

THE LIVES OF KONG:
LABOR AND MOVIE MAKING IN THREE ACTS

BY

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Abstract

THE LIVES OF KONG: LABOR AND MOVIE MAKING IN THREE ACTS

By

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Investigating the globalization¹ process called runaway production—Hollywood film studios moving film production to other countries and regions largely to avoid organized labor—is at the heart of *The Lives of Kong: Labor and Moviemaking in Three Acts*. It demonstrates that runaway production's devastating impact on the majority of unionized American film workers today emerges from an often bitterly contested history. Over three distinct periods, from the 1920s to 1971, from 1972 to 1998, and from 1999 to the present, domestic and foreign film studio management, workers and their unions, artists and craftspeople, and state, federal and other nations' government officials struggled over this issue in significantly different ways.

The re-historicizing of runaway production scholarship found in *The Lives of Kong* reclaims a much-needed scope for the discussion of its causes, consequences, and remedies. In addition, this study makes a unique contribution to labor history scholarship

¹ Social scientists usually use the term "globalization" to refer to the period initiated by the July 1944 United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire which helped plan financing for the post-World War II rebuilding of Europe. From the meeting came the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which was charged with the task of "preventing another global depression" by pressuring countries to apply fiscal policies that would stimulate economies (Stiglitz 2002). While the globalization literature makes a significant contribution to our understanding of postwar global forces, especially economic factors effecting third-world workers, for the purposes of an analysis involving Hollywood production, globalization begins earlier. For example, American motion picture involvement in the globalizing world had included the shift of motion picture productive power during World War I when the celluloid needed for European film production was used for the war effort, and so American film production could grow unimpeded by European competition (Cook 1996).

by recovering aspects of the complex breadth of the history of entertainment labor unions. The project further contributes to the nascent study of globalization's impact on the middle and creative classes. In addition, this dissertation demonstrates how the links between film production processes and film content—a little-researched area—provide essential insight into the conditions under which runaway production emerges.

Using a multi-sited methodology appropriate to studying a globalization phenomenon, this study employs ethnographic methods, including oral history and participant-observation; along with analysis of 809 newspaper reports; and examination of production and film content analysis. The iconic 1933 film *King Kong*, famous for its depiction of a giant gorilla, simultaneously dramatizes an overseas American film production that goes terribly wrong. Each ensuing version, first by Dino De Laurentiis in 1976, and then by Peter Jackson in 2005, joins with the original to provide a time-specific springboard for the discussion of runaway production, including complicated portrayals of attitudes toward film work, film workers, and related explosive tensions involving race, gender and class. By re-connecting film process and product, while at the same time re-historicizing the runaway production debate, *The Lives of Kong* shows the efficacy of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of creative labor, leading to the potential for wide-ranging discussion of the relationships between image and power, which have public policy implications on both the national and international levels.

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[F]iction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible; Shakespeare's plays, for instance, seem to hang there complete by themselves. But when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun midair by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in.

--Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) 43-44

Preface

“It’s good, but it won’t film.”

--Nathanael West *The Day of the Locust*, 1939, 41

I first became involved in the motion picture business when I was twenty-four years old, and living in the San Francisco Bay Area. After I answered Lucasfilm’s advertisement in the local paper for a secretary, I was called for a job interview.

While Lucasfilm’s Skywalker Ranch has since been widely seen on television, especially through journalist Bill Moyers’ television specials, I was unfamiliar with its peculiarities, which are noteworthy. In giving me directions to the place, my interviewer warned me that it was hard to find: after I passed the llama farm, which did not belong to Lucasfilm, I should look for the number 5858 on a wood sign, which indicated the entrance to Skywalker Ranch.

Skywalker Ranch was built in the 1980s with the profits George Lucas made from his *Star Wars* films. Disgusted by the Los Angeles motion picture business, George bought several thousand acres of pastureland in Marin County, north of the Golden Gate Bridge, and built his own movie studio. Designed to resemble a Hollywood idea of a Nineteenth Century prosperous farm, the “Ranch,” as it is called, has state-of-the-art post-production facilities, and includes a 300+ seat movie theater. Just as there is no sign outside the Ranch to distinguish it from any other property on the winding Lucas Valley Road (named long before George was born), there is no sign on the Ranch campus that this is a motion picture studio, although one can see rotting Ewok huts—from an old film set—among the Redwood trees if one looks carefully. The buildings look like someone’s fantasy of a quaint, if oversized, Main House, a shingled Carriage House, a Brook House complete with a brook going by, and then down the road, there’s the Art

Deco “Tech” building, where, according to the manufactured mythology, the Ranch owner’s son rebelled and built a vineyard. For verisimilitude, there are real grapes growing outside the front of the Tech building, just as, for looks, there are horses pastured on the winding road leading to the exit of the Ranch. I worked in the so-called Stable House, where there were offices, not horses. As a secretary, I had French doors from my office leading out to a cobblestone courtyard where a large piece of Nineteenth Century farm equipment sat picturesquely rusting. The sofa in my office was down-filled, and there were gentlemen who were daily responsible for stocking the wood for my working fireplace. My non-union starting salary was \$25,000 a year. One Saturday, while I was working unpaid overtime and had left the French doors open for a breeze, a hawk flew in and landed on the back of the sofa in front of me. We exchanged glances. After a few failed terrifying attempts to leave the building by flying into walls, the hawk went out the French doors through which it had arrived. Although this was not staged by George, it was so fantastic it could have been. Afterward, only the hawk feathers left scattered around my office convinced me the hawk had visited.

While the company’s prosperity owes itself to George Lucas’s business sense and love of the movies, and to the hundreds of bright, dedicated people employed to support that, the place is a peculiar fantasy of George Lucas, down to its smallest details. George allegedly did not like the fact that he could see a building from his office in the Main House, so he had his crew build and landscape a gentle sloping hill between the two buildings to improve his office view. The county-mandated fire trucks on the Ranch are painted a tasteful maroon because, it was rumored, George doesn’t like fire-engine red. I was warned about the “Art Police” before I encountered the phenomena. The Ranch

aesthetic is so strictly enforced that if you put something objectionable up on the wall behind your desk, the Art Police (at that time a lady named Mary) will insist you remove it. In the Main House, where George works, the approved art tends toward original Aubrey Beardsleys and Norman Rockwells. In the peripheral buildings, approved art includes lots of bucolic Northern Californian landscapes. I tested the Art Police by hanging a large abstract collage I made called “It’s Big. It’s Pink” behind my desk. Soon, Mary came by and gently, apologetically told me I had to take it down.

While we worked as employees, we also served in another function: the employees are also “extras” to serve as the fantasy of collegiality for George without the responsibility of interaction—I was instructed in my job interview, after I had been offered the job, that my employment would be terminated immediately if I went up and spoke to George at any time. Once, while standing behind George in the lunch line, I made a joke. He laughed. That was our sole encounter during my time on the Ranch. I was not fired.

During my time there, a person *was* fired for speaking with George. In one way, I understand this: the man has been besieged by people with stars in their eyes, enchanted by the movies he produced. The tall gates and fencing surrounding the Ranch attempt to keep both deer and stalkers off the property.

What lingers in my memory is the aroma of the golden rolling hills, something else George did not make, and the shock of pleasure on hot days, when, during lunch break, after diving from the dock, my body hit the cool water of Lake Ewok, a manmade lake much too near the septic system. The turtles sunned themselves on rocks nearby.

The septic system often had problems because, a maintenance guy told me, it kept getting clogged with condoms. Plumbing problems aside, I loved how peaceful the Ranch was, how quiet, how good it smelled: the fragrant plants, furniture polish, steak from the cafeteria, the fireplace. So many growing things—there was a full-time staff of gardeners. The dress code was terrific; we were expected to wear flannel shirts and jeans, like George did. Despite or perhaps in part because of its Dickensian overtones, I also enjoyed the annual holiday employee gift of a turkey from George.

Actual celebrity encounters were few, although they were often sighted at lunch. Once I gave Steven Spielberg a phone message. Another time, I drove by a fellow walking in my direction whom I realized was Robert Redford. The sunlight reflecting off his golden hair was startling. Jack Nicholson poked his head in my office—he was looking for the Tech Building and he was lost. Unnerved, I walked with Jack down my cobblestone path to his minivan, got in, knocked all his CDs to the ground outside the vehicle, picked them up and got in again, and then directed him and the other occupants of the cigarette-smoke-filled vehicle (all spoke fast fluent French and all wore black) to their destination. They thanked me. When I got out of the van, I felt grateful for clean air. Sometimes we employees got requests to volunteer as film extras. My most significant film role was that of an extra screaming for Elvis in a David Lynch film.

One of the conditions of my employment was my signing a confidentiality agreement stating I would not discuss what I did and the projects I worked on. My years working for Lucasfilm and LucasArts Entertainment Company, both at the Ranch and at the Kerner Complex, and later for Lucasfilm Ltd.'s legal counsel as a paralegal assistant, will have to inform this project in ways other than reports on my work experience. My

job was not prestigious. I was there, I observed, I asked questions, and I took note in this peculiar enclave of a wildly successful independent filmmaker. When my employers offered to promote me, I refused, in part because it would interfere with the time my job gave me to observe what interested me.

What working at Lucasfilm gave me, aside from some company achievement awards, rent money, and the charm of this strange place, was an ongoing interest in the hundreds of different jobs and people who make a motion picture company, people who are almost always legally bound by the companies who employ them to keep silent about what they have helped create. I loved my colleagues. I was inspired by their creativity and intelligence, their awesome dedication, and their humor.

Even at the time, I knew my Lucasfilm work experience was exceptional in the industry. To state the obvious, in the absence of effective labor unions, safe and decent working conditions occur at the whim of a good employer. George Lucas is an idiosyncratic motion picture producer, from the first generation of picture makers whose training came from the American university system rather than the Hollywood “studio system.”² George Lucas was one of several independent filmmakers, including Francis Ford Coppola (who made the *Godfather* films) and Saul Zaentz (who made *Amadeus*) who chose to settle in the Bay Area.

² The term “studio system” describes a type and period of American film production from about 1917 to the late 1940s. Five major Hollywood studios—MGM, Paramount, RKO, Warner Brothers, and Twentieth Century Fox—held a vertical oligopoly over production, distribution, and exhibition. The so-called “Big Five (mentioned above) and the “Little Three” Columbia, United Artists and Universal made for an oligopolic hold on the motion picture business. This was the “Studio System,” “an early film production system that constituted a sort of assembly-line process for moviemaking; major film studios controlled not only actors but also directors, editors, writers and other employees, all of whom worked under exclusive contracts.” (Campbell 605). It has also been called the “golden age of filmmaking.” The oligopoly was broken up by the 1948 Supreme Court Paramount decision which dictated that the studios could not own the theaters.

My employment occurred during a peak period of post-war independent film production, before the present era which is characterized by globalized studio ownership. During this period, innovations in computer technology revitalized motion picture special effects. These innovations were inspired in part by the *Star Wars* films and helped create the prosperity I witnessed. Lucasfilm also profited from the flexible outsourcing of the Hollywood studios that employed his special effects teams at Industrial Light and Magic, and his post-production facilities on Skywalker Ranch.

The Ranch where I worked is a place for industry insiders (not the public) to see the “public face” or front of George Lucas’s production factory. The day the hawk flew into my office, I was working on moving my division backstage, off the Ranch to the Kerner Complex, corporate industrial office buildings and work buildings in downtown San Rafael. The buildings of the Kerner Complex, which also housed Lucasfilm’s award-winning Industrial Light and Magic, sat by an open sewer that ran past all the buildings, just off Highway 101. Forget about the private cinema, and the organic garden which grew vegetables for the Ranch lunch table; our Kerner office, like all the others on Kerner, was an anonymous, cookie-cutter, business building. And we were movable extras, sent on and offstage at will. Periodically we would come to work to find that 25 percent of the workforce had just lost their jobs. Survivors would explain earnestly that George did this because he was grumpy about not starting the new series of *Star Wars* films. The fact that, as non-union employees, we had no recourse against his whims was not an issue. The unemployed--in shock, anger, bewilderment, or sadness-- simply packed up their desks, and left. Our collective memory had somehow become erased--

about the long period during the same century when American workers did have recourse against the whims of billionaire employers.

* * *

The most successful independent film maker in history, George Lucas, has never shot a major motion picture in Hollywood.³ His contempt for Hollywood is legendary, and predates his actual experience of it. (Lucas's father, a small-town businessman in Modesto, California, raised his son to believe Hollywood was "Sin City" (Kline 1999:220).)

Lucas formed his own opinion while in film school at the University of Southern California (USC), and during his early career as a filmmaker. In 1967, Lucas was awarded a USC scholarship to film a documentary about the making of *Mackenna's Gold* on location in Kanab, Utah. What he saw appalled him. Lucas says, "We had never been around such opulence...zillions of dollars being spent every five minutes on this huge, unwieldy thing. It was mind-boggling to us because we had been making [student] films for \$300, and seeing this incredible waste—that was the worst of Hollywood" (Pollock 1983:70). Among the things he noted was the union requirement that a teamster had to drive every vehicle, even if someone wanted to use their *own* car. Also, an entire crew of local technicians being paid full salary sat around while the film was shot by imported Hollywood technicians (Baxter 1999:77). By that time, the average age of a Hollywood film crew worker seemed to Lucas to be about fifty-five, and they were not training their replacements. Lucas's professors at USC had repeatedly told him and his classmates that it would be impossible to get into the Hollywood feature film business after graduation

³ What I learned about this while working at Lucasfilm is proprietary information; so, I have to rely on the public record to continue my story.

(Pollock, 1983:42, 43). Lucas tried to join the Writers Guild and the Directors Guild after he finished film school and was immediately rejected (Pollock 1983:248). According to one of Lucas's biographers, Dale Pollock, Lucas came to see the guilds as "barriers to making movies, reinforcing Hollywood's image as an exclusive club" (Pollock 1983:248).

However, film school had also taught Lucas that because he knew how to light, shoot and cut film, he could make movies. Lucas says, "The studio system is dead...It died...when corporations took over and the studio heads suddenly became agents and lawyers and accountants. The power is with the people now. The workers have the means of production" (Pollock 1983:246).

After graduation, Lucas moved 450 miles north of Hollywood to the San Francisco Bay Area with other young filmmakers including Francis Ford Coppola, Walter Murch, John Korty, Willard Huyck, and Gloria Katz. Another of Lucas's biographers, John Baxter, says, they were "people who shared his commitment to Marin County as a place to make movies, or who couldn't find work in heavily unionized Hollywood" (Baxter 1999:139, Pollock 1983:84).

As a fledgling director, Lucas then worked with the inefficiencies and vagaries of the film unions and Hollywood studios firsthand. While making his first major motion picture, *THX 1138*, which was shot in the newly finished train tunnels of the Bay Area BART system, Lucas noticed that the professionals he hired did not do a better job than the students he'd worked with in school, "They still put the film in backward and screwed up...Only in the professional industry, you pay for it—enormously" (Pollock 1983:92).

He was later devastated by the edits to *THX 1138* that the Hollywood studio executives insisted upon. Lucas says, “The cuts didn’t make the movie any better; they had absolutely no effect on the movie at all...It was a very personal kind of film and I didn’t think they had the right to come in and just arbitrarily chop it up at their own whim. I’m not really good with authority figures anyway so I was completely outraged” (Pollock 1983:97).

Lucas’s second film, *American Graffiti*, was shot in twenty-eight days in Northern California. This film, too, was re-edited by the studio. Lucas says of the edits,

You write [a film], you slave over it, you stay up twenty-eight nights getting cold and sick. It’s exactly like raising a kid. You raise a kid for two or three years, you struggle with it, then somebody comes along and says, ‘Well, it’s a very nice kid, but I think we ought to cut off one of its fingers.’ So they take their little axe and chop off one of the fingers. They say, ‘Don’t worry. Nobody will notice. She’ll live, everything will be all right.’ But I mean, it hurts a great deal (Baxter 1999:138).

The most profitable film in Fox’s history in terms of cost-to-profit ratio, *American Graffiti* cost \$775,000 to make and sold over \$117 million in tickets (Salewicz 1998).

This gave George Lucas power to negotiate for the final edit of his next film, *Star Wars*, as well as the power to trade \$500,000 in salary up front for the merchandising rights to the film, a bargain that would later help make him a billionaire.

Even though Lucas lived in Marin, he shot *Star Wars* in Britain and Tunisia. Aside from his antipathy for Hollywood, several other issues were named as factors, including the cost (the devalued pound made shooting in Britain advantageous), the scenery in Tunisia, and the number of available sound stages in Britain (they needed forty-five sets on eleven sound stages, and that wasn’t available in Hollywood) (Baxter 1999:182, Kline 1999:49).

However, Lucas also had difficulties with organized labor there. Supported by Harold Wilson's Labor government, the British film unions were strong, and crews worked an eight-hour day with two mandatory tea breaks (Baxter 1999:183, 208). They stopped work promptly at 5:30 PM. When Lucas proposed that the crew stay an extra two hours every day, this proposal was soundly defeated by a union ballot (Salewicz 1998:58). Lucas saw himself falling behind schedule because of the union's inflexibility (Pollock 1983:162). The crew was "rough" on Lucas (Baxter 1999:204). Accustomed to the "loud and expansive Hollywood directors who usually worked in England" the crew did not know what to make of this short, slight, kid who wore jeans and old sneakers on the set. His natural reserve also worked against him (Pollock 1983:161).

Many of the special effects for the *Star Wars* films were made in California. Initially, in 1975, Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) was located in Van Nuys, a Los Angeles suburb, because of the proximity to Hollywood's film labs (Pollock 1983:154,170). There are two versions of the story about why ILM was not a union shop. The first is that Lucas tried to get the ILM crew into the film local, but according to Pollock, "union leaders had no use for ILM's resident weirdos" which saved Lucas in overtime and benefits (1983:172). Another story is that Lucas's employees at ILM were sworn to secrecy about their non-union status. However, a local projectionist, the one IATSE⁴ member in town, blew the whistle. John Baxter reports that Lucas and his producer Gary Kurtz viewed local IATSE members as, "a gang of hobbyists and crazies" (1999:177). Either way, the non-union status worked for Lucas because he wanted a

⁴ The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artist and Allied Crafts of the United States and Canada, AFL-CIO, CLC (IATSE) union includes both a wide variety Hollywood film workers (from cameramen to publicists to make-up artists to projectionists) and theatrical stage labor.

malleable and compliant group. Lucas says, “I wanted to be able to say, ‘It must look like this, not that.’ I don’t want to be handed an effect at the end of five months and be told, ‘Here’s your special effect, sir.’ I want to be able to have more say about what’s going on” (Salewicz 1998:62, Kline 1999:50).

After *Star Wars* became the top-grossing film of all time (Salewicz 1998:72), and Lucas released the sequel, *The Empire Strikes Back*, he started to have trouble with the Directors Guild and the Writers Guild (which had finally accepted him for membership). Lucas says, “The Hollywood unions have been taken over by the same lawyers and accountants who took over the studios” (Baxter 1999:324).

The Directors Guild fined Lucas \$250,000 because he put *Empire Strikes Back* director Irvin Kershner’s credit at end of the film rather than the beginning, as the Guild contract mandates. Lucas argued that this convention would have disrupted the opening “text crawl” of the film, (a recycled “innovation” from old-time movies, the “crawl” thrusts the viewer right in the middle of the comic-book-style action). Claiming that Lucas had given himself a credit by having put the Lucasfilm logo at the beginning of the film, the DGA threatened to have the film removed from the cinemas (if the dispute went to arbitration). Lucas, to no avail, pointed out that his name is not George Lucasfilm, just as William Fox’s name was not Twentieth Century-Fox (Kline 1999 139). Eventually they settled out of court for \$25,000 and Lucas resigned from the Guild, noting that none of those funds went to Kershner, instead they went into the “business agents’ pockets” (Salewicz 1998:86, Kline 1999:140).

Even Kershner believed Lucas was wronged. He said, “The DGA works for me...I don’t work for the DGA. I think the Guild hurts itself by doing this sort of thing.

As a result, Lucas is now going to get a British director for his next film, and Hollywood is losing work because of the way the DGA acted” (Baxter 1999:325). Lucas says, “I feel the unions tried to extort money from me for their own coffers. They used a thin technicality, but the only reason they were doing it was to get money” (Pollock 1983:249).

Lucas’s Writers Guild dispute had to do with crediting the contributions of writer Philip Kaufman to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. After Lucas negotiated with Kaufman so he would get part of a point for his work on the character of Indiana Jones and the story itself, Kaufman later requested screen credit. The Writers Guild took Kaufman’s side. This infuriated Lucas who resigned his membership in the guild. As a result of these two disputes, by the early 1980s, Lucas could no longer write or direct films in the United States. Also by that time, as Lucas pointed out, he was so rich he did not need to work anymore (Baxter 1999:325).

Lucas also resigned from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (which presents the annual Oscar awards). Only years later, in 1992, when the Academy awarded him its Irving Thalberg Award (a special Oscar), did he rejoin the Academy. In 1997 he quietly rejoined the Directors Guild (Baxter 1999:389,394).

In the late 1990s, Lucas traveled to Australia to investigate the possibility of making the *Star Wars* prequels there. Australia had many advantages, including a pleasant climate, soft currency and low-cost labor. Those prequels were budgeted at \$120 million each. When asked why he went to Australia, Lucas first said, “In the end it is the talent that is here. I go where the talent is.” He was then asked what talent was in Australia that he couldn’t find in California, and he changed his tune, “We are very keen

to help bring in [to Australia] and update some of the more esoteric crafts that are necessary for large stage productions and to expand that part of the industry” (Baxter 1999:399). Lucas has said,

I’ve been saying for a long time that Hollywood is dead. That doesn’t mean the film industry is dead. But for one region to dominate is dead ... The filmmaker hasn’t figured out that he doesn’t need the agents and the studio executives. What is Hollywood? An antiquated, out-of-date distribution apparatus, a monopoly, a system designed to exploit the filmmaker. The system is collapsing because of new technologies. The movie companies are structured inefficiently. In good times, it doesn’t show. But they won’t be able to survive the bad times (Kline 1999:144).

Of course, that’s easy to say if you’re George Lucas. Twenty-five years later, tens of thousands of ordinary people—actors, writers, directors, editors, camera people, carpenters, plumbers, agents, secretaries, producers and janitors—still struggle to make a living in the Hollywood film industry.

* * *

Even though I moved on from working at Lucasfilm to professional researching and teaching—work better suited to my temperament—I still take a child-like joy in visiting a friend working on a movie set and looking closely at that often blurred threshold between reality and fantasy. A few years ago, I worried to a Hollywood filmmaker friend about finding a subject for my dissertation. My friend said, “Come visit me on the set. I have your dissertation topic.” After I left the soundstage during the visit, my friend introduced me to Gary Dunham, the president of the International Cinematographers Guild, the union local which includes the motion picture camera department (directors of photography, camera operators, camera assistants, digital imaging technicians, loaders, and utilities), still photographers, and publicists. As we stood in the hallway, Dunham and my friend kidded each other about people in their own union threatening to kill them. This alarmed me because it was clear they were no longer

talking about the fantasy world of moviemaking, but rather their real lives. Dunham began to tell me about his efforts to bring democratic values to what has historically been a “sweetheart” union, allied with the producers’ interests (for example, during the last century, the president of Dunham’s union, the president of Fox Studios, and members of the Mafia were jailed for their illegal dealings with one another). Dunham talked about the danger of this work in relationship to his and others’ efforts to combat a phenomena he called *runaway production*--studios and producers outsourcing Hollywood film work to other countries. Because of my knowledge about Lucasfilm, this was an issue with which I had some familiarity.

Over the course of the next few years, as I visited California, interviewed local New York movie makers, and spoke by phone with members of the various Hollywood unions, a picture began to form of a life-and-death struggle among the people who make movies, their unions, and the major production companies.

Union threats and actual violence are nothing new. However, because these people are Hollywood film makers and work on the most profoundly influential mass media the world has known, I am impelled by two key questions: What are the social and historical roots of this situation? And what is the relationship between the conditions of Hollywood labor and the movies’ profound influence?

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List of Abbreviations and terms:

Above-the-line A term used to describe unionized actors, directors and writers

Below-the-line A term used to describe unionized technicians, craft workers and others, including props managers, grips, camera people, publicists, lab technicians, sound technicians, editors, costumers, make-up and hair artists, electricians, set painters, first aid workers, studio arts, art directors and scenic artists, animators, set designers, script supervisors, studio teachers, carpenters, drivers, and costume designers.

CDU Coalition for a Democratic Union. IATSE Local 600 members committed to democratic values, member employment, member health care and insurance, and ending runaway production.

CGI Computer-generated images

DP Director of Photography

DGA Directors Guild of America

EMT Emergency Medical Technician

FMPC The Federation of Motion Picture Crafts

FTAC Film and Television Action Committee, an organization whose sole purpose is to fight runaway production.

IATSE The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artist and Allied Crafts of the United States and Canada, AFL-CIO, CLC, includes both Hollywood below-the-line labor and theatrical stage labor.

IA a nickname for the IATSE

IMF International Monetary Fund

LAPD the Los Angeles Police Department

Local 600: One of the 18 IATSE Hollywood Locals, comprised of camera people and publicists.

MPAA The Motion Picture Association of America. An activist organization that lobbies on behalf of the interest of the motion picture producers.

NEB The IATSE National Executive Board

PA Production Assistant

SAG Screen Actors Guild

SWAT special weapons and tactics

WGA Writers Guild of America

WTO World Trade Organization

List of Charts

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Chapter 1, Introduction: A Collaborative Art

At the top of the Empire State Building, a giant gorilla swats at bi-planes as they dive close to him. Machine gunners in each passing plane shoot bullets into the gorilla. Mortally wounded, he pauses a moment to make sure that the young woman with him is safe, and then he goes on defiantly roaring his opposition to the attacking planes. Finally, riddled with bullets, he falls to his death at 34th Street and Fifth Avenue, across from what is today the CUNY Graduate Center.

As I worked on my dissertation at the Graduate Center over the last few years, I had reason to give a good deal of thought to that giant gorilla. When people talk about the iconic film *King Kong*, they often forget the plot: it is a movie about an overseas American film production that goes horribly wrong. They also often forget that *King Kong* was the first major talking-picture hit that relied upon a large group of talented, behind-the-scenes workers to turn an eighteen-inch puppet into a movie star.

Against Auteur Theory

Auteur theory emerged with the *Nouvelle Vague* (New Wave) of French cinema during the late 1950s and early 1960s. It emphasized “the singular role of the director as a film’s creator,” and is most often associated with filmmakers like Jean-Luc Goddard and François Truffaut, who made highly personal films like *The 400 Blows* (1959), *Breathless* (1960), and *Day for Night* (1973). My former employer, George Lucas, sees himself as something of an auteur. He has said of those filmmakers, “When you find someone who’s going the same direction as you, you don’t feel so alone” (Brody 2007, Sarris in Sitney 1970).

The auteurs were passionately devoted to American cinema of earlier periods. Merian C. Cooper, who (with Ernest B. Schoedsack) produced and directed *King Kong* (1933), saw himself as the creator of the film (Woods 2005:6). Of course, the role of film director is important. As Bruce Bahrenburg, the *King Kong* (1976) publicist, pointed out: “While the role of director may have been magnified recently by avant-garde critics, there is no doubt that it is a crucial one. The director must have the artistic concept of the film—and see that it gets shot” (Bahrenburg 1976:97). Actor Charles Grodin said of *King Kong* (1976) director John Gullermin that his role was significant: “[He’s] really the star of this movie. He’s got the rhythm and quality of the film in his mind constantly and holds it all together through all the delays” (Morton 205:195).⁵

While the field of Cinema Studies tends to promote auteur theory, a number of people who have studied the creative process, such as sociologist Howard Becker, offer a different perspective concerning the fruition of creative work: “All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number of people” (Becker 1982:1). Economist Richard Florida, who studies workers in creative fields including filmmaking, is emphatic that the auteur theory is not only wrong, but broadly destructive to human potential,

One of the greatest fallacies of modern times is that creativity is limited to a small group of people with particular talents. Most people, the belief goes, don't want to be creative, couldn't do it if asked, and would be very uncomfortable in an environment where creativity was expected of them. This belief is false (Florida 2007:34).

