"Engineered Enjoyment": Technology, Capitalism, and the Female Body in Film.

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"ENGINEERED ENJOYMENT": TECHNOLOGY, CAPITALISM, AND THE FEMALE BODY IN FILM

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the link between technology, capitalism, and the female body in 20th century cinema. It argues that commodified pleasure, or "engineered enjoyment," is always produced by establishing technological control over the female body. The scope of this dissertation is limited to films produced during the post-World War II era. In Chapter One I define "engineered enjoyment" and show how film is the prototypical example of such. In Chapter Two I examine how the cinematic apparatus works as a pleasure-producing system and explore what happens when that system breaks down, as in the 1947 film Lady in the Lake. In Chapter Three I critique post-war psychological thrillers which incorporate the idea of the breakdown within their narratives, specifically in the figure of the mentally ill woman as system "out of control." In Chapter Four I address a successful example of the engineering of the female body: the star body of M-G-M actress Esther Williams. Williams's film career was a product of the carefully orchestrated moderation of her physical body. Such controlled moderation allowed her to make the transition from screen star to celebrity spokesperson with amazing success. In Chapter Five I conclude by suggesting new areas for investigating engineered enjoyment in late 20th century culture, particularly the post-1975 "Blockbuster" era.
CHAPTER ONE
"Engineered Enjoyment": An Introduction

"The organizing principle of the Disney universe is control."

Alexander Wilson
"Technological Utopias"

In March of 1995 I spent a week at Walt Disney World with my sister and her three children. The week was difficult for a variety of reasons, not the least of which because I found the park's obsessive degree of micro-management disturbingly Orwellian. Inside the perimeters of Walt Disney World, all grass stays neatly mowed (this in Central Florida where the Kudzu grows a foot a day), all employees remain perky and cute, all lines move slowly but surely, all exhibits deliver the exact same experience at each visit, all foods taste remarkably similar, and all visitors behave in a polite and subdued manner. I felt as if I was in the Biosphere.

Later that summer, I broke my pledge never again to visit an amusement park and accompanied my brother and his daughter to the Six Flags Great America park outside of Chicago. Though not as large or as popular as the Disney complexes, nor as well-engineered or thematically coherent, the Six Flags parks are nonetheless made in the same image, including as they do an association with mainstream cinema.
(through the Batman rides) and animated cartoons (the Warner Brothers' Looney Tunes).

My brother, niece, and I had a truly miserable time at Six Flags: one hour after we arrived, a tremendous rainstorm soaked us and shut down all the outdoor rides for more than two hours. When the roller coasters opened back up, the lines immediately swelled to a two and a half hour wait. Meanwhile, the drainage systems were having a hard time keeping up with the flooding and no one seemed to be dealing with the very real problem of garbage and sanitation. I was understandably cranky, but to my horror I found my criticisms taking the form of a comparison to Walt Disney World.

I missed the control.

In fact, it's fair to say that at that moment, I craved it.

How did this happen? How did I go from complete skeptic to ardent defender of the Magic Kingdom? How did my experience of displeasure (clearly a function of an insufficient amount of environmental control) at the second theme park help to reinterpret my earlier experience as "pleasure"? And most importantly, how was I "produced" as a consumer of "pleasurable activity"—almost against my will?

When the gates of Disneyland first opened in 1955, twentieth century recreation came into its own.
Disneyland's debut officially forged the link between the film and amusement park industries, establishing and institutionalizing a "cinematic" sensibility toward amusement and pleasure where representation was privileged over the original and narrative demands trumped historical accuracy. Guided by an unfailing faith in progress through technology, Walt Disney and his "imagineers" planned and developed a self-contained universe of "fun" based on the twin theories of enclosure and exclusion. In *The American Amusement Park Industry*, Judith Adams writes,

> This place of fantasy, fortified against the intrusion of the real world by a massive barrier, actualizes a perfect world of pleasure where electronics, plastics, and psychology are harnessed for fun and escape from the fetters of adulthood. Its ingenious juxtaposition of advanced technologies with a nostalgic atmosphere of simpler times and locales preserves an ideal version of American history. With phenomenal success it mirrors the desires of its 'guests' regarding the shape of the future. (87)

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What exactly are those desires regarding the shape of the future? Disney, Inc. pursues the middle-class utopian dream of a world with no crime, disease, dirt, violence, poverty, or death—a fantasy that can only be approximated through extreme social and environmental control. Because Walt Disney World is able to exert a tremendous amount of control over its infrastructure, grounds, rides, and lands, as well as over the narratives circulating between and among each, the park achieves what most civic planners can only dream of: the inclusion of all that is desirable and the repression of all that is unpleasant, dirty, dangerous, or different. At Disneyland and Walt Disney World, guests are not in control, they are under control.

Perfect control is not easy to obtain or maintain. The "Vatican City of leisure and entertainment" needs more than just a one-time-only purging of all undesirable elements: it requires a system designed to continually purify and regenerate the park. The imagineers must plan every last detail, from the spotless lederhosen of the "cast members" running Cinderella's Golden Carrousel to the system of underground tunnels which moves workers and supplies throughout the park to the technologically sophisticated "Alien Encounter" ride, the newest spectacular attraction.

For more on the degree of environmental control involved in the development of Disneyland, see John M. Findlay, Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
at the Magic Kingdom. Providing America with "good, clean fun" is not just an art, it's a science.

Disneyland and Walt Disney World are more than just metaphors for late twentieth century culture as plastic, immediate, mass-produced, and commercial—in many ways, they are the best examples of a movement to produce and package "pleasure" according to the systematic, assembly-line methods perfected by modern industry. Most commodities today promise to produce pleasure in the consumer: your appliances/car/clothes will, when properly used, produce a pleasurable sensation in one form or another. Some industries, however, sell the pleasure itself so that the experience becomes the commodity. Disney and other entertainment industries produce technologies which elicit controlled and controllable bodily responses, but it is the responses, and not the technology, which they sell. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will call those commodified pleasures "engineered enjoyment"—a term I discovered in a pool advertisement from the 1950s, and which I feel effectively expresses the relationship between pleasurable experience, technology, and capitalism that this project explores.

The discipline of engineering, like Walt Disney World, acknowledges and even celebrates the exercise of systemic control over environmental conditions in order to produce "pleasure": the LSU General Catalogue blurb for the
biological engineering degree claims that the program "integrates applied biology into the fundamental principles of engineering for the purpose of designing processes and systems that influence, control, or utilize biological materials and organisms for the benefit of society" (130). The language of "influence" and "control" inscribes the engineer in a seemingly inflexible relationship of power to his or her subject matter: the engineer is the colonizer; the biological material or other organisms the landscape/indigenous peoples/raw material to be cultivated and amassed into capital. The phrase, "for the benefit of society," reveals that the discipline of engineering is, like Walt Disney World, steeped in the "ideology of progress"—the belief that technological innovation is always a good thing and that control over environmental and social conditions can consistently produce pleasurable experiences.

And yet—and this is a very important point—the engineer does not exert absolute control over his or her subject/system: power for the engineer is actually quite fluid. "Problem solving" (which is how engineers describe the work they do) is a dialectical activity; systems are designed to conquer one form of resistance only to break down in the face of another. While the ideal goal of most engineering disciplines is to design a system that will
maintain itself into perpetuity, the practice affirms (and actually thrives on) the impossibility of such an ideal.

In any form of "engineered enjoyment" the constant threat of the breakdown is always a driving force behind the production and maintenance process as well as the narratives which script the pleasures themselves. Pleasure's opposite, dis-pleasure or (if the system in question is the human body) dis-ease, is always a possibility even in the most perfectly engineered system. Disney's obsession with total control is actually a reaction to the fear of a breakdown at the level of production, the kind I witnessed on the rainy day at the rival park. Disney knows that disruptions are always a possibility (and thus that total control is never really achievable), so they work extra hard to ensure that most problems never arise in the first place.

What Disney eliminates (or attempts to eliminate) at the level of production, however, they reintroduce narratively. Rides like Star Tours and Alien Adventures, while relying on perfectly synchronized visual and sensual technology, actually dramatize mini-narratives of technology gone awry: R2-D2 "loses control" of our spaceship, sending us careening through the universe; an alien creature is "accidentally" transported into the theater with the audience. While Disney engineers work tirelessly to create ever more reliable and spectacular technological
systems, the narratives at the park reveal that culturally we are still haunted by and fascinated with the fear of the disastrous breakdown, and that "engineered enjoyment," as pleasurable experience, both feeds off of and assuages those fears.³

One recent popular novel which explores the relationship between control and the fear of breakdown in the theme park environment is Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park*. Crichton, famous for writing medical thrillers which tap into cultural fears about contagion, intends the novel as a morality play outlining the ethical limits of scientific and medical technology, specifically the "headlong and furious haste to commercialize genetic engineering" (ix). The novel concerns the attempts of supercapitalist John Hammond to clone dinosaur DNA in order to stock "the greatest single tourist attraction in the history of the world" (67). Part zoo, part laboratory, part Walt Disney World, *Jurassic Park* is actually a small

³ In "Performing 'Nature': Shamu at Sea World," Jane C. Desmond discusses the relationship of control over danger to pleasure in the park experience. Audience members applaud "not only the feat [the performing whales], but the invisible control and domination that is able to cultivate such 'wildness'" (229) and yet, "this subtext of danger, of nature as 'wildness,'"--the possibility that the whales could injure or kill a trainer or audience member--"is necessary to the successful functioning of Sea World" (235). In *Cruising the Performative: Interventions into the Representation of Ethnicity, Nationality, and Sexuality*, ed. by Sue-Ellen Case, Philip Brett, and Susan Leigh Foster (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995): 217-236.

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island off Costa Rica converted into an elaborate simulation of a Jurassic ecosystem, a place where the most adept genetic scientists in the world produce and rear the ultimate anachronism: living dinosaurs. Hammond, whom the book cleverly describes as, "about as sinister as Walt Disney" (42), elaborates on the park concept, calling it the most advanced amusement park in the world, combining the latest electronic and biological technologies. I'm not talking about rides. Everybody has rides. Coney Island has rides. And these days everybody has animatronic environments. The haunted house, the pirate den, the wild west, the earthquake—everyone has those things. So we set out to make biological attractions. Living attractions. Attractions so astonishing they would capture the imagination of the entire world. (61-2)

Hammond wants to commodify living bodies—to produce "living attractions" which, by virtue of being both manufactured and alive, confuse the distinction between natural and artificial.4 Not only does the regeneration of the dinosaurs collapse time (Jurassic/modern) and space (North/South America), it collapses the distinction between

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4 Desmond argues that Sea World performs this very same ideological work: "The lines between the 'natural' and the 'cultural' are continually asserted and erased, drawn and redrawn throughout the shows, revealing the elasticity of this boundary as well as its power, durability, and marketability." In Cruising the Performative (217).
living tissue and mechanical object. It is that confusion—the "real live" body that is nonetheless a product of industrial technology—which makes the dinosaurs such a fascinating and marketable product (Desmond 217).

Hammond recognizes that theme parks require the constant infusion of modern technologies (he even hires a veteran of the Polaris Missile and Walt Disney World projects to run the park), and he seems to heed some of Disney's most important wisdom: automate whenever possible. But whereas Hammond uses military technology to create "living biological attractions," Disney used space age technology to eliminate the need for living staff and attractions. The miracle of audio-animatronics allows Disneyland and Walt Disney World to continuously run shows without ever having to consider the welfare of the performers—no breaks, no strikes, no pay raises, no cast changes. What makes Jurassic Park so unique and fascinating—the regeneration of an extinct species—is what ensures its ultimate destruction and failure as "engineered enjoyment." The "unbelievable control mechanisms" that the park's designers have developed are not adequate to monitor the unpredictability of living creatures (Crichton 126). And the unpredictability of the

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5 This collapse is complicated once again when Steven Spielberg makes a film version of Jurassic Park using mechanical and computer generated dinosaurs to represent the "living" dinosaurs of the narrative.
living body (its refusal to conform to the technological script) turns the simulation of the Jurassic period into a dangerous real. In the film version of Jurassic Park chaos theoretician Ian Malcolm sums up the difference between Jurassic Park's "living attractions" and Disney's automated ones: "If the 'Pirates of the Caribbean' breaks down, the pirates don't eat the tourists."

The novel and film versions of Jurassic Park make explicit the gender politics of engineered enjoyment: the unpredicatable dinosaurs at the park are all female. In order to maintain and control the population of the park, the genetic engineers produce only female creatures. The engineers are quite blunt about their decision to create an all female rather than an all male dinosaur population: they feel that female animals will be more docile and easier to control. But in the novel's final twist, the frog DNA used to complete the ancient dinosaur chains predisposed several species (particularly "the most rapacious dinosaur that ever lived"--the velociraptor) to spontaneously "convert" to the opposite sex when raised in a single sex environment. Therefore, outside of the surveillance of the park's owners and managers, the "female" dinosaurs reproduce on their own, thwarting the geneticists' attempts to control and monitor the population. The initially supposed "docile" female dinosaur body proves to be so disruptive and unpredictable
that, when technological forms of control no longer work, the entire park must be destroyed. The velociraptors, however, escape to the Central American mainland, so that the book ends with the terrifying image of *vagina dentatas* run amok. *Jurassic Park* ultimately dramatizes a fear of/fascination with the female body's potential to "break down," as well as a failed attempt to "produce" and control that body—in particular the body's reproductive capabilities—for profit. I cannot emphasize enough how powerful and prevalent this trope is in twentieth century culture. The uneasy relationship between the use of technology to "engineer enjoyment" and the resistance of the unpredictable female body (of whatever species) to that control will be the focus of this dissertation.

For an examination of the ways our culture attempts to control bodily pleasures for profit, we first need to look at the way sex is, in Foucault's terms, placed under discursive control. Such control cannot be understood using a reductive oppressor/oppressed model which assumes an exercise of power in one direction only. The Foucaultian model of power and pleasure depends upon the belief that "pleasures of the body do not exist in immutable opposition to a controlling and repressive power but instead are produced within configurations of power that put pleasures to particular use" (Williams 3).
According to Foucault, the Victorians believed that it was necessary to establish control over sex and pleasure by creating alternative sites of pleasurable consumption outside the home and by repressing sexual discourse (*The History of Sexuality* 4-5). The experience of bodily sensation was relegated to specific spaces (the brothel, for example) and the expression of erotic or sexual discourse was relegated to the marginal forum of pornography. But prohibition never equals elimination, and the silence about sex which Victorian culture strongly propounded instead produced a cacophony of sexual discourses. Foucault argues that we (as descendants of the Victorians) are not silent about sex, but instead we are always speaking of it, even when we deny we are doing so (*The History of Sexuality* 19).

Repressed sexual discourse emerged in the nineteenth century through legal discourse (the laws criminalizing prostitution and pornography), but also through medical discourse.⁶ During the nineteenth century,

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medicine made a forceful entry into the pleasures of the couple: it created an entire organic, functional, or mental pathology arising out of 'incomplete' sexual practices; it carefully classified all forms of related pleasures; it incorporated them into the notions of 'development' and instinctual 'disturbances'; and it undertook to manage them. (The History of Sexuality 41)

Through relentless investigation, medical discourse codified and normalized sexual practices and pleasures, giving sexuality a specific social function as personal pleasures became an indication of an individual's mental and social stability. Freudian psychiatry in particular developed an elaborate system for investigating the sexuality of the individual in order to determine his or her physical, psychic, and social "health"; sexualities that differed from the heterosexual norms indicated that the individual was not just "abnormal" but "sick" and maybe even dangerous. But medical discourse did not merely relentlessly investigate and control sexuality; it took a form of pleasure in doing so. As Foucault argues,

The medical examination, the psychiatric investigation, the pedagogical report, and family controls may have the over-all and apparent objective of saying no to all wayward or unproductive sexualities, but the fact is that they function as mechanisms with a double impetus: pleasure and power. The pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to
evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it. (The History of Sexuality 45)

There is, according to Foucault, pleasure in controlling and in resisting/acceding to that control, so that pleasure within power relations is fluid (i.e., both the investigator and investigated may "enjoy" their respective positions).

What Western culture has developed, then, is a scientia sexualis, "a hermeneutics of desire aimed at even more detailed explorations of the scientific truths of sexuality" rather than the ars erotica or erotic arts of ancient civilizations (Williams 34). Within the "science of sexuality," regimes of power are committed to hearing the "truth" about sex via a confession, whether freely given by or extorted from the subject. The subject must tell so that those mechanisms of power can experience pleasure in the listening and add to their body of knowledge about sex, which is tantamount to increasing their power over an ever-widening circle of human activity. Foucault comments on this fascination with confession, remarking that it is as if "it was essential that sex be inscribed not only in an economy of pleasure but in an ordered system of knowledge" (The History of Sexuality 69).

The system of pleasure/control described by Foucault is today at work in contemporary pleasure industries, but what was once the province of the state or the medical
establishment is now exercised by private corporate entities.

Walt Disney intuited engineered enjoyment's ability to allow the private corporate entity to function as a form of public social control while simultaneously generating enormous profits. Disney believed that, under the right circumstances, guests could be made to "respond correctly" and that the park could control "mood and behavior" (Findlay 86). Susan Willis argues that this "privatization of fun" (122)—the elimination of free play in public spaces replaced by private corporate commodification of pleasure—produces a particular kind of control: the "erasure of spontaneity . . . . At Walt Disney World, visitors are inducted into the park's program, their every need predefined and presented to them as a packaged routine and set of choices" (122). Many guests, however, find the control at Disney World liberating, and look forward to falling into "the proper pattern, knowing that nothing could arise that hadn't already been factored into the system" (Willis 123).

Jean Baudrillard goes so far as to argue that Disney's ideological function in controlling pleasure is to get us to embrace total social control as utopian ideal:

Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America that is Disneyland (a bit like prisons are there to hide that it is the social in its entirety, in its
banal omnipresence, that is carceral) (12).

Disneyland feels different from the 'everyday' life that tourists leave behind because, while we are all constantly under institutional and discursive controls at all times and in all places, only in Disney do these controls seem to work exclusively for our pleasure. Therefore the Disney universe seems like the 'fantasy' world to everyday 'reality.' But Disneyland is not the opposite of the rest of the world, it is the platonic ideal: every corporation, every city, every political, social, technological, cultural institution would love to wield as much control over environment, employees and customers as Disneyland and Walt Disney World, while simultaneously generating such enormous profits, but few are as free from political and bureaucratic restraints. The best that most such institutions can do is hope that we return from our trips to Disney World with a renewed faith in the benevolent power of corporate America—and with a greater appreciation of our ability to consume.

While pleasure industries must work tirelessly to exert and maintain control over environments and bodies, that control must appear to the consumer to be nothing more than a moderation of experience. Most people do not feel like robots at Walt Disney World because successful pleasure systems run according to a technological script while
managing to repress the fact that such a script exists. The second volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality, The Use of Pleasure*, concerns itself with the cultivation and moderation of pleasureable experiences. Foucault's exploration of the Greek's system of self-regulation of pleasure can shed light on the way our culture has retained the theory of moderation, but has shifted the burden of its production from the individual to outside apparati to expand the definition of the "moderated experience."

Foucault's reading of the ancient Greeks argues that the idea of moderation is essential to a theory of morality. There are no "perversions" or "perverts": he writes, "the practices that contravene nature and the principle of procreation are not explained as the effect of an abnormal nature or of a peculiar form of desire; they are merely the result of immoderation" (*The Use of Pleasure* 44). Moderation, and by extension moral behavior, demands the "threefold mastery of the pleasures of drink, sex and food"--the regulation of the body's intake and expenditures by the individual himself (50).

The attempt to set moderate limits for pleasure does not have as its purpose a limitless jouissance. Foucault writes, "the purpose of diet was not to extend life as far as possible in time nor as high as possible in performance, but rather to make it *useful and happy* within the limits that had been set for it" (*The Use of Pleasure* 105,
emphasis mine). So it was for the regulation of more specifically sexual bodily activity. Sexual moderation both ensured health and happiness and proved one's ability to hold citizenship within the city-state.7 For the ancient Greeks, the use of pleasure in moderation by the individual begat power as a citizen, but also extended that power by allowing it to continue into perpetuity through the individual's descendants and the state's future citizens. While contemporary pleasure industries have incorporated the ideology of moderation which Foucault describes, the burden of control is shifted from the body itself to the technological apparatus which, through more and more elaborate engineering, allows experiences previously termed "excessive" to be consumed under controlled and moderated circumstances.

Modern pleasure industries merge ever more intense bodily pleasures with safety and control, as with roller coasters and other theme park "thrill rides," bungee jumping, and indoor rock climbing, to name a few examples.

7 "If the regimen of pleasures was important, this was not simply because in sexual activity in general man's mastery, strength, and life were at stake. To give this activity the rarefied and stylized form of a regimen was to ensure oneself against future ills; it was also to form, exercise, and prove oneself an individual capable of controlling his violence and of allowing it to operate within appropriate limits, of keeping the source of his energy within himself, and of accepting his death while providing for the birth of his descendants" (The Use of Pleasure 125-6).
You may "feel" as if you're going to die when you ride the
Mayan Mindbender or leap off a crane with a bungee cord
tied around your ankles, but (presumably) you will land
safely, taking away only the memory of the thrill rather
than any physical injuries. And should something "go
wrong" (although there is nothing "wrong" according to the
laws of physics about hitting the ground hard if you fall
from a high place), you or your next of kin will be
understandably outraged. When you pay for your thrill,
part of the agreement is that the elaborate apparatus will
protect you, that you will experience intense sensations
under controlled, safe conditions. Because engineering
allows you to experience freefalling without hitting the
ground (because you have aligned yourself with a technology
that has exerted control over the laws of gravity--making
you feel as if you are the one exerting control) the
experience of falling is translated into (interpreted as) a
moderated pleasurable activity. Without such technological
control, there would be no moderated pleasure, but rather
an excess of bodily sensation, meaning either serious pain
and/or death.

Engineered enjoyment differs slightly from the
moderated pleasures Foucault describes in The Use of
Pleasure in that the control of pleasure is a tool of
capitalism. Prostitution, the least mediated branch of the
pleasure industry, is paradigmatic of the way pleasure and
the body are co-opted by capitalism. The consumer's (the john's) pleasure is produced by the prostitute's body for a price; the participants in the transaction place an exchange value on a particular bodily experience. While the prostitute is potentially a capitalist, producing and marketing a service, she is also labor, since it is her actions which produce the pleasures. Because of the way other discourses of power are inscribed into prostitution (patriarchal privilege, the potential for violence), the prostitute rarely exercises her potential for resistance as a captain of industry; instead, given the marginal legitimacy of her profession, she almost always finds herself doubly subjugated as woman and disenfranchised labor force.

