamble</i>	<b>v</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	CONTEXTUAISING THE TENSION BETWEEN THE ‘AMERICAN DREAM’ AND MARXISM IN PRE-BLACKLIST HOLLYWOOD <b>1</b>
<b>Chapter I</b>	CONSCIOUS AND ‘UNCONSCIOUS’ MARXISM IN HOLLYWOOD: ABRAHAM POLONSKY AND JOHN GARFIELD AND THEIR CINEMATIC CHALLENGE TO ‘THE AMERICAN WAY’ <b>27</b>
<b>Chapter II</b>	ROBERT ROSSEN AND THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD IN HOLLYWOOD <b>99</b>
<b>Chapter III</b>	FROM MEYERHOLD TO PINTER: JOSEPH LOSEY’S POLITICAL AND ARTISTIC JOURNEY <b>167</b>
<b>Chapter IV</b>	TWO DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED RESPONSES TO THE BLACKLIST IN FILMS ABOUT ‘BIG LABOUR’: <i>ON THE WATERFRONT</i> AND <i>SALT OF THE EARTH</i> <b>231</b>
<b>Chapter V</b>	THE ‘UN-AMERICAN’ TAKE ON ‘BIG LABOUR’: <i>SALT OF THE EARTH</i> AND DEMOCRATIC UNIONISM <b>293</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	NOTES ON PERSPECTIVES AND CONTEXTS: MANY ARE MCCARTHYIST <b>329</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>345</b>
<b>Filmography</b>	<b>359</b>
<b>Appendix: Final Ethics Clearance Report</b>	<b>363</b>

## Abstract

### **The Hollywood Left and McCarthyism: the Political and Aesthetic Legacy of the Red Scare**

This thesis assesses the long-term legacy of the anticommunist witch-hunts of the 1940s and 1950s on the political aesthetics of postwar Hollywood, focusing on selected blacklistees who, both individually and as a distinct group of class conscious filmmakers, embodied the new wave of social criticism of American capitalism on film before the HUAC offensive.

The main subjects of this research – Polonsky, Rossen, Losey, Kazan, and Biberman – are reexamined as representatives of distinct ideological strands of the ‘proletarianized’ left culture of the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century America. These key figures of the Hollywood Left are useful case studies on the impact of McCarthyism on American film art not only because their politics pushed them into the firing line of the anticommunist establishment, but also because, having matured artistically during this period of political reaction, their stories suggest some unexplored potential aesthetic directions for postwar American cinema, possible pathways prematurely blocked by the blacklisting of these filmmakers.

Polonsky’s sophisticated grasp of Marxism will be counter-posed to Rossen’s Popular Front liberalism in their cinematic challenges to the American Way. Losey, who, along with Polonsky, carried the Marxist torch in Hollywood, went further than any US radical filmmaker in merging American vernacular modernism with Marxism. His assimilation of Meyerhold’s political aesthetics, more than any other theoretical conquest in the Hollywood Left, held the promise of the kind of film art he eventually would accomplish, at least partially, in exile, in his collaboration with Harold Pinter in England.

Kazan’s and Brando’s collaboration in *On the Waterfront*, heralded not only the triumph of naturalism in acting, but a fundamental shift in the approach to depicting social problems on film, centered now on individualism. Stanislavsky’s triumph over Meyerhold (and Brecht) marked an irrevocable break from the 1930s paradigm in Hollywood, and the extinction of the proletarian ethos of the Popular Front era. The creators of *Salt of the Earth*, on the other hand, doggedly stuck to the proletarian, and by now criminalized, principles of their youth, earning the unique distinction of producing the only officially banned film in America. Reading this labour classic against its pro-Stalinist antithesis, *On the Waterfront*, therefore affords a rare opportunity to shed light on the (so far) under-researched, symbiotic, if hostile, relationship between McCarthyism and American Stalinism.

It is within this political and aesthetic context that the thesis will seek to quantify the losses to American film art caused by McCarthyism.

## Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “The Hollywood Left and McCarthyism: the Political and Aesthetic Legacy of the Red Scare” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Committee, reference number: 5200903536 (D) on January 4, 2010.