In *Organizing Creativity*, Kara Joliff Gould shows empirically how film art is collectively made. Gould spent three months observing the production of three

⁵ One early reader of this project said of Gullermin’s previous film, “The auteur in the *Towering Inferno* is the guy doing the special effects.”

consecutive episodes of a one-hour primetime television drama,⁶ and concludes that “despite the scientifically managed structure of contemporary film production crews in the U.S., crew members at lower levels of the hierarchy can and do make substantial creative contributions to the final product” (2006:iv). She found that “experienced lower-level production workers often have a wealth of knowledge and expertise beyond their own crafts from which the entire production can benefit” (2006:v). Gould maps the “shifting authority” of creativity and shows how rank-and-file crew members contribute creatively (2006:26).

This shared creativity is hard for the general public to see because of what I call “the paradox of invisibility.” Especially in film, really good work makes itself invisible. It becomes a seamless part of a whole, and there's no way the viewer can appreciate it, because it is taken for granted. For example, I asked camera assistant Gary Dunham about moments on film in projects he worked on that he was particularly proud of (As a camera assistant, his work is “pulling focus.” He makes sure that the picture is in focus no matter where the camera moves.) Dunham said:

It's three o'clock in the morning and everybody's tired, and they want to go home, and it's all up to you. You don't have a rehearsal. You've got some guy running at you from sixty feet to minimum focus, which is five inches, and then [he] stops, and you have to judge that. And then you just do it, and everything's perfect. And you walk away...

Dunham adds, “Things in film will stand out if they're mistakes. If it's soft, [he laughs] you just go, ‘Ugh,’ but if it's in focus and sharp, you're not looking at it. You're looking at the acting.” This paradox of invisibility supports the false or exaggerated claims of the auteur.

⁶ Institutional Review Board (IRB) mandates required that the name of the show remain confidential (Gould Correspondence with author 2008).

I propose an alternative to the auteur theory: that the role of artist changes throughout the production and distribution process, much like a relay race where the baton is passed from person to person. In crude summary, the writer and whoever raises the money to make the film are the first and second artists.⁷ The writer passes the script to the director whose receptive and organizational arts are exercised through collaboration with masters of other arts: cinematography, costume, makeup, light, acting, scenarists, and the contributions of the crew. After the film is “in the can,” or the pixels are on the hard drive, the post-production workers, the visual and sound effects editors and the editors’ assistants then become “the artist” in coordination, again with the director. Distribution relies on the art of publicity, which brings the film to a public which rarely comprehends more than the art of the actor. The director and the producer can play artistic roles throughout the process.

In the entertainment business, for at least the past four decades, it has been conventional to talk about Hollywood labor in terms of those who are either above-the-line (actors, writers, and directors) or below-the-line (craft workers) (Scheuer 1963). However, this project takes a step back, to look at the workers as a whole, acknowledging that significant contributions are made at all levels of the production. In relation to this, I argue that film labor job loss differs from other forms of job loss. While there is an art to a seam sewn in a sweatshop, that art does not often result in a product in which subtle differences have a broad impact on ideology and cultural understanding for millions of

⁷ If you think raising money is not an art, you might find it beneficial to study this subject. An argument for the producer’s role as artist in other parts of production goes as follows: producer Marty Bregman says, “I either buy a book, or have an idea, or acquire a magazine piece which I believe will ultimately make a good film. After I acquire the rights, I ‘cast’ a writer who has the right sensibility for this specific material.... After I have a screenplay, I bring on a director” (Baker 1991:285).

people. Elements of runaway production, as they are discussed throughout this project, are not simply about labor, but also about resulting aesthetic and artistic considerations which can have substantial cultural costs and benefits.

The Hollywood Sewer

Creativity emerges from specific contexts and cannot be fully understood apart from its history. S. J. Perelman said that Hollywood is, “a dreary industrial town controlled by hoodlums of enormous wealth, the ethical sense of a pack of jackals, and taste so degraded that it befouled everything it touched” (Mitgang 1964:41). The phenomenon Perelman described continues to the present era. For example, the studio executives were sued recently by the Screen Actors Guild for employing premature babies for use in film production in order to get around the Screen Actors Guild contract that prohibits the use of child actors younger than two-weeks old (this was enacted to protect newborns from use in film production). The executives’ argument was that prematurely born babies fell outside the age guidelines of the contract (Blumenthal 1997, Lewis 2007, Robb 1996).

To Perelman’s statement, I would add that rank-and-file workers are not unaffected by this befoulment. Consistently throughout my research, I learned about historical and currently living individuals who--and by extension groups of people--behaved in ways ranging from the offensive to the allegedly and actually criminal.⁸ This activity is not limited to studio representatives. Many unions are rife with nepotism,

⁸ For more information, see also Aller 1972, Neilsen & Mailes 1995, Schwartz 1982, Prindle 1988, Robb 1995, Verrier 2006.

cronyism, racism,⁹ violence, sexism,¹⁰ ageism, “business unionism,”¹¹ and all manner of other corruption (Nicholson 2004). The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artist and Allied Crafts of the United States and Canada, AFL-CIO, CLC (IATSE) is a superb example (Nielsen & Mailes 1995). For instance, IATSE President Thomas C. Short, who held office during the time I researched this project, was a third-generation IATSE member. He was once indicted with his father for embezzling from the IATSE. (The charges against Short were dismissed. His father served prison time.) (Verrier 2007). In keeping with the IATSE tradition, President Short regularly employed profane language,¹² threats, blacklisting,¹³ bullying, and physical violence to keep film workers under control in order to deliver a compliant workforce to the studios (Robb 1995, Nielsen & Mailes 1995, Verrier 2007, Wright 2006).

⁹ See “Scribes: Same Old scene, White males still dominate writing work force” in *The Hollywood Reporter*, March, 9, 2007, 1.

¹⁰ See “Low Clearance, The ‘Celluloid Ceiling’ is sagging” in *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 14, 2007, s-2, and *The Hollywood Reporter* “Women in Entertainment” issue, December 2006.

¹¹ The term “business unionism” is used to describe practices by union leaders which have allied them with business interests rather than the interests of their rank-and-file membership whom they are supposed to be protecting (Aronowitz 1991).

¹² President Short has publicly referred to both his direct employees and democratically elected local representatives as “pains in the ass” (Coleman 2003).

¹³ Blacklisting is defined as, “to put on a blacklist.” A blacklist is, “a list of persons who are disapproved of or are to be punished or boycotted” (Websters 1999:119). In this case, film workers in the union can no longer get union film jobs because of the blacklist. This has been going on in the motion picture business since long before the HUAC-related blacklists, and has continued long after them (Nielsen & Mailes 1995). Despite the fact that President Short has publicly stated, “The IATSE deeply regrets the blacklisting days of Hollywood...Our Union leadership and its members do not condone the singling out of any individual on the basis of his or her political views” (Variety Short 2002), as of 2007, the IATSE by-laws still condone blacklisting, long after the other guilds have removed that language from their by-laws, and in defiance of IATSE membership protest (Wexler 2007 interview).

The Argument

The Lives of Kong: Labor and Moviemaking in Three Acts focuses on the eight-decades-long tensions in Hollywood, between film workers and the studios, when American film production goes to other countries or regions. The phenomenon dates back to the 1920s. Labor union members first called it “runaway production” during the 1950s (Variety 1950c). Today, runaway production is the most significant issue facing the majority of unionized American film workers. It costs the United States over \$10.3 billion and 23,000 jobs a year (DGA 2008).

This issue has received little attention for many reasons. A 2001 Department of Commerce report suggests one reason why:

When production is lost, it neither generates the same tangible, visual image of unemployed workers standing outside the fence of a shuttered physical factory, nor does it elicit a cohesive nationwide industry response. However, the economic impact and job loss are no less real or important to local communities (Miller et. al. 2001:12, 50).

Also, Hollywood labor issues in general are, for reasons unique to the entertainment business, hard to see. Movie publicity directs a huge amount of attention toward the films themselves, and scrutinizes only a specific part of Hollywood workers’ lives, namely the lurid aspects of private lives of movie stars with substance abuse problems or in domestic relationship transitions. “The dazzling spotlight which Hollywood turns upon its Personalities throws into shadow the thousands who work in the movie studios—technicians and craftsmen, musicians and sound engineers, painters, carpenters, laboratory workers” (Rosten 1941). In terms of production profits, this spotlight creates the star, and aids substantially in the financial success of the motion picture business.

Previous researchers argued that while runaway production had its roots as early as the late 1930s, it emerged as a significant problem only in the last few decades. I found that this dynamic social process emerged in conjunction with the birth of democratic labor organizing in 1920s Hollywood, and in response to larger global forces. *The Lives of Kong* shows this ongoing contested process during what I found to be three significant periods, from late 1920s – 1971, from 1972 – 1998, and from 1999 to the present. During these periods, domestic and foreign film studio management; workers and their unions; and state, federal, and foreign government officials have struggled over this issue in different ways. I examine aspects of this hypothesis through three different perspectives: newspaper reports from the 1920s to the present, oral histories from film workers, and a comparative study of the production process and content analyses of the three *King Kong* films (1933, 1976, and 2005), each of which was made during one of the periods.

Both the word “runaway” used in a general sense, and the term “runaway production” used to describe film work have been employed many ways. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first known use of the word “runaway” occurred in the sixteenth century. Initially, the term largely was used by property owners and referred to property running away. First there were runaway slaves, then horses. In the 18th and 19th centuries there were runaway elopements, railway trains, and wagons. *Scribner’s* in 1925 wrote of the “runaway market.”¹⁴ However, only after World War II is runaway defined by workers to describe their jobs, and not defined by the property owners.

¹⁴ Prior to the advent of runaway production as a film-labor related phenomenon during the 1930s, when the word “runaway” appeared in the newspapers in relationship to motion pictures, it had to do largely with young girls running away to Hollywood to become stars, or perhaps a runaway horse in relation to a motion picture shot.

“Runaway” was first used in union-related matters in 1949 to describe, “a plant transferred to destroy union effectiveness and to evade bargaining duties” (OED 1989:266). I do not know who first used it in film. The transfer to motion-picture usage could have been suggested to some reader of a 1949 *New York Times* article about a film called *Runaway*, shooting on location in Yonkers, New York (Weiler 1949).

In March 1950, the Hollywood trade paper *Daily Variety* discussed the “bartering away still more jobs of American film workers” in relationship to using European workers in Hollywood foreign film production. Without crediting a source, they called this phenomenon, “runaway” foreign production (Variety 1950c). Subsequently, the term “runaway” has been used in many ways in film production, as is described in detail in the pages that follow.

The many meanings of runaway production were brought home to me during the process of working on this project. One day, not long after thousands of film workers had held a highly publicized rally in the Hollywood Bowl about runaway production (meaning jobs lost due to labor outsourcing), I was sitting in on a pre-production meeting nearby in Los Angeles for a feature film. The director, set designer, and cinematographer were discussing camera angles for the upcoming shoot. When they took a break, the director asked me about my work. I mentioned “runaway production,” and he interrupted, “Let me tell you about runaway production. My runaway production costs are going through the roof. I don’t know what I’m going to do.” “Runaway production costs” is a term commonly used by management to describe their expenses. This can easily be confused with “runaway production” the term used by many film workers to describe job loss (the shifts in the meanings of the term are discussed throughout the

dissertation. The shifts in language use are plotted graphically in Chapters 6 and 8). Use of this term can also be confusing because in American film industry history, Hollywood itself was the site of the early American film “runaways.” The original Hollywood producers initially moved away to Hollywood, running away from the East Coast Edison Trust film making monopoly in the early twentieth century.

Even during the period when the term was initially use to describe outsourcing jobs, film producers and others have countered with arguments that runaway productions were being made for other reasons, for example, to take advantage of authentic scenery necessary to the film’s script (see Chapter 4 for more information). For this researcher, following the tale of runaway production in news reports often felt like watching a cat-and-mouse game. Each time the union representatives caught the film studios in a new runaway production situation, the producers suddenly found new excuses. The union representatives either had to work to resolve the problem or they discovered the excuse was mostly if not wholly fabricated. Then the studios would come up with a new one. The definition of runaway production is, and has been, protean. With no intention of diminishing other definitions of runaway production or the concerns of those who use the term differently, the reason I focus on the film workers’ definition is that these runaway productions have potential cultural costs and implications on a national and international level.

“This is Not a Labor Aristocracy Suffering a Temporary Inconvenience.”

The public perception of Hollywood wealth is accurate: there is an enormous amount of money in the American film business. But the wealth is not evenly distributed. Blockbuster profits in Hollywood depend on the success of a tiny margin of

films: Only three percent of those movies are big hits, and the perception that star-driven movies are more profitable is false: “the sample average profit of superstar movies is negative...[M]ost movies lose money” (Devany 2004:225,234). Despite the fact that stars do not guarantee box-office success, salaries of star actors, directors, and writers are set in relationship to negotiations among high-level agents, distributors and financiers. “With this mercantile power at work, the variable in limiting budgets takes place below the line [with regard to salaries of all other film workers], where union power can be eluded by shooting elsewhere” (Miller et.al. 2005:119). Even actors, writers and directors, over the long haul, do not benefit in the way that the mass media tabloids suggest. For example, the average Hollywood film director and the average Hollywood actor can expect to make only two movies. Seventy-five percent of directors direct one film (Devany 2004:238). Two-thirds of the members of the Screen Actors Guild make less than \$2,000 a year (Prindle 1988). And ninety-five percent of Screen Actors Guild members make less than \$5,000 a year. All below-the-line workers, including cinematographers, editors and makeup artists who win Academy Awards, are “day hires” who can be fired at will after a single day’s work.¹⁵ The average work day, which in the 1940s was about eight hours, has gradually increased to approximately 16 – 22 hours (Wexler 2007). As film scholar Toby Miller put it, “This is not a labour aristocracy suffering a temporary inconvenience” (2001:82). For those who can get jobs, the working conditions are, for the most part, not conducive to living a life that meets the basic human need to provide for one’s family so they can live with dignity. In almost any

¹⁵ There is also a misconception that these workers are all extraordinarily wealthy. Most--69.2 percent--of Local 600 members earn less than \$100,000 a year (8.1% of the members earn over \$200,000. 8.4% earn less than \$20,000, 12.7% earn between \$20,000 and \$39,999, 16.2% earn between \$40,000 and \$59,999) (Glover 2004).

other industry, these working conditions would be considered ample grounds for large-scale labor activism. Yet, for anyone who complains, there is a glamour-drunk surplus army of trained talent eager to take that job, and IATSE union leadership willing to blacklist the complainer (Wright 2006, Dunham 2006 interview).

For America as a nation, the loss of American film work has larger costs, “Harnessing the creative energy of people currently ignored and misused is crucial to our long-term economic prosperity” (Florida 2004:63).

It follows logically that American film unions, facing internationalized corporate capitalism, would organize globally with other film workers’ unions. However, given the labor climate briefly touched on above in the case of the IATSE, and explored in-depth in this project, it is understandable why the reach of the “International” IATSE has not extended beyond Canada, and film workers have not been able to organize internationally as their employers have moved business overseas. Further, given the difficulties which are described in this project, it is equally understandable that the IATSE, in an ongoing way, remains tragically impaired from within (see Chapter 9 for discussion of current issues hampering effective democratic film union organizing to combat runaway production).

* * *

The example of the dynamic social process of runaway production combined with the evidence from the production process and the film content of *King Kong*, together present a remarkable opportunity to approach a sociology of film. *King Kong*, originally made during the studio system era, has been remade in successive periods coincident with the phases of runaway production. Because this emblematic Hollywood film depicts film labor relations, it is possible to compare and contrast the changes in the labor conditions

during the film production process, and in the film's content. This analysis addresses the power and "magic" of cinema while acknowledging what sociologist Howard Becker in his art worlds analysis called "the complexity of cooperative networks" (Becker 1982:1).

I share with Toby Miller the following bias, "We regard films as commodities whose value is derived from the labour that makes them" (Miller et. al. 2005:5).

Because film is a creatively collaborative art form, the power of cinema is also derived from the labor that makes it. Film has mostly been studied either in terms of film content or film production. Rarely are the two connected. There has been little acknowledgement that labor, content, and audience share a correlation with each other and to the larger issue: the "connections between image and power" (Ewen 1999:xvi). This project makes those connections.

Chapter 2 Colonial Kong

“I am King Kong.”

--Merian C. Cooper, co-producer, *King Kong* (Woods 2005:6)

“Kong was the product of many contributions.”

--Ernest Schoedsack, co-producer, *King Kong* (Goldner1975:51)

Introduction

King Kong (1933) opened during the Great Depression, on March 2, 1933, two days before Franklin Roosevelt took office (Peary, G. 2005:94). At the time of the film’s release, the government had not yet responded in a meaningful way to the Americans’ desperation over unemployment and poverty. Driven by the despotism of studio management, Hollywood workers were in the process of organizing and building toward unionization (Balshofer and Miller 1967, Ross 1941).

Because *King Kong* was made during the studio system era, I had expectations about the origins of the picture which were not borne out by the facts. I expected it emerged as a packaged formula, that some writer in a room full of writers on a studio lot had come up with a gorilla picture and it had simply been produced by the machine-like process for which the studio system is famous. Instead, the roots of the film are highly personal, and based, in part, on the life experience of the producers, one of the writers, and the crew. The plot of *King Kong* also emerged from the ideas of previous eras, as well as events of the twentieth century.

The Tail End of the Nineteenth Century

In 1899, six-year-old Merian Cooper, the son of southern plantation owners in Jacksonville, Florida, received a birthday gift from an eponymous uncle. The gift, which would change his life, was a book called *Adventures and Explorations in Equatorial*

Africa published in 1871 by Paul du Chaillu. It inspired young Cooper with a thirst for international adventure and a strong interest in gorillas (Morton 2005). As Cooper said later in life, “I wanted to be an explorer. I wanted to fly. I had a sense of drama. I wanted to dramatize exploration” (Cooper and Schoedsack (1925) additional materials).¹⁶

The film industry, like young Cooper, had international interests almost from the start. By the late 1890s, for example, American and French filmmakers were already shooting in Canada at Niagara Falls (Gasher 1995). The American movie industry has, since its inception, relied on a wide range of international talent and locations. For example, in the early years, “motion picture production” often meant the theft of a foreign product.¹⁷ This production method saved the Americans from the costs of actors and other crew, the problem of coming up with a story, and almost all the difficulties involved in the process.

Although the Americans were pioneers in the piracy process, workers in other countries also duplicated films, and later developed large-scale businesses devoted to copying. The story “Break up of Big Film Theft Ring like Dime Novel” in the *San Jose Evening News* July 4, 1922, (page 7) describes stolen film being sent to a man called “King Kong,” a “Eurasian, part Irish and part Chinese, who once was a London Music-

¹⁶ A short person, Cooper did not mention that du Chaillu always referred to himself as the “shortest man of the party” (522). Young Cooper may have taken heart from the accomplishments of this earlier short adventurer.

¹⁷ Fred Balshofer, who later became one of the largest early independent producers, got his start in Philadelphia in 1905 at Siegmund Lubin’s company. Gold letters on the plate glass on the front of Lubin’s store read, “Manufacturer of Moving Pictures.” Balshofer’s job was to make duplicates of French films from Pathé Frères and Mèliés. Part of his work was to paint over the French companies’ trademarks on the celluloid. Once, while he was screening a film for a prospective customer, the man yelled, “Stop the machine!” In a rage, the man thumped on his chest and bellowed, “I made that picture. I am Georges Mèliés from Paris.” Lubin walked in and complained to Mèliés how hard it had been for Balshofer to paint over the trademark and left the room laughing. Speechless, Mèliés, “stamped out of the room” (Balshofer & Miller 1967:6-9). (International intellectual property rights were not at that time as well-defined as they are today.)

hall star and who has had a valorous record in the French Foreign Legion.” King Kong led an Asian film copying syndicate. Willis O’Brien, the man who would later animate the original *King Kong* and oversee the special effects, grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area, near where the “King Kong” (or sometimes “King Dong”) stories appeared. Perhaps, he read or heard of King Kong and later suggested the title of the film. Because O’Brien was notoriously taciturn and modest, the likelihood of his having taken credit for this contribution is small. Scholars and others often suggest that Cooper came up with the name King Kong (Morton 2005, Wray 1989, Vaz 2005). Cooper never disabused anyone of the notion.

When Hollywood became Hollywood

Hollywood was named after a country estate in Ohio by a California real estate developer and former Ohioan named Horace Henderson Wilcox. When he parceled up and began selling the California land in 1887, he envisioned an utopian community where no alcoholic beverages would be sold. He gave away free land to any religious group that would build a house of worship (Berg 1989).

By the early 1900s, others had a different vision for the region. Until that period, moviemaking in the United States largely had taken place on the east coast, with much film production centered around Fort Lee, New Jersey. Independent production “ran away” to Los Angeles between 1907 and 1913, in part to be far from Thomas Edison’s Motion Picture Patents Company or “The Trust” as it was called, which pooled patents to monopolize film production and distribution (Scott 2005, Campbell 2007). The formation of the Trust had international consequences. Prior to the Trust, European filmmakers had a 70 percent share of the American market. After the Trust was formed,

only the French production company Pathé Frères had enough power to join them (Fisher 2007).

The newly relocated American independent companies' proximity to nearby Mexico allowed them to dash across the border if they were in danger of legal prosecution for patent violations (Campbell 2007). Edison also helped up the ante in violence in the film production process by making it necessary for film companies to hire goons--men willing to do violence--to protect the cameras and the crew from Edison's menacing detectives (Balshofer 1967).

Hollywood was also advantageous to film makers because of the low tax base and cheap labor. West Coast film workers were paid 25 – 50 percent less than their New York counterparts (Ross 1941). Los Angeles was a notoriously anti-union town (Milkman 2004). At that time, because natural light was needed for the necessary out-of-doors shooting, warm weather and varied scenery contributed to Los Angeles's allure (Cook 1996).

By 1915, the landmark success of *Birth of a Nation*, a three-hour epic about the civil war and the birth of the Ku Klux Klan, made several things clear. The power center of innovation in American filmmaking was no longer solely the East Coast. Also, the film had many technical innovations which altered the future of cinematic storytelling. These included, "varied camera distances, close-up shots, multiple story lines, fast-paced editing, and symbolic imagery." The success of the film was a signal flare to the industry that their future profits lay in re-structuring to make longer, more elaborate, narrative films (Campbell 2007:425). Further, *Birth of a Nation* had a power far beyond that of simply entertaining and diverting. The vicious racial stereotyping in this story gave

emotional support and justification to those who believed in racism (Ewen & Ewen 2006).

In 1917, the Supreme Court decided on a lawsuit by Fox, one of the independent studios, against the Edison Trust. The Court broke up the Trust because of restraint-of-trade violations (Campbell 2007). The “independents” became the studio system, with a vertically integrated monopoly on film production, distribution and exhibition which was undisturbed until the Supreme Court Paramount decisions in the late 1940s (Devany 2004). (With the exception of RKO which died in the late 1950s, the principal studios of that period are still name-brand parts of the multinational conglomerates that run American moviemaking today.)

Hollywood film production has almost always had global business interests, but America has not always been the leading film producer. Prior to World War I, both Italy and France were ahead of the U. S. in the global film market (Cook 1996). France had a vertically integrated international film studio before most of American film production even moved to Hollywood. (By 1909, the Pathé Frères film production company had 200 cinemas in Belgium and France (Fisher 2007)). Because the chemicals to produce celluloid for film stock were also needed to produce gunpowder, the European studios shut down during World War I, and by the War’s end, the United States controlled most motion picture production and had established worldwide distribution networks (Cook 1996). (During the war, in 1916, Universal built the first Hollywood studio in India (Miller et. al. 2005).

Merian Cooper, at this time, was a WWI pilot and war hero. In 1919 in Vienna, he met Ernest Schoedsack, a combat and newsreel photographer. A few years later in

1922, he suggested Shoedsack as replacement cinematographer on an around-the-world expedition he had joined. During this adventure, Cooper and Schoedsack came up with the idea of making “natural dramas,” films that combined narrative and non-fiction techniques. They would take footage of real people and events in exotic lands that would be shaped in the editing room into a dramatic narrative like a fictional adventure story. This type of story was a fusion of narrative fictional filmmaking and the documentary tradition in early filmmaking; the most famous product of the documentary tradition would be *Nanook of the North* (1922). Cooper and Schoedsack collaborated on several silent films including *Ra-Mu* (1922), and *Grass: A Nation’s Battle for Life* (1925), about Persian herdsmen making the dangerous crossing of snow-covered mountains in search of grass for their livestock. *Grass* opens with an introductory title card about this film being shot in the “cradle of the race” where we can find the “secrets of our own past” before our “forefathers,” the “Aryans of old...rose and began conquest of the earth.” Cooper’s attitudes toward race, which will be discussed at greater length later, are manifest in the early films. Cooper’s and Schoedsack’s flair for adventure was also apparent. They took many risks during the making of the film, and as Cooper said, “We’ll probably die up here, but let’s make the goddamn picture.”

The Studio Basic Agreement (1926)

Cooper was not a great supporter of organized labor in filmmaking. He and Schoedsack shot natural dramas for many years in locations without the use of Hollywood crews. They saw themselves as a team.¹⁸ He said in a later interview, “I

¹⁸ Cooper said of Schoedsack, he “was unquestionably one of the great outdoor cameramen.... We were a good team. We could do a lot of each others jobs and overlap one another in various areas. But I was never in his class as a photographer. His sense of timing is remarkable and he is a man of great physical courage.”

don't like mass production. You need one brain or two brains to do the thing" (Cooper and Schoedsack (1925) additional materials). Cooper maintained a lack of affection toward organized labor throughout his life. While in most of the screen-time of his 1933 film, *King Kong*, was dominated by various eighteen-inch-tall Kong puppets, in several scenes, a "real-sized" giant arm, a giant-sized foot, or a giant Kong head was used. These had to be tested before the film was shot. For testing the lift mechanism for the great hand of Kong, which would, among other things hold Fay Wray, Cooper sent for a secretary, a woman he estimated he paid about eighteen dollars a week, and told her to go up in the great hand. Cooper said there were, "No unions, no guilds, no anything... I said, 'Get up in that hand.'" He recounted this, amused to be relating that it was the most terrifying moment of her life (*King Kong* (1933) film commentary).

Cooper's attitude toward organized labor was shared by many studio executives. However, according to cinematographer Arthur Miller (who would later win Academy Awards and also serve as president of the American Society of Cinematographers), from the point of view of the crews working in Hollywood, the period from mid-1924 on was, "the murderous years... I don't believe there ever was or ever will be a time when the

Similarly, Schoedsack gave Cooper a great deal of credit: "Cooper's unfailing loyalty to those he considered his friends or companions in peril, his single-minded persistence in trying to get something done no matter what the obstacles, and a tenacity that might be described as bulldog, or even bull headed... During my long and happy association with Cooper, we always collaborated fully upon all the important issues affecting our productions, but in many parts of our work. We divided our duties according to our likes dislikes and abilities. And as we seldom interfered with each others departments, this made for an ideal partnership. The business of public relations and publicity for instance, which I dislike heartily, being the Strong silent type, I always left to Cooper who fortunately for both of us was very good at it.