What prostitution has in common with more mainstream "engineered enjoyment" is the way it responds to the consumer's desire to experience a particular sensation in isolated, repeatable circumstances. What separates prostitution from these other pleasure industries is its immediacy of bodily experience through touch, penetration, orgasm, and/or exchange of bodily fluids—meaning its lack of secure sanitary/safety controls—as well as its direct economic exchange. As Priscilla Alexander notes, the courts have held that "sex acts for which all participants are being paid by a third party (viewer, pornographic filmmaker, etc.), and in which there is no direct physical
contact between paver and payee, are legitimate, while continuing to uphold the laws which prohibit the same actions if one participant is paying the other directly" (Alexander and Delacoste 192, emphasis mine). Legitimate pleasure industries mediate both the experience and the economic exchange involved in buying pleasure.

This is not to say that prostitution is not or cannot be controlled or moderated, but by and large moderation of the prostitution industry takes the form of legal or, in rare cases, bureaucratic control, as in the state of Nevada. But because of the quasi-legal or quasi-respectable status of prostitution—which is directly related to its lack of sufficient mediation away from the body, most sex workers do not have the opportunity to exploit fully the economic potential of the business in the same way as a "legitimate" pleasure industry such as Disney, Inc.

For more mainstream pleasure industries, touch, penetration, and orgasm are replaced by other, less overtly sexual experiences which are distanced from the body by technology of one form or another. "Engineered enjoyment" takes the model of prostitution (the exchange value of pleasure), combines it with the idea of regulation by discursive rather than solely legal means, and, via technology, extends it to other domains of bodily pleasure, including visual and intellectual as well as physical
pleasures. But the ability to experience more and different pleasures is not necessarily politically or culturally empowering. At the same time that the body is experiencing these previously unavailable or deadly "pleasures," the individual is more and more firmly inscribed as a subject of capitalism and the patriarchal institutions which it serves. The purpose of "engineered enjoyment" is to disperse and localize power via the moderation and control of pleasure-seeking subjects— in other words, to keep the little people happy.

What does the regulation of pleasures mean for women as social subjects? Why is it so important to place the female body—both as consumer and commodity—under control? Central to my thesis is the idea that the female body is positioned as a pleasure system unto itself as well as a subset of larger pleasure systems. In both instances, however, the female body, like the dinosaurs in Jurassic Park, is always on the verge of a systematic collapse. Thus it must be controlled to prevent dis-ease to itself and to others as well. Just as the kind of physical excess harnessed by bungee jumping can, if not carefully moderated, lead to injury or death, so the sexual excess

8 Jane Kuenz discusses how, for many guests, the pleasure of Walt Disney World is identification with the dominant ideology— with middle-class values, restrictive gender and sexual roles, and the ideology of progress. In "It's a Small World After All: Disney and the Pleasures of Identification" (66).
produced through the female body can, patriarchal logic argues, lead to a potentially threatening jouissance, hysteria, or contagion.

In "This Sex Which is not One," Luce Irigary rewrites the female body as an excess of sex organs, as autoerotic and insatiable; to a phallocentric culture, the possibility of such an excess of pleasure is overwhelming since it can dwarf masculine sexual pleasure localized in the penis. In Dora Freud argues that female hysteria always has at its roots a sexual trauma, so that an excess of sexual (dis)pleasure can also produce an unstable social subject. Even though "hysteria" has been discredited as a specific medical disorder, the term still has a certain cultural currency, as my discussion of the "hysteric" in post-war psychodramas will show. And, of course, sexual excess always brings with it the threat of venereal disease and/or death—especially when localized in the figure of the female prostitute, the figure, next to the male homosexual, most scapegoated for the spread of AIDS in recent years.

Sexual excess within the female body can produce the sexually voracious femme fatale, the hysterical body which is dangerous to herself, or the "carrier"; the contagious body who spreads disease, chaos, hysteria, even death to those around her. None of these possibilities is comfortable or acceptable within a patriarchal culture which values female sexual and social passivity. The
beauty of "engineered enjoyment" is that it provides women as well as men with pleasurable sensations which, when correctly monitored, prevent the excesses of jouissance and hysteria (or at least move them to the very margins of experience) and provide safety and sanitary controls to eliminate the threat of contagion. At the same time, engineered enjoyment produces the female pleasure-seeking subject as a consumer who will continue to purchase similarly moderated pleasurable experiences.

In this dissertation, I am using theme parks to understand movies, instead of the other way around. I am very much concerned with cinema's efforts to control the female body through narrative and spectacle, as well as what economic ramifications those "engineerings" of the female body might have for viewers at large. As a feminist, I am also interested in understanding the continued resistance the female body offers to increasingly more sophisticated methods of control. I have chosen to read movies from the post-World War II era because that period represents a shift for the industry from a vertical integration (characterized by control over every aspect of the production, distribution, and exhibition of one product--film), to a horizontal integration (characterized by the attempt to profit from a variety of different but related products associated with the feature film, such as video cassettes, soundtracks, theme rides, clothing, and
novelizations). Disneyland, of course, is Walt Disney's attempt to diversify by establishing new forms of engineered enjoyment. The question is, what effect did diversification have on the other studios and the films they produced?

In future chapters, I will first be looking at films which explore moments when "engineered enjoyment" breaks down to reveal moments of excess—jouissance and hysteria—experienced through the female body. These films dramatize the struggle to produce moderation and always demonize the effects produced within the female body when systems of control break down. I will also discuss films which I believe to be successful examples of "engineered enjoyment"—films which consistently produce women as consumers onscreen and within the culture at large. Finally I will draw connections between the film industry and other related pleasure industries that rely on scientific, medical, and sanitary discourses to produce, define, and market pleasurable activities. My purpose is to come to a better understanding of women's stake in contemporary forms of engineered enjoyment.

Chapter Two begins my investigation into the commodification of pleasure by exploring the relationship between the female body and the technology of the cinema. If film is a pleasure-producing system, what happens when the system breaks down at the level of production? The
chapter begins with a survey of theory on the cinematic apparatus (as a technology which produces engineered enjoyment) as well as a brief reading of Double Indemnity, a classic noir film whose narrative trajectory and imaging of Phyllis, the femme fatale, illustrates perfectly the politics of the apparatus in classical Hollywood cinema. Double Indemnity is an especially interesting example because of the way the narrative itself uses technological innovation (the dictaphone) to advance the plot and contain the representation of the femme fatale. From there I move to a discussion of Lady in the Lake, a noir thriller shot almost entirely using a first-person or "I" camera in order to cash in on "technology" as a form of product differentiation. While Double Indemnity demonstrates how narrative and apparatus work together to criminalize female sexual pleasure and control the female body, Lady in the Lake illustrates how fragile cinema's ability to engineer enjoyment actually is. The film's inability to effectively fetishize the female body upsets the carefully balanced "system" of visual pleasure in cinema, leaving the female body onscreen uninscribed within narratives of moderation and control.

After examining the phenomenon of the "breakdown" at the level of production, I move to a consideration of the ways popular films incorporate the threat of the chaotic system into their narratives. Chapter Three examines
Sorry, Wrong Number and Possessed, two films which dramatize the attempt by medical and economic discourses to place the disruptive female body under control. In these films, the female body is both a system "out of whack" and a defective cog in a larger system of pleasure. Both films define the female body as inherently diseased and unhealthy so that all women must submit to the scientific investigatory gaze if they wish to "get better" according to cultural standards of "health." But the command for women to "get better" is not an unselfish one: the culture itself is heavily invested in seeing that disruptive, unruly women are brought in line with patriarchal reasoning so that other, larger systems of pleasure can flourish. If the unpredictable, unruly, or unstable female body resists controlling influences, her alternatives are insanity and death. Establishing control over the female body involves not just using medical discourse to contain and redirect sexual expression: while pinpointing female sexuality as a source of overt insanity, the films also manage to implicate an immoderate consumerism as a source of feminine hysteria. It is as if the uncontrolled pursuit of pleasure in any form—economic or sexual—is, for women, a life-threatening practice. Thus, good mental health for women is available only through an imposed moderation of sexual and economic pleasure or, failing that, through an imposed sedation by modern medical technology.
Chapter Four examines a successful attempt by the film industry to "engineer enjoyment" by placing the female body under control. During the late forties, M-G-M featured world class swimmer Esther Williams in a series of technicolor "aquamusicals." Williams' sex symbol status was complicated, however, by her tremendous athleticism. Early studio publicity is fraught with the anxieties provoked by the potential gender transgressions invoked by the athletic female body. To compensate, Williams' publicity displaced the masculinity culturally associated with athletic skill onto genus: instead of a "masculine" woman, she became the "human fish." This hybridization of woman and fish sparked anxieties of its own, specifically about the implied cleanliness of the female body: to neutralize these anxieties, the studio invoked and played upon the cultural obsession with sanitation and hygiene. Through her well publicized "studio makeover," Williams emerged as a wholesome star and modern industrialism managed to recuperate the "dirty" or diseased female body by developing innumerable products to "keep it clean." The perfectly moderated star body quickly became the perfect marketing tool for other pleasure industries. By the mid-fifties, Williams transitioned from movie star to spokesperson for the burgeoning swimming pool industry's largest manufacturer, using her famous face and even more famous figure to promote a new form of "clean" recreation.
to post-war America. The pool industry, like post-war cinema, capitalized on a growing national obsession with sanitation and control, using the chlorine clean female body to promote "engineered enjoyment" as the optimum form of pleasure for the country. Hence, the perfectly controlled, moderated, clean female body becomes a national symbol for "engineered enjoyment."

In the 1947 film Possessed (discussed at length in Chapter Three) the head of the Psychiatric unit administers a "truth serum" to the catatonic Louise (Joan Crawford) in order to trigger the flashback which will produce the story of her descent into insanity. As he administers the drug, the Doctor fairly drools, "Every time I see the reaction to this treatment, I get exactly the same thrill I did the first time." "Playing doctor" over the supine body of the mentally ill female is a tangible, repeatable pleasure for those who have access to the knowledge and power associated with the discipline of medicine. It is also, however, a commodifiable experience: from the children's game of "Operation" to technologically sophisticated CD-rom games like "Sim City," "playing God"--as medical deity or just divine right monarch--has mass appeal. One of the most compelling new computer games, for my purposes, is "Theme Park," an electronic game for the home computer which allows the player to design, build, and operate an amusement park. To win, you must produce within your
"customer" a "level of satisfaction" that is neither ecstatic nor miserable, but somewhere in between. Your pleasure as game player comes from exercising control over every aspect of your very own theme park, a space designed to sell "pleasure." That control is absolute, since you must choose location and type of rides, lay paths and signs, place entrances, exits, shops, food stands and toilets, design landscaping, hire staff, negotiate labor disputes, play the stock market, and continually maintain, renovate, and expand the park. As the game booklet puts it, in order to win you must possess "the skills required to make people happy while simultaneously taking them for as much money as possible" (3). And as the game so vividly displays, making people happy requires the skills of an engineer. The game (itself a form of "engineered enjoyment") parodies itself seamlessly: it's the virtual and real at once, providing a virtual space to separate virtual consumers from their virtual money, while at the same time separating the real consumer from her real money. In this game, power and pleasure seem hopelessly fluid for all involved, since your power as park owner produces pleasure within your customers and within yourself as game player, as well as for the game's developers, who couldn't be happier to have your money.

What's fascinating about "Theme Park" is that women only appear in the virtual park as customers: all of the
support staff, including the entertainers, are male--Teddy Man, Shark Man, Squid Man, Strong Man, Chicken Man, Rhino Man, the Handyman, the Mechanic, and the Guard. Though this would seem to indicate that the game does not engineer the female body to produce pleasure since women are not a part of the virtual park as pleasure-producing apparatus (so they can't be responsible for any breakdown that may occur there), this is in fact not the case. While the virtual park is only interested in positioning women as consumers of commodified experience, for the "real" game player, the virtual female body is still the "problem" that desperately needs to be controlled by the elaborate game apparatus in order to produce the pleasurable experience of winning the game. For "Theme Park" and for every other form of engineered enjoyment, the female body is always the site of resistance that must be contained.
CHAPTER TWO

Pleasure, Breakdown, and the Cinematic System

Market conditions of the late forties and early fifties define those years as pivotal in the history of engineered enjoyment, particularly in light of the cross-merchandising explosion of the last two decades. During this period, the American film industry was in the uncomfortable position of having to relinquish its monopoly over the production, exhibition, and distribution of film. Paramount, Loew's Inc. (M-G-M), Warner Brothers, Twentieth Century-Fox and RKO all owned strings of movie theaters which guaranteed them a venue for their products, no matter how poor the quality. Independent theater owners could contract to show studio films, but had to abide by the practice of "block booking" which involved buying "one or two popular movies plus a cluster of B pictures, westerns, whatever the studio wanted to sell. The theater owners, moreover, had to buy what they were offered without seeing it" (Friedrich 196). Most film historians agree that the eventual divestment of studio-owned theater chains led to the collapse of the studio system (Cook 462).

The legal war against the distribution monopoly began in 1933. In court and in Congress, regulation efforts resulted in a compromise by 1940 whereby the studios agreed to limit the practice of block booking. This compromise
lasted until 1944, when the Justice Department resumed its anti-trust suit. In May of 1948, the Supreme Court declared that the major studios, "in collusion with the minors, had exercised a clear monopoly over motion picture production, distribution, and exhibition from 1934 through 1947," and so forced the studios to divest themselves of either their distribution or exhibition arms" (Cook 462n). In light of this edict, the studios chose to hang onto distribution in order to maintain control over their product and to retain the ability to set admission prices. After fifteen years of steady pressure, the studios finally had to give up and face the inevitable loss of their theaters. While the studio system itself could not survive the loss of the monopoly, the industry in subtle ways realized the need to expand its domain and colonize new forms of marketable pleasures (although, significantly they did not fully recognize television as one such opportunity). The period from 1944 to 1955, when Walt Disney officially entered the theme park business, represents an important phase of reinvention for the film industry which included radical experimentations in product differentiation.

This chapter explores how cinema functions as "engineered enjoyment." Narrative and spectacle (or story and apparatus) work together in specific ways to produce what we think of as conventional viewing pleasure,
positioning the viewer as voyeur and displaying the fetishized female body for a presumably heterosexual masculine gaze. In this chapter I examine how the cinematic apparatus— the mechanisms which "produce" filmic images in the mind of the spectator at the level of production and exhibition—functions by focusing on a film which tries to manipulate the established grammar of film to produce what, theoretically, should be a pleasurable effect.

In the attempt to provide a new "experience" in viewing, the 1947 film *Lady in the Lake* attempts to improve upon the traditional combination of narrative and spectacle by using a first person or "I" camera to place the viewer "in" the diegesis. This experiment was motivated by an impulse to differentiate the final product within the post-war, post-divestment film industry. In order to carve its place out of an increasingly tight marketplace, *Lady in the Lake*

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Lake promises not only a different look to the movie, but a different experience for the spectator.\(^3\) As the posters for the film declared, "YOU kiss a sultry blonde . . . and suspect her of murder! YOU and Robert Montgomery solve a great mystery together in M-G-M's exciting, unusual thriller!" Today we recognize this impulse in new forms of entertainment such as virtual reality and interactive TV; in 1947, however, the filmmakers lacked the sophisticated technology necessary to put their theory into practice. Hence, the film is a failed attempt to engineer enjoyment. In spite of its failure to provide an alternative to conventional pleasure-producing cinema, Lady in the Lake was not panned outright by contemporary critics. The boundless faith in technology promoted by pleasure industries and endorsed by consumers is, by the post-war

\(^3\) Lady in the Lake is not unique in its experimentation with point of view; the extended first-person camera has been used frequently in Hollywood cinema in smaller doses, often with much success. Generally the "I-camera" signifies a heightened state of instability in the character whose vision is represented: in Dark Passage (1947), the extended first-person camera records a fugitive's escape from prison; Possessed (1947) shows us the extended point of view of a woman having a mental breakdown; the slasher films of the seventies use the "I-camera" during psychotic episodes and killing sprees. Even a movie like Risky Business (1983) uses the extended first-person camera technique to convey the heady thrill of independence Joel (Tom Cruise) feels as his parents leave town. Lady in the Lake however, doesn't want to signify despair, hysteria, psychosis, or even joy in Philip Marlowe. It wants the extended first-person camera to provide the spectator the opportunity to step into the diegesis as a tough, cool, male private eye.
years, almost unshakable. Because consumers believe technology can produce ever newer and more intense pleasures, they are unwilling to acknowledge those moments when technology fails to deliver what it promises. The blame for the film's many failures instead falls to excesses of the female body.

Before discussing *Lady in the Lake* as a cinematic "failure," I want to begin by reading a film which provides a textbook example of the way narrative and spectacle work together as a pleasure-producing system. In Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), insurance salesman Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) meets Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck), a suburban housewife who'd like to take out an accident policy on her husband without her husband's knowledge. Neff is attracted to Phyllis, but senses that what she really wants to do is bump the husband off and then collect on the policy. Eventually Neff reveals that he has always wanted to "crook the house"—i.e., pull the perfect scam on the insurance company—and Phyllis provides the opportunity. Neff transgresses not only against the family structure (the Dietrichson marriage, in which he takes the place of husband and father) but also the Law as represented by the insurance company and Barton Keyes, the company's chief investigator, whose job it is to expose
frauds such as Neff's. Neff is, as Oedipal logic and the Production Code would have it, suitably punished in the end for his transgressions: shot by Phyllis (whom he in turn shoots and kills), Neff completes his narrative while bleeding to death in the arms of Keyes. Double Indemnity functions as engineered enjoyment by introducing and containing disruptions at the level of narrative, leaving the cinematic apparatus to function according to established conventions.

As with most mainstream Hollywood products, the gaze of this film is aligned with the male hero's point of view which is generally trained on the spectacle of the female body (Mulvey 62). But Double Indemnity incorporates technology within the narrative to buttress the rigid gender distinctions delineated by the apparatus. The film opens with the image of a car careening down the street, running a red light. A man gets out of the car, goes up to his office and begins speaking into a dictaphone. The action begins in a present tense frame situated chronologically after the events about to be related have

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already happened, so that question the narrative will answer is not "What will happen next?" but rather, "How did this come to pass?" Neff's first words are:

Office memorandum. Walter Neff to Barton Keyes, Claims Manager. Los Angeles, July 16, 1938. Dear Keyes: Suppose you'll call this a confession when you hear it. Well I don't like the word 'confession'. I just want to set you right about something you couldn't see because it was smack up against your nose.

As promised, Neff immediately confesses to the murder Keyes has been investigating.

You want to know who killed Diedrichson? Hold tight to that cheap cigar, Keyes. I killed Diedrichson. Me, Walter Neff, insurance salesman, 35 years old, unmarried, no visible scars—until a while ago, that is. Yes I killed him. I killed him for money, and for a woman. Well I didn't get the money and I didn't get the woman. Pretty, isn't it?

Even before Keyes appears, it's clear that Walter is not speaking to the camera: what looks like direct address is deflected by the dictaphone so that the cinematic illusion remains intact. The device of the dictaphone structures the narrative as a confession springing forth from Walter's consciousness, anchoring Walter as main character (he is in

6 Many noir films which incorporate flashback structures and narrative voice-overs include an intradiegetic listener who serves just this purpose: to prevent any disruption of voyeuristic pleasure. Examples include Mildred Pierce (1944), Dead Reckoning (1947), Sorry, Wrong Number (1947), and D.O.A. (1949), among others.
every scene), as well as providing the logic for the expository voice-over which is used as a transition from one segment to another. Keyes is the privileged listener of Walter's narration, the "father confessor," addressed overtly throughout Walter's narration as well as being the intended recipient of the dictaphone cylinders—and he is ultimately present (but undetected) for the last part of the confession as it is being recorded. Additionally, because of the nature of the address (Walter-speaker, Keyes-listener), the film speaks to the viewer the way Walter speaks to Keyes: man to man. Because of the collusion of the cinematic apparatus and a narrative which incorporates a clever flashback device, Double Indemnity offers its viewers a classic voyeur position—the experience of spying without exposure—thanks to the presence of technological mediation.

Double Indemnity also produces the perfectly fetishized female body, thoroughly eroticized to allay the threat of castration she represents (Mulvey 64). Phyllis first appears in the film at the top of a staircase wearing only a towel. Walter looks at her from the foot of the stairs and is immediately fascinated by the revealing/concealing image of the nearly naked female body, especially as she steps closer, not further away, upon seeing him. Phyllis then disappears to dress and returns; as she descends the staircase, still dressing, the camera focuses on her feet.
and ankles. Neff is so swept away by the spectacle of Phyllis' body he literally fails to recognize the threat she represents as she subtly asks him to help her murder her husband.

Though Phyllis wreaks havoc throughout the film, her sexual excesses are ultimately contained (narratively and imagistically) through her spectacular death at Walter's hands. She also never escapes his narrative control; she appears only in flashbacks narrated by Walter and her story is ultimately relegated to the dictaphone cylinders which Walter turns over to Keyes. What has been a "wild ride"—opening with the car careening through the streets, the murder on the train, and Phyllis and Walter riding the "streetcar" of danger "straight down the line," ends by eradicating the infectiously dangerous female body. Narrative's containment or punishment of excessive female desire coupled with the cinematic apparatus' careful positioning of the spectator as unseen seer ultimately produce a relatively safe, comfortable conclusion to Double Indemnity. We tend take these comforts for granted until we watch a film—like Lady in the Lake— which fails to provide them.

Lady in the Lake begins with a direct address to the audience by Philip Marlowe (actor Robert Montgomery, who is also the film's director). Marlowe introduces the case of the Lady in the Lake and prepares the viewer for the...
experience of being a first-person subject/Marlowe surrogate: "You'll see it just as I saw it. You'll meet the people, you'll find the clues—and maybe you'll solve it and maybe you won't." Before any experimental photography begins, this film announces its intention to restructure pleasure in the cinematic experience: the spectator's thrill, the film hopes, will come not from watching Marlowe do what he does best, but from being in his place.

The "new experience" begins as Marlowe pays a visit to a certain A. Fromsett of Kingsby publications. At this point in the narrative the camera shifts to first person: it walks through the halls, opens doors, stares at pictures, follows the voluptuous secretary as she walks through the room, sits down, stands up, smokes a cigarette, etc., in an attempt to simulate the experience of looking through Marlowe's eyes. A. Fromsett is Adrienne Fromsett, crime fiction editor, who hires Marlowe to find her boss's missing wife, Crystal Kingsby. In the course of the film, Crystal Kingsby and her lover, Chris Lavery, turn up dead and Marlowe is repeatedly harassed by a crooked cop named Degarmot. Marlowe suspects Adrienne, but the real culprit turns out to be Mildred Haveland, alias Muriel Chess, Lavery's former lover and Crystal's rival.

According to the psychoanalytic model of spectatorship (which is the most efficient way to explain the cinematic
apparatus as pleasure-producing system), the rigid, almost fanatical adherence to the first person point-of-view in this film destabilizes conventional viewing pleasure by failing to "suture" the viewer into the text. In The Subject of Semiotics Kaja Silverman defines suture as follows:

A given signifier (a pronoun, a personal name) grants the subject access to the symbolic order, but alienates it not only from its own needs but from its drives. That signifier stands in for the absent subject (i.e. absent in being) whose lack it can never stop signifying.