**Signature of the candidate:**\_\_\_\_\_

**Date:**\_\_\_\_\_

**Name of the candidate:**\_\_\_\_\_

**Student ID:**\_\_\_\_\_

**Date:**\_\_\_\_\_

## Acknowledgements

I owe a great deal of gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Noel King, without whose invaluable assistance, and patience, this undertaking would not have been possible. In particular, Noel's numerous suggestions for relevant academic sources significantly enriched my thesis, and all the stylistic and structural changes he proposed in his many draft reviews markedly improved its readability and analysis. Also, Noel was of great help in guiding me through all the application processes related to research, ethics, travel and academic contacts.

My original supervisor before I shifted my research area (from post-blacklist film criticism to the original historical moment of McCarthyism), Dr. Peter Doyle, provided invaluable advice on writing and structuring of my thesis, in particular, the need to differentiate between the main and secondary stories. Peter also provided much needed moral support during many periods of personal crisis.

Dr. Kathryn Millard was instrumental in inspiring me, then assisting me, with my PhD candidacy, providing me with much needed advice and orientation.

I wish to thank film scholar and author, Jon Lewis, who kindly granted me a very valuable and educational interview on the subject of McCarthyism. He also provided very constructive comments and editorial suggestions on my final draft, which I feel took the structure and argument of my thesis to a higher level.

My understanding of the suppressed class character of American film during the blacklist era was greatly enriched by Dennis Broe, who provided me with a very detailed and insightful account of the political and aesthetic issues at hand during our conversation last year. He also forwarded me his dissertation on the subject of class and labour issues in Hollywood during the blacklisting era, which proved to be very helpful.

Brian Neve graciously collated a lot of valuable research material on Polonsky and Rossen, before granting me a very exhaustive interview on the contradictions and complexities embodied in Elia Kazan, as well as the key issues pertaining to the post-war, 'red' Hollywood. This also proved to be an invaluable source of information and perspective in my thesis.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife Karen Hopperdietzel for her endless patience and understanding, as well as for some valuable proofing and editing help. Ultimately, this thesis would not have been completed without my family providing the necessary material conditions and emotional support.



## Preamble

To begin, it might help the reader to be clear from the outset on what this thesis is *not* doing. It is not a detailed study of the historical and political circumstances of, and the economic pressures that brought about, the blacklist. That work has been undertaken powerfully by film scholars such as Jon Lewis, Brian Neve, Paul Buhle, Dave Wagner, Gerald Horne, Larry Ceplair, Steven Englund, and Reynold Humphries, to name but a few of the most prominent contributors to the field. (Specific works will be cited later in this preamble.)

Although this thesis does not discuss in any closely detailed manner the institutional, commercial, and economic contexts in which the American film industry was operating in the historical period under discussion, none-the-less its writing has benefited greatly from a research trip funded by Macquarie University which enabled me to access valuable primary sources in the following libraries: In Los Angeles, the Margaret Herrick Library (where I gathered material on the Production Code, Bezzerides, the trucking films and industry, Dassin, Rossen); Warner Bros. Archives (Rossen, Bezzerides, Dassin, Garfield, Raoul Walsh, Hal Wallis) and the UCLA Library (Rossen's 1930s films *Marked Woman* and *Racket Busters*); the Public Library in New York (Polonsky's lectures and correspondence); as well as the BFI archives in London (material on Losey), spending one day in each of these institutions.

That brief period of research on primary materials definitely helped me shape my arguments in ways that otherwise would not have been possible. It also afforded me, across an admittedly small terrain, a view of texts which usually would come to me as a section of

another researcher's book. To have been in the actual archive was a very useful experience for someone who necessarily, given this topic, had been operating very much at a meta-critical level, assessing the arguments and accounts of others.

Rather than seek to provide a detailed historical account of the blacklist and the political responses it occasioned the thesis essays a number of different, interconnected strategies.