"Cooper also had the ability sell ideas to people who were in a position to finance them, but his most outstanding characteristic is probably his bravery, as proved by his military record and by certain incidents I have observed myself... And so our somewhat different talents, I suppose your might call them that and shortcomings sort of balanced each other out ... and I think we made a pretty good team for what we were trying to do" (Chang (1927) additional materials soundtrack).

employer in the motion picture business showed less consideration for those he employed than in this period” (Balshofer and Miller 1967:176). Workers who had worked a full day were forced to keep working until eleven o’clock at night without compensation, and after a full week’s work were forced to work Saturdays through daybreak.

Efforts to organize Hollywood labor were supported by the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Film workers were seen as a wedge that would help to organize “open shop” Los Angeles in the wake of successful union organizing in other major United States cities during World War I. Especially of interest to the AFL were the so-called below-the-line labor groups (workers other than actors, directors and writers), namely, technicians and craftsmen who shared workforces in other Los Angeles industries, such as carpenters, painters, musicians, etc. During the late 1920s in Hollywood, after years of “jurisdictional disputes,” bitter bickering and fighting among themselves about which group had the rights to which film production job, the labor groups finally came to agreement amongst themselves and were able to present a united front to the studios (Ross 1941).

One of the oldest below-the-line groups is the American Federation of Musicians (AFM). The musicians were first employed during the silent picture era to play music on the sidelines of film productions in order to help actors evoke the emotions required of their roles. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the musicians and the IATSE were the most powerful film unions (Ross 1941). They were joined in the basic agreement by the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), and the International Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators, and Paperhangers of America (Pendakur 1998).

In November 29, 1926, so-called below-the-line film workers and the studio representatives signed their first written contract. The two-page “Basic Agreement” meant, among other things, that film workers could go home at night: they were no longer required to sleep at the studio. The workers tried to limit their work week to sixty hours, but were unsuccessful. It was considered worth that sacrifice to have obtained a written agreement. Also, according to the agreement, non-union workers could work alongside union workers on feature films. Los Angeles was still an open shop town. One distinctive feature of the agreement is it took the power to negotiate away from the local jurisdiction and put it in the hands of the president of each union (while many parts of the agreement have changed since then, that feature remains to this day). The painters soon objected to their lack of autonomy and withdrew from the agreement. The Teamsters then joined in. In the case of the IATSE, that meant a Hollywood union was controlled from New York City. Also in New York City by that time was the financial control of the studios (Ross 1941, Balshofer and Miller 1967). After unionization, stagehands earned more than most of the actors. The “stagehands improved their wage scales to such an extent that their minimum [was] over half again as high as the minimum of a stage player”; the actors took note of this with some chagrin, and one commented, “No one ever comes to the theater to see a stage hand” (Ross 1941:36).

After the labor unions obtained the Studio Basic Agreement, racism and sexism in the union leadership guaranteed that women and minorities were excluded from the film production process. The twenty-six women directors who worked in Hollywood between 1913 and the mid 1920s were history (Acker 1991). There was also no place in Hollywood for companies like the Lincoln Motion Picture Company (1916-1921), which

made stories about black life focused on the characters' dignity and counteracted common stereotypes. This company was formed by Noble Johnson, "America's first major black movie actor," who would later play the tribal chief in the original *King Kong* (Ewen & Ewen 2006:445).

Chang (1927)

In Cooper and Schoedsack's 1927 hit film, *Chang*, a Thai family makes the mistake of adopting a baby elephant, and the herd comes to the rescue (Morton 2005). Like in *Grass*, this film opened with title cards. This film too, makes a distinction between the modern world and the world in the film: "Before civilization, there was jungle." One card talked of the cast, "Natives of the wild who have never seen a motion picture" and "wild beasts who have never had to fear a modern rifle." These types of characters would also play a significant role later in *King Kong* (1933).

While the following is a minor point, it bears mentioning as it reflects on Cooper's attitudes toward film workers. In an interview much later in his life, Cooper discussed the process of organizing the elephant stampede shot in *Chang*. He mentioned that seven Thai men working on the film were killed in a cholera epidemic. Cooper joked about the remaining elephant herders who were essential to their getting a shot of the elephant stampede, saying it was "a lot of work to hold 'em" after the cholera deaths. Cooper had claimed that it took one or two brains to make a movie, but this cavalier attitude toward loss of life in his crew seems somewhat jarring to this writer, and seems to foreshadow a similar carelessness in one of Cooper's later characters, Carl Denham in *King Kong*.

Quota Quickies

In the aftermath of World War I, British filmmakers were jealous of the American film industry's success. In just a few short years since their settling in Hollywood, the Americans had become extraordinarily prosperous and powerful. The British attributed the American triumph to vertical integration. Toward establishing a similar situation in Britain, film makers convinced parliament to enact the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927 (Fisher 2007).

This had unintended consequences. Loopholes in the legislation were quickly seized by American film makers. The U.S. studios responded to the Act which "mandated cinemas show a minimum number of local films" by making "quota quickies," films paid for by U.S. studios and made by small British companies (Miller 2005:160). Prior to the act, in 1926, Americans had made 26 films in the United Kingdom and Canada. After the 1927 act (which was in force for ten years), in 1928, American filmmakers taking advantage of the loophole and the funding that went with it, made 128 films in the British dominions (Pendakur 1990). The "quota quickies" were largely not of high quality—they were called "B-movies" during the Golden Age of Hollywood, and are what are called today "straight to DVD" movies. They nonetheless filled a commercial need and were successful.

As the studios seizing the "quota quickie" opportunity profited from it, the film workers--with their new, relatively weak contract--who had produced B-films in Hollywood started finding themselves out of work because of the "quota quickies." At this time, Hollywood had "no obstacle to what came to be called 'runaway' production" (Jarvie 1992:138).

Meanwhile, “anxious to avoid the loss of absolute power intrinsic to unionization,” in May 1927, the studios created an in-house union, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (today known largely for its annual Oscar Award ceremony). The studios claimed to be “covering producers, directors, actors, writers, and technicians”--all film workers--with this organization. As will be shown later in the case of *King Kong*, that claim was not supported by appropriate action. The studio heads designed the Academy to distract above-the-line labor (writers, actors and directors) from forming their own unions. It delayed “any serious labor organizing in Hollywood for over five years” until the studio executives lack of good faith in their efforts became transparent to the largely now-outraged film workers (Schwartz 1982:8).

During this period, after the success of *Chang*, Cooper and Schoedsack made their first fictional film (this time in Africa) called *The Four Feathers* (1929). Schoedsack then stayed in Hollywood to make a film called *Rango*. Cooper went off to New York to pursue his other passion, aviation. He joined the board of directors of Pan Am Airways and Western Air Express.

While Cooper worked for the airlines in New York City, he thought about making a “gorilla” picture. Musing on the picture in the city, he thought of a gorilla on a tall building (Vaz 2005). In 1929, the stock market crashed, catapulting the country into economic Depression. The motion picture studios profited from the public’s hunger for escapist entertainment. With little cash on hand, many nonetheless scraped together enough money to go to the picture shows. These movies both helped invent and fed the “American Dream.” The phrase “American Dream” was coined in 1931 to signify “an American social ideal that emphasizes egalitarianism and often material prosperity”

(Websters 1999:37). Also in 1931, Cooper was invited back to Hollywood to work for Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO). He agreed on the condition that he could make his gorilla picture, and he returned to Hollywood (Vaz 2005).

In the original Grauman theater program for the first release of *King Kong*, Cooper claimed that *King Kong* came about because he had “exhausted exploring the world, so he explored his own mind” (Cooper and Schoedsack (1925) additional materials). It is also noteworthy that the new sound technology and its extraordinary popularity with the public had effectively ended the silent picture era. The advent of the “Talkies” irrevocably changed the kind of films the public would pay for. This innovation may have helped force Cooper to leave the jungle and go to the sound stage because, at least for the first few years of sound films, the lack of mobile microphones necessitated that films be made on a sound stage. Even if Cooper had wanted to continue making his adventures in Asia and Africa, he would not have been able to sell them.

***King Kong* Plot Summary**

King Kong starts in New York City where movie producer, Carl Denham (Robert Armstrong), is desperate for an actress to star in his new picture. No agent in town will help him because of his reputation for recklessness. He goes out into the streets of New York and finds his star, the beautiful and nearly destitute actress Ann Darrow (Fay Wray). Once aboard the ship which will take them to a faraway island, Denham gives his star a screen test in which he demands she scream in terror. After the film crew gets to the island, she finds out why: her co-star is a giant gorilla, Kong. In the island village, Denham exposes the whole crew to danger by insisting on filming a tribal ceremony, making his picture without respect to local customs, and infuriating the locals.

Because of Denham's reckless ambition, the locals catch sight of Ann Darrow, and later kidnap her to sacrifice her to Kong. In attempting to rescue her and in the subsequent disasters on this dangerous shoot, twelve members of Denham's crew are killed, as well as many islanders (including one squashed by a giant Kong foot). The producer did not abide by the rules and regulations for safe production that are standard features on a Hollywood set. Because he was away from the United States and the "long arm of the law", the producer suffered no repercussions for the work-related deaths.

After Jack Driscoll, Denham's assistant and the ship's first mate, rescues Ann, despite the danger and the deaths, Denham still wants to make his picture and his fortune. Denham throws a bomb at Kong, knocking him unconscious, and brings him back in chains to New York to be a Broadway star. At opening night of King Kong's show, the chained gorilla escapes. He causes mayhem, havoc and death in New York City, and kidnaps Ann Darrow whom he loves. He takes her to the top of the Empire State Building, where he is shot and killed by gunmen in bi-planes. He falls to the ground below. Ann Darrow ends up in the embrace of Jack Driscoll. Denham intones, "It was beauty that killed the beast."

Even though *I'm King Kong* was the planned title of Cooper's autobiography (Vaz 2005:365), it may be more accurate to say that major parts of the story originated from Cooper's childhood reading both of fairy tales and of Paul du Chaillu's book, and from his experiences as an adult documentary filmmaker. The most prominent overt claim in the film is the connection made between *King Kong* and *Beauty and the Beast*.

Why *King Kong* is NOT *Beauty and the Beast*

It was Hollywood that killed the beast.

--Maurice Sendak (Joyce, Sendak, Chabon 1992:275)

In 1933, Carl Denham claims that Beauty killed Kong. The *Beauty and the Beast* story has been traced in Western culture back as least as far as the eighteenth century (DeCandido 2005). In its earlier form, Beauty is forced to live in Beast's home, and gradually her beauty, her kindness, and her good sense civilize him. After several misadventures, he, in turn, becomes acceptable to her family as a suitor, because of his kindness to her and his wealth. In other words, before the industrial revolution, the message of *Beauty and the Beast* is that it doesn't matter how awful you are or you look, if you learn our ways, and bring some bounty to our house, we will assimilate you. Even though Beast is not civilized like Beauty's people, her love makes him change and be acceptable to the community. It makes him alter his character and his physical appearance. A message of this story is that when people are the "Other" or outsiders, they are but a magical spell away from becoming one of us (Pitt 2007).

By contrast, *King Kong's* message about *Beauty and the Beast* is almost exactly the opposite. The modern "version" is a colonial message of exploitation. Not only can the beast never be like us, we need to enslave and exploit him as a circus act, and kill him at the end if he does not do what we want him to do. The film tells us that during this era, a woman's love, love itself, is no longer a powerful force allowing for assimilation.

Ideas from earlier periods and incidents made it into the film as a function of a phenomenon called "cultural lag." According to William Ogburn, who coined the term, "A cultural lag occurs when one or two parts of culture which are correlated changes before or in greater degree than the other part does, thereby causing less adjustment between the two parts than existed previously" (86). Often the changing part has to do with technological innovation, "a scientific discovery or mechanical invention" (90), and

the lagging part is “generally some social organization or ideology.... In our times in the Western world, technology and science are the great prime movers of social change” (90-1). In this case, motion pictures leaped ahead, and cultural attitudes “lagged.”

Colonialism and related racism continued to be present in the films. The world had changed, Cooper’s attitudes had not. As he wrote early in his career, “The lust of power is in us, we white men... We’ll sacrifice anything for the chance to rule. And I believe that it is right that black, brown and yellow men should be dominated by the white” (Vaz 2005:82).

William Ogburn commented that:

the members of a dominating race who take advantage of their preferred positing to discriminate against a racial group with low incomes, little education, and homogenous occupations of a servitude type are loath to give up their vested interests when social change has altered the rank of the oppressed class by raising incomes, increasing education, and diversifying occupations. They continue to act as if there has been no change, and their actions are quite out of harmony with the new status” (Ogburn 1964:194).

This intractability can be seen most clearly in what Cooper took from Paul du Chaillu’s nineteenth-century work. Both plot points and overall colonial attitudes in *King Kong* draw heavily from du Chaillu.

Many aspects of du Chaillu’s story appear in the film *King Kong* (1933). The character Carl Denham and du Chaillu share the same purpose: they want to track down a gorilla (26). However, Du Chaillu made his four years of explorations as a “naturalist-hunter” (x, 268) in the mid-nineteenth century. His main purpose was to “collect objects in natural history, and to see the country and hunt” (178). He traveled on foot and “unaccompanied by other white men,” killed, stuffed, and brought home over 2,000 birds, and killed over 1,000 quadrupeds of which 200 were stuffed and sent home (insects

destroyed many of his samples). He also brought over 80 skeletons. Among his collection were over 80 new species. His greatest joy was to kill a new species (277).

By contrast, Carl Denham goes on his explorations as a 1930s documentary filmmaker, initially to capture Kong on film, and eventually to capture him in body.

Among the things the two stories share are that du Chaillu, and later Denham, came from what they consider to be the civilized world, New York City, and there they later return (x) (336-7). Both went to an exotic location to find the gorilla. Like Denham, du Chaillu heard about a kind of gorilla “of extraordinary size” (87, 394) which is the object of his quest.

Like du Chaillu, who says “It has been my fortune to be the first white man who can speak of the gorilla from personal knowledge” (394), Denham remarks upon his whiteness, “Boys, we’re seeing things no white man has ever seen before!”

Once in the foreign land, both Denham and du Chaillu see native peoples dancing in elaborate costumes and body paint (141, 213, 236, 281, 282). Du Chaillu remarked,

It is curious what a stirring effect the sound of the tam-tam has on the African. It works upon him like martial music does upon excitable Frenchmen; they lose all control over themselves at its sound, and the louder and more energetically the horrid drum is beaten, the wilder are the jumps of the male African, and more disgustingly indecent the contortions of the woman (236).

Like the natives in *King Kong* are obsessed with Fay Wray’s hair and wanted the “golden haired woman”, the natives du Chaillu encounters were obsessed with his hair, the hair of white people, and made a fetish of it (338, 482). Du Chaillu also noted that native people mocked his obsession with race and had good sport with him upon their showing him a white primate with hair much like his own (330). Denham has no such reflective humor about his own biases.

The film-goers first sighting of Kong is not unlike du Chaillu's first glimpse of a real gorilla (although du Chaillu's gorilla was smaller):

...a sight I think never to forget. Nearly six feet high (he proved two inches shorter), with immense body, huge chest, and great muscular arms, with fiercely-glaring large deep gray eyes, and a hellish expression of face, which seemed to me like some nightmare vision: thus stood before us this king of the African forests.

He was not afraid of us. He stood there, and beat his breasts with his huge fists till it resounded like an immense bass-drum, which is their mode of offering defiance; meantime giving vent to roar after roar (98).

The issue of scale is important to both. While du Chaillu wrote of other large animals (in this case elephants), he remarked on how the size of the giant creatures made other things seem small by comparison:

For the first time in my life I was struck with the vast bulk of this giant of the forests. The eye and mind had leisure to dwell upon his size... Great trees seemed but small saplings to me when I measured them with the immense beast which was standing placidly near them. But there was not much time for this feeling. What we were to do was to kill him, though I felt a sense of pity at destroying so great a life (205).

Like Kong carries off Fay Wray, so to du Chaillu heard stories about a gorilla who carried off a woman and had his way with her (85, 86). Du Chaillu also recorded frequent occurrences of natives stealing women not of their tribes (du Chaillu traveled alone and was always turning down their offers of wives (71,265)). He stated that much of the tribesmen's troubles stemmed from this theft of women. Unlike Denham, du Chaillu noted that women did most of the work (75, 76).

Once Kong makes away with Fay Wray, those members of the Venture crew in hot pursuit see a giant footprint. Du Chaillu, too, saw a gigantic footprint in the earth "several times I have scarcely been able to believe my eyes when I saw plainly the footprints of the huge animal" (117).

Similarly to the Americans pursuing Kong through the woods, du Chaillu pursued his game through a mangrove swamp (145). A monstrous creature upended du Chaillu's

boat (only in his case it was a hippopotamus not a giant snake (242, 253)). Just as Denham and his crew run in terror from the giant snake in the swamp, so to Du Chaillu and his men ran in terror from an enormous snake in the mangrove swamp, “a general panic now ensued, everybody running as fast as could to get out of the way of danger” (146).

Like the Venture’s crew in pursuit of Kong, du Chaillu too made a nerve-racking crossing of a bridge made of fallen trees (488). Also while in pursuit of his game, du Chaillu heard the story of an elephant “trumpeting with rage” who seized a sapling with his trunk “and swayed it violently back and forth, determined to pull it down along with the person who was in it” (169). This animal swinging a giant tree limb to bring down his human quarry may have influenced the scene where Kong upends a log, sending men to their deaths in a crevasse.

Similarly to Kong trampling underfoot a native so to did du Chaillu tell of a man who “lost his presence of mind” in the presence of an elephant “he was caught and instantly trampled underfoot (115). Also like Kong wrestles the giant dinosaur, du Chaillu heard stories about exotic monstrous creatures fighting each other.

Also like Denham, du Chaillu tried to tame “the monarch of these forests” (489) unsuccessfully, even chaining the creature around the neck, like Denham chained Kong. Du Chaillu reported on the death of several baby gorillas in his charge he tried to tame (including one he named “Joe”—Cooper made a 1949 gorilla picture called, *Mighty Joe Young*).

As the crew in King Kong hear Kong’s roar miles off, so too du Chaillu heard the roar of the giant monstrous gorilla three miles off (397):

I heard in the far distance what I at first took to be muttering thunder...but presently perceived the noise to be caused by a male gorilla which was roaring to its female; which later, after a while, could be heard answering with a weaker roar. The forest fairly shook with the tremendous voice of this animal. The echoes swelled and died away from hill to hill, until the whole forest was full of the din (335).

When du Chaillu actually saw the gorilla--much like Kong--the animal roared and beat his chest (158, 335, 489).

The gorilla advances by short stages, stopping to utter his diabolical roar and to beat his vast breast with his paws, which produce a dull reverberation as of an immense bass-drum (397, see also 479).

Du Chaillu's report on the death of the gorilla resonates with the end of *King Kong*. After du Chaillu shot a gorilla:

he falls forward on his face, his long, muscular arms outstretched, and uttering, with his last breath, a hideous death-cry, half roar, half shriek, which, while it announces his safety to the hunter, yet tingles his ears with a dreadful note of human agony. It is this lurking reminiscence of humanity, indeed, which makes one of the chief ingredients of the hunter's excitement in his attack of the gorilla (398).

He later offered a slightly different version:

There is enough likeness to humanity in this beast to make a dead one an awful sight, even to accustomed eyes, as mine were by this time. I never quite felt that matter-of-course indifference, or that sensation of triumph which the hunter has when a good shot has brought him a head of his choice game. It was as though I had killed some monstrous creation, which yet had something of humanity in it. Well as I know that this was an error, I could not help the feeling (490).

To du Chaillu's credit, even as he mystified the gorilla he demystified:

... no description can exceed the horror of its appearance, the ferocity of its attack, or the impish malignity of its nature...the gorilla does not lurk in trees by the roadside, and drag up unsuspecting passers-by in its claws, and choke them to death in its vice-like paws; it does not attack the elephant and beat him to death with sticks; it does not carry off women from the native villages; it does not even build itself a house of leaves and twigs in the forest-trees and sit on the roof, as has been confidently reported of it. It is not gregarious even; and the numerous stories of its attacking in great numbers have not a grain of truth in them. It lives in the loneliest and darkest portions of the dense African jungle... [it] is a strict vegetarian (394-5).

While feverishly recounting the ferocity of gorillas, du Chaillu also commented that the creatures seemed shy and seemed to be avoiding him (396). He also noted, "the

slightest noise alarms them and sends them off. It is only once in a while that you can surprise an old male; and then he will fight you” (287).

In addition to the specific details of du Chaillu’s adventures, the colonial attitudes explicit in the narrative found their way into Kong’s story. Du Chaillu often remarked on the relationships he heard about between the native people and gorillas. He re-told stories of men who turned into gorillas, women who would not look at gorillas for fear they would give birth to one, and gorillas with the spirit of men; and he remarked that gorillas look to be half-man, half beast, and in their play and grief they seemed almost human (26, 85, 86 87 101, 185, 290, 304, 306, 323, 345). While people he stayed with ate cooked monkey, du Chaillu could not try it because it looked to him like a cooked human baby (80).

He compared the tribal people to primates:

They use their bare feet almost like monkeys do theirs. Long practice enables them to catch hold of objects with their toes, and they could jump from rock to rock without fear of falling, while I, with thick shoes on, was continually slipping, and got along very slowly (77).

What finally caused him to end his expedition was that he had worn out his last pair of shoes. Du Chaillu concluded, “after a careful examination of the osteological facts...[and] after having observed the live gorilla and studied carefully its mode of progression, I came to the conviction that in its mode of progression the gorilla is the nearest akin to man of all the anthropoid apes” (417).

Du Chaillu’s approval of the colonialist enterprise was explicit. He wrote of the area of Africa he explored as a place of “tropical magnificence”...

rich agricultural country. I could not help longing heartily for the day to come when this glorious stream will be alive with the splash of paddle-wheels, and its banks lined with trading and missionary posts...any tropical crop will grow in this virgin soil; and it needs only the cunning hand and brain of the white man to make this whole tract become a great producing country (viii).

He spoke of older natives as “dull, lazy, and distrustful” and not Christian (28); “the children, on the contrary, as all children, are bright, docile, easily trained; and in these the hope of Christianizing Africa rests” (29). He did however mention some advantages to not being a Christian. For example, when they ate snake meat, he wrote,

Christian civilization of which I had mused so pleasantly a few minutes before received another shock. I, poor, starved, but civilized mortal, stood by, longing for a meal, but unable to stomach this. So much for civilization, which is a very good thing in its way, but has no business in an African forest when food is scarce (83).

Du Chaillu did not call the people primitive, and noted that “where the negroes have come in contact with the lowest class of whites [where there was slave trading], they are much greater thieves” (200). Further, he remarked,

it would be wrong to condemn the whole people. As future pages will show, I met every where in my travels men and women honest, well-meaning, and in every way entitled to respect and trust; and the very fact that a white man could travel alone, single-handed and without powerful backers, through this rude country without being molested or robbed, is sufficient evidence that the negro race is not unkindly-natured (45).

Late in his life, Merriam Cooper could still recite large parts of du Chaillu’s manuscript that he had memorized. The colonial attitudes in this book, and in Cooper, found fertile ground in Hollywood. After most film production moved to California, Hollywood became “the movie colony” (Rosten 1941). The colonial status was multifaceted. It was not just because Hollywood was at that time a remote distance from most of the rest of the world in a one-industry town, but also that “they colonized the American imagination” (Gabler 1988).

These clever immigrants created an industry that wed the principles of the assembly line to the European heritage of art under the patronage system. The studios were factories

for art, run by ruthless overseers, who viewed their artists and employees with paternalistic, proprietary interest (Schwartz 1982:7).

They created, as F. Scott Fitzgerald called it in *The Last Tycoon* an “empire of their own.”

The Particular Facts and Fiction of *King Kong*

In addition to a “Beauty and the Beast” tale, and a tale of colonial exploitation, *King Kong* is also a contemporary 1930s story about an American film production overseas. As such, *King Kong* speaks to the times in which it was made.

In much the same way that the Hollywood “star system” overshadows the role of the hundreds of crew members working on a feature film, *King Kong* himself conveniently erases *King Kong*’s plot from the public mind. *King Kong* is not just about the “monkey.” In fact, the film’s action starts with a theatrical agent coming to discuss labor problems regarding casting a motion picture with a dangerous producer. It goes on to tell the story about a movie production that goes horribly wrong, depicting a situation that develops into a crisis involving massive destruction and death.

The Film Begins on the Dock

Dissolve on the exterior of the dock by day. (Stock shot). It is a beehive of activity. Coal rumbles into the hold with a noise like a boiler-riveting factory; a derrick swings nets of boxes from [the] wharf to open hatchways. Stevedores shout and truckmen curse. In the background, New York and the river glitter under a benediction of sunlight.

-- Wallace, Cooper & Creelman 1932:11

What gets edited has significance. The above-quoted paragraph, a paean to collective work, was cut from the final script. Merian Cooper, in addition to being producer on this film, was a member of the RKO management. He was in charge of cutting costs. He was not a lover of labor unions or communism (Vaz 2005), and there is no initial romance depicted about collective work in *King Kong*. (In fact, the only time

the crew works as a unit, later during the pursuit of Kong on the island, they are almost all slaughtered.) What the film discusses in the opening scene, aside from the fact that this is a “motion picture ship”, is that there are three times as many crewmen on board as the ship should hold. These are extremely overcrowded working conditions.

By contrast, certain individuals stand out. In the early scenes of the film, a dockworker describes the character of the filmmaker Carl Denham: “They say he ain't scared of nothin'. If he wants a picture of a lion he walks right up and tells it to look.”

The role of Denham was in part modeled on Producer Merian Cooper's own exploits as a filmmaker, which included the aforementioned filming wild tigers and elephants in Southeast Asia and accompanying a tribal migration through dangerous snowy mountain passes in the Middle East. However, the use of Merian Cooper's traits was selective. His reckless courage is much in evidence, but Cooper had a southern accent. Carl Denham has none. The racist implications of the film would have been far more evident to the mass audience, even then, had a southern accent uttered Carl Denham's lines, especially when Denham spoke lines in the film like, “Boys, we're seeing things no white man has ever seen before!” The racist implications also would have been more evident if they had kept a line from an earlier version of the script, when Denham says of Kong, “We'll give him more than that. Starvation—hot irons—they'll teach any beast who's boss” (Wallace, Cooper, Creelman 1932:100).

The Film Casting Meeting on the Boat

The actor's equity and the Hays outfit have interfered with every girl I've tried to hire—now every agent in town has shut down on me. All. But you ... know I'm square.

-- Wallace, Cooper & Creelman (1932)

The above-quoted lines made it to the final script and even made it to the Delos Lovelace's *King Kong* novelization that appeared in 1932 prior to the movie's release. The lines did not make it into the film. (Actor's Equity is the New York theatrical stage union. Prior to the formation of the film actor's union, Actor's Equity made attempts to represent film actors.) What remains in the film is the producer's threat--the knowledge of his recklessness; and the only thing that stands between labor and the exploiter is the agent's conscience. (It is difficult to imagine an agent's conscience as a significant factor in a film made today.) The agent, who will provide an actress for Denham's movie, says,

Everybody knows you're square, Denham but you've got a reputation for recklessness that can't be glossed over. And then you're so secretive ... I've got a conscience, Denham. I can't send a young, pretty girl, such as you want, on a job like this ... without telling her what to expect... To go off for no one knows how long, to some place you won't even hint at, the only woman on a ship with the toughest mugs I ever looked at.