Suture is then a process which appears to create a sensation of plenitude at the same time it is signifying the impossibility of that plenitude. When we speak of the viewer being "sutured" into a film text, we mean that despite the inconsistencies of time and representation inherent in classical cinema, a sense of stability is established, meaning emerges, and "A subject position is constructed for the viewer" through shot relationships (201). The most basic and fundamental mechanism of suture in film is the shot/reverse shot formation: the second shot shows the field from which the first is assumed to have been taken. The spectator, it is argued, looks at one character, and then desires to look at the other whose gaze
supposedly controls the first shot.\textsuperscript{7} While the shot/reverse shot formation sews us into the narrative by identifying a look with a specific character, it also gives us the sensation of access to two synchronous fields of vision (each covering up to one hundred eighty degrees): the view front and the view behind from the character's point of view in time. Despite what our eyes may tell us, however, we see no such thing. Any spectator with the slightest knowledge of the workings of film production is aware that a synchronous reverse shot, filmed at the same time as the shot which frames it, would show not the field of vision of the character but a field of technicians working the camera. This knowledge, however, is suppressed during viewing as we instead bow to the controlling gaze of a character. Silverman writes that the viewing subject "demands to know whose gaze controls what it sees. The shot/reverse shot formation is calculated to answer that question in such a manner that the cinematic illusion remains intact . . . the gaze which directs our look seems to belong to a fictional character rather than to the camera" (202).

In \textit{Lady in the Lake}, there is no conventional suture (and thus no "controlling gaze") for the viewing subject

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{7} For an in-depth look at how the grammar of the shot/reverse shot works in classic cinema, see Lucy Fischer, \textit{Shot/Countershote: Film Tradition and Women's Cinema} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).}
because there is no shot/reverse shot formation within the entire film. The film itself appears to be (though it isn't) a series of first-person point-of-view scenes each done in long takes which represent chunks of time in Marlowe's consciousness: for example, when Marlowe first arrives at Kingsby Publications, walks through the door, meets Adrienne, and is hired to find Crystal, the effect is of one take. In fact there are several cuts in this sequence, but they occur while the camera does a swish pan—a move to simulate the turn of Marlowe's head. These cuts, which occur throughout the movie, are meant to be as unobtrusive as possible and probably only occur because of lighting or focus problems caused by camera movement.8 Once the camera becomes first person, we never see a reverse shot of Marlowe looking; the only image we see of him during the "case" is his reflection in a mirror. Even the four brief moments of direct address—the beginning, after the first and second acts, and the end—are not true reverse shots anchoring the camera's (Marlowe's) look because they do not occur simultaneously with the first person action: the direct address scenes are from the frame.

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8 The use of the swish pan to give the impression of long continuous takes seems to me to be in keeping with one part of the ideology of suture: the occlusion of filmic production. The swish pans are clearly designed to hide the fact that when the camera is moved, lighting needs to be changed, scenery altered, actors touched up, etc.
of Marlowe's narration, which takes place after the case is concluded.

For the viewer of conventional Hollywood cinema, the process of constructing a subject-position has been compared to (and modeled on) the Lacanian model of the process of an individual's entry into the Symbolic which is, of course, predicated by the mirror stage. Mulvey summarizes the mirror stage as follows: "[the child's] recognition of himself is joyous in that he imagines his mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than he experiences his own body" (60). In classic cinema, she argues, the screen itself is the mirror, the images on it a more perfect, more complete reflection of the spectator. The shot/reverse shot structure is both the means to an illusion of plenitude associated with the mirror stage and a kinder, gentler form of castration: the two shots show what appears to be all the vision possible, yet at the same time they proscribe the boundaries of that gaze. Silverman argues that through suture, "the viewing subject re-enacts its entry into the symbolic order" (213). Not so for the viewer of Lady in the Lake. The viewing subject never experiences the plenitude of the image/Imaginary which must predicate the re-enactment of the entry into the symbolic because we never get to experience the full field of vision that a reverse shot would provide, nor do we experience the surprisingly comforting limitations set by that reverse
shot. In *Lady in the Lake*, instead of a mirror stage (provided by the much desired missing reverse shot which would give the viewing subject a sense of visual authority but destroy the first person point-of-view), all we get is a mirror.

The instabilities in the pleasure-producing system caused by the refusal of suture, however, can sometimes be controlled by other cinematic mechanisms. It could be argued that somehow the point from which the film enunciates itself may compensate for the lack of suture by providing a sense of visual authority and, hence, a more conventional viewing experience for the spectator. Annette Kuhn, following Metz, uses the terms *histoire* and *discours* to distinguish between the two forms of enunciation in film. *Histoire* is the mode of address in which a "speaker" is not foregrounded and the source of the enunciation is impersonal, hence, "authoritative." *Discours* foregrounds a speaker and the subjectivity of the address. In *Double Indemnity*, *histoire* would describe the frame sequences

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9 "In written and spoken language, *histoire* is that mode of address characteristic of narrations of past events, in which the narrator is not foregrounded as a 'person': 'I' is not enunciated, and events are typically told in an indefinite past tense. In *discours*, on the other hand, every utterance inscribes both a speaker ('I') and a hearer ('you'), so that 'person' is present throughout . . . . What emerges from this is basically that *discourse* foregrounds subjectivity in its address, while in *histoire* address is impersonal." Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 49.
which record Walter's confession, and discours the
flashback sequences in which he narrates the events leading
up to the moment of confession. Kuhn says, "culturally
speaking, of course, all enunciations originate from
somewhere: the point is that histoire operates to give the
impression that they do not, or at least that the
enunciator is not a subject but an omniscient impersonal
narrating instance, the mouthpiece of some overarching
'truth'" (50). Because of the authority of the visual
image and its apparently natural relationship to reality,
cinematic subjectivity tends to merge back into the
authoritative histoire—as in flashback scenes which take
on their own sense of narrative present unless a voice over
or the actual narrative present intrudes. Kuhn writes,
"without optical point-of-view cinematic enunciation has
difficulty in retaining a sense of subjectivity"—even
though we as theorists know that all shots are subjective
(50).

In a simple long flashback where the narrative frame
is established and not mentioned again until the end, the
body of the flashback performs what Sandy Flitterman-Lewis
calls an "invisible conversion" from discours to histoire
(15). (How many times have we all caught a movie in the
middle and only at the end realized that everything was a
flashback or a dream?) Even The Wizard of Oz, whose dream
sequence is constantly and vividly differentiated from the
narrative present by the contrast of color film versus black-and-white attains a certain sense of histoire while Dorothy is in Oz, particularly for modern viewers who are used to films in color. Even Lady in the Lake, which to many may seem to be the ultimate example of cinematic subjectivity, must fight the impulse to lapse into histoire (the desire on the spectator's part to believe the camera is omniscient, or at least unobtrusive, which stems from a craving for visual authority or control). The "invisible conversion" is hampered by the slow movement of the camera as Marlowe turns to look at those around him, reminding the viewer how firmly we are shackled to Marlowe's overtly subjective point of view. The film also resorts to other gimmicks that destroy any incipient visual authority: Marlowe's disembodied voice echoes eerily (possibly trying to simulate the sound of one's voice in one's own head?); cigarette smoke drifts in front of the lens; telephone receivers are brought perilously close to the camera; the camera is punched, kissed, knocked to the ground, and made to crawl through the dirt. The gimmicks continue through to the final scene of the flashback: at the moment the murderer (Mildred Haveland) is exposed, Degarmot punches the camera one last time, lest anyone forget that the camera stands in for Marlowe.

What this means is that in addition to refusing to suture the viewer into the text, Lady in the Lake refuses
to let the viewer enjoy an "authoritative" visual image (the histoire that film naturally wants to lapse into).

Thus the apparatus as pleasure-producing system experiences a serious breakdown. We are not merely invited, but forced to "identify" with Marlowe's point-of-view, though whether authentic identification actually takes place is doubtful.

For the viewer of this film, pleasure in looking is severely hampered—if not completely destroyed—by the conflation of all cinematic looks: the look of the spectator, the look of the protagonist, and the look of the camera. Voyeurism requires distanced, unlimited looking with no response, no returned look, and no punishment. Not only do the characters speak directly to Marlowe/the camera/the spectator, they even strike out at him/it/us.

The readjustment of the apparatus does not intensify pleasure in this film, it inhibits and even destroys it; the film is an experiment gone wrong, a failed attempt to engineer enjoyment.

How does the systemic breakdown at the level of production affect the narrative of Lady in the Lake? The film attempts to cover over many of the problems created by the first-person camera technique, replacing visual complexities with narrative ones. Like other noir films, Lady in the Lake wants to employ for dramatic purposes an unstable characterization of the female lead, particularly
in the figure of the femme fatale. In most noir films, the unstable characterization of women characters is executed through a variety of methods, including artificial lighting (literally the "shadowy female"), clothing (see Lana Turner's scheming wife in The Postman Always Rings Twice who is dressed almost exclusively in white), and performance (Rita Hayworth singing "Put the Blame on Mame," in Gilda). In other words, the femme fatale is always partially revealed and concealed, is always performing a sort of strip tease for the camera. Writing on the film Gilda, Mary Ann Doane explains,

Striptease provides the perfect iconography for film noir, economically embodying the complex dialectic of concealing and revealing which structures it at all levels—particularly those of lighting and plot. The fascination of a Gilda is the fascination of the glimpse rather than the ambivalent satisfaction of the full, sustained look. (Femmes Fatales 106)

Visually, striptease and fetishization go hand in hand in film noir: the uncovered shoulder or leg diffuses the threat of castration and brings the pleasure of dismissal and disavowal. In classical film noir, the relentless investigation of female sexuality is executed through

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For more on the representation of the femme fatale, see Pam Cook, "Duplicity in Mildred Pierce" and Claire Johnston, "Double Indemnity" in Women in Film Noir; Mary Ann Doane, "Gilda: Epistemology as Striptease," in Femmes Fatales; Stephen Farber, "Violence and the Bitch Goddess," Film Comment Nov./Dec. 1974: 8-11.
glimpses, through peeping; two quintessential examples are Veronica Lake's "peek-a-boo" hairstyle and Gilda's striptease during which she removes only her gloves. The female body in film noir is both a sight of pleasure and an object of fear; like Medusa, it is not to be looked at head on.\footnote{"For the head-on look is simultaneously pleasurable and threatening, the threat emanating from the construction which forces a reading of the female body as the site of negativity, of lack and hence, of the possibility of castration." Doane, Femmes Fatales 106.}

*Lady in the Lake*, however, is one long head-on look at femininity which is a continual source of anxiety for the male spectator.\footnote{For a complete discussion of gender and spectatorship, see "The Spectatrix," a special double issue of Camera Obscura 20-21 (May/Sept. 1989).} The first person camera's relentless stare prevents not only voyeuristic pleasure (as discussed earlier) but any sort of visual strip tease as well. In a sense, the revealing and concealing which Doane describes in *Gilda* become in *Lady in the Lake* over-revealing (of Adrienne's face) and over-concealing (of mise-en-scene through limited point-of-view). *Lady in the Lake*, then, is limited to narrative means—specifically erratic female behavior—when attempting an unstable characterization of the femme fatale.

Erratic female behavior is of course, a staple of the noir genre. In *Out of the Past* (1947), the character of
Kathie Moffat (Jane Greer) goes through a series of behavioral metamorphoses before finally emerging as an evil murderess. Before Kathie ever appears onscreen, she's characterized as slightly hysterical—a crazy "dame" who'd taken a few pot shots at her estranged lover. There's nothing wacky, however, about the woman who comes into a Mexican cantina out of the afternoon sun, backlit so that only the silhouette of her hourglass figure is visible. From this point on her character is different every time we see her: vulnerable, violent, groveling, and ultimately scheming and duplicitous. By the end of the film, one ex-lover calls her a "dirty little phoney" and another responds to the statement, "She can't be all bad. No one is," with "Well, she comes the closest."

But Out of the Past is able to rely on visual cues as well as narrative to complicate the character of Kathie. She is always shot in varying degrees of artificial light, and wears radically different clothing depending upon the effect she wishes to make. Lady in the Lake is much more limited, given its unusual camera technique, and must rely solely upon a form of "narrative striptease"—specifically doubling—to both obfuscate and expose the dangerousness of women (Doane 107).

What we see in Lady in the Lake is not a clear opposition between good woman/bad woman (as in Out of the Past) but a deliberate confusion of Mildred and Adrienne.
Both are presented as enigmatic, powerful, sexually experienced women. Adrienne's first comment as an editor of lurid crime fiction, "There's not enough blood," marks her as bloodthirsty and castrating (she later tells Marlowe she plans to "slash the emotion right out of" his story); Mildred is constructed as a truly bloodthirsty murderess. Both women are involved with the gigolo Chris Lavery and with cops/private investigators. Both women are presented as goldiggers: Adrienne initially wants Crystal out of the way so she can marry Kingsby the millionaire; Mildred, it turns out, has murdered a former boss's wife so that she could be free to marry him. Both women, when their reputations seem shakiest, proclaim their "innate" niceness and promise to reform. Marlowe and Degarmot have both been swept away by these femmes fatales, women who might be or actually are murderers; Degarmot even tells Marlowe moments before he plans to shoot him, "You're in the same boat I am."\(^{13}\)

Adrienne and Mildred are doubles because Adrienne is running narrative interference for Mildred, concealing her, deflecting suspicion onto herself. One female body is

\(^{13}\) There are other instances of doubling in the film as well. Adrienne is a blonde; Mildred used to be. Both women have more than one name: Adrienne is originally introduced as the androgynous "A. Fromsett" and Mildred Haveland uses the aliases Muriel Chess, Crystal Kingsby, and Mrs. Forbrook. Marlowe is twice framed in drunk driving accidents, is punched twice by Degarmot, loses consciousness twice, and two times lands in jail.
attempting to provide narrative distance between the viewer and the other, more dangerous female body, becoming a narrative rather than a visual fetish. After hiring Marlowe to find Crystal Kingsby, Adrienne repeatedly sends him in the wrong direction to investigate. Later, after a relationship between the two has been established, her opposition to Marlowe manifests itself as concern for his safety: "I won't let you go."

Mildred, on the other hand, the real phallic woman, appears in only two scenes: as the landlady at Chris Lavery's house and in the penultimate scene where her treachery is revealed and Degarmot shoots her. She is not completely neutralized by this narrative marginalization for in each scene she appears with a gun, the ultimate signifier of phallic power in film noir, though Mildred's is a tiny "lady's" gun. In the first she hands it over to Marlowe willingly: "Here, you better take it. Men always understand guns." In the second, she produces another gun, the twin to the first (another instance of concealment through doubling), and this time Marlowe takes it away by force, suggesting that men always do understand guns and phalluses and the power they possess. Lacking the ability to contain the female body through visual fetishization, Lady in the Lake forces its narrative to compensate. By the end of the film, both femmes fatales in Lady in the Lake—and the real or imagined threats they represent—are neutralized within the
narrative by the male characters: Mildred through the removal of her gun by Marlowe and her death at the hands of Degarmot, Adrienne by the revelation of her innocence (she hasn't doublecrossed Marlowe after all) and by her final domestication as housewife. By the end of the film, the narrative would have you believe, disruptions have been placed under control and patriarchal order has been restored. But while the narrative of *Lady in the Lake* neatly domesticates the disruptive femme fatale, the film's visuals complicate such a moderation of the female body.

The two most notorious moments of *Lady in the Lake*—Lavery's fist-in-the-camera punch and Adrienne's face-in-the-camera kiss—are famous because they are the two scenes where the film's failure to produce pleasure becomes most obvious. While the punch is a surprise, the kiss is an excruciatingly slow moment, making it a much more interesting scene to dissect.

The scene begins after Marlowe is run off the road by Degarmot. Adrienne brings him to her apartment and puts him in her bed. The scene is shot from a low angle, and Adrienne, whose face has filled the screen for most of the film, dominates the field of vision even more than usual. She becomes the maternal caretaker, tending Marlowe's wounds and even speaking in baby talk at one point. The Freudian implications of the *mise-en-scene* are impossible to ignore: Adrienne is the ultimate in maternal plenitude;
Marlowe is "his majesty, the baby." The maternal and the sexual are conflated as well; Adrienne declares, "I want to be your girl," which is of course the "mother" of all promises that an image can make. In this scene, Marlowe (and the viewer) are constructed as pre-Oedipal, taking pleasure in identification with the powerful maternal/sexual object. But this pleasure, like all pre-Oedipal pleasures, doesn't last. When Adrienne moves to kiss Marlowe, her face comes closer and closer to the camera, the screen gets darker and darker, until it finally goes black. While the screen is in darkness, Adrienne whispers, "You close your eyes too, don't you, Darling." Adrienne, whose point-of-view we never see, has at last exerted control over Marlowe's/the spectator's looking by making him shut his eyes, and her control is significantly a lack (of image, i.e. darkness). Marlowe/the camera/the viewer are unable to deny that lack through fetishization because the apparatus fails to provide tangible distance from Adrienne. In this scene, therefore, we may have a rare, possibly a unique moment in Hollywood cinema where symbolic castration is not only threatened, it is performed, and the woman is not punished for it. Instead of denial and disavowal, the viewer must acknowledge and avow visual

impotence and castration anxiety—a fear which, we are
told, cinematic pleasure systems usually assuage. It is
this moment of dangerous excess which is the primary origin
of the immense displeasure this scene produces.

*Lady in the Lake,* then, can't ultimately produce any
sort of definite moderation of the desiring female body
onscreen. Because of its odd visual effects, visual
containment is impossible; Adrienne is "too present"
throughout the film. And while the narrative attempts to
domesticate Adrienne as Marlowe's "girl," the excesses at
the scene of the kiss (when she "devours" him, if only for
a moment) are too much for the final clinch (when the
camera returns to third person) to recuperate. The scene of
the kiss—where Adrienne actually makes the screen go dark—
is a true moment of sexual excess/jouissance. It
functions as both a dirty joke about a woman having sexual
relations with a mechanical object (the camera as dildo)
and a terrifying example of an independent female
sexuality, invoking the ultimate postmodern masculine fear
that the mechanical phallus will replace the individual
penis as "pleasure producing" technology.

Contemporary reviews of *Lady in the Lake* reveal some
of the anxiety male critics feel toward the scene of the
kiss: it is described as "nerve-wracking" (O'Hara 42):
"with lips fixed for kissing, [the] heroine moves slowly
forward, making male members of the audience squirm in
their seats" (emphasis mine) ("Lady in the Lake" 65-66); "the lovely face of Audrey Totter, lips ajar, comes swimming out at you from the screen, presumably to honor you with a kiss so massive that it might well scare a megalomaniac" (Farber 56). These responses confirm that the scene produces real discomfort and displeasure which can be directly traced to the breakdown of the cinematic apparatus (the lack of distance between viewer and viewed). And yet, though it is clear to me and to most critics who have written on this film in the intervening years that the extended first-person camera is the source of displeasure, those reviewing the film in 1947 are reluctant to critique or pan outright what has been presented to them as a new pleasure-producing technology. Their responses instead run from ambivalent to cautiously optimistic.

Shirley O'Hara of The New Republic pinpoints the camera technique as the point of interest and controversy for the film:

'Lady in the Lake' . . . is a first-rate thriller with one of Hollywood's best craftsmen [Raymond Chandler] in the thick of it, but that isn't what is going to cause all the talk. They've used a new technique in the film which you haven't seen before and which you won't be able to make up your mind about for quite a while. (42)

Other reviewers responded similarly. The New York Times writes, "The picture is definitely different and affords one a fresh and interesting perspective on a murder
mystery." The Times critic does not claim the movie is a success, however:

In making the camera an active participant, rather than an offside reporter, Mr. Montgomery has . . . failed to exploit the full possibilities suggested by this unusual technique. For after a few minutes of seeing a hand reaching toward a door knob, or lighting a cigarette or lifting a glass, or a door moving right toward you as though it might come right out of the screen, the novelty begins to wear thin. Still, Mr. Montgomery has hit upon a manner for using the camera which most likely will lead to more arresting pictorial effects in the future (emphasis mine).

Here the critic notices (as do most viewers of this film) that the relentless first-person stare of the camera is tedious while simultaneously stating that, in the right hands, the technique has potential. Likewise, Bosley Crowther writes: "the full application of this technique should obviously be reserved for only the most appropriate subjects. Mr. Montgomery's was not one. However, his "Lady in the Lake' has broken the ice." For the mainstream movie critics of the postwar years, the failure lies with either Montgomery's direction or the story or the actors, but not the technology itself.

It is significant that human error is always posited as the source of Lady's failure to please in a conventional manner. The few critics who dare a criticism of the first-person technique itself hedge their bets, as if reluctant
to be perceived as "anti-technology" and hence anti-progress. This suggests that, on the cusp of the greatest era of consumption the world had yet seen, critics of the late forties are already too in thrall to the pleasure industry and the promise of ever more sophisticated and/or intense pleasures to critique the film as a "conventional" Hollywood product. Hence, they assume an always positive relationship between ever-evolving technologies and new forms of entertainment, even when the "entertainment" doesn't emerge.

Somebody, or some body, must be blamed, however. Not surprisingly some of the most virulent criticism was reserved for the most over-present performer in the film, actress Audrey Totter. Totter's performance bears the brunt of the condemnation for the film's failure to provide conventional viewing pleasure. O'Hara writes:

She is magazine-cover beautiful, but what she knows about acting could be quickly told. I doubt if Miss Totter is capable of saying 'No' without shaking her head, and when she is either shocked or surprised she opens her eyes wide enough for you to fall right into them. The sensation, I realize to my sorrow, may be pleasant to some. (42)

The reviews suggest that it is Audrey Totter's performance, and not the extended first-person camera, which has "ruined" the film, since it is much easier to invoke some old-fashioned misogyny than to venture a criticism of
modern technological wonders. The only moderation that Lady in the Lake ultimately provides, then, is the extratextual chastisement of the woman performer—which can't be discounted, since Totter's career took a dramatic nosedive after this film.

The difference between Lady in the Lake and Double Indemnity (as failed and successful examples of engineered enjoyment) is not just that the former film represents a more dramatic attempt at product differentiation—at creating a "wild ride" experience for the viewer. There is also a dramatic difference between the types of excesses the femmes fatales exhibit: while Adrienne's kiss is a sexual/Oedipal transgression, Phyllis's murder plot is motivated first and foremost by greed. I would suggest that Phyllis is killed off and order restored in that film largely because of the economic threat she represents; popular texts of the late forties must set limits not just on sexual excess, but also on female economic desire, in order to position women as insatiable—but not unreasonable—consumers.

In Reading the Popular John Fiske declares that buying and ownership form the main, if not the only means of achieving a sense of control in a capitalistic society. Other attempts at control (strikes, etc.) are not endorsed (24). Agency, whether individual or collective, is
directly linked to control, which can only be exercised legitimately through purchasing.