First, while obviously working on and respecting the specific historical time and contexts in which the filmmakers discussed here produced their works, the thesis consistently is aware of its 'own time', not quite in the terms Jacques Derrida mentions in his "The Time of the Thesis" nor in homage to what Michel Foucault called "the history of the present."<sup>1</sup> Instead the thesis is intensely aware of the way some 'distant' cultural texts can be articulated with contemporary circumstances. In this sense the thesis on occasion is close to the late 1970s literary-filmic paradigm that stressed the notion of rewriting and re-inscription of specific texts in later contexts that could not have been imagined at the time of the texts' initial production, circulation and reception. The most succinct formulation of this perspective comes from Francis Mulhern when he says:

What a text 'shows' or can be made to show of its means of production is of incontestable importance. But it cannot be decisive, either theoretically or in the 'politics' of criticism. Firstly, because if a text is not an 'event' but a 'function' transposable in time and space, its conditions of *production* can have no special priority in analysis over its subsequent and variable conditions of *existence and*

---

<sup>1</sup> See Michel Foucault, "What our Present Is," trans. Lysa Hochroth, in Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: semiotext(e), 1997): 147-168; and Jacques Derrida, "Punctuations: The Time of a Thesis," trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, in Derrida, *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, trans. Jan Plug and others (Stanford, California: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004): 113-128



*activity*. Secondly, because what the entire history of discourse on literature shows is how much, in how many different circumstances, a text can be made to signify...<sup>2</sup>

As it happens the inspiration for some of that late 1970s reviewing of Marxist aesthetics was the work of Bertolt Brecht, who figures at certain crucial points in this dissertation. In his “A Short Organum for the Theatre” Brecht says that he could imagine a rereading and restaging of *Hamlet*: “Given the dark and bloody time in which I am writing – the criminal ruling classes, the widespread doubt in the power of reason, continually being misused – I think I can read the story thus....”<sup>3</sup> In saying this Brecht was indicating his view that distant cultural texts needed to be looked at in the light of contemporary political-cultural contexts in order to see how they might be helped to speak to, say, contemporary “dark times.” This perspective connects with many other comments Brecht makes in essays such as “The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre” (33-42), “Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction” (69-76), “Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting” (91-99), “The Popular and the Realistic” (107-114).<sup>4</sup>

Although for Brecht this involved a notion of, say, rewriting Shakespeare by restaging/updating the play, a tactic that has since become commonplace, the same logic follows for the viewing and analysis in our time of distant film texts. Of course one is expected to become familiar with the conditions of the films’ original productions and social circulations, but one’s critical attention need not confine itself exclusively to this historical realm. It is one minor strand of this thesis’ overall argument that some of the blacklisted films speak very eloquently to the current context of a post GFC/GEC world. (And we can leave to one side the fact of Jules Dassin’s having fetched up in Greece, the country currently being

---

<sup>2</sup> Francis Mulhern, “Marxism in Literary Criticism,” *New Left Review* 108 (1978): 42; also quoted in Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism*, (London: Methuen, 1979) p 135

<sup>3</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed and trans John Willett (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979): 179-208; quotation on p. 201.

<sup>4</sup> These are collected in Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979)

seen as the great challenge to the future of European economic stability, the stability of European banks, and the future of the euro!)<sup>5</sup>

But even more generally, since “[l]ying and cheating are the salt and pepper of noir,” as Jack Shafer so aptly put it, elements of the classical Hollywood noir films lose none of their cultural relevance today – one need not strain one’s imagination to fit classical noir villains into today’s big business and mass media structures. Shafer does precisely that in his recent commentary in *The Slant* magazine, likening the recent *News of the World*’s phone hacking scandal to the intricate web of intrigue and back-stabbing in Howard Hawks’ classic *The Big Sleep*. He concludes wryly that if “only we could persuade the 80-year-old Murdoch to wheeze about like *The Big Sleep*’s Gen. Sternwood, get chief executive of Murdoch’s *News International* Rebekah Brooks to vamp it up like Vivian Rutledge, order the *Guardian*’s Nick Davies to do a hero turn as Philip Marlowe, and find a stronger sex angle, then only preproduction tasks remaining would be to wet London’s asphalt and secure sufficient black-and-white stock. Hell, Murdoch’s 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox could produce and distribute it! Call it *The Big Phone Hacker*.”<sup>6</sup>