It could be argued that movies are about action, and that Ruth Rose¹⁹ edited out the Actor's Guild reference to streamline the action. Her final script is often credited with extraordinary leanness and efficiency. Anything that got in the way of the action, the forward movement of the story's drama, was cut. I tried this idea out on a New York filmmaker (who requested anonymity). He said, "Producers are management. Any time they see something in the script about labor, psht [and here he made a swiping hand gesture]... out it goes." This is consistent with the idea that Hollywood's version of a democratic message, is a Capra-esque feel-good sort of message, not one of a collective, union version of democracy. This approach has cultural costs. If labor issues are

¹⁹ There were three main screenwriters on this film. Edgar Wallace died of pneumonia while starting to write the film. His name was the one used on the movie posters because he was famous, and it was thought that his name would sell more tickets. James Creelman was fired because he said to Cooper "there's only so much you [can] shove into a screenplay and still make sense" (Bonus 1933). Ruth Rose was the final writer on the script. She is credited with the snappy streamlined dialogue. Having read Creelman's version (the Estimating Treatment) I agree with the estimation of her talents.

silenced in everyday films, they do not become part of our shared mass media culture which helps shape and define our reality. Film labor scholar Tom Zaniello notes:

Working people, their unions, labor issues in general, and political movements involving the working class have always been a part of Hollywood, independent and foreign filmmaking. But some of the most popular films about labor have presented their subjects in an unfavorable light, while lesser-known works with more balanced or even positive views go unseen and unnoticed. Yet because we live in a culture that receives so much of its information and ultimately derives many of its opinions from visual media, it is especially important to see, to understand, and to study more than the usual selection of media images (Zaniello 2003:1).

A mention in a film holds the possibility of bringing unions to consciousness, and management is not interested in conscious activist labor.

The character Carl Denham has an earnest enthusiasm for exploration that echoes that of Cooper and Schoedsack. Denham says, “I’m going to make the greatest picture in the world, something that’s never been seen or dreamed of. They’ll have to invent some new adjectives when I come back.”

Despite the dangerousness of Denham’s filmmaking adventures, this filmmaker has the loyalty of his crew. His ship’s captain Englehorn says admiringly, “you always bring back a picture and everyone says, ‘There is only one Carl Denham.’” Also unlike subsequent *King Kongs*, in this first version, his crew is seasoned. They have “stuck by” him for two previous films. And, Englehorn reports, Denham pays them well. Their loyalty is evidenced throughout the film. Near the end of the movie, at the theater, when Ann tells Jack Driscoll why she has come to participate in the performance of *King Kong*, the possibility of financial gain is secondary. She tells him that despite her terrible memories of that day on the island, “Of course we had to come when he said it would help the show. Do you suppose we’ll really make a lot of money, Jack?” Driscoll,

uncomfortable in his first “open faced” suit, a tuxedo, jokes, “Enough to pay him back for these clothes, anyway...” Here was a loyalty to filmmakers that was not matched by *King Kongs* made in subsequent film eras. This loyalty was not just because the workers had jobs during the Depression. Part of what the later anti-communist hysteria may have cost this country was a sense of “we-ness,” a sense of loyalty to a group project, that people could work together in good faith as Americans without the fear of being branded “Communist” and blacklisted (Wexler 2007 interview). During this period, in this film, it is noteworthy that it was safe to promote the sense that you could work for a common project. A community-based idea of problem-solving was a credible on-screen film trope. Not everything was an individually-based problem. It is noteworthy that no sense of responsibility to the production exists among characters in any of the subsequent *King Kongs*.

This loyalty and familiarity of the crew on screen also echoes the social network of the studio system in which the picture was made. In studio system pictures, people who worked on a crew were often regular studio employees who worked together on many pictures over time. Robert Armstrong who played Denham, and Fay Wray, who played Ann Darrow, were simultaneously shooting *The Most Dangerous Game* and *King Kong*. They would go to different stages during different parts of the day. *The Most Dangerous Game* is a film about a madman/predator who brings people to his island in order to hunt them as game. Sets from *Dangerous Game* were used in *Kong* (as were parts of animation supervisor Willis O’Brien’s previous cancelled project *Creation*).

As a sociologist, I expected the labor who worked on the film to be at least mildly alienated. Crew members on *King Kong* reported that they remained lifelong friends

(Morton 2005, Wray 1989). In addition, at the point in the Depression when the film was made, many of the people who had jobs were simply grateful to have one. The success of *King Kong* brought RKO, a studio in bankruptcy, back to solvency.²⁰ The profits made possible the making of RKO films such as Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire musicals and *Citizen Kane*. The absence of alienation did not extend to the bottom line: Fay Wray estimated she earned about \$10,000 for her role as Ann Darrow (Morton 2005). Wray, with a wry take on her constant public portrayal in the tabloid magazines as a “nice” person, said fifty years later, “If we’d had a percentage deal we wouldn’t be such nice people. We’d be rich” (Goldner 1975:195). She wrote in her autobiography that Cooper enjoyed the fact that he paid actors only when they worked, which was intermittently, “He enjoyed that fact so much, you really had to enjoy it with him. There was no Screen Actors Guild then to tell you it wasn’t really a laughing matter” (Wray 1989:128). The film that saved RKO from bankruptcy had no such positive effect on the actors. Wray wrote, “Residual payments were not even considered—because there were no established unions to protect us. The Screen Actors Guild had not come into being” (Wray 1989:144).

New York City

All around, walls of friendly lighted windows soar, tier upon tier into the star sown night that washes round the rooftops like a sea; elsewhere, traffic rumbles bravely, newsboys shout, and taxies honk. But here, under the pallid yellow glow of the streetlamps is only silence—the silence of dead trees and dead hopes. On such a night, the benches of Battery Park are all occupied. Here sit the poor and the friendless—the jobless workman, the market victim, the jailbird and the bum—men beaten by age or indolence or circumstance. Many of them have bundles of belongings beside them. There are women, too—bewildered old women, self-possessed immigrant housewives to whom poverty

²⁰ Radio City Music Hall and the Roxy seated 10,000 total. These seats were filled for the first four days of *King Kong*. The film grossed \$89,931 in its first four days (Vertlieb 2005). At that time admission costs were ten cents to fifty cents a seat.

presents no terrors, bold-eyed prostitutes awaiting chance customers, and here and there an impatient maiden whose boy friend is late to the appointment.

--Wallace, Cooper & Creelman 1932:9

This scene, so beautifully drawn in the above quotation, did not end up appearing in the actual film. In the film, only women are shown as made desperate by the Depression; the film sexes the Depression as female. (The men are all aboard ships and well-paid.) When *King Kong* was released, twenty-five percent of the population was unemployed. The prospects for future employment were grim. Capitalism had failed, and instead of dwelling on that failure and possibilities for the future, the movie takes the viewer from the pit of depression, on a glorious rollercoaster ride of an escape. As Ray Harryhausen, who later worked with *King Kong* animator Willis O'Brien on *Mighty Joe Young*, said, "It takes you by the hand from the depression era into the most outrageous fantasy you've ever seen on the screen" (Cooper and Schoedsack (1933) additional materials).

Before taking off on the impossible adventure, the plot of the film firmly grounds the reader in the desperation of that era. In New York City, Women first appear in this film in a bread line at the "Women's Home Mission." Ann Darrow is "discovered" by moviemaker Carl Denham just as she is considering stealing an apple from a New York City fruit seller. Ann hasn't eaten for quite some time, and is grateful for the meal Denham buys for her, and grateful for any job (short of prostitution) which Denham offers her.

There is a clear difference between how Denham pitches this job to Ann Darrow and the dangerous way the job was characterized aboard the boat. He says to her,

It's money, and adventure, and fame. It's the thrill of a lifetime. And a long sea-voyage that starts at six tomorrow morning.... Think, Ann, a long voyage, easy living, the warm

blue sea, moonlight on the water -- isn't that better than tramping New York trying to keep out of the gutter?

While Denham repeatedly emphasizes that he isn't a sexual predator, that he won't engage in "funny business," he neglects to mention that he will be putting Ann in life-threatening danger. It isn't until she's aboard ship, without any way to turn back, that he shows her during her screen test that her role involves more than wearing pretty gowns.

Only because women are essential to the profit in a moviemaking venture, must they be included. Denham insists that Ann Darrow, a woman, has to be hired because the public wants romance. Women are continually belittled throughout the film. They're "a cock-eyed nuisance", and "in the way." They make a man "go soft." Denham's assistant, Jack Driscoll tells Ann Darrow, "Women can't help being a bother. I guess they're made that way." These disempowering stereotypes about women's labor are in striking contrast to the lived experience of screenwriter Ruth Rose.

Rose, herself an active explorer, and a person of great intelligence, gave Ann Darrow very little in the way of any of Rose's own initiative and courage. Instead, Ann screams... a lot, so much so that Wray became famous for screaming and had difficulty subsequently finding roles where she didn't have to scream (Morton 2005).

In real life, Rose was a powerful, resourceful contributor to the motion picture, and a necessary member of Cooper's and Schoedsack's expeditions. From a theatrical family, Rose was an accomplished stage and silent film actor. When the 1919 Actors Equity strike shut down the Broadway theaters, Rose got a two-year job with the New York Zoological Society's Tropical Research Station at Kartabo, British Guiana as an historian and research technician. She later met Schoedsack in 1925 when he took a six-month's cinematographer job after making *Grass* (he needed the money). She was

working aboard the SS Arcturus, the New York Zoological Society's expedition to the Sargasso Sea and the Galapagos Islands. Schoedsack and Rose later married (Goldner 1975).

The stereotype of women Rose helped create, belies the filmmakers lived experience--Cooper and Schoedsack knew how wonderful she was (Vaz 2005). In denying their experience they reinforced and promulgated the idea of the vulnerable helpless blond woman-as-victim. Somehow this stereotype is never asked to square with the fact that Denham is dependent on women, who bring in the film ticket revenue which creates the studios wealth.

While both Ruth Rose and Ann Darrow met their husbands-to-be on a ship, Ann is only introduced to the risks of her work after she cannot choose to refuse the job.

Denham, squinting into his viewfinder, tells her what to do:

Now -- look up. Slowly. You see nothing yet. Look higher. Still higher. That's it. Now you see it. You're amazed. You can't believe it. Your eyes open wider. It's horrible, but you can't look away. What is it Ann? What can you do? No chances for you, no escape. Helpless, Ann, you're helpless. One chance -- if you can scream. Your throat's paralyzed. Try to scream, Ann. Try. If you didn't see, perhaps you could scream. Throw you arms across your eyes, and scream, Ann, scream for your life!

The Director is anticipating that he's going to be filming a woman in genuine danger, so terrified she's screaming for her life. He shows no concern for her safety. He is indifferent to danger as long as he can get his movie. When asked why he is his own cameraman, he reiterates a story told earlier in the film and says,

Ever since a trip I made to Africa. I'd have got a swell picture of a charging rhino, but the cameraman got scared. The damned fool. I was right there with a rifle. Seemed he didn't trust me to get the rhino before it got him. I haven't fooled with cameramen since. Do the trick myself.

He also is indifferent to Kong's needs. Before they have even encountered Kong, Jack Driscoll has a moment of empathy for the creature. In a discussion about filming

Kong, Denham says, "If it's there, you bet I'll photograph it." Driscoll asks, "Suppose it doesn't like having its picture taken?" Denham replies, "Well, now you know why I brought those cases of gas-bombs."

Island

When the crew lands on the island, they come upon the black natives, led by their chief (Noble Johnson), involved in a sacrificial ceremony. It includes the natives dressed up in gorilla suits in homage to Kong. They are chanting in a strange tongue.

Animator Ray Harryhausen was so taken with *King Kong* he actually made a journey out to the Nias Islands named in the film, only to find that the natives were Asian, not black. Further, when his boat landed at the dock on the island, Harryhausen tried out some of Ruth Rose's "native" language dialogue on the first native person he saw. "Bala Bala Kum nono Kong." The man put his hand on his hip and responded "What are you talking about?" in perfect English (French 2005:68-69). Harryhausen added that there was "no mountain on Nias Island that looked like a skull. And no wall. I was very disappointed" (Cooper and Schoedsack (1933) supplementary materials).

This discovery by Harryhausen corresponds with changes in the script, which smoothed the film's images to line up with the stereotype. As late as Creelman's estimating treatment, the script read, "these natives are a white Polynesian type" (Wallace, Cooper & Creelman 1932:32). In the final film, the island's natives were non-English speaking, primitive and black.

Soon after this ceremony, Ann Darrow is kidnapped and sacrificed to Kong.²¹ At this point in the film, with the appearance of King Kong, the role of technicians and animators becomes a major part of the production process. I had some remaining expectations about finding alienation in below-the-line labor, the technicians and animators, during the studio system era. These expectations were quashed. In fact, by all accounts, the people who worked on the film were passionately involved with the filmmaking (Brin 2005:7). There are many stories of explosive arguments between Merian Cooper and Willis O'Brien who oversaw the special effects (he animated Kong). Cooper wanted Kong to be terrifying, "I want Kong to be the fiercest, most brutal monstrous damn thing that has ever been seen." O'Brien said that "it would be impossible to win audience sympathy for a monster ape lacking any human qualities." Cooper insisted, "I'll have women crying over him before I'm through, and the more brutal he is the more they'll cry at the end" (Goldner 1975:56). These arguments usually ended with O'Brien resigning, stalking out of the studio, downing a few drinks at a nearby speakeasy and then returning to work. I would argue that the tension between these two perspectives, incorporated into the film, goes a long way toward understanding what makes Kong such a compelling character. The battle to move the culture forward, to make the cultural lag catch up, is often fought millimeter by millimeter.

Art Worlds, Collaboration and the Myth of the Solo Artist.

²¹ Before he appears on the stage of this project, I feel obliged to put in a word for Kong, who, as a gorilla puppet cannot speak for himself. In real life, gorillas are gentle, plant-eating creatures (Maestriperi 2005) Because silverback gorillas had only recently been discovered by western people a few decades before and they are legendarily elusive creatures, in 1933, little was known of their behavior. At least in *King Kong* (1933), the distortion of gorilla's nature is perhaps more understandable. But to whatever extent this stereotypical characterization has led to considerable public indifference to gorillas well-being, it has contributed to gorillas being driven to near-extinction. However, gorillas as a labor pool, are usually only of interest to filmmakers at places like the Discovery Channel.

Cooper often said, “I am Kong” and that is the title of a documentary about his life. He would claim, “I acted out every goddamn gesture” of *King Kong* (Bird and Brownlow 2005). By contrast, Orville Goldner, who did detail work on the special effects of the film gave a lot of credit to Chief Technician, Willis O’Brien, who had boxing training as well as other skills, for the Kong’s expressiveness (Morton 2005, Magid and Savenick 2005). Goldner says, “Those who knew him say O’Brien was Kong” (Goldner 1975:9).

The first *King Kong*, was for the most part an eighteen-inch human-animated gorilla puppet made of paint, metal, latex, and rabbit fur (by Marcel Delgado), whose every move was manipulated by “stop-motion” animation. “Stop motion” is shorthand for saying that a human moved the gorilla twenty-four times for every second of film--once for each photographed frame (Morton 2005). Afficionados of the stop-motion animation technique call it an “art form that is done in the dark by one guy”; it was invented by Willis O’Brien (Magid and Savenick 2005).

Cooper, in claiming credit for *Kong*, was exploiting a myth about artwork that emerged from the industrial revolution (and was later promulgated as auteur theory). Prior to the industrial revolution, art was largely understood as a group artisanal process, and it was the custom of “great” artists, such as Rubens, to employ teams of artists to produce their masterpieces. Guilds, the forerunners of labor unions, kept talent and trade secrets within their ranks to support the economic viability of art-making processes.

During the early 1800s, the myth of the artist-as-loner was embraced and enhanced by the lives and writing of romantic writers Mary and Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, and William Blake, among others, in part in response to the alienation they felt as

they saw the industrial revolution encroaching on rural life in England (see especially Blake's writing on the "dark satanic mills," and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.)

As Sociologist Howard Becker has argued, art is created by a whole system of people in what he calls "art worlds" (Becker 1982). A film like *King Kong* cannot be made without a large crew (and the crew gets larger and differently skilled with each remake). The fact that a "star" is a collaborative effort is made most clear here, where the star is manufactured by the writers, the production crew, the special effects people, and the post-production crew in the editing room (Apple 2004, Peary, D. 2005:69). *King Kong* would lie flat without the operatic music of Max Steiner, without the scream-and-roar arias between Fay Wray and King Kong. King Kong's roars and other sound effects, created by Murray Spivak who recorded zoo sounds and played them backward, added inestimably to Kong's success (Goldner 1976).

King Kong was a breakthrough picture in terms of special effects and continues to influence filmmakers to this day. Peter Jackson, who directed the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, some of the most successful recent films in Hollywood history, and who later directed the 2005 *King Kong* remake said that when he first saw *King Kong* at age nine:

its power and magic had an instant and profound effect on my young imagination. From that day on I wanted to do nothing else with my life other than make movies—movies like *King Kong*. Watching that film propelled me into a love of making movies and learning how to do visual effects, the very stuff of movie magic (Vaz 2005:XIV).

David O. Selznick, the head of RKO, lobbied hard to nominate O'Brien for an Academy Award. O'Brien, who understood and valued collaboration, insisted on sharing the nomination with eight of his co-workers. Despite Selznick's pressure, the Academy refused to grant a special-effects award until 1940.

The Academy claimed to be for the creative workers. Their unwillingness to recognize O'Brien's team's extraordinary work on *King Kong* was one of many instances where they demonstrated that claim was untrue. The failure of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to create a special effects award that year provided further evidence to many that the Academy was only giving lip service to the idea of caring for the technicians. Their repeated insults of this kind to innovative workers were in part what later mobilized the founders of the above-the-line Hollywood unions.

In *King Kong*, filmmaker Carl Denham shows a real lack of consideration for the people he employs. In Denham's presence, Captain Englehorn twice remarks with sorrow on the loss of the men. Both times, Denham's face is impassive. He never makes mention of the twelve crew members who are killed on the island. Nor does he seem to suffer remorse at their passing. The deaths are only useful to Denham in the context of the showmanship machine: When he announces Kong to the New York audience in the theater, he mentions the dead as a way to heighten the thrill for the public. This kind of indifference to human life contributed to the galvanization of the labor movement. It's not just about an individual artist. The work is made by a group process. People matter.

The Return to New York City

As the curtain goes up in the Broadway theater, Kong is on stage in chains. He sees Ann and gets upset by the newspaper photographers' flashbulbs. Just as Carl Denham is reassuring the audience that Kong's bonds are "chrome steel," Kong breaks free. It is said that early audiences were thrilled by the urban destruction that Kong wrought in New York City. Perhaps he expressed their own anger at what the Depression had brought them, and perhaps he reflected their own desire to destroy it.

In brief, Kong rampages through New York City, finds Ann, and climbs with her-in-paw to the top of the Empire State Building. There he is killed by gunners in bi-planes, played by Cooper and Schoedsack, because, as Cooper said, “We should kill that son of a bitch ourselves” (Vaz 2005:232). They did not actually fly the bi-planes that were live footage in the film, they only made cameo appearances in the close-ups.

Conclusion

Drawing upon the facts and fiction of *King Kong*, we have a picture of producers in heedless pursuit of success. Union threats are still a mere bothersome nuisance to be complained about or edited out. Women and people of color are not respected. Even white male labor is exploited to death. Still, there is a spirit of camaraderie among the film workers, and we still respect the rank-and-file enough to accept the idea that Jack Driscoll can get the girl.

Writer Ray Bradbury said that *King Kong*, and Merian Cooper’s films, were about joy, “You leave the theater after seeing the cavalry films or *The Quiet Man* or *King Kong*, and you go out to welcome life into your heart and soul. And you have Merian Cooper to thank for that.... His films remind you how wonderful it is to be alive” (Bird and Brownlow 2005). I think that joy is complicated by many factors: the ease of the stereotyping which crew members contributed to, the undervaluing of any labor other than the producers, a misogyny so constant that it becomes a running joke, and empathy for Kong, a character so exaggerated that he is allowed to give voice to an experience perilously close to our own experiences of fear and alienation in modern society.

Chapter 3, Hollywood's Golden Turbulent Years (1933-1948)

In March 1933, days after the release of *King Kong*, “a series of events began that suddenly slapped Hollywood into an awareness of its connection to the outside world” (Schwartz 1982:9). To deal with the banking crisis--over nine million Americans had lost their savings since the stock market crash--Roosevelt's first major act as president was to declare a national “bank holiday,” closing all the banks. After Congress passed the Emergency Banking Act, developed by Roosevelt and banking leaders, and Roosevelt gave the first of many “Fireside Chats,” radio broadcasts discussing the situation in frank but reassuring terms with the American people; the banks re-opened March 13 on the condition that they had passed a Treasury Department inspection proving they had sufficient funds (Henretta et. al. 2002).

During that week, of all the studios, only Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) could meet their payroll, and they paid in cash. Universal suspended contracts. Fox told employees that they would not be paid. Columbia, Paramount, RKO and Warner Brothers did not know how they would pay their employees. The studio heads met to discuss the problem and agreed to an across-the-board pay cut (Schwartz 1982). Merian Cooper of RKO with the support of only Harry Cohn of Columbia convinced the other executives that film workers earning fifty dollars a week or less should not have to take the pay cut (Vaz 2005:245).

Louis B. Mayer of MGM called a meeting of department heads, movie stars, writers, and directors at a projection room on the lot. Mayer arrived theatrically, twenty minutes late, and “played the role of a man in torment, looking sleepless and unshaven. He asked his employees to help him save the studio.” Actor Lionel Barrymore

volunteered to take a pay cut, “Mayer looked at him dramatically, attempting to convey gratitude so monumental he had no words to express it.” Writer Ernest Vajda wondered why they should take a pay cut when Metro pictures were successful. Barrymore said, “You are acting like a man on his way to the guillotine wanting to stop for a manicure.” Chastened, the employees present took the pay cut “with tears and solidarity” (Schwartz 1982:9).

After Mayer left the meeting, he turned to Benny Thau, his assistant and asked cheerfully, “So! How did I do?” Later Albert Hackett commented that Mayer, “created more communists than Karl Marx” (Schwartz 1982:10).

On March 12, 1933, the IATSE members refused to take the 50 percent salary reduction. Because the IATSE had a written contract, the Studio Basic Agreement, and they had massive strike power (they could turn off the money flow at the theater by having IATSE projectionists strike), they thought they did not have to comply with the studio’s call for a pay cut.

This resistance had a galvanizing effect on other studio employees from stars to writers to directors, “they saw the protection that had rendered IATSE unions immune to any tampering with salaries. It was time to unionize” (Schwartz 1982:12). The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences administered the pay cuts, adding to the employees’ sense that this in-house union was not serving their best interests. In June, Roosevelt signed the National Industrial Recovery Act and established the National Recovery Administration (Nielsen Mailes 1995). This “fostered collective bargaining as a national policy and urged the unionization of all types of workers” (Ross 1941:217). Section 7a of the act mandated a minimum wage, and maximum hours. It restricted child labor and

said, “Employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and shall be free from interference, restraint or coercion of employers” (Nicholson 2004:208).

In June, the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and Screen Writers Guild attorney, Laurence Beilenson, filed the papers to incorporate SAG. Incorporation was a deliberate choice to attract stars, because it “would insulate its members from financial responsibility.” Created in part in response to the problems IATSE had, the SAG incorporation documents, and also later those of the screen writers and directors, had many provisions designed to protect the workers. All officers were volunteers—there was no incentive to stay in office for the money. Officers and board members would be chosen in direct elections in which every member could vote (the IATSE locals sent, and still sends, delegates to represent the locals in the union elections). An undemocratic part of SAG’s voting rules was that extras did not get a vote because, they far “outnumbered the actors and would have been able to control the union’s policies.” The writers, actors, and later, directors, also chose to organized themselves in “guilds” not “unions” for a specific reason: “Many ... despite their activism, were socially and politically conservative and would have been uncomfortable in any group that featured ‘union’ in its title,” so they chose to be a guild, “to hearken back to medieval associations of artisans” (Prindle 1988:22). Once empowered, the actors acted. On July 12, 1933, the actors formed the Screen Actors Guild.

Eddie Loeb, a Washington representative of the producers and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the company union, attempted to cut actors’ salaries in a draft of the National Recovery Administration (NRA) code. The language in the code

draft stated that actors' salaries were capped at \$100,000, and studios had the right of first refusal after the actors' seven-year contracts ended, which the actors saw as enslavement. Actors resigned from the Academy in protest (Neilsen and Mailes 1995, Prindle 1988). SAG representatives presented their case directly to Roosevelt who was a friend of the enormously popular performer and SAG President Eddie Cantor. Roosevelt pointed out that \$100,000 was more than he earned as President. Cantor responded that the money Roosevelt did not earn stayed with the American people, whereas the money actors did not earn stayed with the producers. The code language changed (sag.org, Schwartz 1982:29).

The IATSE's 1933 refusal to take a pay cut had an entirely different effect on the IATSE itself. The studios made the IATSE members pay for their insubordination. The studios started using non-union labor, and by July, the IATSE leadership called upon over six thousand members to strike. The studios executives kept hiring in other workers to do IATSE jobs, and they broke the union's control:

To help break the strike, the studios placed ½ page ads in the Los Angeles papers calling for workers, and hired hundreds. They offered strategic workers in the conflict five-year contracts with large salary increases. Thousands of desperate and unqualified men showed up at the studio gates. When workers confronted Mayer, he cried his customary tears and claimed New York was pressuring him. The National Labor Board investigated and called off the strike. As a result of the strike, many workers lost cars and homes and were in debt. Hundreds never got their jobs back and left the industry. Two cameramen, ashamed of having gone back to work, committed suicide. The IATSE opened a soup kitchen.

The American Federation of Labor had no stake in supporting the IATSE. Whether the Carpenters, the Electricians (IBEW) or IATSE worked in the motion picture studios, the AFL received workers' dues (Neilsen and Mailes 1988). IATSE's Hollywood membership dropped from nine thousand to 158 men between 1933 and 1935, and the

studios refused to renew the Studio Basic Agreement with IATSE (Hartsough 1989, McWilliams 1979).

The Mob

There was something very wrong with this union.

--Gene Mailes, IATSE Activist (Nielsen Mailes 1995:31)

Roosevelt's legalization of beer in April 1933, and the repeal of the 18th Amendment, ending prohibition, in December 1933, added to his growing popularity (Henretta et. al. 2002). However, nationwide, a whole generation of criminals, who previously had secure employment in the liquor business, needed to find new jobs. In Chicago in 1934, workers in organized crime found their entry into Hollywood through Willie Bioff, a "small-time hoodlum who had done his share of pimping and bootlegging," and George Browne, the leader of the IATSE Stagehands Local in Chicago. Bioff and Browne had been extorting funds from theater owners so the owners would not have to restore wage cuts to local film workers; their tactical error was to celebrate the arrival of a \$20,000 lump-sum payment by flagrantly throwing around their newfound wealth at a gambling joint run by a member of the Capone crime syndicate, then under Frank Nitti's leadership. After their celebration, Nitti's men told Bioff and Browne he wanted half their take, or else (Nielsen Mailes 1995).

By 1934, the syndicate successfully ran Browne unopposed for President of the entire IATSE, and "negotiated" for a two-thirds return of future payoffs. Their successful efforts were aided by former President William Elliot's failure in the Hollywood strike, and by their own willingness to win at any cost. Also, Bioff waved pistols at people to emphasize his willingness to get what he wanted. The syndicate emphasized their sincerity in efforts to go to any lengths to suppress resistance by later murdering Tommy

Malloy, a powerful Chicago IATSE member who had the knowledge and courage to expose Bioff, Browne, and the Capone syndicate. Over 300 cars followed in Malloy's funeral procession (Nielsen and Mailes 1995, Aller 1972). The threats of violence and actual violence were not atypical. For example, when New Jersey members of IATSE found out that their business agent, Louis Kaufman, was involved in the mob, they unsuccessfully tried to vote him out. Kaufman responded, "A lot of people here want to see me in jail. I'll be around when they're gone and they won't die a natural death" (Aller 1972:52). When exhibitors told Bioff that his demand of two projectionists in each booth plus \$100,000 would mean the theaters would go out of business, Bioff responded, "If that will kill grandma, then grandma must die" (Friedrich 1986:64).