... the pleasures of control are found in the ownership of commodities through which people can create or modify the context of everyday life and thus many of the meanings it bears... the consumer's moment of choice is an empowered moment. If money is power in capitalism, then buying, particularly if the act is voluntary, is an empowering moment for those whom the economic system otherwise subordinates. (26)

Thus purchasing is a pleasurable activity in and of itself, regardless of the pleasurable items purchased, since the very act of buying is an exercise of power. This of course is why it is so important to set moderate limits on economic desires in women: to provide pleasures while preventing that exercise of power from becoming threatening to the social order.

In both *Double Indemnity* and *Out of the Past* Phyllis and Kathie are marked as dangerous as much by their desire for consumer goods and monetary wealth as by their transgressive sexualities. In fact, in *Double Indemnity*, Phyllis's avarice is established at the same time as her sexual availability. What Neff appears to be staring at as Phyllis descends the staircase at the beginning of the film is not just her ankles, but a tiny gold anklet on her left leg. While the anklet appears to be a mere adornment, it soon takes on an important narrative role in both
representing Phyllis's avarice and luring Walter into the murder plot. After descending the staircase, Phyllis enters the parlor, still dressing, and sits slumped down in chair with legs crossed, left leg extended so that the anklet appears to be offered for display. When Neff stops his insurance rap to say, "That's a honey of an anklet you're wearing, Mrs. Diedrichson" (revealing his fascination not just with the anklet, but the ankle as well), she uncrosses her leg and places both feet on the floor so that the anklet is still visible but no longer displayed. After Walter prattles on for some time about auto insurance, Phyllis asks him if he sells accident insurance, at which point she crosses her leg, extending the anklet once again. He says, "sure," then, "Wish you'd tell me what's engraved on that anklet." Though we can see that Phyllis is using the anklet (and the leg) like a carrot on a stick, significantly re-extending the leg with the anklet at just the moment she is forming her monetary plans, Walter can only see the fetish itself. So taken is he with the fetishized ankle, Walter can't read the anklet as a warning sign of aggressive female consumer desire.

Other clues to Phyllis's excessive economic desire emerge in her interactions with her husband. Phyllis and her husband are represented as physically/sexually incompatible (she's young and attractive; he's middle-aged and repugnant), but the real rift between the two seems to
be over money, not sex. She spends too much, he says; he
complains about every purchase, she says. He also treats
her like a possession (albeit a neglected one) keeping her,
as she says, on a leash. She complains to Walter. "He's so
mean. Every time I buy a dress or a pair of shoes he yells
his head off. He never lets me go anywhere. He keeps me
shut up." Later, when Walter is renewing Dietrichson's
policies, he sees for himself the status of the Dietrichson
marriage. Phyllis cuts off Neff's sales pitch for accident
insurance saying, "If we bought all the insurance they
could think of, we'd stay broke paying for it, wouldn't we,
honey?" Dietrichson responds angrily, "What keeps us broke
is your going out and buying five hats at a crack."
Phyllis' complaint about her husband is that he refuses to
let her participate culturally as a consumer. (He yells
when she buys "a dress," or "a pair of shoes.") His
complaint is not so much that she spends money, but that
her spending is excessive ("five hats at a crack").

Since Phyllis plots to murder her husband in order to
achieve financial independence, clearly we are to believe
her spending habits are as excessive and pathological as
her husband implies. Frank Krutnik writes,

In many of the 'tough' thrillers, money
figures very much as the coin of
patriarchal authority: the economic
system is controlled by men, as is the
value of money as a token of exchange.
Such femmes fatales as Phyllis in
Double Indemnity, Kitty in The Killers,
Elsa in The Lady from Shanghai, and
Jane Palmer . . . in *Too Late for Tears* are characterized by their pathological greed, their desire to set themselves above masculine authority, signified precisely by their desire for money. (246-7n)

Phyllis's plan to get rid of her husband is not motivated by the desire to replace the husband with Walter, but to replace the husband's income with the insurance settlement. Phyllis doesn't just want to kill her husband, she wants to kill him and get rich doing it. While in one sense, Phyllis engages in the truest form of consumption—"to destroy or expend by use; use up"—in another she is inverting the capitalist model of exchange. She wants to buy insurance and get rich instead of spending and being poorer, to get paid for consuming instead of paying to consume.

What may be the most dangerous characteristic about Phyllis's economic excess is that it appears to be contagious. While Walter reveals that he has always wanted to "crook the house," and thus is predisposed to criminality, he claims he wasn't going to do anything about it until he met Phyllis. While the female body's uncontrolled excesses are a threat to herself, the real reason she must be placed under regulatory control is so that she does not infect others, particularly men, with her dis-ease.
Phyllis represents one extreme of female consumption, one that is significantly purged from the text by the end of the film. No cultural text produced within a capitalist society wants to completely eliminate the possibility of female consumption, however; most want to set moderate limits on the spending activity of women. *Double Indemnity* dramatizes and condemns deadly excesses of female consumerism; other popular texts, however, use similar but less extreme dynamics to dramatize appropriate forms of consumer desire for women.

While looking up reviews on *Double Indemnity* I came across an ad in the *New York Times* for the Phoenix Mutual Retirement Income Plan featuring the heading "Women who want a secure future," above an illustration of a man gazing forward and a woman gazing at him. In big letters, the text begins, Why my wife made me get a RETIREMENT INCOME PLAN." Already, the ad is manifesting the same dynamics as *Double Indemnity*, the woman has "convinced" the man to seek economic security; also, Phoenix Mutual is a life insurance company. The important distinction between this advertisement and *Double Indemnity* is the positioning of the couple which implies that she wants the secure future for him, or for the two of them, not just herself, as Phyllis does.

The text begins:

She was sort of cute about it. She didn't say, 'John, you ought to get a
Retirement Income Plan.' She knew I'd just argue with her.

Instead she said, 'John, how much money do you expect to earn in the next 15 years?' I did a little figuring, tossed in a raise or two, and came out with a total that impressed even me. (Try it yourself—you'll be amazed.)

When I told her, she said, 'How much of that do you suppose we'll have left at the end of 15 years?' I'm not very good at saving, so when I tried to be honest about that, the results hurt a little. "We'll probably have a better house," I said. "The children will be educated, and we'll probably have a couple thousand in the bank." Then I added, "What's more, we'll have had 15 years of fun," and kissed her.

But she was serious.
"John, don't you think we ought to have more than that? [. . . ]
"John, let's decide right now . . . Let's be sure of our future. Let's start using one of these Retirement Income Plans."

The wife, (who is nameless in this little anecdote) has been "cute" (less than straightforward, even duplicitous, the text implies); she knows all along how much money they will have in fifteen years, like Phyllis, who probably knows all about accident insurance before Walter stops by her house. The hook of the Phoenix Mutual ad is the clever way the wife has manipulated her husband into doing precisely what she wants him to do, which, in this instance, is plan for their retirement. While it is clear that he is the provider in the family, she is the one obsessed with economic security. And, like Phyllis, she feels this can best be done through the institution of the
insurance company. In this instance, female consumer desire is harnessed in moderation for the benefit of the corporation and the family: the woman who desires economic security will also enrich the insurance company. However, should that desire move beyond "security" into "wealth" (should it become "excessive"), then in other texts like Double Indemnity, it becomes dangerous, and the desiring subject must then be eliminated.

While pleasure industries like cinema continue to seek out more and more intense or excessive experiences, those that come without safety nets (physical, psychic, or economic) cannot yet be embraced unproblematically. Perfectly engineered pleasures in film include not just a safe position from which to watch, but the safe production of the moderated female body. Lady in the Lake and Double Indemnity teach us that intense pleasures are only pleasures if we can ultimately be sure they are safe.
CHAPTER THREE

Medical Discourse and the Psychological Thriller

During World War II, the United States launched a co-ordinated effort to lure women into the workplace. In 1942 the War Manpower Committee created and developed a viable plan for recruiting women into industrial positions by working with popular women's working class and middle class magazines (Honey 26). The country had no post-war plan for encouraging women to return to the domestic sphere, however. The WMC was disbanded as soon as the war ended, leaving popular discourses to negotiate unchecked the tensions between returning war veterans and newly independent female war workers. The post-war backlash against female independence— the push to purge women from the workplace— offered what was considered a compromise for women: the creation of the "professional housewife" who would use at home those talents she would otherwise display in an outside career (Walker 7). Psychologists such as Ernest Dichter pioneered the use of Freudian psychology to market household goods to women; such work represents the enlistment of medical discourse in the interests of industrial capitalism to create the ideal female consumer, one whose desire for economic independence has been tempered even as her desire for commodities is stoked.
In her book, *Couching Resistance*, Janet Walker reproduces a "Dexedrine" ad from the fifties which shows a heavy-set woman gazing unhappily into a store window. The caption reads, "Weight loss could improve her mental outlook" (30). The ad, which appeared in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, implies that the woman is miserable because she is unable to consume commodities to the degree that she might like. She has a poor "mental outlook" because shopping, or more specifically, "gazing" at commodities, does not bring a smile to her face. We know also that the reason she is not happy shopping is because her body has grown "out of control" according to rigid cultural standards of attractiveness for women--this is why she cannot buy the dress that she might like to. The pharmaceutical company offers to supply the control that the female body lacks, helping the woman to become the "healthy" consumer that she--and industry--would like herself to be.

An entire genre of post-war film explores medicine's stake in establishing and maintaining control over the female body. The "psychological thriller" feeds off of the cultural backlash against independent women by dramatizing "horror stories" about epidemics of mental illness among "dislocated" women. In this chapter I discuss *Possessed* (1947) and *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1947) because they have both overtly incorporated medical discourse into their
narratives. Both lead females are presented/diagnosed as "hysterical." In a straight psychoanalytic reading of these films, Louise's schizophrenia in *Possessed* is brought on by her pathological masochism, while Leona's hysterical heart condition in *Sorry, Wrong Number* can be traced to her excessive narcissism. They are classic "cases" of female mental illness, particularly as represented in Hollywood film. But while female madness has often been linked to sexual desire, the women in these films also serve as repositories for cultural fears about female economic independence. Like Dichter's research and the "Dexedrine" ad, psychological thrillers such as *Possessed* and *Sorry, Wrong Number* are interested in defining women's mental health as a function of the ability to consume to an appropriate degree. If left to its own devices, the


unmoderated female body will wreak havoc on itself as well as on those around it. These films serve as morality tales, arguing that "engineering" the female body's economic and sexual desires is necessary to produce any sort of safe, much less pleasant, cultural environment.

Possessed opens on the streets of L.A. with the spectacle of the hysterical woman: Louise (Joan Crawford) wanders aimlessly, uttering only the name "David." She is taken to the hospital where she is diagnosed as suffering from a "non-traumatic stupor" and is sent to the "psychopathic" department. After a brief examination, the chief psychiatrist, Dr. Willard, orders a shot of "narcosynthesis," a drug which will force the inarticulate Louise to tell him what has happened to her. Louise then narrates a flashback which covers the end of her relationship with David (Van Heflin), and her employment as a private nurse for a Mrs. Graham. After David leaves the country and Mrs. Graham dies under mysterious circumstances, Louise agrees to marry Dean Graham (Raymond Massey). David appears at the wedding and strikes up a friendship with Graham's daughter Carol, of whom Louise is extremely jealous. After a series of breakdowns (during which she mistakenly confesses to murdering Mrs. Graham, who has in fact committed suicide), the flashback ends as Louise confronts David and shoots him. The film itself ends as Graham arrives at the hospital and Dr. Willard
informs him that Louise is "completely unbalanced," but with proper help (i.e., under the controlling gaze of the medical establishment), "there's every reason to believe that someday she'll be herself"—that the mind as "system" will one day be repaired. Possessed deviates somewhat from the "collapse-therapy-cure" formula of most films dealing with mental illness in that Louise is not cured; rather the doctor suggests that she might be in the future.

Like most films incorporating psychoanalytic discourse, Possessed is obsessed with diagnosing the sick female body: the entire narrative revolves around the question, "What's wrong with Louise?" After the hysterical Louise is taken by ambulance to the hospital, we see a long tracking shot from Louise's point of view on the gurney—and all of the sensations of disorientation and powerlessness which were so distracting in Lady in the Lake work to great effect here as clues to Louise's psychic state. The point-of-view shot carries us through the hospital corridors to an examining room staffed by youthful interns who look Louise over for an initial diagnosis. Here the film offers its first introduction to an official medical discourse. The first intern glances at Louise and

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A few examples include Carefree (1938), Now, Voyager (1942), Lady in the Dark (1943), The Dark Mirror (1946), The Locket (1946), The Snake Pit (1948), Whirlpool (1949), and The Three Faces of Eve (1957). Most of these films are discussed by Doane in The Desire to Desire and Walker in Couching Resistance.
"Looks like a coma. Diabetic?" The second intern shines a light in her eyes and responds: "I don't think so. It's a non-traumatic stupor." (He makes this astounding diagnosis without checking for other injuries!) The first intern then dismisses Louise with, "Take her to psycho." This scene functions as a dramatic example of the power of medical discourse to identify and define the "sick" female body. Medical authority renders the female body transparent and readable at a glance; knowledge is a sort of X-ray not just into the interiority of the body (so that the intern can confidently claim Louise has sustained no physical traumas) but into the mind and soul as well. But complete access to that interiority is available only to the qualified (just as, in the occult film, the priest is the only one to cast out the demons). The intern can read Louise's current physical state ("non-traumatic stupor"), but it requires the talents of Dr. Willard, the chief

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4 In *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, a study of the modern slasher/horror film, Carol Clover comments on the similarities between the "occult" film (particularly those that deal with Satanic possession and exorcism) and the woman's films of the forties categorized by Mary Ann Doane as "medical discourse" films. Both genres, she argues, are fascinated with the interiority of women and the methods of curing or ridding her of whatever "possesses" her, be it mental illness or demonic possession. In other words, they are fascinated with what they perceive to be "inherently wrong" with the female body and use the best technology available to "fix" it (57).
psychiatrist, to tell us why and how Louise came to be in such a stupor.

Dr. Willard begins his examination with "What have we here?" to which the younger doctor replies, "Catatonic stupor. She was in shock but she's out now." As chief of psychiatry, Dr. Willard is the most adept reader of bodies as texts, and as he looks Louise over, he does come to some amazing conclusions. "Beautiful woman. Intelligent. Frustrated. Frustrated just like all the others we've seen. It's always the same." His ability to read her condition so easily is qualified by the hint that she is part of an epidemic of madness among women—he's seen cases like this hundreds of times. Dr. Willard continues his diagnosis: "Trouble of some kind. Simple, perhaps, but she wasn't able to cope with it. And now this." He checks her reflexes. "Complete confusion. Hypoactive deep reflexes throughout. Catatonic posturing"—all this from a glance and a tap. Even though the "readability" of Louise's body has already been established, Dr. Willard's powers of diagnosis seem especially mystical. Either he "possesses" occult-like powers or, more likely, he commands the discourse that "writes" Louise in the first place. The mystification of Dr. Willard's diagnostic abilities, however, is in keeping with the medical establishment's desire to keep the ability to name and define within its own discursive field: Dr. Willard may be gifted with
amazing powers of perception but the real "magic" is medical technology itself.

Dr. Willard doesn't have to work too hard to "write" Louise's illness; Louise is the perfect ahistorical psychoanalytic patient. Dr. Willard describes her, "Name unknown. Previous medical history, unknown. Age, education, profession, if any, unknown. All unknown." Her body and its symptoms are the only texts available (or necessary, we soon realize) to define and interpret her illness. The text provides its own context as Louise is induced to narrate the story of her breakdown—and yet, Louise's body/voice is a text without textual authority, the quintessential unreliable narrator whose story is repeatedly challenged and refuted by the more authoritative medical discourse of Dr. Willard.5

Dr. Willard's attempt to diagnose Louise evolves into a battle over utterance. He is determined to make her talk about herself/her illness, using her confession, as Foucault says, to fuel his knowledge of/power over her body. After she mumbles the word, "David" (which we have heard before and now thoroughly associate with her present illness), Dr. Willard challenges Louise to speak: "You can

5 For more on the way medical and legal discourses use confession to "write" the body of the "degenerate," see Michel Foucault, I, Pierre Riviere. Having Slaughtered My Mother, My Sister, and My Brother—: A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).
talk, you know, you just did." When she doesn't reply, he continues: "Tell me this. How do you feel. I said, how do you feel?" Louise gasps, "I feel . . ." to which Dr. Willard smugly replies, "You can't find the words, can you? You want to, but you can't. Something's preventing you, is that it? Just nod your head if I'm right." Louise's nod provides the illusion of consent, allowing Dr. Willard to use the discursive tools necessary to pry loose her story. The resistance between Louise and Doctor Willard (between feminine hysteria and masculine medical authority) is reinterpreted by Dr. Willard as resistance between Louise and her unconscious so that instead of an antagonist, the doctor positions himself as the mediator between Louise and her own worst enemy: her troubled mind.6 The real threat, however, seems to be that Louise might withhold information from the medical authorities. Dr. Willard's desire to know (which is sadistic, as the scene bears out) is cast (by himself) in benevolent, helpful terms, as he tells Louise: "Now then. In order to help you we've got to find out something about you. And to find out about you, we've got to make it possible for you to talk." He then orders the shot of "narcosynthesis," (what in a thriller would be

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6 This dynamic is reminiscent of Dora's resistance to medical authority, particularly to analysis by Freud himself, which he reads as evidence of neurosis on her part. See Freud, Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (New York: MacMillian, 1963), 37.
called a "truth serum") and justifies using a drug as a short cut to Louise's unconscious, saying, "It'll just help you to tell us what we want to know." Technology is intent upon eliciting the confession under the guise of "fixing" whatever is wrong--by any means necessary. And, as Foucault suggests, Dr. Willard finds the exertion of power over the patient to be a very pleasurable experience. As he administers the narcosynthesis, he says to the other doctor, "Every time I see the reaction to this treatment, I get exactly the same thrill I did the first time."

In "Sexual Misdemeanor/Psychoanalytic Felony," Nina Liebman argues (as do Walker and Doane) that in madness films, "women are punished with insanity for expressing their desire, just as in film noir (sic), they might be murdered for the same crime. Madness is the punishment for entering the male territory of expressive desire" (27). Liebman notes that in films like A Streetcar Named Desire and Splendor in the Grass, the female character's mental decline follows sexual intercourse so that sexual desire is responsible for the descent into insanity. In Possessed Louise's first flashback opens with a suggestive scene of David at the piano, smoking, and Louise in his bedroom, dressing. Although the hint of post-coital bliss is soon qualified (they've been swimming, not fucking), presumably by production code restrictions, the suggestion of just completed sexual activity remains throughout the scene, as
Louise overwhelms David with her passionate declarations of love: "'I love you' is such an inadequate way of saying I love you," followed by, "I wish we could go swimming again." David responds ambivalently to Louise's obsessive adoration, saying, "Everyone wants to be loved, but no one wants to be smothered." The "explanation" of Louise's "madness," then, is her overinvestment in her illicit sexual relationship with David. In fact it is her demand for the "exclusive right" to his attentions ("I want a monopoly on you"—she says) that leads David to break off their relationship.

The dramatization of Louise's obsessive love for David is immediately followed by paranoid behavior in the present-tense frame. After Louise tosses and turns in her bed, muttering about conspiracy plots, the doctors move to one side and confer. Dr. Willard says:

> Do you notice the beginnings of the persecution complex? 'He did it deliberately . . . part of a plan . . . wanted to hurt me.' No attempt to evaluate the situation or see the man's viewpoint. No judgement. Lack of insight. Classic symptoms. This is where the psychosis begins.

The intern continues the exploration of the roots of Louise's illness:

> Even further back, Doctor. She said herself that before she met him she'd never felt anything very keenly. [. . . .] I think her exact words were, 'I wasn't happy, I wasn't sad.' Typical schizoid detachment. Split personality.
Dr. Willard rejoins: "Yes, the seeds were there and her obsession for this man made them grow." The doctors agree that conditions inherent in Louise's psychic makeup have contributed to her present condition so that the true source of illness is Louise herself, and not the series of traumatic events that she has been through. The origin of madness is carefully located within the female body, and the reproductive imagery of "seeds" recalls the ancient tradition of associating hysteria with the womb. Louise's body is a "vessel" for madness fertilized by (sexual activity with) David; insanity gestates within her for a significant amount of time with side effects from mild to severe before its final manifestation—birth—in the murder of David. Here the film makes clear the equation of madness with the feminine, and sanity, judgement, and insight with masculinity, science, and medicine. Even though the doctors argue that Louise's excessive sexual desire only spurred on an already fragile psyche toward a breakdown, it is her very "femaleness" that defines her as fragile to begin with. Thus the film is able to argue that excessive sexual desire in any woman is likely to lead to madness since the female body as system is predisposed to such a breakdown. This argument has profound cultural

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implications, since it legitimizes control over the
desiring female body as necessary for the very survival of
that body.

The dis-ease engendered within Louise's body is, the
film argues, hastened by "unhealthy" cultural conditions:
Louise is, as I mentioned earlier, part of a larger
epidemic of female madness which is linked as strongly to
social conditions as to Louise's inherent "unhealthiness."
This is the second movie I've discussed which hints at
epidemics of bizarre or dangerous female behavior. In
Double Indemnity, as Walter and Phyllis plan the murder of
her husband, Walter, himself infected by Phyllis' greed,
suggests that women all over the country are killing their
husbands in order to collect accident insurance. In
Possessed, Louise is "frustrated" just like all the other
women Dr. Willard (and hundreds like him) see every day:
given that Louise is in a catatonic stupor at the time, the
movie suggests an epidemic of serious mental illness among
"normal" women which supports its construction of the
female body as the perfect "host" for insanity. But Dr.
Willard doesn't just blame the female body for female
hysteria: he tempers his biological essentialism with the
suggestion that "unhealthy" cultural conditions have
contributed to this epidemic. Upon Dr. Willard's arrival
in Louise's hospital room, he asks his assistant, "How many
does this make?" The assistant replies, "Twenty today.
One manic, three seniles, six alcoholics and ten schizos," to which Dr. Willard responds, "And going up all the time. This civilization of ours is a worse disease than heart trouble and tuberculosis and we can't escape it." Dr. Willard's comment hints that the "unnatural" dislocation which is part of a post-war economy is a source of mental illness, suggesting that Louise's rootlessness (as a private nurse with no husband or children of her own) leads to her aloofness which leads to illness. But what appears to be a cultural critique of modernity ("civilization") is really just a critique of changes in women's political and economic status which have contaminated our culture by creating the (beautiful, intelligent, frustrated) independent woman like Louise and "all the others." Here the film invokes a kinder, gentler form of backlash. The independent woman is condemned as a danger to society because first and foremost she is dangerous to herself. Hence, anti-feminist movements to get women out of the workplace are cast as benevolent in scope, since they have women's mental health—as well as the "health" of society—at heart.