This illustrates the main driving force of the historical method employed in this thesis, namely that the stock-in-trade elements of the classical *noir* lose none of their original potency when re-inscribed in contemporary “dark times.” At the risk of oversimplifying the complex reasons for the transcendental nature of this genuinely American mode of filmmaking, the secret to its persistence could be tied to the ideological health of the ‘American Way.’ Even a cursory observation of the *film noir* lifecycle supports the idea that

---

<sup>5</sup> For a very insightful commentary see Jonathan Lanchester’s recent column that focuses specifically on Greece: “Once Greece Goes...: Any Hope for the Euro?” *London Review of Books*, Vo. 33, No. 4, July 14, 2011: pp. 3-7.

<sup>6</sup> Jack Shafer, “Rupert Murdoch, Film Noir Hero and Nick Davies as the hard-boiled hero in *The Big Phone Hacker*,” *The Slant*, July 6, 2011.

the flowering of this cinema of darkness is inversely proportional to the strength of the appeal of the normative Americanism of white picket fences and the WASP-dominated middle-class outlook of its cinema. One need not be an American film buff to recognise that the two historical moments that did more than any others in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to undermine the nostrums of the ‘American Way,’ the 1940s and the 1970s, saw the greatest surges of the *noir* modes of filmmaking.

Viewed from the context of today’s GFC/GEC and the growing tensions between the big powers, none of the urgent social and political challenges plaguing American and world capitalism in the 1940s, which animated classical *film noir*, have been resolved. With the benefit of the hindsight, it could be argued that the post-war boom, culminating in the Kennedy-era spirit of democratic liberalism, seems more like a temporary aberration in the evolution of the ‘American Way.’ Translated into the political aesthetics of *film noir*, even its 1970s revival in the form of *neo-noirs* like *Taxi Driver* can only serve to reinforce the argument that any capitalist disequilibrium – and the period between 1968 and 1975 was definitely one such systemic crisis period – finds corresponding psychological distortions in its film protagonists. De Niro’s Travis Bickle personifies more than the psychological damage caused by the Vietnam war; he also perfectly fits the description of a post-war *film gris* hero who suffers, in the words of Thom Andersen, from “psychological injuries of class.” (In relation to the 1970s revival of *noir*, it is worth recalling that Howard Hawks’s *The Big Sleep* was remade in 1978 by Michael Winner and starred Robert Mitchum as Marlowe and James Stewart as Gen. Sternwood.)

But even more to the point of this thesis, it is of interest that an excellent piece has appeared in *Film Quarterly* on some recent fiction film, TV film, documentary, and avant-garde

responses to the global financial crisis.<sup>7</sup> This article includes a break-out section in which the titles of the films under discussion are listed and within this collection is a sub-section entitled, “Precursors” where the authors list films from the 1920s and 1930s (*L’Argent*, *Kuhle Wampe*) and more recent films from the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century.

No films *noir* or films *gris* are listed but my point would be that some titles could well have taken a distinguished place in that list of “Precursors.” And since Brecht-Dudow’s *Kuhle Wampe* is mentioned at length in the article, this permits a neat segue to the Brecht legacy alluded to earlier, his contribution to the 1970s literary-cultural theorising of the historical-cultural relocation of texts. Although this perspective takes only a very minor role in this thesis, it has a very distinguished intellectual lineage, that is, the work drawing on Brecht and Benjamin which saw post 1970s Anglo literary-film-cultural criticism shift its attention from original moments of cultural production to the subsequent, often very distant contexts within which these texts could find themselves located, and these contexts would themselves be found to be highly productive. This Machereyan-Althusserian turn of late 1970s and early 1980s English cultural criticism saw writing from Tony Bennett, Tony Bennett-Janet Wollacott, Roger Chartier, Francis Mulhern, Michael White, Barbara Klinger, among others, concentrate on the material, transformative effects of subsequent cultural contexts in which texts were embedded: Accordingly, “reading formations,” and/or contexts of reproduction were deemed as significant as originary contexts of production.<sup>8</sup> This work would later

---

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Krinkle and Alberto Toscano, “Filming the Crisis: A Survey,” *Film Quarterly* 65, 1 (Fall 2011): 39-51.