Bioff and Browne went to the studio heads in 1935 offering a compliant labor force in exchange for \$2 million in payoffs. They found willing negotiators, "the majors welcomed the opportunity to pay for studio labor relations that served their interests" (Hartsough 1989:51). As labor activist Gene Mailes put it, "Men like Joe Schenk, Chairman of the Board of 20th Century Fox, would rather deal with the leading criminals in the country than their own employees" (Nielsen Mailes 1995:112). However, many IATSE members supported Browne. Herb Aller, a long-time IATSE business representative said, "Our feeling was that Browne could do the job. How and when no one cared" (Aller 1972:55).

The IATSE emerged from January 1936 negotiations with renewed and strengthened participation in the Studio Basic Agreement: the IATSE had the first closed-shop agreement in Hollywood history. The IATSE also had enlarged jurisdiction over camera operators, stage carpenters, grips, lab technicians, property people, sound

technicians and lamp operators. In addition the IATSE had levied a two-percent assessment against the wages of all members (this netted them approximately \$6.5 million dollars, much of which was shared with the syndicate). It is estimated that the payoffs to Bioff and Browne saved the studios \$15 million (Hartsough 1989, McWilliams 1979, Cogley 1956). Those IATSE members who tried to protest the new conditions of their employment were “beaten up, suspended from their jobs, and expelled from the union” (McWilliams 1979:87).

Given the IATSE’s compromised status with the studios and organized crime, it is noteworthy that in 1936, IATSE Second Vice-President William Covert publicly protested producers going to foreign countries to evade “union wages and conditions.” He was speaking mostly about the “quota quickies” still being made in England. In June 12, 1936, Covert raised the issue during the report of the General Executive Board at a meeting held at the Muehlebach Hotel, in Kansas City, Missouri:

FOREIGN PICTURE PRODUCTION: Second Vice-President William P. Covert called the attention of the General Executive Board to a condition pertaining to the increase in emigration by recognized producers to foreign countries for the purpose of evading Union wages and conditions, citing England in particular. Some producers engage qualified cameramen, studio workers, etc. in this country and then take them abroad to perform the necessary service, while others rely upon those employed in the craft in European countries. Pictures are produced at an extremely low figure, making it practically prohibitive for American-made pictures to compete with those made on the other side.

It was determined by the members of the Board that the only successful method that could be employed to combat the expansion and perpetuation of such a condition would be through its control by a tariff law. The matter was left entirely in the hands of President [George] Browne to use his best endeavors in an effort to effect some progress toward this end (IATSE Proceedings 1936:120).

While little is known of Covert beyond his status as a career IATSE insider who served in IATSE administration from 1919 to 1950 (iatse-intl.org 2007), it is reasonable to speculate that perhaps he was emboldened by the passage of the Wagner Act in 1935 which “reaffirmed the right of workers to organize” (Nicholson 2004:214) and by the

organization of other Hollywood workers, and perhaps because he was responding to a situation so dire that even with his union's compromised status, he had to say something.

Workers, specifically labor represented by the IATSE, had an unmentioned advantage. The IATSE has for most of its lifespan played a "sweetheart" role—that is, they are known for being an undemocratic union in the pockets of the producers (Nielsen Mailes 1995:105). For that reason, over the IATSE's hundred-plus-year history, union representatives have only spoken out if there's something of great significance to their members, like for example, overwhelming unemployment. During this phase, the runaway production issue threatened the existence of the workers by removing the source of their livelihood. So, when the IATSE representatives spoke up, all the players knew their grievance was substantive.

Perhaps because Covert's suggested remedy involved governmental not studio action, he felt free to speak.

In any event, Browne was saved from accounting for his lack of action on this matter by the British government and by Adolph Hitler. When, after ten years, the British renewed the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927 as the 1938 Film Act, they excluded film production outside Britain (in the British dominions) thus cutting off Hollywood's access to Canada as a site for making quota quickies (Pendakur 1990). Also by the late 1930s, Europe was a battlefield. That made foreign production there impossible, and the issue did not emerge again in a serious way until after the War's end. When issues about Bioff and Browne were raised at the 1938 IATSE convention, a Lincoln, Nebraska projectionist by the name of Roy Brewer "worked to reject every grievance against Browne and Bioff" (Nielsen Mailes 1995:xii).

The Federation of Motion Picture Crafts (FMPC)

Within this world of fantasy are thousands of workers of all kinds who sweat, and who fight the same bitter struggles as other thousands of workers to secure a decent livelihood.

--Jeff Kibre (Ceplair 1989:64)

The years 1936-37 marked the high point of American labor's political clout (Nicholson 2004:215). In mid-April 1937, the Wagner Act was upheld by the Supreme Court (Prindle 1988). On April 30, 1937, the Federation of Motion Picture Crafts (FMPC) took the studio executives by surprise and "walked out of studios, demanding recognition" (Horne 2001, Prindle 1988:28, Ceplair 1989, Nielsen and Mailes 1995). The FMPC was a coalition of unions under the leadership of Jeff Kibre, including over 6,000 people: art directors, cooks, costume designers, lab engineers, technical directors, sound engineers, set designers, scenic artists, hairstylists, make-up artists painters, plasterers, and plumbers, among others.

Jeff Kibre was a second-generation Hollywood studio worker--his mother had worked in the art departments of the studios (Ceplair 1989). He was also a communist who ignored the teachings of the Party and did what he thought was right. The Party did not support his actions. Like everyone else, the Communist Party leadership was much more interested in above-the-line labor.

According to labor leader Harry Bridges, Kibre was, "one of them....he had a simple eloquent manner of radiating this quality. He possessed a special talent for making it clear to the rank and file that he knew their problems and for inculcating in them an emotional sense of solidarity as the means to their freedom" (Ceplair 1989:66). Among his closest friends was Mae Huettig, who later wrote *Economic Control of the*

Motion Picture Industry (1944) a book which helped support the later Supreme Court Paramount decisions (Ceplair 1989).

The FMPC, an organization working for union democracy, had emerged in part in reaction to the IATSE, “the conservative, despotically governed, suspected mob-affiliated union [which] had nothing to offer anyone with any idealism” (Prindle 1988:28). To help fight the strike, the IATSE brought in thugs from their organized crime connections to assault the strikers, who were shown in the newspaper photographs in hospital beds. SAG leaders offered tacit and public support of the FMPC, but they had their own agenda. The threat of a sympathetic SAG strike brought about a meeting between SAG officials and the producers: On May 9, SAG leaders met with Louis B. Mayer who agreed to recognize the Guild as the actors’ bargaining agent, which meant SAG would have its first written contract. Willie Bioff of IATSE attended that meeting. When the SAG leadership announced their victory to their members, they also mentioned their complete support of the IATSE (Prindle 1988, Nielsen Mailes 1995).

The strike failed, but Kibre was not defeated. Reorganizing under the banner of the IATSE Progressives, Kibre began investigating Bioff’s and Browne’s backgrounds with the help of his attorney, Carey McWilliams, and a private detective agency (Ceplair 1989, McWilliams 1979). The IATSE Progressives soon filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Browne responded by ending the two-percent assessment, and Willie Bioff resigned. The IATSE then began fighting back with red-baiting (anti-communist) flyers, harassment and violence. Kibre received so many death threats that he needed continuous protection, and ultimately his attempt at Democratic trade unionism failed, “He failed in Hollywood ... because he could not match the power

the IATSE could muster... movie studio bosses, California legislators, Los Angeles policemen, American Federation of Labor bureaucrats, and thugs and gangsters” (Ceplair 1989:64).

However, Kibre succeeded in beginning the process that would spell the end for Bioff and Browne (This process was also helped by the news stories of Westbrook Pegler who later won a Pulitzer for exposing the IATSE (Nielsen Mailes 1995)). Kibre was blacklisted by the IATSE, so could find no work, but he knew his ongoing presence in Hollywood was a thorn in the side of IATSE. He agreed to leave town in exchange for IATSE agreeing not to persecute members of the democratically oriented United Studio Technicians Guild (USTB). He went on to work for the CIO fishermen’s union (Nielsen Mailes 1995).

The ongoing red-baiting of Kibre and others got enormous media attention, and served the Hollywood studios as a very public distraction from the influence of organized crime in Hollywood. As Carey McWilliams, who helped expose Bioff and Browne, wrote in his memoir,

The Bioff episode left me with a feeling that the army of sleuths, informers, and House Un-American Activities Committee investigators who descended on Hollywood in the 1940s to ferret out “reds” and radicals and expose “Communist” plots might better have devoted their talents to investigating corrupt labor practices in the motion picture industry. The perspective of a quarter century confirms this impression (McWilliams 1979:92).

Among the most well-known of the organized crime figures was Bugsy Siegel who worked with the Screen Extras and was extensively involved in the building of Las Vegas. He was later murdered. Johnny Roselli worked for the film studios’ Hays Office as a “labor conciliator.”

The employment of Roselli by the Hays Office is perhaps the best measure of the hypocrisy of the movie industry of the period....This bootlegger, strong-arm goon, and

illegal gambler [held] a responsible position in the agency created to protect the morals of the American people” (Messick 1973 101-2).

Later, Roselli went to jail for extortion, and when he emerged became a movie producer. He was murdered. Arnold Rothstein, an organized crime leader, owned a large stake in Loew’s which owned MGM. The government was not unaware of these underground connections and took advantage of them. When federal government officials noticed that in certain gangster films, the machine guns fired without sticking, they approached the “technical advisors” for tips about how to improve their own weaponry (Messick 1973: 62).

The Directors Get a Basic Agreement (1939)

Even though star directors often earned more than the producers, they were concerned about protecting unit production managers and assistant directors who worked for them and who did not earn star salaries. This caused them to seek a written agreement with the studios. This group had formed as a Guild in 1936, and had, like the Writers appealed for NLRB certification as a bargaining agent. The NLRB decided in favor of the Writers in 1938. Prior to the NLRB decision in favor of the Directors, they negotiated with the studio executives for their first nine-year agreement in 1939. This was a remarkably quiet process (Ross 1941, Schwartz 1982).

Frozen Funds (1940)

During the War, the aforementioned “quota quickies” problem had vanished for the film workers, but now the studios faced a new problem on the foreign front, “frozen funds.” During World War II,

European nations could no longer afford to import luxury items like films—and export their earnings—when the need for more vital commodities was pressing. A common remedy to these states’ balance-of-payments problems was to freeze funds; films were allowed entry, but only a portion of their earnings could be withdrawn (Gasher 1995).

By May of 1940, producer Samuel Goldwyn was making inquiry through his British representative about ways to deal with the frozen funds problem. He asked whether he could form a “transatlantic producing concern to make one picture with frozen funds in England.” He wished to make a film called *Undersea Boat* with David Niven (Churchill 1940:31). He was not successful. The frozen funds issue would not reappear until after the War’s end when over \$14 million of Hollywood profits were “frozen” in countries including France, Italy, Holland, Norway, Sweden, and Australia (Film Production 1948). Frozen funds would then become the workers’ problem as well.

The Writers Get a Basic Agreement (1941)

In 1941, spurred by the imminence of United States entry into World War II, the writers finally got their first guild contract with the producers. At the final meeting prior to the studios’ capitulation, a soft-spoken and gentle man named Sheriden Gibney, who was one of the writers’ representatives, said to the producers, “Because of the unstable situation, we think it best if you recognize us and make an agreement with us....” Harry Warner shouted in response, “That’s all they want...those dirty communist sons of bitches...they want to take my goddamn studio, my brothers build this studio. I came here from Europe...my father was a butcher...” Warner then “let out a string of obscenities.” The writers were “stunned. We didn’t even get angry because we were watching a man who was obviously getting blown out of his head.” Two of the producers’ representatives, Y. Frank Freeman and Eddie Mannix, with their backs to the men in the room, each took one of Warner’s arms and carried him out as he screamed, “and furthermore, you dirty commies.” There was silence. When the two returned, Silberberg said, “Gentlemen, we regret that Mr. Warner cannot rejoin us. He wasn’t

feeling well. But we've discussed your proposal, and we find it acceptable" (Schwartz 1982:172-3).

The End of Bioff and Browne in Hollywood (1941)

Ending the work Jeff Kibre began, in 1941 a Federal Court found Willie Bioff and George Browne guilty of extortion and sentenced them to eight and ten years, respectively, in prison. Richard Walsh, who had been George Browne's vice president, and had received a portion of the 2 percent assessment in salary in addition to his regular salary, took over the IATSE (Nielsen Mailes 1995). At the 1942 IATSE Convention, he characterized Browne as a "victim of circumstance" (Nielsen Mailes 1995:77). With the exception of a few challenges early in his presidency, he had undisputed power over the IATSE until 1974 (Horne 2001).

Joseph Schenk, the head of 20th Century Fox, and the producers' liaison to Bioff and Browne, was sentenced to a year and a day (he received a Presidential pardon after only serving four months.) The conviction "increased executives' hatred for the radical leadership" in the unions "whom they felt had been responsible for putting one of their leaders in jail thus disgracing the entire industry... The heads of the industry were tough, brutal business men who believed in revenge" (Schwartz 1982:132, Prindle 1988, Ross 1941, Horne 2001).

World War II

When America entered World War II, and America became allies with Russia to defeat the Axis, all of sudden, the anti-communist rhetoric was silenced, briefly.

Even though the War slowed overseas production, many talented film-makers moved to Hollywood from other places. Hollywood has always depended on foreign

talent, and some of its most famous stars, like Charlie Chaplin, Marlene Dietrich and Cary Grant, were from other countries. World War II meant an increase of refugees flowing in to Hollywood, including the famous playwright Bertold Brecht, who would later be called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. When asked then whether he had ever been a member of a union or the Communist Party, he told HUAC no, and promptly moved back to Germany (Navasky 1991:80, McGilligan and Buhle 1997:411).

The Conference of Studio Unions

During the 1940s, in the wake of the Bioff-Browne debacle, Herbert Sorrell, who had been active in earlier efforts for democratic unionism, organized below-the-line film workers. This group included the remnants of Jeff Kibre's USTG, painters, publicists, screen cartoonists, story analysts, lab technicians, carpenters and electricians. They became a militant group called the Conference of Studio Unions (CSU), in another attempt to form a democratic alternative to the IATSE. At least initially, the producers welcomed the confrontation because it diverted attention from the film workers' common cause: bargaining for better conditions. Sorrell was dedicated and soon successful in gaining for his workers some of the best wages in the industry (Nielsen Mailes 1995).

While Sorrell was later vilified for alleged communist ties, it is important to note that he broke with the United States Communist Party policy of no wartime strikes by calling for a walkout in March 1945, which led to the most violent, serious labor confrontations in Hollywood history. Sorrell believed that "war or no war we should not give up any basic American trade union belief" (Nielsen Mailes 1995:87-91).

The conflict between the IATSE and the CSU resulted in a series of strikes in the mid-1940s that captured the attention of the American public. Initially 7,000 film workers went on strike. The 1945 strikes culminated in “Bloody Friday” or “The Battle of Warner Brothers” on October 5. From inside Warner Brothers’ studio, from the top of the five-story-high sound stages, people started dropping six-inch bolts on the strikers. Then the Warner Brothers private fire department turned fire hoses full force on the strikers, and Warner’s private police threw gas grenades into the crowd. Cars were overturned, and goons paid \$50 each by the IATSE attacked the strikers with monkey wrenches leaving many injured and nine people hospitalized (Nielsen Mailes 1995).

(The CSU was not a completely egalitarian organization. During a July 1946 strike, when William Riddle, a black Janitor attempted to cross the picket line and was seized, he said angrily, “I ain’t white enough to get into your union. Your picket line ain’t good enough for me!” Riddle was released and he went to work (Horne 2001:226)).

The CSU was eventually destroyed, some say, because their message was complex and nuanced. The people who opposed them, led by IATSE representative Roy Brewer, had the power of the studios, the IATSE, the local police and the mob behind them, and they also had a much simpler message. They labeled the CSU members “communists.” “Brewer’s argument was the one that prevailed, probably because it was far easier to understand... for four years Brewer bludgeoned [the CSU] with a never-varying attack: communism, communism, communism” (Prindle 1988:43, Horne 2001, Nielsen and Mailes 1995). Some have argued that Brewer was sincere, and that in his mind, “the vulnerability of his stagehands became indistinguishable from the plight of the free world” (Prindle 1988:42).

Brewer's strategic action also made him a major force in Hollywood. He built, a power base for right-wing politics in Hollywood that would make him one of the most powerful men in the motion picture industry within a few years. He initiated the Hollywood blacklist, starting with the long-time irritants to the leaders of the IATSE, namely the remnants of the old IA Progressives and their supporters. (Nielsen Mailes 1995:126).

The destruction of the CSU also had implications for democratic trade unionism in the IATSE. According to Gene Mailes, who worked with Herbert Sorrell in the CSU,

The results have been that the IA studio workers have not gone out on a major strike for over forty years [as of 2008 it's over sixty years]....Years after more militant unions have gained advantages, the IA members are still thrown a few crumbs to keep them quiet. The problems we were fighting then are still faced by current studio workers. It might even be worse today (Nielsen Mailes 1995:114-5).

President Roosevelt died in office in 1945, and Harry Truman became President.

After the November 1946 elections, for the first time in eighteen years, Republicans controlled both the Senate and the House. American left the "hot war" mentality for the "cold war" mentality (Nielsen Mailes 1995). Some have argued that the underlying cause of the subsequent investigations of "communists" by the House and Senate, and the attacks on progressives in the labor unions, had more to do with the dismantling and disempowering of Roosevelt's New Deal than any real Communist threat to America.

Taft Hartley (1948)

According to a congressman who helped shaped Taft-Hartley, the Hollywood union conflicts were "a very, very important consideration when we were drafting" the legislation. Film labor historian Gerald Horne writes, "The formulators of the Taft-Hartley legislation...were influenced profoundly by the startling scenes of violence from Hollywood and the torturous elections and jurisdictional battles that characterized union struggles there" (Horne 2001:15).

Taft-Hartley was also part of a general pattern of legislation: It is characteristic of American labor history that during the war periods, workers are granted certain powers and freedoms in order to encourage them to support the war. World War II was such a moment. American workers not only felt their power, but knew that it was with their help that America won the War (Nicholson 2004).

It is also characteristic that after a war is over, big business—with government support--clamps down on labor power and re-constrains and discourages workers. The Taft Hartley Act (1948) stripped the labor movement of its power in many ways. Among those most significant parts of Taft Hartley for film workers, and for Hollywood film production that did not occur in Hollywood, were that the Act demanded that union members sign an oath declaring they were not a members of the Communist Party, and created “right to work” states where big business could operate unfettered by unions (Henretta et. al. 2002, Nicholson 2004).

HUAC (The House Committee on Un-American Activities)

In March of 1947, out of respect for the Screen Actors Guild conflict-of-interest clause, the SAG President, Robert Montgomery, as well as vice-presidents Dick Powell and Franchot Tone resigned because they had production interests in films that could raise questions about their allegiances in representing actors. Ronald Reagan, a third vice-president, suddenly was SAG President, and equally as suddenly was no longer a liberal. He blamed his political shift on harassment by the CSU (Horne 2001). In April 1947 he invited FBI agents to visit him at home and he named people he believed to be communists (Prindle 1988:50).²²

²² It is important to acknowledge at this point that this work examines nuances of human behavior, group behavior, and the nuanced portrayal of such behavior in the motion pictures. An interesting aspect of

IATSE President George Browne, prior to his arrest, had first invited Martin Dies of what was then called the Dies Committee (and would later be called the House Committee on Un-American Activities or HUAC) to investigate Hollywood communists. Herb Sorell commented that the congressman “would do better to investigate Bioff than Communists” (Nielsen Mailes 1995:65). In May of 1947, the House Committee on Un-American Activities came to Hollywood to talk with “friendly” witnesses who cooperated with their investigations (Prindle 1988:52). The committee was comprised of men including J. Parnell Thomas (who would later serve prison time), and Richard Nixon, (who would later have to resign the United States Presidency because of his wrongdoing with regard to the Watergate break-ins) (Henretta et. al. 2002, Cole 1981).

During the 1947 House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) investigations in Washington, D.C., eleven prominent and well-liked members of the Hollywood labor community (who would later be called the “Hollywood Ten,”), refused to answer questions posed by a Congressional committee about their membership in various organizations, including, most importantly, their union affiliation, and they refused to name alleged Communist sympathizers. They were blacklisted by the studios, and were imprisoned for contempt of Congress (Campbell 2007). “Sadly, the Screen Actors Guild, the Screen Writers Guild (SWG) and the Screen Directors Guild (SDG) made virtually no effort to challenge the sacrifice of their members to the blacklist” (Ceclair 1998). In 1951, HUAC expanded the scope of its investigation in Hollywood.

the research was exploring the complicated roles of people like Reagan, Richard Nixon, and Roy Brewer. People are contradictory. Unlike many movies, this project attempts to demonstrate that there are no “good guys and bad guys.” These people, who have been both lionized and excoriated in the popular media, are neither good guys nor bad guys. They made decisions and took actions that were helpful and harmful to many people. They stood for principles or did not stand for principles about which many have widely varying attitudes. My hope is that this complexity--and not some final judgment about the content of their character--is what stays with the reader.

When members of above-the-line film unions had appealed to their leadership for help with this “aggressive witch-hunt” (Campbell 2007:253), they found none. For example, in 1951, SAG President Ronald Reagan told actor Gale Sondergaard, who had appealed to the Guild for support in responding to HUAC, “all participants in the international Communist Party conspiracy against our nation should be exposed for what they are—enemies of our country and of our form of government” (Davis 1982).

I believe that those thinking people who feared communism and those thinking people who were sympathetic to communism’s possibilities mostly did (and do) not speak to each others’ concerns. Those who feared communism considered what *in practice* Russia and China had done in the name of communism and wanted to prevent that in the United States. Some were willing to go to any lengths to do so. Those thinking people who considered the positive possibilities of communism saw that communism *in theory* offered more egalitarian opportunity. Each group saw the other as hopelessly dangerously misguided. The two sides had in common that they were trying to avoid the totalitarian nightmare. The Right wing saw it in China and Russia and feared its implementation here. The Left wing saw it in the Right wing. A benefit to the studios of this debate and the conflagration around it was that it divided and distracted the labor movement from their common cause.

Among those who testified against Communists was Roy Brewer; and in Hollywood he became the most powerful unofficial “clearance officer” to whom those who had been falsely accused of communist sympathies, those who were repentant, or those who had been misunderstood could appeal. “If a conversation plus his own research convinced him that the artist either did not deserve to be on a list in the first place or had

genuinely mended his ways, Brewer would write a letter to the studios attesting to his political cleanliness. This was usually all that was necessary for professional resurrection” (Prindle 1988:58).

In the movie industry, by 1955, 106 writers, 36 actors, and 11 directors testified, took the Fifth Amendment and then were blacklisted (Prindle 1988:61). HUAC and the industry did not stop there. The persecutions, with the studio executives’ active help, had the effect of silencing not just communist voices, but also liberal voices in American moviemaking. There was also a cost to the content of films after progressives had been “purged” from the ranks of Hollywood workers, in part through the crushing of the CSU, in part with the help of the Taft Hartley Act and in part through HUAC. According to actress Karen Morley, who was blacklisted,

Movies just got worse. Movies have always been fairly violent but in the old days writers tried to express human values. They tried, for example, to explain why a kid turned violent—he had been poor, his family was wretched, his boyhood was terrible. There was a motivation other than just evil. The violence had to be motivated sensibly. This was a streak, I believe, of progressive thinking.

All that kind of treatment pretty much went by the board during the blacklist. Now violence became an art, a cult, and with it came the passive women. The beautiful, strong ladies went away, and the weak, beautifully built women took their place, actresses chosen more for their figures than for their faces or for their characters... The passivity is what I found most distressing (McGilligan and Buhle 1997:478).

There are many reasons, during the next few years, that Americans turned away by the millions from the motion picture cinemas and sought entertainment elsewhere (many of these reasons are discussed in the next chapter). Here is another: when Hollywood muffled its democratic and progressive voices, the films may have lost a quality that made many people want to see them.

Paramount Decisions

The Supreme Court's "Paramount decisions" of the 1940s receive much credit for the breakup of the studio system. There were other factors. In 1936, movie star Bette Davis, who had been offered yet another unattractive part by Warner Bros. and was tired of feeling like "an assembly-line actress," moved to Great Britain. She was sued by Warner Bros. and she lost. Though she had to go back to the assembly line, her courage inspired others. In 1944, movie star Olivia de Havilland won her case in the Supreme Court against Warner Bros. and was freed from her contract. The contract system, which for many studio employees was a kind of slavery, had been dealt a "mortal blow" (Prindle 1988:177). By the late 1940s when the Supreme Court made the Paramount decisions, which broke up the vertically integrated oligopolistic hold the studios had on the motion picture business by ordering the studios to divest themselves of their theaters, Hollywood was changed.

The studio system was devised by immigrants from Eastern Europe who had not been born in egalitarian societies (Berg 1989). Perhaps in part because of this, they created a factory mode of production which had many aspects in common with the feudal system. Even though many of the studio system movies were great, the fall of the studio system was often celebrated by workers as a release from slavery. However, in addition to the losses sustained by the studios as a result of the Paramount decisions, there were losses to the film workers. The studio system in many cases provided a constancy of studio employment which the later irregularity of independent production, and of location shooting would not. At the studio, the place and people had a certain consistency, despite changing projects. Each location shoot is subject to the particular mania of those in

charge, with new crew, and the unexpected incidents inherent in filming in an unknown place.

It is too simple to claim that, like proverbial monkeys at a typewriter, if the studios produced enough films (and many studios turned out one a week), they were bound to make a good one once in a while. For all the studio heads' colorful and abusive complaining, those turbulent years when progressive film makers still could work easily in Hollywood, and the slave-like conditions under which many workers toiled, made possible the so-called golden years of American film making.

Chapter 4

What We Talk About When We Talk About Runaway Production (1948-1971)

Overview of Film Workers' Unions Subsequent to World War II

What was true of the United States labor force in general during this period was also true of many below-the-line Hollywood unions, especially the IATSE:

Rambunctious labor democracy...gave way to near permanent bureaucracies, organizational stagnation, and elitism. In several cases, this new power took the form of outright gangsterism; in others it imitated the top-down and autocratic corporate model, not so different from gangsterism itself, but legal (Nicholson 2004:239).

Organized labor had been forced to change because of laws like Taft-Hartley which purged American unions of progressive leadership and membership: "Organized labor was no longer an engine or center for social or democratic change in the country. That role had been traded in for institutional legitimacy, stability, and security" (Nicholson 2004:261). The resulting prosperity mostly benefited "white male workers and their children" (Nicholson 2004).

After the turbulence of the previous era, by the late 1940s, despite significant challenges by film workers' groups led by Jeff Kibre and later by Herbert Sorrell and the Conference of Studio Unions, the film unions' jurisdictional lines were fairly well-defined, and have remained so to this day. Hollywood workers were divided by job category, and hence by unions, into distinct hierarchical categories. As was discussed previously, "above the line" workers--the top layer--include those who get large screen credits and receive the most scholarly and popular mass-media attention: the writers, organized into the Writers Guild of America (WGA) (formerly the Screen Writers Guild);

the directors, organized into the Directors Guild of America (DGA); and the actors, organized into the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) (Kleingartner and Raymond 1988).