Another "unhealthy" characteristic of the environment which produced Louise is the post-war breakdown of class barriers. During the course of the film, Louise crosses class boundaries from nurse to wife, servant to mistress. The appeal of being a rich man's wife along with her
illicit desire for David (the combination of material and sexual excesses) has overwhelmed Louise's working-class sanity. The film sets up the tension between servant and mistress early on: after David breaks off the relationship with Louise and takes her home, we realize that the house she lives in is actually her place of employment. As she sobs in the kitchen, the buzzer for the room upstairs rings and she dutifully responds to it. Louise is a servant, a private nurse for Mrs. Graham, a never seen woman who suffers from unnamed ailments which are assumed to be psychological. After Pauline's death, Louise marries Dean and becomes a wealthy matron without leaving behind her status as caretaker: she accepts his proposal, saying, "[the money's] not important. The important thing is I think I could make you happy." And yet the money is important: Louise's discomfort with her change in status facilitates one of her many breakdowns toward the end of the narrative. Late in the film, Louise has a delusional episode during which she imagines that she is responsible for Pauline's death. While the film places the burden of Louise's illness upon her failed relationship with David (and treats Pauline's death as something of a psychological red herring) the fact remains that Louise has usurped

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8 In this sense, the film is reminiscent of Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), in which the nameless heroine's paranoia is fed by her discomfort at having "married up" the social scale.
Pauline's position as mistress of the house, taken over her husband and children, and replaced Pauline's ill body with her own. No wonder she confessed to murdering her.

Watching *Possessed*, I can't help wondering why medical authority—specifically Dr. Willard—is so vigilant in the identification and containment of the female body—so much so that it almost seems like overkill. It can't be mere coincidence that, instead of finding herself cured at the end of the film, Louise sinks into a catatonic state. Dana Polan in *Power and Paranoia* suggests that one reason for such overzealousness might be a widespread cultural paranoia:

> this is not to say that . . . the 1940s . . . is dominated by paranoia, that Americans essentially live their reality through a paranoid perspective. Paranoia is only one social practice among many, only one imaginary way that the forties come up with to live the contingencies of the moment. Paranoia can easily fuel what might seem its exact opposite—an aggressive surety, a forward propulsion of the human subject into a world that it tries to make over in its own image. But in such a case, paranoia is literally the underpinning of aggressivity. (13-14)

This makes sense, particularly in the light of the Cold War politics emerging in the late forties where fear of Communist aggression led the United States to implement its own aggressive policy of nuclear weaponry. In terms of a film like *Possessed*, such an understanding can help us reread the medical discourse as a defensive strategy.
(against what it perceives as threatening femininity) as well as an offensive one, acknowledging the potential weaknesses of technological and discursive power. The "aggressive surety" of the doctors highlights their fear of the "broken" system that may ultimately escape their efforts to "fix" it. They diagnose Louise so quickly not because they know what's wrong but because they are afraid that, left unnamed, it will spread.

Possessed provides at least three moments where the medical establishment's fears of losing control over discursive authority and the female body seem justified. The first challenge occurs in one pivotal scene where Louise manages to foil the doctors (and the spectator) by narrating a hallucination which is not immediately obvious as such. After Louise marries Graham and reconciles with his daughter, the two women attend a piano concert together. At the concert, Carol spots David and invites him to their box. During the concert, the pianist plays the Schumann piece David played for Louise at the end of their affair; upset, Louise leaves the concert early and goes home. Once home, her senses are distorted. The wind howls, the clock ticks loudly, her heart beats audibly, the water drips on the window sill. These are all clues for overt cinematic subjectivity—for the hallucination which is about to come—but they are dismissed when they disappear as Louise looks out the window and sees David's
car drive up. Louise shuts the window and goes to the
hallway to watch David and Carol enter and kiss; he says to
Carol, "We fooled her, didn't we?" and leaves. Carol comes
up the stairs and goes into her room, where Louise
confesses to the murder of Pauline. Carol runs to tell her
father, and Louise slaps her; Carol tumbles down the stairs
where her body remains for a second and then vanishes. The
front door again opens and Carol enters, this time without
David. The previous scenes are thus belatedly marked as an
hallucination--Louise's distorted senses and the vanishing
body serving as quotation marks around the dream. Doane
claims this is a radical moment implicating all spectators
in the 'insanity' of viewing; she writes that, for most of
the movie,

> the spectator's eye becomes that of a
doctor, and the spectator is given, by
proxy, a medical or therapeutic role.
Although the narrative is presented as
subjective, the spectator always knows
more than the female character, is
always an accomplice of the
diagnosis . . . (The Desire to Desire
58)

except at the moment of the hallucination when the
spectator is not "diagnosing but a part of what is
diagnosed" (58). The image is, according to Doane,
"possessed" by a madwoman, which, like the scene of the
kiss in Lady in the Lake, threatens a breakdown of the
entire viewing system. The scene also discredits medical
authority, however, which can make such a snap diagnosis in
earlier scenes but can't (or won't) clue us in during the hallucination. Despite their "aggressive surety," the doctors can't be trusted anymore to tell us what sanity is and who is or is not sane.

The second challenge to the authority of the medical discourse occurs just after the hallucination when Louise decides to seek medical help. Here the medical discourse which has been confined to the frame narrative in the hospital is incorporated into Louise's flashback, so that she, and not Doctor Willard, utters (repeats, really) the diagnosis of her illness, collapsing the distinction between patient/doctor, narrator/narrated. The new doctor attempts to explain Louise's hallucination: "It sometimes happens that a patient is unable to distinguish between reality and unreality. In your case you're still able to make that distinction." This seems like an obvious misdiagnosis, however, since Louise has already had the hallucination. In spite of his claim, "I know all I need to know," the new doctor seems to miss the boat here. Yet he continues,

We all have dreams . . . . Bad dreams sometimes. But we wake up and we say, 'That was a bad dream.' Occasionally, however, we find a patient who can't wake up. He or she lacks insight, the ability to distinguish between what is real and what isn't. Now that may be true in your case. It's too early to know definitely.
After claiming that she still has the ability to distinguish between reality and unreality, the new doctor backtracks and claims that it's too early to tell whether or not Louise is "dreaming." This doctor defines insanity as the inability to "wake up" just as Dr. Willard does, but this definition is uttered by Louise in her "dream state" induced by "narcosynthesis" which seems to comment on such a definition: Willard has Louise artificially waked up to tell her story, which will then convince him of her utter insanity. He has put her in limbo between sleep and waking and then called her insane for staying there. At this point the film opens up a space for reading Dr. Willard as complicit with Louise's madness, rather than attempting to cure it.

The third challenge to medical authority that this film presents is the rapid spread of mental illness throughout the text. As the narrative progresses, the line between sick and well grows increasingly vague. Louise is not the only ill woman in the film: the first Mrs. Graham (who is heard but never seen) is an invalid whose illness is never mentioned, although it's hinted that it is psychosomatic. Dean says to Carol: "You know your mother was unhappy. It was part of her illness," and "You're mother was very ill . . . . That illness made her imagine all kinds of things." Women are not the only susceptible characters, however; the real danger here seems to be that Louise has the ability to
infect (through sexual contact?) her husband and her lover. Dean, we learn, is unwell, sick enough to request that the coroner's hearing be held in his house. He never gives in to emotion either (a trait which, in Louise, indicates a "schizoid detachment") and he's paranoid: when he claims his wife killed herself "deliberately," he sounds like Louise in hospital when she says that David broke off their relationship "deliberately." When David greets the newly married Dean and Louise, he says with great irony, "This is absolutely the healthiest circle I've ever moved in." But even David's mental health is questioned by Carol, as she responds to his heavy drinking with, "Sometimes it's not your liver I worry about, it's your mind." At this point in the film it is difficult to decide who is sick and who is well, and who knows the difference, which may be why Dr. Willard and his assistants have to be so insistent about establishing their discursive authority over Louise's ill body.

Ultimately, the excesses of Louise, like those of Phyllis in Double Indemnity, are too great to be recuperated. While she is not killed off, by the end of the film she has lapsed into a catatonic stupor. Dr. Willard may promise a full recovery, but the visual image of a prostrate Louise belies that promise. In this film, medical discourse works to set moderate limits on sexual and economic desire. Bodies that experience such dramatic
systemic breakdowns themselves, and which then wreak havoc on larger social/cultural systems (by resisting authority and committing murder), cannot be "fixed" and instead must be eliminated. But while Possessed argues that female bodies which refuse to conform to the limits set by medical, social, and economic discourses face serious mental illness, Sorry, Wrong Number promises an even grimmer end to the uncontrollable female body: violent death at the hands of a stranger.

Sorry, Wrong Number opens in the posh New York apartment of Leona Stevenson (Barbara Stanwyck); Leona is confined to her bed, desperately trying to phone her husband (Burt Lancaster) at his office but getting only a busy signal. A reverse shot tells the viewer that the phone is off the hook. When Leona asks the operator to try the number, she is cut into a conversation about a murder to be committed at 11:15 that evening. She tries to inform the phone company and the police about the murder but her information is so sketchy and her manner so imperious and self-centered that she is all but ignored. She turns her attention again to finding her husband Henry. Through a series of phone calls to Henry's secretary, Leona's father, Henry's old girlfriend, and Leona's doctor, we discover that Leona is a pampered, spoiled heiress who has "seduced" Henry with her money and now keeps him on a tight leash economically; she also has a heart condition which
suspiciously flares up every time Henry tries to assert his independence. Frustrated with his position as paper pusher within her father's drug corporation, Henry and another employee come up with a drug smuggling scheme which involves fencing stolen company pharmaceuticals through the mob. Henry tries to doublecross the mob but they catch up to him and demand to be reimbursed. The mob accepts as repayment the promise of Leona's life insurance, since a Chicago doctor has given her only a few months to live. Henry discovers, however, that Leona's illness is psychosomatic, that she is not going to die (of natural causes) any time soon. Henry then arranges Leona's murder, which is the murder plot Leona overhears at the beginning of the film.

Like Possessed, Sorry, Wrong Number is interested in diagnosing the sick female body. Both films open with the spectacle of the demonstrably ill woman portrayed by a glamorous movie star. While Joan Crawford walks in a daze through the streets of L.A., Barbara Stanwyck (as Leona) is confined to her bed wearing a fussy, elaborate nightgown, surrounded by trays of pills and medicines. But while the medical authorities immediately identify and diagnose Louise as a "schizophrenic," the nature of Leona's illness remains unnamed until the end of the film. At first she is merely an "invalid." Then, Leona's father tells Henry that Leona suffers from a "weak heart." By the end of the film,
Leona's "heart condition" is reinterpreted as "cardiac neurosis"—so that what is initially perceived to be a physiological condition is instead "all in her head."

Though Leona's illness is at first given an organic source (the heart), the film nonetheless leaves plenty of clues for the "psychosomatic" diagnosis which ultimately emerges and is confirmed by the medical authority in the film. The opening image of Leona sulking in her bed is very much like that of the schizophrenic Louise at the end of Possessed, also in bedclothes, telling Dean she lied to him because she "felt like it." Leona's narcissistic traits appear when she tries to report the contract murder by giving seemingly irrelevant personal information, such as the fact that she's ill, or that she can't locate her husband. She keeps telling the operator and the police, "I'm an invalid, you know," and "I'm all alone in this empty apartment." It turns out such information is not really irrelevant; she is in fact the intended victim of the murder. But at the very beginning, her inability to clearly report what she's overheard is a function of her narcissistic self-absorption—a form of moral tunnel-vision.

Another clue that Leona's illness is of a psychosomatic rather than a physiological nature is the heavily incestuous relationship she shares with her father, J.B. Cotterell. Early in the film, while Leona is on the phone
trying to report the planned murder, the camera moves about her room, resting briefly on a photograph of her father. The presence of the picture of the father comments on the absence of a photo of Leona's husband Henry, especially since the personalized photo (head shot with message from subject) is a standard signifier of heterosexual desire in cinema. Later, when Cotterell calls Leona, we see that his den is literally overflowing with similar pictures of her (some of which are actually early Barbara Stanwyck starlet photos and so coded as Hollywood's standard erotic representation of the female body). Each possesses only photos of the other, pictures that, in the economy of film, signify passionate attachment. Cotterell's den is also filled with taxidermied animals and a full-length portrait in oil of Leona as a child, all of which underscores his desire to preserve her in a childlike state and makes the incestuous overtones of the film even creepier. The film dramatizes Leona's overinvestment in the father-daughter relationship; her inability to negotiate the Oedipal process--to trade her father for her husband--at the very least signifies an arrested development and more likely hints at much more serious psychic disorders.

The film also hints that Leona has inherited her madness from her parents. The first time we see Leona have an "attack" is during the scene in which she announces to her father that she intends to marry Henry. Her collapse
is triggered by her father's jealousy of another man in Leona's life, so that the attack at first appears to be a response to Cotterell's desire to keep Leona for himself. But Cotterell's involvement in the development of Leona's illness goes further back than that. Leona's heart condition pointedly recalls the death of her mother from a heart ailment during childbirth. The doctor later tells us, her father laid the groundwork for her neuroses by his utter conviction that Leona suffered from the same heart ailment that killed her mother. The father's over-investment in Leona as object choice has fostered Leona's illness, while the mother has "transmitted" the specific form that Leona's neurosis takes.

After the first "heart attack" (which facilitates Leona's marriage to Henry), we see two more of Leona's attacks in flashback; both of these moments come before the doctor's "cardiac neurosis" diagnosis, and yet they seem to indicate mental illness given that they appear motivated by her frustrations, which Possessed tells us are a primary cause of schizophrenia in women. The second "heart attack" occurs after Henry attempts to establish his own career outside of the Cotterell corporation. The third occurs after another stab at independence on Henry's part--his attempt to move Leona out of the Cotterell mansion and into an apartment of their own. But Leona's "attacks" are not only responses to "frustrations," they are also a very
effective form of manipulation. Leona's use of her body to control both her father and Henry places her squarely in the tradition of the femme fatale who also uses her body to manipulate men. While the difference between Phyllis in Double Indemnity and Leona seems to be the health of their respective bodies, Leona's body actually is healthy: it's her mind that's unwell. And so, for that matter, is the mind of Phyllis, whose murderous greed qualifies her as a sociopath. The difference between Phyllis and Leona, then, is not so much how each woman works, but how the men in their lives are worked upon: Walter responds to the promise of an ankle(t); Henry to the threat of a heart attack. The film manages to argue that female mental illness is really a plot to control men, critiquing the use of the female body in any exchange of power resulting in economic empowerment for women and making a strong if misogynist case for the containment of that body.

Late in the film, medical discourse steps in and both the nature and source of Leona's illness are authentically identified. The doctor finally says "what's wrong with Leona." Significantly, his answer only satisfies the demands of narrative; his diagnosis is medically nonsensical:

9 This too, is reminiscent of Freud's analysis of Dora, whom he accused of using hysteria to control her father, Herr K., and even Freud himself (141).
There's nothing wrong organically with her heart; it's as sound as a bell. Your evidence just now confirms what I thought. Her condition is mostly mental. She's what we call a cardiac neurotic. Her attacks don't spring from any physical weakness, they're brought on by her emotions, her temper, and her frustrations.

Again, as in Possessed, the frustrated woman is the perfect host body for mental illness. Leona rejects the doctor's diagnosis, screaming "liars, liars, liars..." (which, of course, is not the best way to prove that you are not mentally ill). Leona, however, retains a potential for resistance even after the doctor finally "names" her illness, since he is only the latest in a long line of doctors—though, like Dr. Willard, he is presumed to be the most knowledgeable in his field. Every previous doctor, however, has concurred with the father's assumption/projection that Leona inherited her mother's heart condition. This suggests either that the medical profession is full of incompetent practitioners or that Leona has duped the medical community by appropriating all of the signifiers of illness for her own ends. Either way, Leona's illness (like Louise's) challenges medical and masculine authority, which helps explain why the doctor dismisses her with such "aggressive surety" (He says, "I believe I prescribed a sedative for you didn't I? Well then, just double the dose") as well as why the film is so confident about killing her off.
While the doctor pinpoints the father's own paranoias about Leona's health as the origin of her later "cardiac neurosis," he also says that "Marriage continued the process," without explaining exactly how this happens. He is ostensibly referring to the pattern—established by Leona's father and perpetuated by Henry—of giving in to Leona's demands when her health seems threatened, i.e., letting the sick female body dominate the healthy male one. But the first and greatest power imbalance in Leona and Henry's marriage is not in the realm of health, but of money. Like many films of the forties, *Sorry, Wrong Number* is critical of the economic empowerment of women like Leona, and it is her use, or misuse, of her money—an immoderate consumerism—which is critiqued as the source of disaster in the narrative.

In the film, the feminization of Henry is firmly tied to economics, to the compromise of his working-class morality by Leona's overpowering wealth. During Leona's flashback to the dance at the Matthews College for Women, Leona, overdressed well beyond the other co-eds in flashy sequins and gloves, stands at the front of the "hag line" and cuts in on Henry and Sally. In asking Henry to dance, Leona assumes the masculine privilege of choosing a partner, and although she recasts the "hag line" as "an old Spanish custom," we are to believe it is her wealth (her status as "spoiled rich kid") which makes her so
aggressive. From the first, power in their relationship is divided by money rather than sex. While dancing, Henry asks Leona if she is "the cough-drop queen" (the capitalist princess and/or the queen of disease); Henry, it turns out, is just a working-class kid from Grassville. While both have working-class roots, their cultural similarities end there: as Henry notes, he works at a drugstore and Leona's father owns a hundred of them. What little resistance Henry initially offers to the wealthy Leona vanishes by the next scene, as he sits behind the wheel of her Lagonda, looking more like her chauffeur than her date.

This film seems to take great pains to establish what Possessed only hints at: that crossing class boundaries is a dangerous activity since it can seriously upset conventional gender dynamics. Earlier I discussed how moving from servant to mistress poses one of the many threats to Louise's sanity: likewise the overindulgence made possible by her father's wealth is responsible for Leona's narcissism. But Sorry, Wrong Number argues that crossing class boundaries can produce corruption and criminality as well as insanity (Possessed argues this too, since Louise winds up murdering David). Thus, class ambition is to blame for Henry's foray into drug smuggling as much as Leona's narcissism. The warning about the dangers of crossing class boundaries comes from Sally Hunt, Leona's former college classmate and the character who most
embodies middle-class respectability in the film. Sally confronts Leona in the dorm about the dangers of a rich woman dating a working-class man:

Henry's poor, Leona. He's been bitterly poor all his life. I know that wouldn't matter to some boys, but does matter to Henry terribly. I've known him all my life. Henry's father was a drunkard. He'd work one day and drink up every penny in the house the next. There were eight children.

Leona, knowing full well that this conversation is about money, responds, "What has this got to do with the price of eggs?" Sally answers, "Leona don't turn his head, or he'll never be able to find himself again." The phrase "turn his head," usually has sexual connotations, but here it refers to Leona's fabulous wealth which she knowingly uses to "seduce" Henry. The film is enormously worried about the weakened moral fiber of the working class male: Sally fears (correctly, it turns out) that the temptations of wealth will overwhelm Henry's fragile sense of right and wrong. Like Walter in Double Indemnity, Henry "catches" his avarice from his sexual partner. Sally Hunt intuits the "infectiousness" of wealth in the hands of a woman: hence her resistance to Leona and Henry's relationship.

Leona announces her intentions to Sally Hunt defiantly (and in announcing them, she is again co-opting masculine privilege): "If I want to make something of him, show him a good time, introduce him to people, that's my business."
And if I want to marry him, that's my business too." Leona mixes business with pleasure, the discourse of economics with the discourse of sexuality. Finding a husband is her "business" but not in the traditional sense. Leona doesn't need a husband for economic security or even emotional sustenance: her father provides both. For Leona, Henry is merely a "possession"—a valued commodity. During the wedding/honeymoon montage, the phrase: "I Leona take thee, Henry" is repeated five times, once by the minister and four times by Leona, driving home the point that Leona "owns" Henry now. The relationship which began with Leona cutting in on a dance culminates in a marriage in which gender expectations are completely reversed—a reversal which is clearly meant to be read as perverse and unhealthy.

Henry narrates his discomfort with the economically influenced gender imbalance in his marriage; his flashback (which occurs within the doctor's flashback in an incredibly complex moment of cinematic enunciation) details his inability to find an economic niche for himself with which he is comfortable. When he confronts Leona with his desire for a job outside her father's company, he explains:

I don't want to just graft off your charity the rest of my life. I want a chance. A chance on my own.

To which she replies:

Only you're not getting the chance. I won't have you traipsing around, do you
hear? . . . You're not going to throw away a million dollar business like Cotterell's for an idle whim. It happens to be my business too, you know. And to think my own husband turns up his nose at it.

Leona ridicules the cultural myth of masculine independence: she calls Henry's desire to be a self-made man (which only emerges after he's enjoyed the luxuries provided by her wealth) an "idle whim." And callous as Leona's comment seems, she is actually correct, since it is impossible for Henry to have "a chance on [his] own" in an economic market dominated by huge conglomerates like Cotterell's. He will continue to be economically feminized, trapped by his desire to spend without the means to earn.

During the next segment of his flashback, Henry narrates his attempt to create his own domestic space over which he can exert some control: he goes apartment hunting, explaining to Leona, "We just can't go on living with your father forever." She responds, "I don't see why not. There's plenty of room. It's comfortable. I like it."

According to matrimonial tradition, a daughter is supposed to be handed from father to husband, to leave one home and establish another. Instead, the father and daughter in the Cotterell family absorb the husband into their incestuous bond, so that Henry is positioned as the disobedient
son/brother. Leona, however, displaces incestuous tensions onto issues of money.

Leona: Besides, who's going to pay for this little thing?
Henry: I hope eventually I will . . .
Leona: Eventually. But in the meantime, it's my money and I'm the one who's going to pay for it.

Henry bristles as Leona once again asserts her economic dominance. Finally, he seems to realize what sort of position his flirtation with wealth has led him to.

You told me once I'd love this kind of life. You want to know something? I do love it. I love it now more than you'll ever know. But I want to be my own boss profiting by every bit of it, not just a stooge on the outside looking in. Get it?

Henry doesn't just want to look like a captain of industry, he wants to be one. But Leona's tight control over the Stevenson finances ultimately drives Henry to criminal activities: he approaches Waldo Evans and they begin pilfering drugs and other substances from Cotterell's and fencing them through the mob. The drug smuggling subplot parodies the American myth of independent businessman trying to make it on his own; unfortunately, while trying to get out from under Cotterell's, Henry gets swallowed up by another conglomerate: the mob.

The continued feminization of Henry through the economic imbalance in his marriage extends from the realm of gender to that of sexuality. While Leona's wealth and
power are cited as the source of the Stevenson's perverse and unhealthy marriage, the relationship between Henry and Waldo, his fellow blackmailer, is far and away the most tender of the film. It is no surprise that when Waldo phones Leona and relays the story of their criminal activities, Leona responds, "This is one of the queerest things I've ever heard." Henry's pursuit of Waldo deliberately parallels Leona's of Henry. On their first date in the Lagonda, Leona holds out her gold case and says, "Cigarette?" When, a moment later, they kiss, it's apparent that it is not so much the cigarette that segues to seduction (or stands in for it, as in Now, Voyager) but the expensive cigarette case. When Henry convinces Waldo to join him in his smuggling plan, he takes Waldo on a drive and flashes an expensive cigarette case at him. Waldo is seduced "into the life" of crime by Henry with promises of wealth and freedom, just as Leona woos Henry away from Sally Hunt. The scene in which Henry and Waldo establish their partnership seems especially homoerotic: as the two men huddle under one umbrella in the rain, Waldo initially expresses dismay at Henry's plot.