<sup>8</sup> See Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism*, London: Methuen, 1979; Tony Bennett & Janet Wollacott, *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero*, London: Macmillan, 1987; Michael White, “Reading and Rewriting: The Production of an Economic Robinson Crusoe,” *Southern Review* 15,2 (July 1982): pp 115-12; Francis Mulhern, “Marxism in Literary Criticism,” *New Left Review* 108 (1978): pp. 77-87

inform studies of “the Bond phenomenon”, *Superman*, and would orient Barbara Klinger’s excellent study of the films of Douglas Sirk, in her *Melodrama and Meaning*.<sup>9</sup>

This “interpretive optic” (as David Bordwell might term it) in no way dominates the critical perspectives on offer in the argument undertaken in this thesis. It is more a kind of occasional wondering aloud, in words on the page, about which of the many films *noir* and films *gris* discussed here speak most strongly to our contemporary post GFC/GEC cultural economic context. And if they *can* be said to do this, are they doing it in a way that is more compelling than such contemporary fiction films as *Up in the Air* and *Wall Street 2: Money Never Sleeps*?

Given that this thesis was written in a contemporary “dark time” of perhaps the most spectacular instance of “casino capitalism” we have ever witnessed (and whose effects continue to play out now beyond the US and the UK and into Europe) it was inevitable that I came to wonder about the place some of Krinkle’s and Toscano’s chosen films occupied in relation to our contemporary global economic events.<sup>10</sup> The world of *Tucker’s People* occasionally seemed not at all far away.

The other main orientation towards subsequent historical contexts that appears in the course of discussing my chosen films and their original cultural contexts concerns the fact that my

---

<sup>9</sup> See Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994)

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Kopkind uses the term “casino capitalism” in the context of his 1993 discussion of Richard Linklater’s film *Slacker*, and Douglas Coupland’s book *Generation X*, among other texts: “The domestic and economic relationships that have created the new consciousness are not likely to improve in the few years left in this century, or in the years of the next, when the young slackers will be middle-aged. The choices for young people will be increasingly constricted. In a few years, a steady job at a mall outlet or a fast food chain may be all that’s left for the majority of college graduates. Life is more and more like a lottery - is a lottery - with nothing but the luck of the draw determining whether you can get a recording contract, get your screenplay produced, or get a job with your M.B.A. Slacking is thus a rational response to casino capitalism, the randomization of success, and the utter arbitrariness of power.” (Andrew Kopkind, “Slacking Toward Bethlehem,” *Grand Street* 44 (1993): 177-188; cited on p. 187)

years growing up in the former Yugoslavia – before emigrating to Australia at the age of eighteen – were shaped by Stalinism. But even such a powerful personal experience was not the decisive factor in motivating some of this thesis’s robust criticisms of those Stalinist organizations in the US, and the USSR, that curbed the creative and socialist impulses of all the Hollywood Left figures discussed here. 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 tragic case of Vsevolod Meyerhold, the Russian avant-garde dramatist, and the modernist legacy he bestowed upon Joseph Losey, is only the most graphic manifestation of the division of labour shared between the Stalinists and the McCarthyist witch-hunters in eradicating much of the materialist and dialectical potential of cinema.

Paradoxically, living through the death throes of a Stalinist regime, an experience alien to most Americans, perhaps endowed me with a greater empathy for socialist-minded filmmakers in Hollywood than might obtain in someone growing up in the most anticommunist country in the world, in most cases as a part of, or a descendant of, the “silent generation,” so powerfully chronicled by Ellen Schrecker in her seminal study of the legacy of McCarthyism, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (1986). Eastern Europe did not witness a growth of a comparable “silent generation.” But that’s another story.