So-called “below the line” labor consists of almost everyone else who actually helps make films or aids in their promotion, technicians such as the gaffers (the lighting electricians), the best boys (the gaffer’s chief assistant), the grips (stagehands), those preparing the cameras, wardrobe people, hair-stylists, make-up artists, publicists, and others. The major below-the-line unions include the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States, its Territories, and Canada (IATSE), the National Alliance of Broadcast Employees and Technicians (NABET), the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, the Teamsters (Kleingartner and Raymond 1988), and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). Workers who make movies are rarely discussed as a single entity, and rarely in my experience do they talk about themselves as part of a single working group.

The Hollywood Unions Unite: AFL Film Committee (1947)

In April 1947, film union leaders formed the Hollywood AFL Film Committee to, “work out a program for the use of motion pictures in labor-public relations.” Established prior to an AFL convention, which would occur the following week, the Committee planned to urge the AFL to use part of its public relations budget for film production. Led by Roy Brewer of the IATSE, the Committee included members from SAG, the Teamsters, “laborers, studio projectionists, grips, plasterers, film editors and electricians” (Brady 1947). Their project quickly fizzled: I found no record of the Committee producing any films. By 1949, the renamed AFL Film *Council* was

“composed of studio unions and guilds representing more than 20,000 employees in the motion picture industry” (Film Daily 1949). Soon, the Council set its sights on other targets, which aligned them with the producers’ and the nation’s interests, and against those of foreign governments.

Frozen Funds Again...

Between 1948 and 1952, the Marshall Plan poured \$13 billion dollars into war-torn Europe to help the Europeans rebuild and prevent the Russians (and by extension communism) from influencing that rebuilding (Henretta et. al. 2002). Meanwhile, the Hollywood studios were concerned with getting \$14 million in frozen funds out of Europe. Due to national laws enacted in countries including France, Italy, Spain and the UK, for the purpose of rebuilding their economies, American theater revenues in these European nations could not leave the countries where they were earned. After lobbying by the Americans, by June of 1948, the British began to allow the producers to use the funds for motion picture production (*New York Times* 1948:31). Other countries soon followed suit. In order to use the frozen funds, the studios began to film pictures in those countries, using local crews. The Hollywood studios made nineteen films using frozen funds in 1949 (Gasher 1995).

Reagan, Brewer, Walsh and Thomson go to Washington (1949)

It’s important to note that despite Hollywood labor union leaders’ stand against communism among their members, they aggressively took a pro-labor position for their members’ employment, as long as it did not conflict with the studios’ interests. In 1949, representing the AFL Film Council, the Screen Actors Guild President Ronald Reagan, the Writers Guild President Kenneth Thomson, and International Alliance of Theatrical

Stage Employees (IATSE) officials Roy Brewer and President Richard Walsh--went to the White House to discuss Hollywood unemployment with President Truman (sag.org, *Los Angeles Times* 1949a, 1949b, Marthason 1949, Arthur 1949). The unions were working together “to ease currency restrictions” (Brady 1949a). According to Reagan, “Every Englishman who works on an American financed picture there means one worker out of a job here” (Brady 1949b).

Hollywood Foreign Film Production Escalates

In addition to the Frozen Funds issue, many other factors contributed to the escalation of Hollywood film production overseas. After World War II, the U.S. dollar was strong, and European labor costs were low.

Also, the popularity of Italian neorealist films of the mid- to late-1940s influenced filmmakers to seek locations off the studio lot. These films were often vigorous depictions of working class life with gritty black-and-white urban scenes. They were welcomed in the United States, at the same time as American progressive films had been effectively killed by the studio response to the HUAC investigations. The American filmmaking community showed their appreciation for these films by giving them Academy Awards. (Among the producers of the neorealist films was Dino Di Laurentiis, who made *Bitter Rice* (1949), and won back-to-back Academy Awards in 1957 and 1958 for producing Federico Fellini’s *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria*, and would later make *King Kong* (1976) (imdb.com, Puttnam 162, Kezich and Levantesi 2004:54).)

Another factor in foreign production of Hollywood pictures were technical innovations that began to drive the shift to location shooting and away from the sound stage in the early 1950s. The use of wide-screen formats--such as Merian Cooper’s

Cinerama in 1952--and the use of color, caused the previously acceptable sound stage sets to, “look cramped and phony.” Also, technicians developed camera and audio equipment that was lighter and more portable (MacCann 1962, Kehr 1999, Vaz 2005). While these innovations didn’t necessitate location shooting abroad, they almost immediately led to shooting on locations other than a Hollywood sound stage.

Also again thanks in part to the work of Merian Cooper, who in addition to being a movie maker was also a pioneer in the field of commercial aviation, commercial air travel was slowly becoming an affordable possibility for Americans, both for business reasons and for pleasure (Vaz 2005). This made location shooting and post-production more time-efficient than it had been in previous decades. As the post 1950s movie audience became more affluent and better-traveled, they were less easily fooled.

During the earlier studio system era, producer Samuel Goldwyn was asked by a director if his jungle picture could be filmed in a real jungle. He said, “A rock’s a rock. A tree’s a tree. Shoot it in Griffith Park [in Los Angeles]” (Meisler 2001). In the later period, “You could no longer plunk down a couple of palm trees and say it was Hawaii to someone who had been to Honolulu” (Funke 1974).

Especially in the years just after World War II, for entertainment, Americans favored the radio, which only required an initial small investment in the machine. By the mid-1950s rock ‘n’ roll began finding its audience through the radio, and millions of actively interested young listeners felt these songs gave voice to a part of themselves that had not before been expressed in popular culture. By contrast, at the same time, union members stopped singing at union meetings. Perhaps they felt, because their leaders

were in cahoots with big business and big government, their voices went unheard (Nicholson 2004:268, Henretta et.al. 2002:818).

By the early 1950s, movie attendance, and hence movie production, were in serious decline for additional reasons. While this shift is often attributed to the arrival of television, the decline began before most Americans owned televisions. With the Depression over, the public was less in need of the escape that movies provide. In the postwar period, Americans moved in record numbers to the newly built suburbs. Between 1945 and 1950 home ownership doubled. After the war, couples who married on average were nineteen years old. Prior to that, couples' average age was twenty-four (Campbell 2007:253). This formerly movie-going audience had mortgages to pay, and small children to raise.

Many things had changed in the United States. Jackie Robinson integrated baseball in 1947, and Truman desegregated the military 1948 (Henretta et.al. 2002). Racism was still upheld by the nation's highest court. In March of 1950, the Supreme Court declined to hear the Curley case, where a Hollywood film was banned in Memphis because it showed black and white children playing together. *Variety* noted, "the south ...does not ... recognize equality between the races even in children" (Variety 1950a). Also during this period, Willis O'Brien finally won an Academy Award, ostensibly for his work on the film *Mighty Joe Young*, but actually as a belated thank you for the work he had done on *King Kong* (1933) (Variety 1950b, Morton 2005).

Bartering Away U.S. Film Workers Jobs is Named "Runaway Production"(1950)

As was mentioned in the Introduction, in 1950, the *Daily Variety* discussed the "bartering away still more jobs of American film workers" in relationship to using

European workers in Hollywood foreign film production. They called this phenomenon, “runaway” foreign production (Variety 1950c). The *Hollywood Reporter* soon began using the term, and by April 1950, *The New York Times* was also using it (Spiro 1950).

The following chronological sequence is an attempt to map an outline of the now-named runaway production between 1948 and 1971. During this period, runaway production went mostly to Europe and to Mexico. Aspects of this phenomenon had previously appeared in the aforementioned 1920s-1940s “quota quickies” and “frozen funds” matters. The story is more complicated and interesting than these paragraphs indicate, but this makes a start at describing what has been--and is still--glossed over or denied.

Runaway Production (1950)

By April 1950, twelve to seventeen 1950 film productions were already slated to go abroad (Spiro 1950). During the war years, almost no film production had taken place abroad, so this sudden change was dramatic. The studios were hiring actors (except the stars) and technical workers from non-union foreign labor at the site. To Hollywood workers, actors and technicians alike, this seemed to be a dangerous trend. Roy Brewer, the West Coast representative of the IATSE workers, and other craft labor leaders threatened to appeal to the United States government for aid (Spiro 1950). The IATSE workers were soon joined in the struggle by the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and their cause was taken up by the American Federation of Labor (AFL).

Blaming Frozen Funds, the Studios Claim to Need to Appeal to Foreign Markets— (1950)

The studio representatives defended runaway production by stating that in the post-war period, their money in European countries was “frozen.” So they were channeling those funds into U.S. initiated foreign film production. To a certain extent this had validity, but when necessary, the studios suddenly found creative ways to channel frozen funds into other business. As Eric Johnston, the leader of the producers’ organization, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), told the AFL Film Council, “We’ve raised tankers in Marseille harbor and sold them to American shippers. We’ve built ships in various countries. We’ve manufactured rayon in Italy, and engaged in other similar enterprises to convert frozen funds into dollars. In fact, we’ve been so successful at it that two other large industries have come to us to learn how we do it.” In addition, to justify foreign film production, the producers used an argument which they have used repeatedly, “We must continue to make films abroad in order to keep our foreign markets” (Spiro 1950). The press has quoted this claim faithfully without comment for over fifty years.

At that time, over one-third of industry “gross revenue” came from outside the United States. By the later part of this period, in 1964, it had risen to 55 percent of the gross revenue (Spiro 1950, Schumach 1964a). Never, however, in the history of *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* reporting on runaway production, or any report I read, has anyone reported any country’s representative saying, “We will not exhibit American films if you do not make movies here.”

The AFL Film Council Again (1950)

IATSE and SAG, under the umbrella of the AFL, continued to work on the AFL Hollywood Film Council to combat runaway production. (Spiro 1950, Pryor 1953a,

New York Times 1952). They passed a resolution protesting “instances where producers go elsewhere to cut production costs and get cheap labor.” The producers claimed that they were filming abroad for artistic reasons or to use frozen funds. The union representatives clarified their position: “We are not objecting ... to the making of pictures abroad for the purpose of using up frozen assets or of obtaining authentic backgrounds.” The union representatives threatened to bring the entire AFL labor force into the struggle (New York Times 1952).

Frozen funds legislation created a problem: the more films Hollywood made abroad, the more money was frozen (MacCann 1962:79). This Catch-22 ended when the combination of American pressure for foreign legislative change and the relative stabilization of the post-war economies of these countries, resulted in the end of frozen funds legislation.

Richard Nixon, Roy Brewer and Ronald Reagan

During this period, Richard Nixon, who had served on HUAC, was making his political ascent. Using the new medium of television, he saved himself from getting kicked off the Eisenhower ticket as a vice-presidential candidate with his “Checkers” speech in 1952. Despite Nixon’s wrongdoing regarding campaign “slush” funds, after he got on the air and stated emphatically that he would not give back a gift puppy his daughter named, “Checkers,” Republican viewers flooded Republican headquarters with sympathetic calls (Henretta et. al. 2002).

Roy Brewer had successfully moved from leading the battle against Hollywood communists to leading the battle against runaway production. Until 1953, he was President of the AFL Hollywood Film Council. At that time, he said the effects of

runaway production had made Hollywood into a “ghost town.” According to Brewer, fifty percent of the 22,000 members represented by the Film Council were unemployed (Pryor 1953b).²³

In October 1953, Brewer set his sights on a different goal. He resigned his post as West Coast representative of the IATSE in order to run against IATSE President Richard Walsh for the leadership of the entire IATSE, including theater and film unions (Pryor 1953d). For Brewer, the destruction of progressive Hollywood would prove to have been a more attainable goal. In 1954, Brewer lost to Walsh, and never again attained a major position of power within the film community.

Also in 1954, Senator Joseph McCarthy, who had ferociously pursued his own anti-communist agenda for the past four years, made the mistake of including the United States Army in his attacks. The televised hearings drew millions of viewers, and McCarthy’s harassment and bullying without producing any hard evidence, destroyed his credibility. At one point, after McCarthy attacked an associate of the army’s chief attorney, Joseph Welch, Welch stood, faced the senator and said, “Until this moment, Senator, I think I never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness. Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator. You have done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you no sense of decency?” In December, the Senate condemned McCarthy for “conduct contrary to Senatorial traditions.” He was dead within three years from alcohol-induced cirrhosis of the liver (Farquhar 2003:213-4). By this time, over 15,000 federal employees, among many others, had lost their jobs due to their political beliefs (Nicholson 2004:254).

²³ The term “Ghost Town,” which, for this researcher, evokes the Old West was actually coined during the Depression in 1931 (Websters 1999:491).

For members of the entertainment unions, there was new employment on the corporate sponsored televised shows such as, “G.E. Theater,” “The U.S. Steel Hour,” “Westinghouse Playhouse,” and “The Texaco Star Theater.” Earlier efforts, like the AFL Film Committee’s, to make films about and by working people failed, “The corporate media, entertainment, and new communications industries would more effectively resist labor union organizing efforts than manufacturing, mining and the basic industries that preceded them. Corporate enterprises invested billions of dollars a year advertising their products on the new media.” General Electric was so impressed with SAG’s cooperation with HUAC, that they hired Ronald Reagan. After his SAG presidency, Reagan spent nine years hosting the “GE Theater,” the fame from which helped to launch his political career. GE paid Reagan \$125,000 a year (Nicholson 2004:249, Prindle 1988). Brewer and Reagan remained lifelong friends (sag archives). Also in 1954, the phrase “under God,” was added to the Pledge of Allegiance. In 1956, “in God we trust” would be added to American coins (Henretta et. al. 2002:816).

Patriotism as a Weapon (1955)

In 1955, the two largest labor organizations in the United States, the AFL and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), merged. The AFL-CIO represented 90 percent of the 17.5 million members of labor unions. At that time, 33 percent of Americans were members of unions, the peak of union membership in the United States (Henretta et. al. 2002:811, Nicholson 2004).

Also at that time, the IATSE made public a “new” issue, that some Hollywood stars, producers, directors and writers, were making pictures abroad and staying away to take advantage of a tax loophole that allowed them to avoid customary income tax

payments by working abroad for seventeen months of an eighteen-month period (Pryor 1955a). This amendment to the tax laws had been in effect since 1951, and was intended to persuade, “engineers, skilled workers, economists and business executives to undergo hardships in hot remote, primitive areas. It was not intended to be a movie ‘gravy train’” (Tucker 1953).

In an attempt to combat this cause of runaway production, the union representatives used patriotism as a weapon. Claiming that producers were going abroad, “to escape paying American wages to American workmen” (Pryor 1955a), the union labor representatives threatened the studios with forcing them to label pictures in the opening credits with the places the films were shot. This, they believed, might cause public patriotic outrage. The flashpoint for this issue was the filming of a quintessentially American story, *Daniel Boone*, about Boone’s life on the Kentucky frontier, in Mexico (the picture was independently produced by Gannaway Ver Halen and distributed by Republic Pictures) (Pryor 1956). This also caused the AFL to threaten a nationwide consumer boycott. Consistently throughout runaway production history, the making of a “classic” American story abroad has galvanized organized labor.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s because of the severe job losses caused by runaway productions, workers would use the patriotism argument. As one cameraman put it, “If our national purpose is to assist the people of this country, then the time has come to act. To remain dormant is to surrender and yield to the forces of greed” (Schumach 1960e). However, even the reporters would come up with confounding and countering questions, such as, “Is a film American if it is made with German funds frozen in Spain featuring an American star who lives in Switzerland, if the promoter of the

venture is an American who has combined forces with a Frenchman who split the world-wide release of the picture between an American company and a Franco-Italian distributor?" (Glenn 1962).

Labor Silence (1956-1959)

Through Hollywood labor history, new technology has created new jobs. In this case, for almost three years, the major dailies did not report on runaway production, despite its ongoing rise from 1956 to 1959. With Brewer gone from his position of power, film workers had lost their loudest advocate protesting runaway film production. Also, television production jobs had started to flood into Hollywood. Using many of the same skills and the same equipment, film workers could easily transfer to television production jobs. The loss of feature film production jobs was not felt to be as significant, since people had television work.

The political climate in the United States was also changing, in part thanks to television. In 1957, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus defied a federal court order to desegregate Central High School in Little Rock. His resistance was part of a larger reaction to the 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, a suit which had been pursued by the NAACP. On the evening news, America's television screens showed "scenes of vicious mobs harassing the determined students." The resulting public outcry forced a reluctant President Eisenhower to send in 11,000 troops, federal troops and members of the Arkansas National Guard, to protect the students (Henretta et. al. 2002).

At the same time, in Hollywood, what director William Wyler called the "backlash" against McCarthy had begun. In 1957, the Writers Guild lodged a formal

complaint against the Academy for the bylaw which made any blacklisted person ineligible for an Academy Award. (Unlike other blacklisted film workers, because writers work alone, some blacklisted writers continued to get work in the movies during the blacklist period, with the tacit approval of studio executives who appreciated being able to hire these experts inexpensively on the black market.) In this case, blacklisted writer Michael Wilson, was ineligible for an Academy Award for his nominated script for *Friendly Persuasion*. The film did not win, but blacklisted writer Dalton Trumbo, working under the pseudonym Robert Rich, did win an Academy Award for *The Brave One*. When no one approached the stage to claim the statuette, Jesse Lasky, Jr. rushed to accept the award in Rich's/Trumbo's place, and the press covered the event by speculating whether the winner was a blacklisted writer (Smith 1989).

In 1958, actor Kirk Douglas met with then-vice-president Richard Nixon in order to try to obtain a written statement against the blacklist. While Nixon refused to write a statement, he told Douglas that the blacklist problem belonged to the film industry and they should resolve it themselves. In a political shift away from his earlier fervid anti-communism, Nixon implied that government would no longer interfere in Hollywood blacklist business (Smith 1989).

The Studios Blame the Spectacle Film (1959)

In 1959, the producers added a new claim to their list of defenses: the needs of the spectacle motion picture required vast numbers of workers (extras) who were unaffordable in Hollywood. Between 35 percent and 50 percent of films were shot abroad that year (Schumach 1959a). Regarding production of *Solomon and Sheba* (1959), Ted Richmond, an MGM producer said, "For hiring an army, there is no place like

Spain.” The studio representatives would go to Spain’s defense minister and ask for 3,000 people. The labor cost was \$80,000. In Hollywood it would have cost \$1.6 million. A sound stage studio rental in Spain cost \$500 a week. In Hollywood it was \$750 a day (Schumach 1959b).

Mr. Richmond claimed that he could not make *Ben-Hur* (1959) or *Solomon and Sheba* in Hollywood, “Either you make these spectacle pictures abroad or you don’t make them at all.” Regarding spectacle pictures, the producers further claimed that because television cut movie attendance 50%, the spectacle was what brought moviegoers back, “we must make bigger pictures of high quality at higher costs. This is the only way we can get people out to the theaters” (Schumach 1961h).

In Hollywood, as below-the-line workers, and above-the-line actors continued to lose jobs, some blacklisted Hollywood workers began to get jobs back. Beginning the official end of the above-the-line blacklist, in 1960, blacklisted writer Dalton Trumbo, was credited by his real name for his work on *Spartacus* and *Exodus* (Smith 1989, Baar 2008 conversation). The success of *Spartacus*, one of the new “spectacle” films, saved Universal from dire financial problems (MacCann 1962:112).

In response to the producers’ claim about the production needs of spectacle films, labor union representatives renewed their rhetoric about the “un-American” issue, “These producers... pocket the difference between American union scale and slave wages and then take advantage of a loophole in the law to mask this foreign-made product as American.” By 1963, the out-of-control *above-the-line* costs of *Cleopatra* and other spectacle films made the production of those films abroad much less appealing to the studios. (*Cleopatra* cost \$44 million, the equivalent of \$300 million in today’s dollars

(Scott, W. 2007). By 1965, the claim about the need to film spectacle pictures abroad was rendered unusable by George Stevens' successful local Hollywood production of the spectacle picture *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.

By 1960, 87 percent of Americans had a television in the house (Henretta et. al. 2002:815). During the early 1960s, with their televisions, many Americans watched the Nixon-Kennedy Presidential debates where Nixon lost because he looked ashen and sweaty (those who heard the debate on radio by-and-large did not think he had lost). Americans also watched as astronauts made their first forays into space. And Americans watched as freedom riders, people who went to the South to help call attention the ongoing abuse and disenfranchisement of black Americans, were beaten and busses were burned on the nightly news (part of the protests included targeting illegal segregation on the busses). Public outcry, influenced by televised images of the events, forced federal officials to act (Henretta et. al. 2002). Had I been old enough to watch television by then, I would have stayed home too.

The Studios Blame the Stars, the Directors, and the Producers (1960)

Even before they exhausted the spectacle argument, the studio representatives rejuvenated an old scapegoat. In 1960, in a new attempt to disclaim responsibility for runaway production, a studio representative claimed that, "often the studio has very little authority in deciding where a picture shall be made." Instead, the star forces it to be made "where it is most convenient for him" (Schumach 1960g).

William Holden was the only actor ever "outed" in the *New York Times* for living overseas. Specific objections were made about filming *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960) and *Counterfeit Traitor* (1962) abroad. The producer claimed the films called for foreign

locales. Holden said, “it was the producers who started it all, opening companies abroad for production and distribution.” He added, “I don’t blame the actor” (Thompson 1962).

Other “named” workers who answered to the *New York Times* reporters were directors and producers, among them, William Wyler, Karl Krueger, Billy Wilder, and Henry King. Each defended his actions in different ways, showing that the individuals’ understanding of runaway production and its meaning and impact varied greatly.

For example, Karl Krueger producing *Comanche* in Mexico, cited the need for, “historical accuracy [and] authenticity,” and claimed he was using Hollywood labor, “a group of essential (Hollywood) guild men down here” (Pryor 1955b).

Billy Wilder answered to complaints about runaway production while shooting *One, Two, Three* (1961) in West Berlin. (The fast-talking film shows communists and capitalists to be unscrupulous, stubborn fools.) Wilder claimed that this could not be called a runaway production because all the key crew people, including the cameraman, script supervisor, special-effects man, head gaffer and cutter were from Hollywood, and had worked with Wilder before. The irrepensible Wilder said of one of his crew, “obviously the man has no talent but I’m used to him” (Wood 1961).

Producer Henry King, accused of runaway production, ignored the point of lost jobs, and called the complaints about runaway production “bellyaching.” “There is not enough money to build the sort of sets that we can find ready-made by nature on location all over the world today” (Schumach 1961a).

The Studios Blame Labor Unrest (1960)

Whenever possible, the studio representatives tried to blame the victims of runaway production. On January 16, 1960, the screenwriters went on strike over the

issue of “residuals,” a share of income for use of the writers’ work in venues other than traditional movie theaters. The actors went on strike two months later over the same issue. The studio representatives used these strikes to claim that runaway production was caused by labor unrest in the United States. Further they threatened that if Hollywood became strikebound they would “make all their movies abroad” (Schumach 1960a).

The “residuals” issue was significant, and may have played a role in the decline of runaway production during the 1960s and early 1970s. The actors and writers were seeing their jobs vanish due to competition with their own ghosts: the movies they worked on in previous years that had been resold to television. The actors and writers did not share in the profits of this resale. Movies from previous eras, screened on television, also diminished the need for new productions. The writers and actors demanded a percentage of the profits from these re-screenings. By June 1960, Hollywood was experiencing the worst production slump since the 1927 onset of sound pictures (Schumach 1960b). Adding to Hollywood employment problems, in 1960, of the 387 films Hollywood made, only 154 were shot in the United States (Schumach 1961c).

When the strikes were settled, the studios agreed to contribute \$600,000 plus 5% of the net revenue from each feature film screening to the Writers Guild of America (WGA) pension health and welfare funds. The actors received a lump sum payment of \$2.65 million which created their first “Pension and Welfare” plan, as well as ongoing individual payments of residuals from films made after January 31, 1960 (sag.org 2007). Both the writers and the actors had wanted a personal share of income from all productions they had worked on after 1948. They settled for a share of all productions after 1960. As usual, the studios’ representatives found a scapegoat other than

themselves. Claiming that, “the villain in the writers’ strike—as in nearly all movie troubles since the end of World War II—was television,” (Schumach 1960c), the studio representatives then made a new claim. They said that overseas film production was necessary to meet the competition of foreign producers (Schumach 1960e). Perhaps because this did not prove a remotely viable claim, it was not used again.

The Studios Say They Need Authentic Locations, But...(1960)

By September 1960, the studios’ ongoing cry that they needed to produce motion pictures overseas for “authentic locations” came under attack, because union representatives caught the studios changing scripts to include foreign locales for the purpose of moving production abroad. John W. Lehnert, head of the Hollywood AFL Film Council and the business representative of the IATSE Motion Picture Editors Local 776 said, “We have never been unreasonable about movie producers filming abroad to get authentic locales...But this has been abused. Scripts are being changed to give them foreign locales so they can be made abroad... The fact is pictures have been made in Hollywood depicting every country in the world. There is no reason that this cannot continue” (Schumach 1960f, Shanks, Lehnert et. al 1961).

The Federal Government Steps in (1961)

In 1961, labor and management formed a group to discuss this issue. Their relationship was fraught. After considerable labor appeal, in October 1961, Congressman John H. Dent requested that the union supply proof of runaway production for his subcommittee studying effects of imports on employment. By the end of October, SAG was accusing the producer’s lobbyists of pressuring Congress to block the investigation (Schumach 1961c).

Metaphors about Runaway Production

While I read, annotated, and re-read the over 800 newspaper articles written about runaway production, and looked for the contours of the story, certain metaphors began to stand out. A metaphor is “a figure of speech in which a word or a phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them” (Webster 1999:730). It comes from a Greek word meaning transference. As I reflected on this it seemed to me that in the use of metaphor, a fiction is used to clarify a fact. As is demonstrated throughout this project, at the microlevel of newspapers reports, the interweaving of this kind of fiction (metaphors) into facts in everyday life is common. Metaphors seem to be the fictions we make up to clarify and make more vivid our facts. (Curious that our popular literature is categorized as “fiction” or “non-fiction,” as if stories were the norm and the facts are an outlier.) I came to see metaphors as “micro-stories”--shorthand or compressed stories we tell about our experiences, fictions that enhance, enrich, deepen or broaden our understanding of the truth.

Total War (1961)

As Dwight D. Eisenhower left the office of the President, he warned of the dangers of the emerging “military-industrial complex” (Henretta et. al. 2002). At the same time, union representatives escalated their use of the metaphors related to war and battle to describe their relationship to the studios regarding runaway production. By 1961, SAG felt it was facing “oblivion” (Schumach 1961e). The union threatened “total war” To describe their labor situation, they used terms like “alarming” “disastrous” and “wiped” (Anonymous 1961a). The studio representatives made their customary

unchallenged and irrelevant-to-production counter-claim that without revenues from overseas ticket sales they would not survive. SAG offered a new concession, “splits.” They urged that motion picture interiors be made in Hollywood while the exteriors could be shot overseas.

Union representatives were inspired by the success of a similar strategy call the “Eady Plan” in England (Puttnam 1998). They proposed federal subsidies to compete with foreign ones. The subsidies could come out of a 10% tax on movie tickets. Other suggestions about government intervention included changes in the tax structure to allow for actors to have a fluctuating income spread, and that domestic productions be allowed federal small business loans (Schumach 1961f).

Management’s Problem: Framing Their Arguments

In how they frame their arguments, the studio representatives had an ongoing fundamental problem. They could not admit a real motive for runaway production: to decrease labor costs by relying on non-union workers. At least during this period, when union labor was powerful and popular, by admitting this, the studios would have a public-relations disaster on their hands, “If they cry too loudly that labor costs are too high in Hollywood, they are admitting, in effect that they work abroad to take advantage of cheaper labor” (Schumach 1961d).