Waldo: Mr. Stevenson, how could you? You, so young and fine.
Henry: Yes I'm young, young enough not to waste my life in dreaming. There are things I want to do, big things. The only way to get them is to be strong!
Waldo: It's just that I . . . I wouldn't want to see you take a chance like that alone.
Henry: May I come in?

They check to see if anyone watches them enter together and then slink inside. Waldo's voice over explains: "And we weren't caught for nearly a year." Later, Henry physically protects Waldo from Morano's thugs (something he doesn't do for Leona), which suggests that he is far more comfortable with his masculinity when he is with Waldo than with Leona. Waldo allows Henry to be butch; Leona claims that position in their relationship for herself. Again the film argues how fragile the working-class male is, how his inability to resist the seduction of wealth can lead him down the path of economic and sexual "criminality." Thus, for the sake of his preservation (as well as hers) the female body must be placed under control.

Some critics have argued that Sorry, Wrong Number dramatizes a modernist fear of technology, that the real villain of the piece is the increased mechanization of an already isolating culture (Telotte 50). But though author Lucille Fletcher writes in the preface to radio/stage script of Sorry, Wrong Number:

It is still, as I see it, a simple tale of horror, depending for its merits to a great extent on the device of the telephone. The busy signal, the crossed wires, the mechanical voices of the operators, are its chief technical elements, providing the conflict without which Mrs. Stevenson's dilemma would be impossible. . . . (5)

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the film and the surrounding publicity are ultimately uncritical of technology itself. As I've suggested before, the female body takes the blame for the disasters which occur.

In *Sorry, Wrong Number*, the telephone is a narrative device in the tradition of the dictaphone in *Double Indemnity* and "narcosynthesis" in *Possessed*, but one which seems always on the verge of breaking down. The story begins when Leona cannot reach Henry by phone and ends with the line, "Sorry, wrong number." But in both cases, the phone company is arguably not at fault. At the very beginning, Henry's phone is not busy or dead but instead has been left off the hook. In the final scene (when the killer says, "Sorry, wrong number"), the telephone company does not dial a wrong number: clearly Henry has been connected to the right number, with the wrong listener (the murderer) answering the phone. And the conversation between the murderers that Leona overhears at the beginning (which is the only error the phone company does commit) is narratively justified, since it offers her the one chance to escape her fate. Despite the author's comments, Leona is not a victim of the telephone; she is murdered by her husband (or at his request). Thus, the film quite clearly places the responsibility for disaster not with technology but rather humanity—specifically with Leona who, in
addition to transgressing against masculine privilege throughout the narrative, is unable to save herself in the final minutes by simply leaving her bed and going to the window to scream. As with Lady in the Lake, this film is not yet at a point where it can comfortably critique technology for fear of undermining technology's potential to produce pleasure.

The promotional campaign for Sorry, Wrong Number helps to recuperate any critique of technology the film may suggest. The Sorry, Wrong Number ad which ran in Variety invokes a pun on busy phone lines/theater lines. At the top of the two-page spread sits an enormous telephone receiver framing the following text:

This line was BUSY all day long with more people—19,000 of 'em—than have attended any N.Y. Paramount Theatre opening since the New Year's Eve Premiere of "Star Spangled Rhythm" way back in 1942 . . . BUSIER than the lines that made history with "Welcome Stranger," "Road to Rio," outgrossing all Paramount hits since July, 1946 . . . BUSIEST of any opening in the past 26 months, with one of the N.Y. Paramount's 6 Top Grosses of All Time that's ready to put you right back in War-Boom BUSINESS! (11-12)

The ad puns on the confusion between ticket lines and phone lines, business and busy signals. The connection between business and busy signals seems exceptionally clever, given how telephones and money play such an important role in the narrative of the film. A movie which is about economic
disruptions (caused by a woman not exactly in the workplace, but in control of large amounts of money) which are resolved through her death will help businessmen find their way out of the economic confusion of World War II toward a post-war prosperity. This ad recuperates telephone technology in the service of pleasure and capitalism and helps clear up any lingering doubts about technology's ability to produce pleasure which may have been invoked by the film itself.

It's important to remember that in both Possessed and Sorry, Wrong Number the system failure located within the female body cannot be fixed. For all its rhetoric, medical technology cannot recuperate either Louise or Leona; because both women are too "out of control," they are either literally or metaphorically eliminated. While these films function as forms of engineered enjoyment, they do not produce the female body as moderated consumer onscreen, which means they don't exploit their full cross-marketing potential. Despite the pervasive misogyny of our culture, industry doesn't want to "kill women off." Instead it wants to recuperate and situate them (as Dichter suggested) as consumers. The psychological thrillers incorporate medical discourse and technology to set absolute limits on female consumer and sexual desire, but because the female body is never brought under moderated control, the genre can't produce a position from which women can safely
consume. Another post-war genre—the technicolor musical—is much better able to incorporate technology and the female body to produce female consumers onscreen and off.
"I can't act, I can't sing, I can't dance. My pictures are put together out of scraps they find in the producer's wastebasket. I've never had a picture that was praised by Time or Life. But I'm one of the two women among the 10 top money-making stars, and you've got to do articles about me, don't you?"

Esther Williams, in Robert Wernick, "The Mermaid Tycoon"

The career of 1940s film star Esther Williams is an excellent example of the way our culture successfully engineers the female body to produce marketable pleasures. From Olympic athlete to M-G-M star to celebrity spokesperson for the home swimming pool industry, Esther Williams' success was always directly related to her perfectly moderated body. This chapter will explore how modern industries place female bodies under cultural and social control, and what sorts of meanings those bodies can produce for consumers.

An early article on Esther Williams perceptively comments on one of the many contradictions a "swimming star" brings to the screen: since the days of Mack Sennett, "the bathing suit has [been] a symbol of a fair newcomer's prospects. When she can safely refuse to pose in a bathing suit, she is a star" ("Look, A Bathing Beauty Who Swims!").
Williams, however, the star of a series of swimming musicals produced by M-G-M from 1944 to 1955, could never refuse to pose in a bathing suit. In fact, her film career evaporated the moment she ceased to be a bathing beauty. While most female movie stars experience success as a direct relationship to their youth and beauty, the relationship between celebrity and the body is especially intense in Esther Williams' case. As Williams acknowledges in the quotation above, she is nothing but body—a body which was nonetheless a powerful economic and social force.

Esther Williams captured the U.S. record for women's freestyle in 1939 and qualified for the Olympic training team. The outbreak of war cancelled the 1940 Olympics in Helsinki, however, so Williams retired from competitive swimming to work as a model at I. Magnin's. In 1940, Billy Rose recruited her for his Aquacade at the San Francisco Golden Gate International Exposition. Most of the early publicity on Williams insists that, though movie scouts were interested in her from the moment she appeared in the Aquacade, she resisted the temptation to appear in films because she had a firm grasp of her own limitations as an actress. Only after M-G-M promised a year of acting, singing, and dancing lessons did she agree to sign a contract with the studio. But there was more to the transition from athlete to starlet than posture and French lessons: M-G-M's introduction of the "cinemermaid" to the
American moviegoing audience was a carefully orchestrated and executed public relations campaign.

Williams' career was not unprecedented. From the beginning of American cinema, athletes have crossed over to become film stars with relatively little effort. Buster Crabbe and Johnny Weissmuller, both competitive swimmers, had successful (if somewhat limited) careers as matinee idols, and during the silent era, Australian Annette Kellerman (the original "movie mermaid") enjoyed a brief career as a swimming star.¹ Williams' immediate onscreen predecessor, however, was Sonja Henie who made six films for Twentieth Century-Fox from 1936-43 (and three more afterwards for other studios). Henie's movies are in many ways a blueprint for Williams': set in scenic locations, they are loaded with talented actors who handle the burdens of music, dance, and comedy, leaving the Olympic champ free to shine in the elaborate skating sequences.

Not only were other studios producing musicals featuring sports stars, but by the early forties, synchronized swimming was well established as an entertainment venue. Water ballet, or "stunt swimming," as its earliest practitioners called it, had existed on an informal level at least since 1914. The "water pageant" (performed almost exclusively by young women) was a staple

¹ Ironically, Williams would later portray Kellerman in the 1951 musical biography, Million Dollar Mermaid.
of summer camp life, college and university physical education programs, county and state fairs, and public and private pools. In 1933 the "Modern Mermaids" officially introduced synchronized swimming at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. Most of the early texts on synchronized swimming credit the Modern Mermaids with exciting national interest in water ballet, moving the activity (not yet self-identified as a "sport") from the public pool to the mainstage arena (Curtis 1). By the time Williams starred in her first film, 1944's Bathing Beauty, the public had at least heard of water pageantry (via the Century of Progress and the two Billy Rose spectaculars in New York and San Francisco), even if, perhaps, they had never seen such a show before.

Much of the early publicity on Williams implies that the three assets she brings to the big screen are her face, her figure, and her national championships. As an early feature in a 1943 Life magazine puts it: "Hollywood finds starlet who can swim as well as pose by a pool" ("Esther Williams" 53). While her swimming records brought a certain amount of built-in name recognition and a unique differentiation from other young actresses, her obvious physical strength and athletic prowess invoked complex cultural anxieties about gender and sexuality.

Throughout the twentieth century, the body of the female athlete has been fraught with contradictions.
Michael Messner argues that while the country as a whole enjoyed a boom in organized and recreational sports in the late teens and early 20s, the gender politics of the day prevented women from participating as fully as men: " Whereas sports . . . for young males tended to confirm masculinity, female athleticism was viewed as conflicting with the conventional ethos of femininity, thus leading to virulent opposition to women's growing athleticism" (68-9).

Those traits which competitive sports supposedly foster—strength, independence, competitiveness—directly contradict traditional gender roles assigned to women—weakness, dependence, passivity—making the female athlete a problematic and potentially disruptive social subject.

Not only did women's participation in athletics threaten traditional gender roles, the athletic female body itself became a site of contradiction and confusion. Visible strength in women—muscles—threatens gender distinctions grounded against the body and thus assumed to be "natural."² Christine Holmlund, writing on contemporary bodybuilding, notes that while we as a culture see nothing confusing about the Arnold-like muscles of male

² See Judith Butler, Gender Trouble (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) and Bodies That Matter (New York and London: Routledge, 1993) for more on "denaturalizing" the body and reading it as constructed in much the same way as we read clothing as "drag."
bodybuilders (since muscularity and masculinity are assumed to be compatible if not interchangeable),

Images of muscular women . . . are disconcerting, even threatening. They disrupt the equation of men with strength and women with weakness that underpins gender roles and power relations, and that has by now come to seem familiar and comforting (though perhaps in different ways) to both women and men. (302)

Perhaps even more than the cross-dressed figure, the (nearly-naked) cross-gendered body of the female bodybuilder calls into question the cultural construction of both masculinity and femininity and the relationship of each to the body.

Of course, what is threatening about muscular women is not merely gender confusion (is she masculine or feminine?) or even sex confusion (male or female?) but the potential for confusion of sexual orientation. The athletic female body invokes a chain of signification from athleticism to muscularity to masculinity or "mannishness" to lesbianism. From the 1920s on in American culture, "[m]annishness, once primarily a sign of gender crossing, assumed a specifically lesbian-sexual connotation; and the strong cultural

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3 This is the same queer visibility argument I explore in my article "Draped Crusaders: Gender, Sexuality, and Same-Sex Drag in The Mark of Zorro," forthcoming in Cinema Journal. The culture at large collapses sexuality onto visible gender signs; thus the cross-gendered person's visible "difference" from normative gender roles signifies a "different" or aberrant sexuality.
association between sport and masculinity made women's athletics ripe for emerging lesbian stereotypes" (Cahn 335).

In addition to being marked as "different" or queer, the cross-gendered female also implicates those who gaze upon her body. As Laurie Schulze argues, "The danger to male heterosexuality lurks in the implication that any male sexual interest in the muscular female is not heterosexual at all, but homosexual" (43). Schultz also argues that such homophobic logic flip flops to suggest that any woman who finds the muscular female attractive is not responding heterosexually to masculinity, but rather to the gender-crossing itself, specifically to the recognizable figure of the butch lesbian. Since the athletic female body has the ability to suggest a potential homosexual desire within all heterosexual gazers, she is, to a homophobic culture, a dangerous thing in dire need of containment. Susan Cahn discusses the historical movement within the discipline of women's physical education to "orient their programs around a new feminine heterosexual ideal" (328). By the thirties, women's P.E. programs began selling exercise and sport to women by emphasizing the beneficial effects on a woman's appearance. Contrary to the popular stereotype, they argued, exercise will not make you "look like a man," but will in fact make you a more heterosexually attractive
woman with a trim waist, slender figure, and flawless complexion.

Esther Williams is no Bev Francis (The Australian powerlifter turned bodybuilder in *Pumping Iron II* whose heavily muscled build sparks the controversy that is the film's central conflict); she clearly is a product of the movement toward the heterosexual ideal which Cahn describes. Williams is athletic and muscular, but also voluptuous and conventionally beautiful—"Hollywood's Prettiest" of 1944, according to *Life* magazine. Her shoulders may be broad and her arms defined, but she is not "ripped" and few people would have difficulty determining either her sex or her gender. And yet, as an athlete, a physically powerful woman, she negotiates cultural anxieties about strength and gender. In fact, much of the reason for her success may be the brilliant way she merges "femininity" and athleticism into an aesthetically pleasing yet politically innocuous form.

The intersection of strength and beauty wasn't always a problem for Williams: early publicity on the actress emphasized the contradiction between her movie star looks and athletic prowess. A 1942 article in *Collier's* reports that her swimming style "is still less beautiful than powerful. She is lithe and feminine in looks but she has the strength of a man and plows through the water with the same effectiveness" (Crichton 13). The *Collier's* article
closes with an anecdote about Williams outswimming male challengers at Santa Monica beach. The distance contests frequently end, the article relates, with Williams towing her male competitors back to shore, "setting them down and putting them on their own just before they reach the breakers and before any busybody on shore can recognize the gentleman's state. 'This is my definition of tact,' says Miss Williams" (96). Clearly the publicity is aware of the potential Williams' strength and skill hold to upset gender conventions: hence the story reports that she uses "tact"--an artful negotiation of gender expectations--when physically besting male swimmers by not exposing them to public ridicule. Nonetheless, she does beat them, according to the article, and the M-G-M publicity department let the story appear. To a certain degree, the cultural climate of World War II gave women a political, economic, and social flexibility which would make the phenomenon of the "athletic female star" a possibility. See, for instance, the Rosie the Riveter poster where Rosie cradles a rivet gun in heavily muscled arms. But as the war drew to a close, tolerance for "strong women" (onscreen and off) dropped off dramatically. Post-war publicity articles on Esther Williams never mention the fact that she is capable of besting men in the water. After 1945, the M-G-M publicity machine continued to exploit Esther Williams' history as a swimming champ (even refusing to change her
name because it was as "Esther Williams" that she won her titles), but it became increasingly obvious that some system would have to be developed to repress the disturbing connection between physical strength and masculinity evoked by Esther Williams' star body.

One obvious solution was to emphasize the feminine training the studio provided. In most of the publicity surrounding Williams, her athleticism is not erased, but it is "softened" or redirected toward more feminine pursuits. Not only did the studio take credit for teaching Williams to speak, dress, and walk "appropriately," but M-G-M also claimed it retaught Williams to swim "in graceful girl fashion" as Williams' aquatic skills were rechanneled from competitive to performative swimming ("Look, A Bathing Beauty"). Never mind that, after a year with the Aquacade, Williams probably understood synchronized swimming better than anyone at M-G-M; it was important for the studio to appear to have orchestrated the change in swimming style. Fortunately for M-G-M, synchronized swimming is a happy meeting ground for athleticism and femininity: as a performance, water ballet reinforces stereotypes of traditional femininity (it's graceful, flowing, splashless) while as a physically demanding sport, it encourages athleticism and a certain amount of competitiveness, although like ice skating, participants compete against an ideal (numerical) standard, rather than each other.
However, Williams' re-training was not enough to negotiate contradictions between strength and femininity; in fact, reminding her fans that she had to be taught to swim "in graceful girl fashion" only entrenches her original or "natural" style as masculine.

The discourse surrounding Esther Williams more successfully represses the gender anxiety over "female athlete" by displacing it onto a humorous blurring of genus: instead of asking whether Williams might be masculine and/or feminine (and all that such gender confusion might imply), publicity surrounding the star jokingly asks whether she is human and/or marine animal. By doing so, the issues of strength and prowess in the water are cleverly associated with aquatic life rather than masculinity. Most publicity reads like the following: "There is a new girl out at MGM in Culver City named Esther Williams who is a cross between Lana Turner and a seal" (Crichton 13). Within the complex hybrid that is the young starlet Esther Williams, "Lana Turner" is the ultra-feminine bombshell, the seal (and not, say, Johnny Weissmuller) is the one with the muscles. A cursory glance at the publicity on Williams reveals a proliferation of puns on water, sea life, and mermaids: she is referred to as "amphibious"; an "amphibian attraction"; "Queen of the Surf"; "the delectable crawl stroker"; "very beautiful in an amphibious sort of way"; "half woman, half fish"; the
"human fish"; "MGM's Mermaid"; "Water Queen of the World"; "Queen of water ballet"; "Queen of the Aquaballet"; "Aquabride"; "Cinemermaid"; "porpoise"; "fish out of water"; and my personal favorite, "dish out of water."

By displacing gender anxieties onto genus, the films (and the publicity surrounding them) are able to focus an immense amount of attention on Williams' body while (for the most part) repressing cross-gender anxieties associated with the muscular female body. In fact, reviews of her performances are often reduced to an appreciation of her tanned and fit figure with critics doling out "A's for Anatomy and barely D for Dramatics" ("M-G-Mythology" 82). The reviewer for Newsweek says of Thrill of a Romance that Williams "belongs in a bathing suit for reasons more immediately apparent to the masculine eye" ("Two Men and a Wife" 110). A review of Easy to Wed in Time quips, "Esther Williams shows off her dramatic talents in elaborate gowns and her more notable gifts in a plain bathing suit" ("Easy to Wed" 97). And of Neptune's Daughter, Time writes, "her special gifts are apparent when she is photographed in a swim suit or in a pool" ("Neptune's Daughter" 90). The emphasis on her talents as "gifts" reinforces the relationship between Williams' "natural" body and her celebrity while repressing the obvious fact that the body is a product of conditioned athleticism as well as studio engineering.
By the time Williams becomes a full-fledged star (around 1947-48), the troublesome issue of female athleticism has for the most part been successfully displaced. She is/has a female body unquestionably worthy of being ogled by male spectators; in fact, the male critics agree that the whole reason for seeing the movie is to see Esther in a swimsuit. Nonetheless, occasional anxieties do emerge, as when reviewers slyly comment on Williams' size as opposed to her muscularity or athletic skill. At 5'7", she towers over Mickey Rooney in her debut film, *Andy Hardy's Double Life*. Later, critics would comment on her "large and immaculate loveliness" (Crowther) or call her a "robust little star" ("Easy to Love"). Calling Williams a "big" woman doesn't necessarily blur gender boundaries the way calling her an "athletic" or "muscular" woman would, but the emphasis on physical size does recall the controversial issue of female strength, proving that to displace is not to erase.

The "human fish" moniker may help allay anxieties about gender crossing, but it also leaves Esther Williams' star body vulnerable to the taint of "uncleanliness": fish are, the conventional wisdom goes, slimy, scaly, and smelly. Additionally, "fishiness" associated with women invokes the cultural phobia of female genitalia as "unclean" or "unhygienic." Neutralizing the vulgar connotations of the "human fish" was not easy for M-G-M, but by tapping into a
larger cultural obsession with controlling and monitoring feminine hygiene, the studio managed to keep in check any taint of "uncleanliness" that might emerge in connection with the star body.

The connection between "cleanliness" and desirability in women escalated to a national obsession during the post-war years. In "How To Build Your Sex Appeal," Motion Picture magazine ascribes to Lana Turner (arguably the sexiest of the stars of the late forties) the belief that "sex appeal vanishes completely unless cleanliness and daintiness are present. . . . Men are attracted by femininity . . . and no girl can be feminine unless she is dainty and immaculate" (Buckley 73). In "Don't Wait for a Mate," another fan magazine article in which movie stars dispense dating advice, Esther Williams says "Men admire . . . cleanliness more than they admire a beautiful face, perfect figure, ability at witty repartee" (Block 67). The most desirable women in the world--Hollywood movie stars--are appealed to as authorities on what constitutes desirability. And in their opinion (which is by no means unique to Lana and Esther) desirability is tied to gender ("femininity") which is then inextricably linked to "cleanliness"--which just happens to be available only through the purchase of modern consumer products. Both onscreen and off, Esther Williams is an immaculately clean celebrity. First of all, as a "bathing beauty," Williams
is constantly "bathing"; her interminable association with the water ensures that no one will doubt the cleanliness of the star body. (How can she be dirty? She's just taken a dip in the pool.) Second, the athletic female body itself deflects the taint of "uncleanliness" by being "the picture of health" (as Williams is called in *Easy to Love*). Here "healthy" does not mean merely strong, able-bodied, coordinated and agile, but also (to the paranoid late forties and early fifties) "germ-free." As "the picture of health," Williams's body is "antiseptic" as well as powerful and muscular (Wernick 144).

But if for some reason exercise couldn't keep the female body clean, modern industry would. A brief look at any women's magazine from the late forties and early fifties reveals a larger cultural obsession with feminine hygiene. Advertisements harp on the fact that the female body needs to be deodorized, sanitized, "freshened" and generally placed under some sort of "control" to be presentable and desirable to a male audience. Post-war culture experienced an explosion in commodities designed to control body odor, bad breath, excessive body hair, and menstruation. The female body must always be prepped for heterosexuality—as the Fresh cream deodorant ad puts it, she must be "lovely to love" ("A Fresh Girl . . ." 12)—by remaining inoffensive to the nose as well as the eye.
Closely related to the obsession with controlling "cleanliness" in the service of heterosexuality is the policing of the form of the female body. Girdles and bras promised to reconstruct the female body into the desired form, treating it as so much clay to be molded and shaped. A Jantzen girdle ad announces:

anybody can have a better figure! . . . Anybody can look better, feel better, wear clothes better, get around better, do bigger and better things, all by placing the body under the slimming, trimming, soothing, smoothing influence of a Jantzen girdle or panty-girdle. ("Anybody Can Have . . ." 49)

Not only was it inevitable, but it was imperative that women submit to the superior technology of American industry. Echoing the Dupont slogan, "Better things for better living . . . through chemistry," consumer culture hammered home the message behind engineered enjoyment: that placing your body under the controlling influence of industry will free you to experience a kind of pleasure you've never known.