For the purposes of concluding this “Preamble” to my study of Hollywood and McCarthyism, it is worth relating one more aspect of life under Stalinism, applicable to all subjects of this thesis: Like most young people with a modicum of social and political consciousness, my generation strove to live up to the ideals trumpeted by the Communist establishment, *despite*

a widespread perception of these leaders as immoral, corrupt members of the “red mafia.” The last point is critical in comprehending why the Polonskys, Rossens, Loseys, Kazans, Bibermans and others, more often than not possessed of intellects superior to those of their Stalinist cultural handlers, remained committed to the “lost cause” long after it was effectively criminalised by McCarthyists. It was not so much the Party’s prestige or even coercive power; rather it was the artists’ sense of social justice and a commitment to genuine Communist ideals that compelled them to risk their financial and professional standing. It is in this historical and political context that the ferocity of the ideological battles surrounding the “Maltz affair” of 1946 could begin to make sense. The CPUSA’s disciplining of Maltz is one of the more graphic manifestations of the political pressure to preserve Stalinist ideology even against one’s better judgement. In fact, one of the central arguments of this thesis is that American Stalinism carried out important preparatory work for McCarthyist witch-hunters in softening up the Hollywood radicals for what would prove to be the relatively easy job of wiping the troublesome reds out of the American film industry.

As was indicated at the start of this “Preamble,” the thesis has benefited enormously from existing studies written by researchers who have had the opportunity to spend lengthy periods of time in the relevant archives. These works include, first and foremost, Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner’s Hollywood Left trilogy, comprising *A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Lincoln Polonsky and the Hollywood Left* (2001), *Radical Hollywood: The Untold Story Behind America’s Favorite Movies* (2002) and *Hide in Plain Sight: The Hollywood Blacklistees in Film and Television, 1950-2002* (2003), which meticulously chronicles the political and aesthetic evolution of the Hollywood Left. Another important trilogy of works on Hollywood blacklist, authored by Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (1986), *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (1999) and *The Age of McCarthyism: a Brief History With Documents* (2002), also contains, and examines,

substantial archival material on the socio-political contexts of the blacklist, providing a clarifying study about one of its defining legacies, the emergence of the above-mentioned “silent generation.” Both these significant contributions to the subject of McCarthyism owe a great debt to the pioneering and original research work on the HUAC years, McCarthyism and the blacklist undertaken by Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund in their monumental *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community 1930-1960* (1980). Also, James Lorence’s meticulous archival research into the political and production contexts of *Salt of the Earth*, including his indispensable book on the topic, *The Suppression of Salt of the Earth: How Hollywood, Big Labor, and Politicians Blacklisted a Movie in Cold War America* (1999), afforded this thesis invaluable insights into one of its key themes, the relationship between the strange bedfellows, Stalinism and McCarthyism, as played out in the making and breaking of this seminal act of cinematic defiance against the HUAC.

In particular this thesis takes much of its inspiration from some recent work on the topic of the blacklist by scholars such as Brian Neve, Dennis Broe, Jon Lewis and Reynold Humphries. The work of each of these scholars afforded me a great many suggestive insights and indications of how this thesis might contribute in a small but distinctive way to such a well-trammelled field. In particular, Brian Neve’s invaluable historical study of the ‘lost,’ or suppressed, social tradition of the Hollywood social problem film, in works such as *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition* (1992) and “The Screenwriter and the Social Problem Film, 1936-38: The Case of Robert Rossen at Warner Brothers,”<sup>11</sup> laid the groundwork for some key aspects of my study of the inherently progressive and even socialistic character of the Hollywood Left. This perspective was only reinforced by the recent groundbreaking work by Dennis Broe who, in *Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood* (2009), departed from much of the conventional wisdom of the scholarship on McCarthyism by

---

<sup>11</sup> This was published in *Film & History* 14,1 (February 1984): 2-13.