Very rarely did on-the-ground Hollywood labor-management grievances enter the newspaper-reported discussion. When raised, these issues were discussed without attribution. Featherbedding in the craft union basic agreement forced the studio producers to hire more men than they needed. Under the cover of anonymity, some producers complained about the restrictiveness of the craft unions. Complaints were

made that some unions had “been so reluctant to admit new members that many workers are too old for their jobs.” Even under cover, the producer/informants back-peddled, “Hollywood craftsmen are the most efficient in the world and are worth more than similar workers abroad” (Schumach 1962b). This featherbedding/aging counterclaim was rarely reported on. It was too dangerous a tinderbox in a pro-labor era.

One of Labor’s Problems: Proving Their Point

During this period, the union representatives also had an ongoing problem. The factory that made movies had left the factory building and often became a project-based roving production process, settling down wherever was most convenient (Storper, Christopherson 1986). Movies, by their nature, provide project-based work. Because of this, runaway production was hard to pinpoint by the workers except through their experience of unemployment, and the reporting in the papers about the ongoing productions that were not being made locally. As we have seen, this difficulty of pinpointing the problem was compounded by the studio representatives’ blaming runaway production on numerous not-always-central causes. What rankled every labor group in every period was the “glowing” financial reports boasted of by the studio representatives in the face of the workers inability to meet their food payments, car payments and mortgages (Schumach 1961h). Because of the studio’s ongoing profitability, which did not come solely from box office receipts, the studios could not plead poverty. As Eric Johnston, the head of the studio organization’s Motion Picture Association of America, admitted to Congress during hearings about runaway production, “I’ve heard Hollywood called many things. But I don’t think it can yet be called a depressed area” (Schumach 1961h).

Union Racism Weakens the Argument (1961)

Another problem American unions faced in general was that leadership no longer had a legitimate moral high ground on social issues, “For the first time in the nation’s history, the largest union organizations were no longer leaders in efforts to advance democracy itself. The cold war neutralized or silenced independent voices on behalf of human rights and gender equity for decades...” (Nicholson 2004:256). Other groups and coalitions, like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) emerged to work on social justice issues.

Likewise, the AFL-Film Council, and the unions in general did not have the moral high ground. The film unions frequently used the rhetoric that overseas production was un-American. They finally were caught short by NAACP allegations in 1961 of discrimination in film portrayals and of widespread employment discrimination in Hollywood. Against the union argument that it is “un-American” for American companies to employ cheap foreign labor and evade taxes, the NAACP said that “craft unions discriminate against Negroes and that some craft unions have no Negroes. Such discrimination it can easily be argued, is un-American.” SAG could respond that its rolls were open, as could the WGA. IATSE could not (Schumach 1961g). (In a moment of unintended hilarity during the time of this discussion, movie star and SAG vice-president Charlton Heston described himself as a “migrant worker” (Schumach 1961h, MacDougall 1961).)

The Changing Industry

Between 1947 and 1962, the British, French, Dutch and Belgian global empires “disintegrated” (Henretta et. al. 2002:803). It is a stretch to draw a correlation to

Hollywood, but nevertheless it is noteworthy that by 1962, most of the movie pioneers and moguls were dead, including Harry Cohn, Cecil B. deMille, Jesse Lasky, Louis B. Mayer, and Joseph Schenk. The film industry was changing, “everywhere the producers—whether independent, semi-independent, or staff—are beginning to have a gray-flannel look.... Hollywood has become a conservative, settled town” (MacCann 1962:112-113). This helped set the groundwork for Hollywood’s later corporatization:

If nobody is paying any attention to the future of the organization, it will probably fall into the hands of second-rate men. Friends, relatives, accountants, and lawyers can provide a comfortable environment for a dynamic and creative leader, but after he is gone, such people are not likely to become creative overnight....The easiest way always seems to be a process of massive neglect, based on seniority, familiarity, and nepotism (MacCann 1962 128-9).

This was the Hollywood my former employer George Lucas experienced when he started looking for work a few years later.

Nixon and the Tax Loophole

While running for California governor in September 1962, Nixon pledged to take action to halt runaway production. He vowed that if elected, he would plug tax loopholes that allowed for runaway production, “California must pay its obligation to the industry that first made us world famous. An official from Governor Brown’s campaign immediately fired back that Nixon “blew his lines” and reported that Brown supported President Kennedy’s measure to close the loophole (Greenberg 1962). Nixon lost.

Both groups had missed the fact that the loophole was already closed. Labor activism helped to bring about a Congressional Subcommittee investigation (Schumach 1961b, 1961c), which led finally to closing this loophole in the Tax Code in April of 1962. Congress amended the tax law and limited the exemption for Americans living

abroad to \$20,000 a year for the first three years and \$35,000 each year after that (Schumach 1962a).

To a certain extent, the tax-loophole issue was, all along, a red herring. It allowed the studio representatives to temporarily deflect attention from their responsibility for runaway production. Very few members of the Hollywood film unions took advantage of it. After the loophole closed, the *Times* reported a brief dip in runaway production, then it continued unabated.

Labor and Management Appeal to the Federal Government (1963)

During this time, in the larger American labor union picture, “the unions took undeserved credit for the rising standard of living ... It was government action, not business or labor, that drove the prosperity and provided the base for a high wage policy” (Nicholson 2004:256). In 1963, Hollywood again needed government assistance to solve their problems. Recognizing their need for government intervention regarding runaway production, a Hollywood labor-management committee appealed to the Secretary of Labor, W. Willard Wirtz, for help with eliminating subsidies, import quotas, reduction of foreign tariffs, screen time quotas, remittance restrictions and other competitive measures established by some foreign governments that “severely handicap[ped]” domestic film production and distribution abroad. For the first time, fear of foreign reprisal other than at the box office was mentioned. In this case the fear was of “retaliatory tariff actions abroad.” These fears did not materialize (Schumach 1963a, 1963b).

To a government committee, the studio representatives admitted that the rationale that they were making films abroad for artistic reasons was just a cover. The producers said they were producing abroad because of foreign-government subsidies. (The UK,

France and Italy, where half the foreign film production took place, provided largest subsidies) (Schumach 1963c). The IATSE laboratory technicians local 683 leader Donald Haggerty wanted economic pressure put on producers. Pat Somerset, the President of the AFL Film Council, dismissed the runaway production problem as “old.” At that point, a member of the joint committee of producers and union representatives dismissed as unimportant “so-called ‘runaway production.’” Members of the committee began to argue amongst themselves in front of the congressional committee and were scolded by Undersecretary of Labor John F. Henning “Your problems are too complex to be settled in the streets. A divided labor movement is a weak labor movement. It will hurt you if you appear disunited” (Schumach 1963d).

By the next year, the film labor unions had pulled out of participating in the committee because they had come to believe management was not sincerely committed to resolving the problem (Schumach 1964a). By this time, Hollywood labor union membership had risen from 22,000 in the early 1950s to 34,000. In 1963, sixty-five percent of Hollywood labor was employed making television films (Schumach1963c).

The Screen Actors Guild Acts Alone (1963)

Unwilling to wait for the coalition to work, SAG members took independent action to deal with runaway production. They entered into an agreement with British and Irish actors unions to force producers to pay actors the same rates, or the higher rates where there was a different scale. They also made a commitment to information sharing in order to enforce this agreement (Schumach 1963b).

Did this Labor Threat Make a Difference? (1964)

In 1964, the union representatives made a threat that seems to have made a difference: the IATSE demanded residuals and a ban on runaway productions. The *New York Times* called it a “boiling labor crisis” (Bart 1964). While the results were not reported on, I argue that a partial explanation for the sudden subsequent shift in runaway production, and IATSE silence, could be that IATSE leadership, behind closed doors, may have agreed to table discussion of individual residual payments for their members in exchange for increased production in the United States. It is likely that the producers saw that the savings they were accustomed to on overseas production would be offset by NOT having to give individual IATSE members a percentage of each film’s revenue. Unlike the actors and writers who started receiving individual residuals for their work in the 1960s, the IATSE laborers to this day have never seen contract-based individual residual payments from motion picture production. Instead, the studios contributed to the IATSE collective health and pension plans.

To a film technician or craft worker, what the IATSE deal meant, if you worked for example on *Star Wars* or *Titanic*, two of the most lucrative films ever made, was nothing. An actor makes money every time those films are on television. A “below-the-line” technician, even if he or she is a highly skilled worker, such as an editor, or cinematographer, earns *nothing*; and if he (and it is almost always a he) did not qualify by working enough hours during this quarter, that person risks losing the health insurance for which the IATSE pension plan receives funding instead.

The First Domestic Runaways (1968)

By 1968, American sentiment was growing against the Vietnam War. At that time, there were 536,000 American soldiers fighting there. The AFL-CIO continued supporting the war in Vietnam, “even when that war became massively unpopular, and when most workers were increasingly critical of its continuance” (Nicholson 2004:241).

At the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, over ten thousand people, led by Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, protested the Vietnam War. They also called for the legalization of marijuana and the end to money. These media-aware protestors knew “the world [was] watching” and their rioting in the streets was broadcast all over television-owning America. Even though this protest may not have had the effect the protestors desired, television had a powerful effect on helping end the war, “Vietnam was the first war in which television brought films of the fighting directly into the nation’s living rooms.” Those images helped inspire and support the anti-war movement (Henretta et. al 2002:838-865).

Also in 1968, Richard Nixon, the Republican presidential candidate, used television against the protestors. He was elected on the platform of representing the “quiet voice” of “the great majority of Americans, the forgotten Americans, the nonshouters, the nondemonstrators” (Henretta et. al. 2002:866).

In 1968, motion picture runaway production to other countries went down 20 percent. That did not mean that 20 percent more films were made in Hollywood. A new kind of runaway emerged: movies made in non-Hollywood domestic locations in the name of “authenticity.” Outside the thirty-mile radius of Hollywood and hence, union jurisdiction, films could shoot a longer six-day shooting schedule (Windeler 1969). Late

1960s federal tax breaks, which were briefly discontinued, had helped bring film production back to the United States (Puttnam 1998:213).

Federal Tax Credits (1971)

The 1971 Revenue Act said American companies could, “write off against tax 7 percent of any investment made in equipment and machinery within the United States.” This Act also allowed small independent productions to claim 100% tax exemptions for films made in the U.S. (Putnam 1998:212-3). Experts argue that those exemptions made possible a renaissance period of American filmmaking, including films such as *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975), and *Taxi Driver* (1976), which could not have been made without the credit. The Act was abolished in 1976 because it was abused by people creating fraudulent tax shelters. However, the credit remained in effect until the mid-1986 (Puttman 1998:214, (Gendel 1986). Because this federal measure mandated U.S. film production, it helped support the significant shift that resulted in a new phase of runaway production—from Hollywood to the rest of the United States.

Runaway Production, The Second Phase

Chapter 5. *Corporate Kong* (1976)

“[It’s] a one-man operation. I explain why: the producer selects the story, selects and approves the script, chooses the director, together [with] the director makes the cast of the movie. The producer follows the production’s day-by-day shooting. Then he’s in charge of post-production, he’s in charge of the marketing ... he’s in charge of every process of the movie from the beginning to the end.”

Dino De Laurentiis, producer, *King Kong* (1976) (Buchholz 2002:16)

“The real auteurs of this ‘King Kong’ are not the producers, the director or the writer, but Carlo Rambaldi, Glen Robinson and Rick Baker, who are credited with having been responsible for designing, constructing and engineering the mechanisms.”

Vincent Canby, *The New York Times* ‘King Kong’ Bigger, Not Better, In a Return to Screen of Crime” (1976:16)

The trajectory of the making of the second *King Kong* (1976) began in an Italian town called Torre Annunziata in 1919. On August 8, the third child of seven was born into a family of pasta makers. Named for his grandfather, Augustino—Dino, as he would be called—was “born with the shirt” (wrapped in his mother’s placenta), which according to local lore meant that he would prosper. As he grew, his family planned for him to enter the family pasta company, Pastificio Moderno, which had about 100 employees and manufactured 220,000 pounds of pasta a day. By the time he was a teenager he was a successful pasta salesman whose territory extended from Reggio to Rome. De Laurentiis grew up in intimate relationship with the management of many employees and with complex networks of geographical distribution (Kezich and Levantesi 2004).

In a train station on a fateful day in 1936, young De Laurentiis saw a poster for the first film school in Italy. The school offered classes for actors, cameramen, directors, and technicians. (It had opened the previous year. By contrast, in American, the first college film course had been offered in 1929 at University of Southern California

(Tibbets 1977)). Dino applied, and did not hear back, so he re-applied the following year. He comments,

If you lived in a provincial town like Torre Annunziata, where there was nothing to do in the evening but go to the movies with your friends, the cinema was a world of fantasy. I had always been in love with it... For me, the actors were the cinema. I didn't have the faintest idea of how a film was made, of what went on behind the cameras. Still, to work in the cinema was one of my dreams (Kezich and Levantesi 2004:8).

De Laurentiis's second application to film school was successful. He wanted to be an actor. After he told his father about this dream, his father said, "I've always known that I had a slightly crazy son, but until now... Still, when I'm dead, I don't want any of you children to scold me for having denied your deepest ambitions" (Kezich and Levantesi 2004: 9). His father agreed to pay his son's tuition and expenses for a year.

Thus, a career was launched. One morning, while the students were on the Via Appia, learning about acting on location, the dictator Mussolini, "galloped by on his white horse, then wheeled and halted." Their professor saluted Il Duce, who asked what the group was doing. After the professor explained, the dictator said, "Bravo! You are the future of the Italian cinema!" and rode away (Kezich and Levantesi 2004:11). According to his biographers, this may have been the most political moment in De Laurentiis's life, as he frequently claims that his disinterest in politics is almost total (Kezich and Levantesi 2004). However, as a man immersed by default in the labyrinthine complexities of Italian life, in film school, in postwar Italy, and etc., making politically relevant films came naturally, and De Laurentiis has shown no hesitation about using political themes in films for commercial gain.

De Laurentiis soon became aware that his obsessive interest in filmmaking leaned more toward being behind the camera than in front of it. He says, "I'm...missing the

kind of presence that bores right through the screen, the presence you need to become a star” (Kezich and Levantesi 2004 :12). He has also said somewhat more bluntly, “At some point I see my face in the mirror and said it was better for me to stay in back of the camera” (Buchholz 2002:27).

After he finished school, De Laurentiis got work as an extra at Cinecitta, the famous Italian film studio started by Mussolini in 1937. When World War II came to Italy, De Laurentiis’s mind was elsewhere. He wanted to make movies. And as early as 1941, he was already holding forth in the magazines about producing movies: “If a film is no good, it’s the producer’s fault!” (Kezich and Levantesi 2004 :23). After De Laurentiis had exhausted all his military deferments, he convinced the officers who recruited him that his best service would be creating variety shows for the troops, and so he spent his military service.

As has been mentioned, the neo-realistic filmmakers who had such a powerful effect on film makers and audiences around the world, emerged from postwar Italy. De Laurentiis comments,

[T]here suddenly appeared a new group of filmmakers: ourselves. We looked around and discovered these extraordinary stories of real life. We managed to film them in the most makeshift way, in that dimension of absolute poverty that the critics then christened neorealism. Look, we shot on the streets because we didn’t have a single penny. We had nothing: only ideas and enthusiasm... I would argue that the cinema was the first great ambassador of Italy in defeat. As I see it, the cinema also touched off Italy’s postwar economic boom: foreigners saw one of our movies and it made them want to know us better, to visit our country and buy our products (Kezich and Levantesi 2004:54).

In 1946, De Laurentiis produced *Il Bandito* (the Bandit), one of the earliest neorealistic films. It is the story of a man who is shell-shocked in World War II, and becomes a criminal after the war. De Laurentiis says, “Immediately after the war, we are a group of people who want to make movies, but we have no industry, no financing, not

even the film to make movies—no equipment. We are very poor people, but ... we create this movie, put together with a little money” (Buchholz 2002:32).

Of his neorealist classic, *Bitter Rice* (1949), De Laurentiis says, “it was drama, with sex, violence, but realistic. It was a true story” (Buchholz 2002:37). He chooses not to comment on the film’s Marxist critique of workers in the rice fields and instead focuses on the “racy scenes of [Silvana] Mangano and Vittorio Gassman performing the Rhumba” (Buchholz 2002:35). The film made Silvana Mangano a star, and De Laurentiis married Mangano the year the film was released.

In his biographies, De Laurentiis’s ongoing disclaimers about the politics of his neorealist films is understandable in light of his later emigration to the United States and his mid-life embrace of Hollywood. However, at that time the Neorealist filmmakers saw cinema as having a “responsibility” that “comes from its enormous power.” Their project was a blatantly political act for solidarity: “a strong purpose, a desire for understanding, for belonging, for participating—for living together.” They saw themselves as meeting a human need for a “concrete homage towards other people, toward what is happening in the world.” They claimed this was distinct from Hollywood films, which they called, “cinema’s capitalist structure” resulting in films that were “unnaturally filtered, ‘purified,’ and ...at one or two removes [from reality].” For this reason, Neorealist filmmakers critiqued the Hollywood spectacle and championed the drama of ordinary everyday life, where, for example, many complicated factors are involved in the decision to buy a pair of shoes. They were out to “excavate reality” (Zavattini (1966 [1953])). This neorealist impulse, however disclaimed, goes a long way toward understanding how,

when De Laurentiis would come to make *King Kong* many years later, his *Kong* would contain the most searing critique of corporate capitalism.

Filmmaking in postwar Italy was supported by the 1949 Andreotti law which declared a film “national” and hence eligible for loan guarantees, subsidies, and other benefits, if it was in Italian or there was an Italian-language version of the film, and if it was developed from a story written by or adapted by an Italian author. At least half of the cast and crew had to be Italian (the director was considered just a member of the crew). This allowed De Laurentiis to use funding from state sources to hire international stars for his films, and use internationally famous directors, which in turn enabled his films to reach far broader audiences who would go to a “Kirk Douglas movie” or an “Audrey Hepburn movie” De Laurentiis produced, even if they knew nothing else about the film. The Italian Andreotti legislation complimented the previously discussed American legislation during this time which allowed Americans living abroad to take advantage of income tax regulations to save money, and helped create a favorable climate for European production (Kezich and Levantesi 2004:187). During this period, De Laurentiis developed worldwide distribution contacts which would later enable him to secure funding to pay for a film’s cost prior to its release (Kezich and Levantesi 2004:222).

De Laurentiis went on to produce films directed by the great neorealistic Italian directors including Antonioni, De Sica, Fellini, Rossellini and Visconti, and as mentioned before, he won back-to-back Academy Awards in 1956 and 1957 for producing two films by Fellini, *La Strada*, and *Nights of Cabiria*. (However, he was no great worshipper of the director as auteur. As he said about Jonathan Demme, who directed *Silence of the*

Lambs and did not want to direct the De Laurentiis sequel, *Hannibal*, "When the Pope-a-die, we create a new Pope-a. Good luck to Jonathan Demme. Goodbye" (Buchholz 2002:24.)

Between the 1950s and the 1960s, De Laurentiis became one of the most powerful people in Italian film industry, which, after Hollywood, was the most successful in the world (Kezich and Levantesi, 2004:122). As Italy prospered, public taste and demand shifted. Also, the film industry prospered, and filmmakers could afford to make less gritty films. De Laurentiis produced Italy's first color film, *Totò a Colori* (1952). He also began making spectacle films including *Ulysses* (1954), *War and Peace* (1956), *Barabbas* (1961), and *The Bible* (1966). His vision was always one of industry and growth in business. De Laurentiis comments, "[M]y ambition in the fifties was to create an Italian industry to make international movies" (Buchholz 2002 328).

In the 1960s, he built his own studio, Dinocitta, to make spectacle films in Italy, but the energy of film-making, the cultural climate and the legal constraints that made possible the success of spectacle films were changing. Italy's 1965 Corona law was intended to halt productions of international productions "which were denounced as alien to the traditions of the Italian cinema. The state now intended to protect the national character of the film industry... The Corona law...specified that the film must be made in Italian. The director too had to be Italian, along with a majority of the screenwriters, 66 percent of the principal actors, 75 percent of the secondary actors, and 75 percent of the crew and technical personnel" (Kezich and Levantesi 2004:187). According to De Laurentiis, this had a catastrophic effect on the Italian film industry, "When the Corona law was passed, the export of Italian films to foreign markets collapsed overnight... This

was a serious blow to the image of our nation, whose best ambassador had been the postwar cinema. Film production was relegated to a provincial level, and with a few exceptions, it's never recovered" (Kezich and Levantesi, 2004:187-88).

De Laurentiis sold Dinocitta--whose most famous film, the camp classic *Barbarella* (1968), starred Jane Fonda--to the Italian government. He moved to the United States in 1973. (This move coincided with the shift in runaway production from Europe to the United States in the aftermath of the U.S. tax incentives of the early 1970s.) Though De Laurentiis had been famous in Europe, he was relatively unknown in America. His first American film, *Serpico* (1973) starring Al Pacino, was a critical and commercial hit. The film tells the story of an honest police officer who blows the whistle on his corrupt colleagues. *Serpico* was part of a then recent-trend of gritty American regional films, films that were made possible also in part by changes in the technology including new lightweight cameras like the Éclair and the Arriflex, and Cinemobiles—film studios on wheels (Sharp 2006, Cook 1996). De Laurentiis then produced *Death Wish* with Charles Bronson in 1974, which is about a New York City architect who kills people at random after his wife is killed. He then made *Three Days of the Condor* (1975) with Robert Redford, a political thriller about a CIA researcher who comes back to work one day to discover everyone in his unit has been killed, and then comes to find it was an inside job. The film capitalized on public interest in the paranoia and political intrigue resulting from corruption in the Nixon administration. The successes of these films made De Laurentiis a “player” in the American film industry.

Independent film

A popular contemporary notion of independent filmmaking is that these types of films are small-budget, gritty works with a social message or an eccentric plot. De Laurentiis' early neorealistic films and his early American films fall into that category.

However, independent filmmaking in the broad sense has existed as long as filmmaking itself. As was discussed Chapter 2, the men who founded the major studios we know today were considered the "independents" when they fled to California and created the Hollywood studio system. They moved from the east in part to make their films independently of the Edison Trust monopoly. (This was not "runaway production" both because the move to Hollywood predates the term, and because the term runaway production was used by the Hollywood union members to discuss their lost jobs.)

After the "breakup" of the studio system in the late 1940s, when the Supreme Court ordered the studios to divest themselves of the theaters that gave them a vertical monopoly, motion picture production entered a period of shifting gears. In conjunction with other previously discussed factors, such as the birth of television, and the large shifts of the U.S. population to the newly-created suburbia, the film industry was forced to change its production patterns in order to survive. This became known as an era of independent filmmaking (Cook 1996).

Although the studios still had massive power, there was room for new "independent" filmmakers such as De Laurentiis. "By the late 1970s, the industry had been dramatically transformed. In the contemporary motion picture industry most films are made by independent production companies, which subcontract work to small specialized firms" (Storper Christopherson 1987:104). While the efficiencies of the studio system had been legion (Bordwell et. al. 1985), the independent era had its own

advantages. As *King Kong*'s producer Dino De Laurentiis said, an advantage of being independent is "You are not a slave to the studio" (Bahrenburg 1976:143). The term "independent" has many meanings. De Laurentiis' independence included a production deal with Paramount that allowed him the use of the studio lot and facilities.

A New Type of Independent Film

The independent era also was characterized by film productions seeking to make new types of films that would draw consumers out of the house and to the theater. After the 1940s, theatrically released movies had to compete with the allure of the consumer's TV set and comfortable sofa.

In the 1970s, a few movies changed the direction of the attention of motion picture executives: they called these films "blockbusters." While the term was coined during World War II to describe bombs that could destroy an entire city block, (Webster 1999:123), "blockbuster" was adopted by Hollywood to describe films like *The Godfather* (1972), *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Sting* (1973) and *Jaws* (1975) which generated domestic grosses in excess of \$50 million "and, almost as important, a public excitement that spreads from the particular film to movies in general. Such a sequence reassure[d] film people that the huge risks inherent in their game need not be in vain and that they [were] not presiding over the final agony of an industry that [had] been in decline for over a quarter of a century" (Time 1976).

Likewise De Laurentiis' focus turned toward making a blockbuster of his own. One day he saw a movie poster in his daughter Francesca's bedroom for the original *King Kong*. He started to think about re-making the cult classic. After he announced his intention to make the film at a press conference, he spoke with Federico Fellini who said,

“Don’t you realize that I would be happy to make *King Kong*?”

De Laurentiis said to him, “Fefè, there’s plenty of things you want to make, but at the last moment you always change your mind.”

Fellini said, “I could seriously consider making *King Kong* with you.” The conversation went no further (Kezich and Levantesi 2004:118), and the job went to John Guillermin who had recently directed the special-effects-oriented hit *The Towering Inferno* (Bahrenburg 1976). De Laurentiis intended *King Kong* (1976) to follow in the new “blockbuster” tradition. Advertising slogans in advance of the film’s release said the film would be, “The most exciting original motion picture event of all time” (Morton 2005:142).²⁴ De Laurentiis saw himself as an independent producer who was part of the new corporate model of filmmaking. When asked at the time of the film’s release why he made *King Kong*, De Laurentiis said, “I am an industrialist.” Richard Eder, the journalist who interviewed him commented, “Maybe Mr. De Laurentiis’ identification is that of the industrialist with his product—the potato chip king’s snacking zeal, the arms manufacturer’s lyricism about a new tank—but it is very strong” (Eder 1976:40).

New Sites for Location Shooting

One characteristic of film production during the independent era was a shift out of the studio and away from Europe to domestic locations, “In place of old wants... we find new wants, requiting for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes” (Marx 2001 [1849]:248). While *King Kong* (1976) was not a runaway production--it employed Hollywood union workers--it followed the pattern of runaway productions, and of much

²⁴ The publicity surrounding blockbuster filmmakers’ boasts of enormous success undermined the studio representatives’ cries of poverty at the bargaining table. The studios were in a bind. Motion picture promotional strategy depends on boasting about successes. The studios promotion strategy backfired when they had to negotiate with their unions.

filmmaking during this period. Unlike *King Kong* (1933) which was almost totally shot on the studio lot, *King Kong* (1976) was shot in New York City, Hawaii, and California. Reliant upon that shift, another thing that characterizes productions during that era was the studio's differing claims about why location shooting was now taking place in the United States.

For example, in one part of the book, *The Creation of Dino De Laurentiis' 'King Kong,'* author Bruce Bahrenburg claims that the need for location shooting in Hawaii had to do with cost cutting (5). Hawaii was chosen because it was “cheaper to shoot” there than the studio (95). *King Kong* was budgeted at twenty million dollars, one of the most costly films since the catastrophically expensive *Cleopatra* (1963), discussed in Chapter 4. Bahrenburg says, “If this much money was going to be spent, shooting would have to go out of the studio” (Bahrenburg 1976:23).²⁵

Bahrenburg further claims location shooting was essential because modern audiences “no longer accept fake scenery” (Bahrenburg 1976:100). We can hear in these claims echoes of earlier studio claims during the first period of runaway production. Shooting in New York City was, for the most part, more effective than attempting to recreate New York on the studio back lot. However, the need for authenticity only went so far: A local harbor in San Pedro, California was considered an acceptable substitute for Micronesian docks, and the Culver City back lot was fine for the Nias Island tribal native scenes, and for New York City's Shea Stadium (Bahrenburg 1976).

²⁵ *King Kong* (1976) went \$4 million over budget. The final cost was \$24 million, \$3 million of which was spent on Kong himself. At one point, Jack Grossberg who was in charge of production quipped, “The production is so strapped for money now, we can't afford to put a penis on Kong” (Bahrenburg 1976:88). There are, of course, no visible genitals on any of the three Kings Kong.