Not surprisingly, since many underwear manufacturers also branched out into the swimwear business, swimsuit ads reflected both the desire to present the female body as clean, healthy, and sanitized, and offered the suit as the instrument best capable of putting the unruly body under control. The Nanina swimsuit company gleefully promotes its "patented 'sani-crotch'" (65), while others brag about
"built-in" bras and "Phan-Tum" girdles ("Surf Togs" 25). Thanks to the productive collaboration between the fashion and textile industries, form and function have been successfully integrated: as one ad puts it, "everything's under control in your poolproof and see-worthy MABS" ("Mabs Makes Magic . . ." 60).

The most dramatic meeting of industrial technology and high fashion appears in an ad for "Sea Goddess" suits:

Swim suit born in a laboratory . . .
designed from a man's point of view.
SEA GODDESS goes scientific . . . to bring you a fabulous swim-fashion . . .
aided and abetted by four great names in American Industry! CELANESE fortisan and FIRESTONE Controlastic . . .
to give slim, sleek figure-flattery to the Satin Bra and shirred front panels. DUPONT Nylon and U.S.RUBBER Lastex make the sheer lace sides that gently--but oh! so firmly--mold your figure! ("Swim Suit Born . . ." 30).

This ad makes perfectly clear both who it is engineering the female body and why. The perfectly formed, hygienic female body responds to male heterosexual desires (as well as fears of disease and death) and keeps the wheels of business and industry turning. By no means is the Sea Goddess ad an anomaly: other swimsuit manufactures took pains to advertise their connections with industrial giants like DuPont, Monsanto, Burlington Mills, and U.S. Rubber, and the big industries themselves frequently took out ads in fashion magazines advertising their products independent of specific swimwear companies. Either way, industry's
stake in the female body is clear: keep it clean, keep it controlled, keep it coming back for more.

Cleansed by water, deodorant, and a "sani-crotch," and hemmed in by built-in brassieres and girdles, the "human fish" can blur genus as much as she wants to. No one can accuse Esther Williams (as the swimsuit wearer of the era) of being unsanitary or out of control. In fact, as spokesperson for the swimwear company, Cole of California, Williams aligned herself both with the industry that puts the female body under control and with that portion of the population which needed such management. Not only is the star body the best example of the perfectly moderated female body, but she has joined forces with American industry to spread the gospel to other bodies in need of systemic control.

As the above discussion implies, grooming Williams for stardom represented a huge capital investment for M-G-M, one that went far beyond the typical "starlet" education program. In addition to the engineering of her star body via popular discourse, M-G-M invested heavily in the production of the movies themselves. The specific demands of the "Aquamusical" (the spectacular water ballets and underwater sequences), required that the studio build a tank 90 feet square in which to stage and shoot the water scenes, as well as develop new camera technology for
In addition, M-G-M also developed new forms of underwater make-up, costuming, and dance. Part of Williams' status as celebrity was confirmed through the publicity of M-G-M's investment in "research and development" for the aquamusicals. As if the elaborateness of the water ballets was not enough, studio publicity made sure that Williams' fans were well aware of the "cost of production" of her movies. Williams' aquamusicals reflect this process of commodification of the star body in their narratives as well as in the elaborate water ballet spectacles. Two films, *Neptune's Daughter* (1947) and *Easy to Love* (1953), feature storylines about champion swimmers whose "face and figure" form the basis of other industries: a swimsuit factory and a theme park, respectively. While cannibalizing Williams' "history" (as promoted by the studio), the films also provide a blueprint for the

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For *Bathing Beauty* M-G-M developed and publicized a new camera crane which allowed an overhead camera to move horizontally and vertically at the same time, as well as a specially constructed "aquachamber" to facilitate underwater camerawork ("Bathing Beauty" 77). Ten years later, the director of *Jupiter's Darling* (same guy, George Sidney) outfitted crew members with "aqualungs" so that they might stay underwater for up to two hours at a time. M-G-M also developed a "neutral buoyancy" underwater camera which is weightless in water, motionless unless moved ("Even the Stagehands" 93-95). This camera was developed by the head of the M-G-M camera department specifically to enhance the underwater sequences of the Esther Williams' films (to allow for more sophisticated, mobile camera work underwater, as opposed to the static, telephone booth-like aquachamber).
marketing of her body and persona outside the film industry.

In the opening moments of *Neptune's Daughter* (1949), Keenan Wynn addresses the camera directly and says, "I'd like to tell you a story about a guy, a girl, and a bathing suit"; with this introduction, the film announces that the commodity (the bathing suit) will play as integral a role in the narrative as the conventional heterosexual romance of Hollywood musicals. The film features Eve (Williams), a serious minded "career gal" who has been plucked from the roster of the local swim team to help establish the "Neptune" Bathing suit company. For Joe (Wynn) starting a business with Eve is both natural and logical, a sure-fire recipe for success: "With my ideas and her face and figure, we'd be a cinch." Though theirs is presumably an equal partnership, what Eve brings to the business is first and foremost a body. The film slyly acknowledges what kind of economic exchanges usually involve women's bodies: when Eve worries about how going into the swimwear business will affect her amateur standing as a swimmer, Joe responds, "There comes a time in every woman's life when she has to turn professional."

Though she may be a business "professional" and not a prostitute--"I'm strictly a career gal," she says, "The only interest I have in men is whether or not they whistle at our bathing suits"--the film is still unsure how to
position Eve within the swimsuit business; in the introductory sequence, Joe characterizes her as a talented partner:

She was clever. She designed and modeled her own suits. They were new, different. A little gag here, a little trick there—and did they sell! Say, she could sell anything... Before you knew it, we were in big business.

But while Eve may have thrown herself wholeheartedly into her job, she also shuns the power and authority associated with running a business: "You're the barker of this outfit, I'm just the trained seal," she tells Joe, positioning herself as a mere "spokesmodel" (the dressmaker's dummy, again just a body) rather than an executive with decision-making powers. Here again masculinity—this time associated with economic rather than physical power—is deflected away from Williams herself through the metaphor of marine life.

Once Eve is established, however ambiguously, as a "businesswoman," the narrative works to move her out of the economic sphere into a domestic one—all the while retaining the body's potential as spectacle to be consumed. Eve is introduced to her leading man, Jose O'Rourke (Ricardo Montalban), as he tours the bathing suit factory. The sequence is a celebration of American industrialism as well as a blatant plug for Cole of California, a popular swimsuit manufacturer of the forties and fifties.
(Although Cole's name is never mentioned, the ads in Eve's office are the actual "Esther Williams' Cole of California" ads which appeared in American fashion magazines at the time the picture was released.) Inside the factory, Eve seems comfortable with industrial technology as she shows the tour group the sketch artists, the pattern machines cutting paper, the fabric weaver, the automatic blades cutting the material by size, and the finishing department sewing the suits. But this is the last time we will see her as an "executive." At the end of the tour, Eve announces, "you have seen the Neptune Bathing Suit conceived, designed, created: if you will kindly step into the sales room, you will see it come to life." As if to complete the gestation-birth metaphor, she puts the suit on and gives the commodity a corporeal presence. We are reminded again what Eve brings to the business during the finale to the fashion show, as she swan dives into the pool in her white "streamliner" and hops out to demonstrate that it neither shrinks, fades, nor stretches.

The film's finale is another "fashion show"/water spectacle sponsored by the Neptune company to feature the "new swimwear line" in general and Eve in particular. The finale is much more spectacular than the earlier fashion show, featuring not just modeling but choreographed water ballet. The narrative of the film works to domesticate Eve, to move her from executive to housewife so that by the
final spectacle she has left the company to marry Jose and return with him to South America. But while she is no longer a "swimsuit executive," she is more firmly associated with her former product, as she has exchanged the business suit for the swimsuit. Both narratively and visually, she is, by the conclusion of the film, a more effective "swimsuit salesperson" than she was at the beginning, an important point to remember since the film is so heavily cross-merchandised with the Cole of California swimsuit company. Even—and especially—when domesticated, Esther Williams' star body is always marketable and marketing.

In Easy to Love Williams plays Julie Hallerton, the star of the water show at Cypress Gardens, Florida. The film burlesques the relationship of the female body to the pleasure industry, since Julie must perform almost every duty at the park: she skis, she swims, she poses for pictures in a hoop skirt, she models for brochures, she even types and takes dictation. Pleasure at Cypress Gardens is completely dependent upon the many skilled performances of Julie's body. When Julie threatens to quit, her boss Ray (Van Johnson) panics at the economic impact her departure will have on the park. What begins as a struggle to maintain control over the means of production turns into a competition over the means of reproduction, as Ray finds himself battling two other
rivals for Julie's affections. For Ray, however, the contested ground is still the female body. When Ray proposes (supposedly because he is in love, although he clearly wants to keep her at the park), Julie finds herself with one foot in the domestic sphere and the other in the economic. While she ultimately emerges as a prospective bride, the grand finale (directed by Busby Berkeley, no less) firmly and forever situates her as "water spectacle." And of course, narratively her marriage ensures the continued operation of the Cypress Gardens park.

Given the commodification of the body which takes place onscreen, it is no wonder that Esther Williams was such a successful celebrity spokesperson. Like many celebrities, Williams had no qualms about endorsing products like soap, panty hose, suntan lotion, and rental cars. And, as I mentioned earlier, she enjoyed a successful collaboration with the Cole of California swimwear company during the late forties and early fifties. But it was as president of the International Swimming Pool Corporation that Williams most dramatically put her "obvious talents" to use as a marketing strategy. The "immaculate" actress whose body has been cleansed of disease, dirt, and bodily discharge and placed under the control of industrial giants via the swimsuit industry brought a powerful form of recreational and social sanitation to the country.
In 1956, *The New York Times* announced that Esther Williams ("Movieland's Swimming Star" and former world record holder) was "in deep commercial water"; she and her husband had joined forces with businessman Don Pruess to form the International Swimming Pool Corporation ("Esther Williams Now Sells Pools"). Williams held the title of company president; her responsibilities reportedly included pool design and promotion. ISPC offered an impressive selection of design options which incorporated the latest in pool construction technology: the original vinyl liner pool, the in-ground fiberglass shell, the above ground pool (which could be taken apart and enlarged or moved), as well as the traditional poured and spray concrete pools. The company soon became one of the top manufacturers and distributors in the country, and by 1958 was selling pools all across America as well as in Thailand, Guatemala, Venezuela, El Salvador, and Panama.

During the late fifties ISPC launched a massive advertising campaign—"A pool a week for six weeks!"—and in 1959 alone, Williams traveled some 200,000 miles across country promoting the pools. As with her movies, the display of her "healthy" body was still paramount in the promotion of the product. Kiplinger magazine comments that the package was marketed "under the shapely aegis of Esther Williams" ("New Back-Yard Swimming Pools" 29); *Newsweek* went so far as to publicize her measurements "(38-27-34)"
"That Back-Yard Boom" 60). And in ISPC's own ads, the "joys and physical rewards" of swimming were graphically illustrated by the display of Williams' own fit body. Not surprisingly, the same themes of sanitation and control that whirled around the star body permeated the pool industry of the early fifties. Though somewhat more subtle than the hygiene ads (or, perhaps, less deliberately misogynist), the pool industry's fight against contamination still seemed to draw on the metaphor of the inherently unclean female body.

The swimming pool holds an important place in post-war culture: the late forties and fifties experienced a move to redefine not just recreation, but recreational space. Just as television redefined the average living room as a "home theater," so the private swimming pool recolonized the suburban back yard as a "home resort"--As American Home magazine put it, "A Country Club in your own backyard" (Brett 130). Until the early fifties, the home swimming pool was a luxury available only to the very rich: it was the absolute symbol of decadent excess associated with Hollywood and the upper classes. A 1951 handbook on backyard landscaping observes, "Swimming pools are like substantial fortunes, practically everyone would like one and few obtain them" (Abbe and Hawkins 26). In 1945 there were approximately 8,000 home swimming pools in the U.S. and 25 manufacturers. By 1956, those numbers jumped to
35,000 pools and 1000 manufacturers and an estimated total sales of 325 million. The industry continued to expand dramatically each successive year until, in 1960, the country approached 250,000 pools in use, 4,000 manufacturers in the U.S. alone, and total sales worldwide of nearly one billion dollars. These numbers refer to the in-ground and above ground backyard pool models whose new, relatively moderate prices made them accessible to the post-war middle and upper-middle classes. But the smaller, cheaper plastic inflatable pools (available for less than a hundred, rather than several thousand dollars) also experienced a tremendous boom during the late fifties, indicating that the "private pool," no matter how small, enjoyed popularity among all classes.

The popular press of the mid to late fifties gave all sorts of reasons for the backyard pool boom, from the viable to the silly: commuters were tired of sitting in traffic on weekend jaunts to the beach, the working man was weary of mowing his lawn, housewives craved their own form of Hollywood glamour (Zipser 19). One critic argued that

5 These figures are culled from articles which appeared in the New York Times from 1957 to 1960. They include "45,000 Swimming Pools Due to Be Built in 1957" (January 2, 1957; ); "Old Swimming Hole Moves to Backyard" (January 6, 1958; 57:6); Alexander Hammer, "Backyard Pool Salesmen Expect 600-Million Year Despite Slump" (May 11, 1958; VIII, 1:3+); "Sales Splash" (February 12, 1959; 40:2); "Buyers Plunge to Get Into Swim As Installation of Pools Widens" (January 11, 1960; 95:3).
the backyard pool boom was "part of the cycle of suburban living" following fast on the heels of the backyard barbeque craze, the second car, and the television (Dempsey 23). Technological innovations made construction and installation cheaper without radically diminishing the private pool's association with Hollywood and the upper classes. Most importantly for the middle classes, by the mid fifties the swimming pool could be bought on the installment plan as banks begin to approve loans for pools as "home improvements." At the root of these technological, economic, and social changes, however, was an evolution in the conception of the home: a new interpretation of the distinction between public and private space, as well as between work and leisure.

In *Make Room for TV*, Lynn Spigel, following Foucault, argues that during the nineteenth century, the Victorian domestic ideal insisted upon a strict division of public and private spheres, a strong separation of inside and outside worlds (12). Home was a respite for the weary man (carefully maintained by his wife, the "angel in the house"). The prevailing wisdom was that leisure activities should not exhaust and tax the energies of the individual, but should prepare one for "the proper discharge of duty" (14). By the turn of the century, as American consumer culture continued to grow and evolve, Americans believed that "the home should incorporate secular pleasures and
physical comforts" as well as the spiritual necessities so important to the Victorians (18). More importantly, as women moved into the public space as consumers, the lines between public and private space blurred (20). The home became a "well-run machine" just like the factory. Meanwhile, as an antidote to mechanization, modern architecture emphasized a fluidity between the outdoors and indoors: suburban homes were built in "woodsly" or previously undeveloped areas, architects incorporated views and vistas through window placement and sliding glass doors, and interior designers began to popularize "natural" furnishings (via landscapes, furniture, wallpaper, etc.).

By the late forties and early fifties not only had the distinction between private and public been confused, but the Victorian conception of work and leisure had been turned on its head as well: rather than leisure time preparing the individual for work, work became the price one paid for leisure (Tichi 85). Leisure time assumed an important cultural status as the measure of our civilization: the quality of life was now measured by the quality of play. Thus, Spigel writes, "In the new American dream house, recreation was held at a premium. By the postwar period, the ideology of domestic leisure had evolved from the informal play of the previous decades to an exaggerated obsession with family fun" (34). In addition to its significance at the private or familial
level (its ability to "give life meaning"), recreation took on an important political and social significance: if the family is the unit upon which the entire culture/nation is built and recreation is the glue which holds together the family, then "play" is essential to the future of the country.

While the family may have developed into an ever more tightly knit unit during the postwar years, the culture at large was fragmenting and reformulating itself into different configurations, most obviously along the lines of urban/suburban areas. The move to the suburbs, however, was not a return to Victorian notions of "privacy"—one family unit retreating behind the sacred walls of the home. The suburbs can be read as a "new form of social cohesion that allowed people to be alone and together at the same time" (Spigel 101). Each suburb functioned as a small community with its own sense of belonging amongst homeowners; middle class suburbanites "secured a position of meaning in the public sphere through their new-found social identities as private landowners" (101). Those landowners who also owned pools represented the best collapse of public and private sphere, as they found themselves the proprietors of a "resort" or "club" which could be enjoyed by the entire neighborhood or just the family.
In an era of increased pressure to desegregate public institutions—including public swimming pools—private all-white communities placed a premium on exclusivity. Like the television which brings the world to your living room but doesn't let it dirty your carpet, the backyard pool functions as another form of social sanitation; not only do bathers get to swim in perfectly monitored, chlorinated water (where bacteria or algae, or creatures that might sting or bite cannot survive), but pool owners can bring the beach to the back yards rather than the family to the beach, limiting the crowd to those from the same community/racial group rather than the general public. Those who had moved to the suburbs to enjoy living in an exclusive, monitored environment soon found that they were also vacationing under the same conditions.

The emphasis on homogeneity extended from the pool guest list to the maintenance of the pool itself. Owners and operators of swimming pools demand an almost obsessive level of cleanliness from pools. While lakes, oceans, and

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rivers are frequently opaque and teeming with all sorts of life forms, the backyard pool must be both crystal clear and organism free not merely for the satisfaction of the customer, but to pass muster by the health department as well. (In fact, the customer's requirements are frequently more stringent than the health department's.) There are, of course, legitimate reasons why the water in a pool should be "clean": cloudy water is a safety hazard, since lowered visibility makes it difficult to spot swimmers who may have gone under, and the still water of a swimming pool can be a breeding ground for organisms and viruses that affect the respiratory system and the skin. But, as a 1959 article in Swimming Pool Age (the pool industry magazine) pointed out, "relatively few cases of illness have been reported to official agencies throughout the United States and these have always been associated with poorly maintained facilities" (Eich 21). In the early years of the pool boom, public and private pools had rarely if ever been associated with epidemics of disease transmission, except in cases involving serious neglect of pool water. Additionally towels and shower facilities were frequently the culprit in cases of disease transmission and not the pool water itself.

Nonetheless, the consumer demanded (and continues to demand) that the swimming pool must kept immaculately clean, practically sterile. The industry was happy to
oblige, since the clamor for sanitary pool conditions sold an infinite number of filter systems and chemicals. While the obsession with cleanliness was cloaked in the language of "health and safety," the urge was also clearly an aesthetic one. Perfect water, the industry argued, is not only clear and bacteria free, it is "Mediterranean Blue" (Griffin 46). And as an ad for Johns-Manville filtration systems says, "Nothing makes a pool more inviting than sparkling clear water... and nothing repels bathers as effectively as murky water." Almost no pool built after 1955 was without its own filtration and chlorination system (a pump system designed to circulate water, remove foreign particles, and kill bacteria, algae, and other organisms in pool water). And almost without exception, the advertisements which sell these filter systems are up front about the pleasurable sensations that are a product of such intense technological control: an ad for Filtrapool systems states, "Her Swimming Pleasure depends on clean, sparkling water."

Poolside pleasure is not just about controlling the body of water itself, but also the bodies in the water. An article on pool rules and regulations emphasizes the need for "Bather Cleanup" before entering the pool: "Many pool patrons are blissfully unaware of the need for thorough cleansing of their bodies before enjoying a swim. They feel that since they are going into the pool anyway, 'Why
take two baths'" ("Pool Rules and Regulations" 55)? According to the industry, it's not just the bodies themselves that are problematic, but rather the genital area. As the article on pool rules puts it, "To be effective, a bath must be taken in the nude. Those parts of the body covered by a swimming suit need cleansing the most" (55).

The ads which sell pool chemicals and filtration systems convey the belief that both bodies—the body of water and the female body posed next to it—are in need of control, and while offering to contain one, by association they promise to clean the other. Two ads from American Sanitary, a wholesale pool accessory company (and what to make of that company's name?) best dramatize this trend. One features a young woman in a strapless maillot seated on the end of a diving board, smiling at the camera. The text next to her reads, "Who cares what's on the other end of the board—as long as it's made by American Sanitary" ("Who Cares . . ." 89). The second ad features a different young woman hanging off the end of the diving board, her legs and waist in the pool. The text next to her reads, "This is one pool accessory you can't order from AMERICAN SANITARY . . . but just about the only one" ("American Sanitary" 95). Both ads position women as "pool accessories," but ones which American Sanitary does not offer, possibly because, in its natural state, the female
body is not a sanitized and sanitary product. But, the ads argue, the purchase of American Sanitary products will go a long way towards achieving the perfectly moderated backyard pool.

Given the way the pool and the female body are positioned as terminally organic entities requiring constant chemical control, it is not surprising that some of the advertisements for the chemical agents used in the pool are strikingly similar to the douche ads of the late forties and early fifties. "Genuine Roccal Sanitizing Agent", a "Sure-Fire Control of ALGAE and slime-forming bacteria" (55) and "Zonite" douche which "destroys and removes odor-causing waste substances" (63) both promise to use modern chemicals to manage living organisms, again arguing that "cleanliness," i.e., the absence of algae and other organisms, is the most desirable state for both the pool and the female body. Interestingly, though both ads emphasize that the respective chemicals are powerful germicides, neither product wants a total cleanliness or zero tolerance of "foreign" material. What the douche and the pool chemicals promote is a "powerful germicide" which will remove or contain the offensive organisms and yet not be so strong as to damage either the "delicate tissue lining" of a woman's vagina or a vinyl pool liner. For market purposes, it is better that the douche and the pool chemicals be made to work with human tissue or delicate
vinyl, since such moderateness ensures the need for an ongoing sanitation system. Pool owners and sexually active women must repeatedly buy Roccal and Zonite to maintain cleanliness, even after it has been initially established: the products work with and not against the pool's and the body's resistance, using the chemical's planned obsolescence as industrial insurance. Nowhere is twentieth century's obsession with controlling organic systems through modern technology more clear than in this juxtaposition of pool maintenance and feminine hygiene.

Though cleanliness and sanitation were paramount to the pool industry, and though this emphasis on purity can be connected to festering racial tensions and fears of the day, it is a mistake to assume that the backyard pool was not a theater for exoticism, or, in Said's words, Orientalism. Public swimming pools were indeed contested grounds for desegregation; the refusal of whites to swim in racially mixed groups was always phrased in the language of "contamination" which was beyond control. But while whites shrank from contact with African-Americans in the public sphere, the backyard pool did not hesitate to incorporate a well moderated "otherness" into the homogeneic white suburban household largely through the

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7 In "Desegregation in Jackson, Mississippi," Sallis and Adams refer to an incident in which a local motel closed its swimming pool to guests when NAACP officials registered, claiming "insufficient chemicals" (243).
pool accessory industry. The reintroduction of racial difference into the suburban back yard is yet another function of engineered enjoyment: racial difference is mediated by technology so that it can function as a form of pleasure.