foregrounding social class, in particular the proletarian character of the Hollywood Left. This perspective helped further clarify my own class-oriented thesis. Another scholar who broke from the orthodoxies of this field of study, Jon Lewis, powerfully complemented this Marxist perspective with his important historical and materialist assessment of the blacklist from the standpoint of the industrial and economic imperatives that gave rise to this anticommunist reaction. Importantly, in works such as *Hollywood v. Hard Core* (2002) and *The End of Cinema as We Know It* (1999), Lewis links the blacklist with another powerful turning point in that same historical moment, the Paramount decree of 1948, further charting the path for the kind of historical materialist reading of the Red Scare attempted in this thesis. Reynold Humphries's recent survey of the history and the politics behind the blacklist, *Hollywood's Blacklists: A Political and Cultural History* (2008), provided further critical reinforcements for my focus on Stalinism as a decisive factor in neutralising the threat posed by the class-conscious practitioners of *film noir*.

Nor can one overlook a seminal piece by Thom Andersen, "Red Hollywood," an essay which inspired the documentary of the same title Andersen made with Noel Burch in 1985, which clearly and powerfully showed the extent of the political and aesthetic losses suffered by Hollywood at the hands of the anticommunist witch-hunters. Finally, this brief survey would not be complete without acknowledging the pioneering work carried out by Michael Denning, who in his monumental study of the "proletarianisation" of American culture from the 1930s, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (1996), significantly deepened the historical and theoretical framework for the development of my central thesis on the class-determined, political imperatives of McCarthyism.

It was this writing together with the distinguished earlier work of many film scholars, whether it be the interviews with blacklisted individuals collected so assiduously by Patrick

McGilligan, memoirs from some of the blacklisted, the actual process of the blacklisting chronicled meticulously by Victor Navasky, ground-breaking original work on the HUAC years, McCarthyism and the blacklist by Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund already mentioned, which helped the thesis arrive at a structure in which it could argue that Hollywood's bargain with the devil, sealed by the Waldorf statement, might have saved its industry, but, as with any Faustian deal, the price was a surrender of its soul, in this case embodied by the socialist-minded blacklisted. That is why the long-term legacy of McCarthyism is perhaps best summed up by the title of Jon Lewis's 1999 book and essay, "The End of Cinema as We Know It." Contained in this title, as I hope to demonstrate in this thesis, is the most critical legacy of McCarthyism, which boils down to an essential question: Is post-blacklist Hollywood able to grasp the essence of the social organisation of, and the human condition arising out of, contemporary capitalism, as convincingly as is shown in the best work by the blacklisted generation? More specifically, had politically sophisticated filmmakers like Losey and Polonsky been permitted to keep working in Hollywood, would their undeniable influence have pushed the pendulum in American cinema towards the kind of "higher social and psychological realism" Andersen ascribes to the pre-blacklist *film gris*? Even more importantly, would American film art have been able to forge the new aesthetic forms needed to put a mirror up to an increasingly complex, and bizarre, capitalist society – or, as Mayakowsky put it, a "magnifying glass" – which is precisely what Meyerhold and Brecht, and their protégé Losey, strived to do in their own ways?

By way of dealing with these questions, especially the last one, this thesis tries to imaginatively treat the significance of the film work created by these key directors and some of their co-thinkers associated with the Hollywood Left, work produced predominantly within the broad generic terrain of *film noir* and *film gris*, with a particular focus on the distinction between Stalinism and Marxism and their associated aesthetic features. It is by exploring this

key ideological fault-line in Hollywood Left that this thesis hopes to give full weight to elements of this story that previously have been neglected. In particular, the aesthetics of politics. More specifically, my hope is that the examination of this dichotomy, embodied in the conflict between Meyerhold's and Stanislavsky's methods, as it worked out in the American cinema and the application of "the Method" in that cinema, will present a useful corrective to the unbridled adoration of this acting/performance style. Another related aspect of the Stalinism-Marxism dichotomy concerns the favourable objective conditions in post-war America which offered the opportunity for the emergence of a new and perhaps distinctly American kind of political modernism, linked to European and particularly Soviet modernisms of the pre-war era.

As it panned out, Stalinism and McCarthyism acted in unison to prevent that movement from taking hold.