In all fairness, the pool industry was only doing what Hollywood and other predominately white institutions had done, which is appropriate racial otherness for their own ends. In "Are All Latins from Manhattan?: Hollywood, Ethnography, and Cultural Colonialism" Ana M. Lopez argues that during the Good Neighbor Policy years (1939-1947), Hollywood established itself as a sort of "ethnographic institution— that is, as creator, integrator, and translator of otherness" in relationship to Latin America (406). When war in Europe closed down the European and Japanese markets for film, Hollywood (at the urging of the U.S. Government) set out to woo Latin America. The introduction of Latin American themes, music, and actors reached out to Latin American audiences as Hollywood had never done before, and it served to keep the Good Neighbor policy forefront in the collective consciousness of the North American audience. Movies with Latin American themes needed to do more than just appeal to a Pan-American audience, however; they needed to "posit a complex otherness as the flip side of wartime patriotism and nationalism" (409). Racial difference must be made to seem
non-threatening without actually being eliminated or erased, so that the white power structure stays firmly in place. Latin Americans onscreen needed to be "nonthreatening, potentially but not practically assimilable (that is, not polluting to the purity of the race), friendly, [and] fun-loving" (409). When showcased next to the ultra-white stars of musical comedy (for example, the popular combination of Carmen Miranda and Betty Grable at the Fox studios) such non-threatening ethnicity provides an entertaining contrast (a "splash of color") while shoring up the racial purity of the star herself.

The Esther Williams' cycle, like many of the big budget Hollywood musicals, frequently makes use of a "domesticated" or colonized ethnicity. Many of them incorporate exotic settings into the storyline--Pagan Love Song, set in Tahiti, filmed in Hawaii; On an Island with You set in the South Pacific; Fiesta set in Mexico; Easy to Love filmed at Cypress Gardens, Florida, which is tropical, if not exactly exotic. The music too, borrows heavily from Latin American rhythms and sounds--Xavior Cugat and orchestra appear in four Esther Williams films. And while Esther Williams is often cast opposite actors from M-G-M's

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8 The conga, the rhumba, and the samba--staples of Cugat's repertoire--are all derived from Afro-caribbean sources; in Esther Williams films we get a white version of a latin version of an African musical form.
stable of "latin types" such as Ricardo Montalban and Fernando Lamas, she occasionally played ethnic roles herself: the half-Tahitian woman in Pagan Love Song, the Portuguese heiress in Easy to Wed, and the Mexican bullfighter (!) in Fiesta. But the "otherness" of latin stars, storylines, music, and characters is always tightly controlled in an Esther Williams' movie, mostly through a deliberate obfuscation of ethnic specificity. In Dangerous When Wet, Argentinean Lamas portrays a randy Frenchman, and in Neptune's Daughter, Mexican Montalban plays Jose O'Rourke, captain of the "South American" polo team. And while Cugat speaks with a thick accent and his band plays rhythmic Latin tunes, he is also a concert violinist who seldom wears anything but white tie and tails or a dinner jacket. Divorced from political or social contexts, the dark men of the Good Neighbor musicals (and the otherness that they represent) are relegated to the status of attractive scenery.

Although it didn't appear until 1949, Neptune's Daughter still qualifies as part of the Good Neighbor cycle described by Lopez. When Eve protests having to put on a water ballet for the South American polo team, Joe browbeats her into submission by arguing, "You're a Good Neighbor, aren't you?" The narrative develops a love story between a California swimsuit executive and a "South American" polo player, invoking and then containing
stereotypes of the excessively sexualized "latin lover" who evolves into an American patriarch. Interestingly enough, the film not only makes Montalban's ethnicity friendly and appealing (even as it fails to identify his country of origin), it goes out of its way to establish ethnicity in general as performance. Neptune's Daughter exploits performative ethnicity most dramatically during a lush production number which appears halfway through the movie. At this point, the film fades to the neon sign of the "Casa Cugat" nightclub, then fades to black. The new number opens on a pair of hands playing the claves, followed by a series of hands wreathed in bracelets of bananas moving in time to the drums. The camera then pans to long lines of pulsing congo drums and jawbones. As candles in coconuts shells burn, dancers with exposed midriffs and bones in their hair pray to an enormous wooden totem. A bandmember in samba costume belts out what appears to be a battle cry as a female dancer (with dark skin but very blue eyes) screams. When all the "savagery" is finally over, the camera pulls back to remind us that we are still on the dance floor of the Casa Cugat—a fact it

9 The Good Neighbor films in general promote a performative ethnicity. Carmen Miranda's tremendous popularity during the war is evidenced and bolstered by the ease with which she is imitated; the U.S. Army even published instructions on how to turn a GI into Miranda with little more than a tablecloth and some plastic fruit. See Alan Berube, Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II (New York: Free Press, 1990).
is easy to forget, given the Berkeleyesque grandeur of the number itself. All of the savagery is nothing more than a nightclub act, talent brought in from elsewhere who must perform two shows nightly and join a union.

Additionally, the secondary plot of *Neptune's Daughter*, involving Eve's younger sister Betty (Betty Garrett) and Jack Spratt the masseur, has Spratt (Red Skelton) masquerading as the "South American" Jose O'Rourke in order to date Betty. Skelton has several comic scenes burlesquing the already burlesqued ethnicity within the movie. Much of the humor stems from the fact that so many people, including Betty, can't tell that Spratt is just some "stupid looking, red-headed goon," and not the captain of the South American polo team. By the late forties, "South America" (in its homogenized North American formula) is so familiar that it can be signified by the merest suggestion: in Skelton's case, Gaucho pants and a silly accent. And yet "real" Latin American ethnicity (whatever that might be) remains unfamiliar and unknowable in Hollywood films: all that's recognizable is the imitation.

In *Neptune's Daughter* the clothing itself, particularly the Neptune bathing suit, is a complex colonial hybrid. Not only does the Neptune collection appropriate Otherness as a fashion gimmick (we see suits named "the Sarong" and "the Riviera" as "Slow Boat to China" plays softly underneath), but, as Eve mentions during the factory tour,
the suit is made of "silk from China, rubber from Malaya, wool from Australia, cotton from all over the world--and of course our own wonderful synthetic rayons made right here." The very fabric of the suits is a colonial melange, with American technology as the jewel in the crown of worldwide textiles. Again, otherness is cultivated, processed and refined by US industry into a pleasure-producing product that is finally only nominally heterogeneous.

During the postwar years, ethnicity was performative, appropriative, ultimately an excellent accessory to American homogeneity. Long after the Good Neighbor years fade, American entertainment culture would continue to invoke a tightly controlled Otherness for "color" or splash. Not only did the pool industry invoke the "tropics" as a selling point but the pool accessory industries that sprang up alongside the home pool boom gleefully exploited exotic cultures for suburban home decoration. Pool owners of the late fifties could choose a portable cabana for their pool that was "like the pavilions of ancient Chinese war lords," or a "Japanese Pavilion," or one that was "Out of the Arabian Nights" ("New Delights at the Water's Edge" 23). They could decorate the pool house with Japanese armchairs, zebra striped rugs, India cane furniture, French cafe tables, and Italian Terra Cotta statues ("Poolside Paraphernalia" 102-3). Swimsuit designers (like the fictional Neptune Bathing Suit Co.) not
only used foreign textiles, but incorporated tropical colors and patterns. Cole of California advertised a "Peruvian" suit with the tag, "Con muchas curvas" (36). The pool owner could buy toys, towels, chairs, clothing, umbrellas, drink mixes, sun tan oil—all of which incorporated a calculated exoticism in their design and marketing. Racial difference, like sexual difference, must be placed under rigid discursive control before it can be reintroduced into the sphere of pleasure.

Of course, the most effective way for white America to interpellate racial otherness without radically challenging racial purity is to get a tan. As Hollywood star and spokesperson for the backyard pool industry, Esther Williams is always beautifully and evenly tanned. Her deep tan never challenges her status as white woman (except in the films where she plays women of Latin or Polynesian extraction); rather it confirms her whiteness along class lines, since in twentieth century industrial nations, only those white people with time and money enough to vacation in sunny spots can afford such beautiful tans. One of the major appeals of the backyard pool, along with quality recreation and the convenience of a home vacation, was the homeowner's ability to tan comfortably at his or her own leisure. For a fraction of the cost of an extended tropical vacation, the new pool owner can carry around on her back (so to speak) the signifier of leisure time and
disposable income. Esther Williams democratizes the tanning process the way she democratizes the swimming pool: her mission is to use her body to sell the privileges of the rich to the middle and working classes. To the socially mobile post-war generation, it was an irresistible pitch.

The end of Esther Williams' association with the swimming pool industry dramatizes a different sort of systemic collapse—obsolescence. At Disneyland and Walt Disney World, rides and exhibits that malfunction can be immediately repaired. When they grow outdated, they are given makeovers. Walt Disney World recently revamped Tomorrowland from a concrete and asphalt blight to a Buck Rogers Sci-Fi fantasy complete with spacemen on stilts and neon burger condiments. But exhibits that become hopelessly outdated (or, more likely, politically incorrect) are removed, like the original "Indian Village" featuring "real Indians" who danced, paddled, and attacked, replaced in the seventies by "Bear Country" and the audio-animatronics of the "Country Bear Jamboree" (Weiner 133). In the mouse's universe, systemic disturbances are either fixed or eliminated: if a previously integral part of the park can't be brought back into the fold, then it must be expelled—just as if it never belonged.

As a movie star whose fame was a direct function of the condition of her body, Esther Williams' exchange value
always faced the pressures of time: M-G-M chose not to renew her contract in 1955, tacitly acknowledging that, at 33, her days as a bathing beauty were numbered. A few years later, her association with ISPC would also end with her bosses claiming that she had "outlived her purpose."

By late 1959, International had fallen on hard times with creditors in hot pursuit. Pruess beat them to the punch, filing for voluntary bankruptcy in early 1960, along with four affiliated companies which manufactured pool components for International ("International Swimming Pool Files . . ."). The court papers declared that company was "expanding too rapidly"; Williams was not mentioned except in connection with the company's product. In court, Pruess seems to argue that the company was too successful to stay afloat; the system couldn't meet the demands of the market it created. In other words, Esther Williams was too good at her job of creating consumer desire for swimming pools.

Six weeks later, Pruess turned on Williams, painting her as an expensive figurehead whose outrageous fees brought down the company ("International Pool Says . . ."). Pruess claimed that Esther Williams had served "in a promotional capacity" only, and that for such insignificant work she had collected $607,000 in royalties over the last three years (an amount which, coincidentally, was more than International's debt: court documents revealed assets of $1,250,000; liabilities of $1,714,600). In a statement
released to the press, Pruess argued, "Not only did these payments force up the prices of our pools, but they are also one of the major reasons for the serious financial problems here at International" (6). Only two years earlier, Pruess was touting Williams as an "ideal corporate image" and patting himself on the back for having landed the marketing coup of the decade: the woman the world most associated with swimming was selling his swimming pools ("Esther Williams and Swimming Pools" 58). But inside the bankruptcy court in 1960, Pruess complained that "[t]he fantastic cost of exploiting and promoting the Esther Williams name and likeness as a sales aid has cost us dearly" ("International Pools Says . . ."). More than likely, Pruess's own inept management forced International into filing Chapter 11. Described as a "free-wheeling, free-dealing, free-spending type" of executive, Pruess was more interested in signing up franchise holders than selling swimming pools ("Esther Williams and Swimming Pools" 60).

Pruess had it both ways: he capitalized on Williams' fame to push his product, and yet when he (as CEO in charge of running the company) steered International into rough financial waters, he blamed the marketing fee owed to Williams, implying that as a "figurehead," she really didn't do anything to earn the money. On the eve of International's reorganization and Williams' departure from
the company, Pruess announced "We firmly believe a company does not need to associate the name of a nationally known individual as its figurehead or trademark to be successful" ("Swimming Pool Woes"). Pruess in effect argued that Williams had outlived her usefulness, and, as trademark, was now obsolete.

Time magazine calls Pruess on his hypocrisy: "Thanks largely to Esther Williams' name and luscious presence, sales climbed from $500,000 through 50 distributors in 1956 to more than $9,000,000 with 762 distributors in 1959" ("Without Liquid Assets" 98). Williams herself was not happy at the way Pruess blamed her for the company's troubles, firing off an accusation of her own: "If a man can't provide a 5% payment on a $10 million gross to the person who is the whole reason of the business, I don't think that man should be in charge anymore" (98). While it is obvious that the "face and figure" of Esther Williams was the cornerstone of International's early success, that same face and figure became expendable when the company was reorganized. In May of 1960 Williams resigned as president, Pruess found new backers, and remained as CEO.

The example of Esther Williams' association with ISPC shows us that even when industry is able to "produce" the perfectly moderated body, that body is doomed, eventually, to obsolescence. Engineered enjoyment is always historically contingent, either upon the "state-of-the-art"
technology incorporated into the production, or the living, aging body so produced. As the case of Esther Williams proves, the controlled female body is inherently marketable—for a limited time only.
"Film is an addiction that leaves its traces in the body itself . . ."

Frederic Jameson
Signatures of the Visible

In May of 1994 the Baton Rouge Advocate ran a story about the senior project for a group of mechanical engineering students at LSU. The accompanying photo, captioned "What a woman" featured two male engineering professors gazing intently into the exposed torso of "Robotic Whoaman," a mechanized female mannequin designed by four students to be used by retailers to attract customers. Robotic Whoaman, whose "head turns from side to side while simultaneously dipping her shoulders and twisting her waist" was designed to differentiate herself from static mannequins in storefront displays (Baughman 18). And while the photo shows two men fascinated by the interiority of the mechanical woman, the students who designed and built Robotic Whoaman clearly expect that she will produce women as consumers by making female shoppers take a second look at the products Whoaman wears. Clearly the process of engineering the female body in the service of capitalism which I have been discussing in this project
extends beyond the motion picture industry to other realms of consumption.¹

The purpose of this dissertation has been not just to document the early movement of the film industry toward horizontal integration (via the cross-merchandising efforts of Esther Williams) but to show how important the controlled representation of the female body is to the production of pleasure and the positioning of viewers—specifically women viewers—as consumers. There is, I believe, an important link between control and pleasure, specifically between systematic control over the female body and the ability to commodify pleasure.

In this dissertation I have explored filmic representations of the female body as system in need of control from three perspectives: I have considered what happens when film as a pleasure-producing apparatus breaks down at the level of production (as in Lady in the Lake), what happens when the breakdown of the female body is incorporated into the narrative (as in Possessed and Sorry. Wrong Number), and finally, what happens when the body is successfully placed under control by industry and technology (as with Esther Williams' star body). While I think that these perspectives help to explain how film

¹ One study which explores the relationship between the shopping mall and cinema as sites of consumption is Anne Friedberg's Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
works as pleasure-producing system, they are by no means the only ways to look at engineered enjoyment. I think a detailed history/critique of the evolution of visual technology since 1955, including Cinemascope, 3-D, and the many innovations in color and sound which have developed over the years, would go a long way to explain the increasingly interdependent relationship between technology and pleasure in late 20th century culture.\(^2\) I also think that more work needs to be done on films made since 1975, when Steven Spielberg's \textit{Jaws} ushered in the "blockbuster" era, changing forever the way feature films are produced and marketed for "runaway" success.\(^3\) Likewise there is room for work on interactive cable, "virtual reality," and other "immersion" entertainment systems which, following in the tradition of \textit{Lady in the Lake}, seek to provide the experience of "stepping into" a diegesis.\(^4\) Understanding the uses of engineered enjoyment is absolutely dependent

\(^2\) One fascinating work which investigates the history of technical innovation in movie exhibition is Douglas Gomery's \textit{Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States} (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).


\(^4\) One recent study of new entertainment technologies is Janet Wasko's \textit{Hollywood in the Information Age: Beyond the Silver Screen} (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994).

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upon first understanding the technologies of power which produce such pleasures.

I began this dissertation with an anecdote about my visit to Walt Disney World which literalized for me the interdependence of pleasurable experience and control. That control, I hope I have emphasized, is more and more dependent upon modern technology. But technology is no longer just a means to produce control which then produces pleasure; today it has intrinsic entertainment value of its own. For example, the Discovery Channel features a weekly show entitled "Movie Magic" which is devoted to promoting Hollywood's latest special effects wizardry. Likewise, I recently saw on the Sci-Fi Channel a half hour "documentary" on the "making of" the newest attraction at Universal Studios, Florida, the "T2 3-D" ride. Both the "Movie Magic" show and the "T2" documentary purport to "demystify" the sophisticated technology of contemporary special effects, including "morphing" and 3-D, but neither actually fully explains the process in any clear or educative way--the computer technology is simply too complicated to do so. What appears to be an explanation is really a remystification of the process: the "amazement" of the onscreen spectacle is transferred from the image itself to the elaborate (and still opaque) apparatus which produced it. Technology is fetishized in and of itself, while at the same time the final spectacle is invested with
exchange value by emphasizing the immense labor power that went into the production.

Ironically, as technology grows more and more sophisticated and fascinating in its own right, the entertainment experiences produced seem more and more similar. Thomas Schatz argues that, post-1975 (when the modern "blockbuster" era was ushered in by films like *Jaws*), "we see films that are increasingly plot-driven, increasingly visceral, kinetic, and fast-paced, increasingly reliant on special effects, increasingly 'fantastic' (and thus apolitical), and increasingly targeted at younger audiences"—just like theme park rides (23). And as action movies like *Die Hard* and *T-2* grow more visceral for the viewer, thrill rides like *Star Tours* and *Body Wars* rely more heavily on sophisticated visual technology to simulate movement and other bodily sensations. The slogan for Universal Studios Theme Parks in Florida and California aptly captures this movement toward homogenization of entertainment experience: "Ride the movies," the parks declare.

This trend toward the indistinguishability of commodified experience is linked to economic factors. One reason films look more like thrill rides is so that they can actually spawn a ride at the parent studio's theme park: Warner Brother's has made as much of an industry out of the *Batman* franchise at Six Flags as Universal has of
Jaws and Disney has of The Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin, and The Lion King. And thrill rides are just one form of "synergy," that form of cross-merchandizing "formerly and less pretentiously known as tie-ins" (Adler 69). As popular texts replicate themselves over and over in synergistic enterprises, however, it becomes less and less clear which (if any) is the "original." In 1955, Walt Disney planned Disneyland as a space where guests could "live the fantasy," or "enter into" the diegesis of their favorite Disney film. Thus the film text retained its status as primary source for the park's narratives. Also, the early Disney thrill rides were clearly derivative of identifiable Disney feature films. In fact rides like "Mr. Toad's Wild Ride," "Peter Pan," and "Snow White" are not fully comprehensible without having seen the original films on which they are based. Today, over forty years later, it grows harder to tell what, if any, is the primary text of contemporary engineered enjoyment: not only do movies look and "feel" more like thrill rides, but they often look to thrill "games" as their source material (as with Mortal Kombat and Super Mario Brothers.) Also, it is no longer necessary for a film to prove itself as a blockbuster before being reinvented as a theme park ride: in the summer of 1995, the film Casper and the Universal Studios ride opened on the same day. Though "Casper" already enjoyed a great deal of
cultural currency as comic book character and animated cartoon, the ride itself was clearly produced in connection with the 1995 film, while at the same time proving that the feature film is no longer the exclusive point of identification for those who tour the park. Other rides seem to function independently of the feature film narrative which they exploit: the new Universal Studios T-2 3D ride uses the same "high concept" of the Terminator movies, that of time traveling killing machines, and even brings back the feature actors of T-2, but introduces a different narrative and a much different monster, the T-one million. If rides once sold and promoted movies, movies now promote and sell rides, so that it's impossible to tell which takes precedence in an economic hierarchy. As Baudrillard says of Disneyland's idealized version of Main Street, we are surrounded by copies for which there is no original (11).

Others besides studio executives and theme park owners have recognized the economic possibilities of engineered enjoyment. Shopping mall developers (who have always looked to the movies to help promote consumption) are today heavily borrowing ideas from theme parks to ensure survival. The new "destination entertainment centers" are no longer anchored by traditional large department stores like Bloomingdale's and Macy's, but rather by big-screen movies and themed restaurants (Kaufman 72). The new malls,
"equal parts amusement park and retail center" aim to give consumers an "immersive experience" which will also induce them to spend money freely (Kaufman 72). Some developers have even planned to save entire urban areas through "Disneyfication." The Disney Corporation has plans to completely overhaul the seedy Times Square district in New York City, turning the most notorious neighborhood in the country into a family tourist stop. The $34 million project "will anchor a whole new entertainment district, housing [three] theaters, a 25-screen multiplex cinema, themed restaurants--including and ESPN sports spa--and a branch of Madame Tussaud's wax museum" in addition to luxury hotels and memorabilia stores (Adler 68). The architect behind this massive effort at gentrification said, "Disney . . . has taught Americans a lot about what they're missing in their urban life"--and what seems to be missing is the kind of total social and environmental control usually found only at Disney but soon to be available downtown (Adler 69).

This brief survey of the contemporary entertainment industry reveals just how much more work needs to be done on contemporary themed experiences: we need to ask of them, as I have attempted to ask of those films and products from the post-war years, how they incorporate technology and narrative to establish control over the female body, how that control translates into pleasurable experience, and
how those experiences continually produce women as consuming subjects.

The reason we should investigate the relationship between the establishment of control over the female body and the production of pleasure is not merely to criticize theme parks and movies for contributing to the proliferation of mechanized pleasures and unbridled consumption; there are other, more disturbing side-effects of a cultural correlation between control over the female body and pleasure. Most obviously, many of the fastest growing industries today are founded upon the potentially destructive belief that establishing control over the female body will produce "happiness" or pleasure: I'm thinking in particular about the growing weight-loss and exercise industries but also of the recent boom in cosmetic surgery, once available only to the very rich but now readily accessible and affordable to all. In fact, in my own hometown, cosmetic surgery is now available at the local mall: a few years back, a sign on the "Cordova Square" marquee read, "Enjoy a youthful face and figure with plastic surgery performed in office." Plastic surgery ("performed in office" at your convenience) is to be "enjoyed"--by the patient, and by those who in turn consume her "new" image, despite the obvious fact that such surgery, like any surgical procedure, is potentially life-threatening. Such an emphasis on engineering the female
body to produce pleasure can have even more destructive ramifications: arguably a case can be made equating the obsession with control over the female body to the explosion of eating disorders in the last fifteen years. And any country whose laws guaranteeing reproductive freedom are as tenuous as ours ought to be very concerned at a cultural movement emphasizing technological control exerted over the female body as a source of pleasure.

Though there are significant similarities between the engineered enjoyments pioneered during the post-war years and those produced today, there are, as I have discussed above, significant differences as well. One of the most important changes is evident in the "Theme Park" CD-rom game I discussed at the end of my introduction. While the female body—in the form of the virtual park's female customers, whose pleasurable responses allow the player to win the game—is still the site of resistance that technology must contain, "Theme Park" doesn't just offer to control and moderate the female body for us; it lets us perform such actions ourselves. This sort of interaction may be the most important trend in entertainment industries today, signaling as it does our explicit participation in the continued commodification of female bodies and bodily experience.
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Candidate: Catherine Williamson

Major Field: English

Title of Dissertation: "Engineered Enjoyment": Technology, Capitalism, and the Female Body in Film

Approved:

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