Bahrenburg also claims that Hawaii was chosen for the jungle scenes because of “the availability of skilled labor and movie equipment” (Bahrenburg 1976:24). He never reconciles the three differing claims about location shooting, but then he was hired by the production company to write the book about the production and served as the unit publicist on the film.²⁶

One thing that was clear about location shooting was its impact on the crew. Location shooting added to the stress. On the studio lot, the work week was five days. On location, the work week was six days, and sometimes seven. Even Bahrenburg admitted the “intolerable schedule,” causing “physical exhaustion” sent one crew member into intensive care (Bahrenburg 1976:98). If the scene where Jessica Lange was rescued from the ocean was shot in a studio tub, she would not have been endangered by circling sharks (the crew did not tell her until afterward) (Morton 2005).

Hollywood wears out its welcome

Another characteristic of film production during the independent period is the phenomenon of production beginning to wear out its welcome. For local California residents, the thrill of the glamour of proximity to motion picture production was wearing off. Subjected to repeated incursions by film crews, Californians had become annoyed by the lights, the noise, and the general disturbance of production. This tension in Hollywood-area filming is part of what helped make other locations more appealing for production. For example, when *King Kong* was filming in Culver City on the studio lot, the local police department got 150 complaint calls and had to curtail the planned hours

²⁶ His status as a Paramount employee is nowhere mentioned in the book. In other words, Bahrenburg is the mouthpiece of the studios. *King Kong* was his first project. He worked as a unit publicist for Paramount until 1989 (imdb.com).

of the evening shoots (Bahrenburg 1976). Quite possibly, the attitude of some members of the film crew did not contribute to the harmony between the film production and the local residents. Near the end of the shoot, Bahrenburg reports on the attitude of a crew member regarding neighborhood complaints: “‘Ingrates,’ a grip sneers, nodding toward the row of houses beyond the back fence. ‘They should be happy we’re bringing work to this dump’” (Bahrenburg 1976:126).

Employment in the Independent Era

For our purposes, the most significant shift was how labor was employed. “The film industry had changed quite a bit from the time of the original *King Kong*. Studios no longer maintained rosters of actors and technicians on payroll, so each time a new film was begun, a whole new crew had to be put together from a pool of freelancers” (Morton 2005:156). In the independent era, employment had become more precarious, and less secure.

The Plot Sickens

“I have been faithful to thee ... in my fashion.”
--Ernest Dowson (1867-1900)²⁷

The story of *King Kong* (1933) was set in the 1930s. Similarly, the 1976 re-make of the original also set the story contemporaneously. Because of this time shift, many of the political and social issues in the camera’s lens have shifted. The film’s plot reflects, to a certain extent, the politics of its time: *King Kong* (1976), includes currents of the emerging social critique of corporate power, a growing concern for environmental issues,

²⁷ In *King Kong* (1976), a remake of the original 1933 picture, the blonde wannabe actress comes not from depression-era New York City, but from a filmmaker’s yacht. The yacht’s name, Cynara, is well-known because of Ernest Dowson’s poem whose most famous line is, “I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.” This reference is fitting considering that the second *King Kong* both resembles the first and takes liberties with the original story. Dowson’s poem also spawned the phrase “gone with the wind.”

and a cultural lag which includes elements of both earlier colonialist attitudes and the more recent past attitudes of the 1960s.

Yet, *King Kong* (1976) is similar to the original in many respects. There's still a blonde actress. A giant gorilla falls for her and is captured for commercial exploitation. After the gorilla's escape from his chains at his New York City performance, the film ends with his death-by-gunfire and his fall from the top of Manhattan's tallest building. Many plot details are also true to the original *King Kong* (1933). Under the leadership of a fellow now named Fred Wilson (not Carl Denham), a boat sets sail for a mysterious island in Southeast Asia. When the boat lands, a group of Americans--including a blond actress (Jessica Lange), and a Jack Driscoll substitute, now called Jack Prescott (Jeff Bridges) (who is the expedition's "official" media recorder)--explores the island. They come upon an ancient giant wall, and a tribal ceremony which involves the sacrifice of a woman. The black natives, discovering the Americans watching the ceremony, are initially angered. Catching sight of the blonde, the chief offers to trade six native women for her. The American party refuses the offer and goes back to the boat. Later that evening, the blonde is kidnapped off the boat by natives in canoes, who accidentally leave a bracelet that shows they have been on board. The Americans send out a rescue party, but arrive just after the natives have offered the blonde to Kong, a giant gorilla. In trying to rescue her, several members of the American crew are killed. Kong fights a giant creature on the island. The blonde is rescued by Jack. They jump off a cliff together into the water. In pursuing the blonde, of whom Kong has become fond, Kong is captured. Once back in New York, and similar to the first Kong, he is put on display in chains as an on-stage spectacle. Seeing the flashing light bulbs of the newspapermen's

cameras, he assumes they are trying to hurt the blonde. He breaks out of bondage to rescue her. He takes her to the top of the tallest building, which resembles his native refuge on the tallest part of the island. He is shot and killed.

This rest of this chapter concerns itself with differences between *King Kong* (1933) and *King Kong* (1976).

The Tone of Kong

In keeping with the tenor of the times, this is the most campy, overtly knowing, and cynical of the three *King Kong* films. For example, as the film director and crew land on the island, Fred Wilson, their leader, says he's worried they'll get eaten alive. (This in-joke refers to Kong chewing humans on the island in *King Kong* (1933)). Wilson pauses a beat and demands mosquito spray. Later, after Kong takes the blonde from the sacrificial altar, Jack says to the disbelieving Wilson, "Who do you think just came by? A man in a monkey suit?" (Of course, Kong was played by Rick Baker in a monkey suit.)

By 1976, the American public had good reason for cynicism. Americans were already reeling from the nation's withdrawal from Vietnam and its implications for the United States' international power.... [M]any people also grew disenchanted with their political leadership in the 1970s, as one public official after another, including President Richard Nixon, resigned for misconduct (Henretta 2002:874).

At the time of *King Kong*'s release, the country had in its immediate hindsight the post-Watergate pardon of former President Richard Nixon by President Ford, after Nixon had committed "high crimes and misdemeanors" (Davis 1990:403). In addition, the country was faced with severe economic problems including spiraling inflation, growing unemployment and deindustrialization, and a growing federal deficit (while runaway film production, as discussed in Chapter 4, would move back to the United States, and would

“run away” to places in the U.S. other than Hollywood. Due to the 1971 tax incentives, many employers in other industries “moved their operations abroad, where they found a cheaper, more compliant workforce” (Henretta 2002:885)). America was a nation confused, hurting, and angry. Cynicism was a widespread public sentiment in response to the perceived indifference of government to demands for humane leadership and social change.

Corporate Power—Changing the Plot

We must not forget that the boiling heat of modern capitalistic culture is connected with heedless consumption of natural resources, for which there are no substitutes.

--Max Weber (1946:366)

In the plot of *King Kong* (1976), the corporate motivation for exploitation is blatant. Reflecting the shifts in political climate, the project is no longer about making a film, but rather about a naked grab for resources (oil). Unlike in the first film, which commenced at a dock in New York City, *King Kong* (1976) starts at a dock in Surabaya, Indonesia. The sympathies evoked for a destitute New York during the Depression, are replaced by an “exotic” Asian locale, and the prospect of an American ship exploring a mysterious South Sea island for oil.

The film starts with the camera looking up at a ship named “Petrox Explorer,” whose logo on a nearby crewmen’s shirt is a patriotic pastiche. The screenplay describes the company logo as “red-white-and-blue as if hacked from an American flag...[a] rather arrogant symbol of the Petrox conglomerate whose gas stations plaster the U.S. from coast to coast” (Semple 1977:19). Calling the original story device of a “two-bit movie producer heading for the South Seas on a speculation scouting trip with a gorgeous blonde actress...just too plain silly for today’s audience,” screenwriter Lorenzo Semple,

with producer Dino De Laurentiis's encouragement, replaced the veiled metaphor for exploitation with an overt one (Semple 1977:6).

When *King Kong* (1976) First Assistant Director David McGiffert described how this filmmaking period differed from earlier ones, he could have been talking about the character of Fred Wilson (played by Charles Grodin). McGiffert said, "What gets you is the cold-bloodedness of management... This business is a flat-out money-making arrangement. There's no heart in filmmaking anymore..." (Bahrenburg 1976:201). The adventurous movie producer character Carl Denham was made into what one character in the film calls an "environmental rapist," Fred Wilson. Wilson is a mid-level flak, "a slick, smooth, youngish, self-satisfied, upward-mobile [*sic.*] oil executive from Petrox headquarters" (Semple 1977:21). Whereas Denham was his own boss, Wilson is called in the film "a New York desk guy" who has to perform for upper management or he will end up "wiping windshields."

These plot changes speak directly to current events. The sharp economic downturn of the 1970s marked the end of the American dominance of the global economy (since the end of World War II). In part, the downturn was caused by the oil crisis of the mid-1970s which had its roots in earlier decades.

Until just after World War II, the United States had been the world's leading oil producer and consumer. By 1972, the U.S. produced only 22 percent, and needed supplies from elsewhere to keep up with demand. The Middle East had increased production 1,500 percent since World War II, and was the United State's primary source. National autonomy in the Middle East during that period had emerged as country after country threw off the yoke of colonial control. Both American and European oil

companies had been forced out of the region. While this low cost seems laughable now, Americans were stunned by increased costs when OPEC (the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) raised oil prices from three dollars to twelve dollars a barrel between 1973 and 1975. In addition, an oil embargo, in retaliation for foreign aid to Israel between 1973 and 1974, meant that Americans had to drive less or spend a lot of time waiting on lines at gas stations. Americans turned away from their “gas guzzler” vehicles and started buying more fuel efficient German and Japanese cars, which had a significant impact on the American economy. Although it was a “shock to the American psyche” that we were “hostages to economic forces,” these events did not cause Americans to change their behavior. Oil consumption actually increased, and American demand for oil seemed insatiable. In 1975, inflation was at 12 percent and the “economy entered its deepest downturn since the great depression” (Henretta 2002:880,896).

Differences between Carl Denham and Fred Wilson

The differences between *King Kong* (1933)’s Carl Denham and *King Kong* (1976)’s Fred Wilson also reflect shifts in movie production. In the first film, Denham answers to no one. By 1976, the producers and studio heads are no longer complex revered figures. That first generation had mostly passed from the earth, and those aged originals who still lived held little power (Berg 1998). Unlike Merian Cooper, producer Dino De Laurentiis had no vested interest in how the lead character, now an oil company executive not a movie executive, would be portrayed. Also, it was in keeping with the tenor of the times to make Wilson’s motives and authority untrustworthy. Grodin plays Wilson as a pompous fool whose bold assertions are repeatedly shown by the film to be ludicrous. For example, once the crew gets to the island, Wilson states after they see the

great wall, “This island is not inhabited.” The next moment the crew starts to hear drums beating on the island.²⁸

Wilson operates according to pecuniary dictates: “The ‘objective’ discharge of business primarily means a discharge of business according to calculable rules and ‘without regard for persons.’ ‘Without regard for persons’ is also the watchword of the ‘market’ and, in general, of all pursuits of naked economic interests” (Weber 1946:215). We see how Wilson uses the three main characters: Dwan, Jack Prescott, and Kong. The corporate exploiter consumes everything in his path and puts it at the service of the company’s needs. Professor Prescott becomes a cameraman. The tribal people’s God, Kong, is stolen to be the oil company’s new mascot. Dwan, a shipwreck survivor, becomes a star.

The Differences between Jack Driscoll and Jack Prescott

Unlike Jack Driscoll who plays the lead crew member in the first film, in *King Kong* (1976) his substitute, Jack Prescott, is a shipboard stowaway. He wants to get to the island because his work in primate paleontology has led him to seek out an interesting gorilla there. After Wilson’s crew catches and imprisons Prescott on board, and then checks his background to confirm Prescott is not a spy from another oil company, Wilson immediately presses Prescott into service. Wilson says of Prescott, “I know just how to use him,” and then makes Prescott into Petrox’s media man. “You are now this

²⁸ Similarly, on the set, Grodin made assertions about his role that were quickly cast into doubt. He said, “if you had gone out to make a film about how man has exploited and polluted his streams and atmosphere, and you did it in a documentary style, no one would come out to see the film. But in doing *King Kong*, I realized, I had a chance to work in a film with the potential of being seen by more people than any other film in the history of the business, and it could say something.” A Hawaiian reporter, hearing this, put down his notepad and walked away muttering, “He must be kidding.” (Bahrenburg 1976:67, 89).

expedition's official photographer." This activity is by-the-book exploitation, which resonates with Marcuse's writing about capitalism: "Everything cooperates to turn human instincts, desires and thoughts into channels that feed the apparatus" (Marcuse 1982 [1941]:144).

Also unlike the first *King Kong*, Prescott in *King Kong* (1976) has no loyalty to the expedition leader's vision. Wilson initially wants to exploit the tribal people on the island by getting them to kill Kong so he has access to what he believes is a huge cache of crude oil. He is stopped by Prescott:

Wilson: I will buy the chief.

Prescott: The nineteenth century is over, man. You can't just waltz in and grab their island.... Even an environmental rapist like you—even you wouldn't be asshole enough to murder a unique new species of animal! Why, kids would burn every Petrox gas station from Maine to California."

Prescott's statements, while they have the flavor of rhetoric of the anti-war movement hippies, also reflect a larger growing public awareness of the environmental costs of using irreplaceable natural resources. The 1969 oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, and the much-publicized pictures of marine birds slicked over with crude oil, had brought widespread public attention to the damage wrought by oil companies. Issues surrounding the construction of the Alaska pipeline were also in public awareness at this time, and there was growing environmental awareness (Henretta 2002:886-7). (The author feels nostalgic for a moment when a major motion picture acknowledged the power of the people as a viable threat.)

Wilson orders the oil exploration to continue, even after Dwan has been kidnapped by King Kong. Prescott pleads for her life, "there's a girl out there who might be running for her life from a gigantic crazy ape." Wilson responds firmly that the oil

comes first. He says with smarmy irony, “I know how you feel Jack. I feel the same. But there’s a national energy crisis that demands we rise above our selfish private emotions.”

King Kong as a Commercial Star

When it is discovered that there is no useful oil on the island, Kong becomes the natural resource to be exploited, and his commercial possibilities seized upon. Wilson’s assistant says of Kong, he’d make a “hell of a commercial. The battles we at Petrox fight to fill your gas tank.” Like the “tiger in your tank” that Exxon has. (Similarly, the large Kong that was made for the film was rarely used as an actor in it. He was mostly useful for commercial purposes. The big gorilla generated enormous publicity for the film.

Most of Kong’s actual onscreen work was done by a man in a gorilla suit (Morton

2005).)

Actor Charles

Grodin said of his role as Fred Wilson, “You’d have to be Albert Schweitzer not to have taken Kong away from his island and brought him to New York. People can identify with Wilson and what he does to Kong. After all, exploitation is the dominant posture of mankind today” (Bahrenburg 1976:66-7). It is noteworthy that in the plot of this *King Kong*, commercial interests create the media. By 1976, the thirst for adventure and the desire to film it are no longer, in fictional portrayals, credible reasons to create a movie.

Because this second version is explicitly about corporate power, the film shows Kong’s passage on the ship after he is captured on the island. On the oil tanker, Kong is caged where the oil would normally be stored, and there are bars on the roof of the tank, preventing Kong’s escape. Critic Steven Rubio says,

Here we see Kong jailed in the bottom of the ship, a more explicit and disturbing connection between the story of Kong and the story of slavery. The film’s general tone of irony would seem to make such a connection trite, but the irony is missing from these

scenes, which acknowledge the racial undertones of the story in ways at which the original only hints (Rubio 2005:33).

Kong's stardom bypasses motion pictures completely. Stardom has transcended, or been scalped from the motion picture business. Kong is sent straight to celebrity in an advertising career. As Dwan tells him when he's violently "acting out" in his cage on the ship, "Take it easy... stop waking up sleepy people. No one is going to hurt you. You're just going to America to be a star."

Ann Darrow becomes Dwan

Dwan is also incorporated into the machine. She happens upon this expedition by accident, when she floated by the Petrox Explorer in a life raft.²⁹ After Kong is captured and caged on the ship, Wilson puts Dwan into service by making her the co-star of his "Beauty and the Beast" commercial spectacle. Even though screenwriter Semple said that the filmmaking plot device was "silly," in the end he could not do without it. Dwan *happens* to be an actress wannabe who floats by the Petrox Explorer. Prescott *happens* to have brought cameras with him when he stows away. Further, the trope of stardom cannot be disposed of, as is discussed later.

At the Theater in New York City

The big scene at the theater in New York City in *King Kong* (1933) moved to the larger arena of New York's Shea Stadium for *King Kong* (1976). Kong himself has become fused with the interests of the oil company: A fifty-foot-high Petrox gas tank is wheeled out on stage, then the cover is lifted to reveal the gigantic caged Kong with the same silhouette as the gas tank. While this happens, Wilson croons, "Oh the power... Oh

²⁹ Dino De Laurentiis' first acting scene in film school involved his imagining a beautiful young girl in a small boat (Kezich and Levantesi 2004).

the super power.” Wilson’s excitement over the exploitation of the beast, and the triumph of corporate power, verges on the orgasmic.

After Wilson announces that Kong is in an “escape-proof cage certified by the New York City department of...” Kong breaks free of his bonds, steps on Wilson and crushes him to death.³⁰

Corporate Demands also Shape Time Off-screen

In the actual production of *King Kong* (1976) we see the changing shape of worker’s time. The changes were occurring across the board in Hollywood film production (Wexler 2006, Wexler interview 2007). In this case, Paramount and Universal, two major studios, were competing to make a new version of *King Kong* in the mid-1970s. Each claimed they had the sole and exclusive right to make the film. De Laurentiis, in partnership with Paramount, made efforts to stop the Universal production. One thing he did was advertise that his picture would be released in a year. That, along with other factors, resulted in behind-the-scenes bargaining that gave Universal a

³⁰ *King Kong* (1976) uses the newly built World Trade Center, a symbol of global capitalism, instead of the Empire State Building as the site of Kong’s last stand. Like the Empire State Building was in 1933, the World Trade Center towers in 1975 were the tallest modern buildings. Because the World Trade Center towers--in the wake of their 2001 destruction and the thousands of people killed then--mean many complex and different things to today’s film viewers, I watched the film with a peculiar hindsight. A *Time* magazine report during that period states presciently about Kong’s last stand: “that final destructive binge could be seen—and lines in the script lightly suggest it—as a projection of Western fears of, what might happen if the Third World should develop its potential power and strike back” (Time 1976). Having watched the film carefully many times, and read both the printed script and a working script in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences library, I can not find that “light” suggestion. I was surprised to find that the unpublished *King Kong* (1976) script at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences library still placed the final scene at the Empire State Building. “At one point, the production gave serious thought to switching to the Empire State Building” (Morton 2005:194). I was also surprised that during the “acrimonious” process, when the production company negotiated for the World Trade Center site with the Port Authority, the owners of the Empire State Building actively, publicly campaigned for the film to move the shoot to 34th Street: they hired men in gorilla suits to parade around the top of the Empire State Building (Bahrenburg 1976:190-191).

percentage of Paramount's gross, and gave De Laurentiis the right to produce the film. The cost of that bargain was borne by the film crew who had to work twelve-to-eighteen hour days for months to complete the film that De Laurentiis had guaranteed would be done in a year (Morton 2005). The ruthless competition of two corporate giants meant that the demands on the film laborer's time increased. As Construction Coordinator Gary Martin said, "Six days a week, twelve hours a day! You get tired" (Bahrenburg 1976:244). On-the-set medical problems included the aforementioned crew member in intensive care, as well as two overdoses (Morton 2005), a pinched nerve (Jessica Lange), and a lot of colds and injuries (Bahrenburg 1976). Crew response to this pressure varied. One called the time constraints and the schedule "exhilarating" while another called it "totally and completely insane" (Morton 2005:185).

Stereotypes

While it is clear that the filmmakers who worked on *King Kong* (1976) understood that the stereotyped depictions of black people and of women were in need of revision, how the filmmakers went about this process brings resonance to the cliché "unclear on the concept." The film-makers missteps in one case was widely publicized. As has been mentioned, in *King Kong* (1976), a great deal of Kong's performance is created by Rick Baker in a gorilla suit. In order to cast that role, the production advertised in the Hollywood trade papers for "a tall, well-built black man." The advertisement caused fury among civil rights groups and created "the film's major publicity gaffe" (Time 1976, see also Morton 2005:204). Rick Baker, a white man, who worked on make-up effects for *King Kong*, and had made extensive study of gorillas, was eventually cast in the part. (Morton 2005). (Vincent Canby referred to him as one of the

“auteurs” of the film. Baker would go on to create the creatures in the cantina for *Star Wars* (1977), and in 1981, he was the first winner of an Academy Award for best make-up in *An American Werewolf in London*. He has won five subsequent Oscars for best make-up (imdb.com).)

In another largely unpublicized example of the filmmakers’ lack of clarity, Sally Perle, the extras’ casting director, made interesting choices in casting the tribal people. Despite the fact that the film is again set in Southeast Asia, Kong’s island natives are again black, not Asian. Perle could not use union extras to cast the parts because, she said, “The union only had very pretty blacks, so they gave us a waiver for most of our extras. When they can’t supply us, we can go out and find them” (Bahrenburg 1976:123). The stereotype dictates that the native people can not be “pretty.”

The screenwriter is equally “unclear on the concept” since he refers in the published script to the dancing natives on the Indonesian island as “painted dancing Ju Ju men” (Semple 1977:57). Juju is a word not from Asia but from West Africa. It relates to a “fetish, charm or amulet of West African peoples” or “the magic attributed to or associated with jujus” (Webster 1999:634). The writer is referring to people on the wrong continent. He writes of their rituals: “another Ju Ju man ... dances into view wearing a crazy ape-mask. He also wears high platform footgear to increase his height, and wears paw-like skin gloves.” In the film, a man in a “primitive” gorilla mask, with sweat shining on his brown torso, thrusts his pelvis rhythmically at the female blonde sacrifice during the ritual. The stereotype, blending the black and the gorilla, is even more exaggerated than in the first film.

Token Black Crew Member

A “token” black member was added to the ship’s crew. Boan (Julius Harris) was originally described in the published screenplay as, “big and black with a shaved noggin” (Semple 1977:20). When Boan’s name—pronounced “Bone”—is called in the film, this can evoke in viewers’ minds the slang term for an erection.³¹ Boan has a curious role, part of which never made it to the screen. Again, what gets edited out is instructive in helping us understand how films get smoothed to serve stereotypes. In the published script, Dwan gets whistles for the cute outfits she wears on deck, and she “cheerfully whistles back at bare-chested Boan” (Semple 1977:48). This, of course, is not in the film, since it would violate the boundaries of the stereotype if Dwan were already comfortable with black male sexuality and miscegenation.

In the film, Boan takes over some of the moments that Carl Denham had in *King Kong* (1933). Denham made the one direct reference to race in the 1933 picture, “I tell you that there’s something on that island that no white man has ever seen.” In the 1976 version, Boan makes the one spoken reference to race when he is ordered to drill for oil samples more quickly: “Ain’t bustin my black back for no white company master.” Whiteness and blackness, again evoke references to the “civilized” white master and by comparison, the subjugated black man.

Wilson, who is unmanned by his role as a corporate flunkey, could not play Denham’s masculine parts and still remain in character. For example, in the 1976 version, when Kong sends many crew members to their death by knocking them off a log into an abyss, Boan, not Wilson, is on the other side. Boan is the survivor who goes back to tell the others. After his return, the published script says, “The big black man is all

³¹ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, boan is an obsolete word meaning bone or boned (Oxford Compact 1982:238).

scratched and battered from his jungle ordeal but he is working hard” (Semple 1977:115). It is noteworthy, that with the exception of Dwan, whose whiteness is repeatedly emphasized when she is described with Kong (Semple 1977:75, 89), no other characters are identified by size and color after they’ve been introduced in the script.

Asian Stereotypes

With regard to stereotyping, Asians fare differently in *King Kong* (1976) than in *King Kong* (1933). In the first film, the Asian cook has speaking lines, however they are comical and hackneyed. He talks with Ann Darrow while they’re at sea, and he also discovers that Ann has been kidnapped. In *King Kong* (1976), there are two Asian male roles. The cook no longer has lines, but has an additional job: he is also ... a masseuse! The Asian masseur stereotype is added to the Asian chef stereotype. The other Asian male role is a martial one: that of a corrupt dockside security guard who silently takes Jack Prescott’s bribe, so that Prescott can sneak on board the ship. (In the script, the security guard is not cast as a specific race. The script does specify that “dusky Indonesian dockworkers sweat under footlights as their women prepare weirdo repasts in the shadows” (Semple 1977:19). This scene did not appear in the film.)

Behind the Scenes: Sexual Hide-and-Seek

Sexually loaded stereotypes are deliberately placed in the film, and then denied in public documents, in a kind of hide-and-go-seek game. The sexuality of the relationship between Dwan and Kong is made more explicit in *King Kong* (1976) than it was in the first film. However frankly it is shown, the published script does not admit it is there. In the unpublished script at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the scene between Dwan and Kong on the oil tanker reads as follows, “Dwan stands there, between

the enormous thighs. Without anything specific being seen, the sexuality blows your skull.” (Academy 1975:75). By contrast, in the published script, the scene reads, “Dwan stands there. Kong gazes down at her. She retreats a bit, halts. The ape just gazes and breathes. The sound of the latter grows quieter, as it pacifies him merely to know that she is here and near to him in his incomprehensible captivity” (Semple 1977:133-4). Sex? What sex? She’s a human sedative.³²

Labor

The film makers kept insisting this was a film about *Beauty and the Beast* (once again ignoring that Beast doesn’t die at the end of the fairy tale, he survives and assimilates). Many members of the crew talked about how this *King Kong* emphasized the “love story.” Second unit director William Kronick called it a “sensual retelling of beauty and the beast” (Bahrenburg 1976). Bahrenburg says, “Kong is a less violent monster...no longer does he snack indiscriminantly on the natives. He is now a more romantic lover” (Bahrenburg 1976:19). De Laurentiis insisted, “It is the greatest love

³² Below is another example, from the celebrated strip-tease sequence, of the difference between the sexually loaded scene in the unpublished script archived at the Academy, and the published version of the scene. In the Academy script, “Dwan—kneeling there, as ape fingers DESCEND and again STROKE her. Once, twice, back and forth—then they PLUCK away a piece of her robe. Another piece of her robe. Her mouth opens in a “Nooo!” but she cannot make any sound. She is as if drugged, perhaps by the sheer unspeakable sensuality of this situation. The gentleness and precision of the ape’s actions are extraordinary. He has her bare to the waist now, her skin-and-feather gown stripped down and falling about her lower parts. The back ape hair moves across her breasts.” In Kong’s face you see, “the lips slightly parted to reveal those ghastly unspeakable teeth”; in her eyes you see “mirrored every nightmare and fantasy of womankind” (Academy 1975:59).

In the published text, Kong could be her personal dresser and style consultant: “Kong’s face is ferocious but the light of his enormous eyes is soft. Dwan is kneeling there, as ape fingers pluck away a piece of her robe. Another piece of her robe. Her mouth opens in a ‘nooo!’ but she cannot make any sound. The gentleness and precision of the ape’s actions are extraordinary” (Semple 1977:106).

story of all time.” When asked by an incredulous interviewer what he meant, De Laurentiis said (in Italian):

“When I make love, the pleasure is not the mechanical thing at the end...It’s to be with the girl I love, to caress her, to be tender, to feel I am loved. What I consider this love story to be is the purest possible love story. Because it can’t be consummated” (Eder 1976:40).

Building the Gorilla

Behind the scenes, the drama was not a love story. It was about building the gorilla. There were both Italian and American crews, led by puppet master Carlo Rambaldi and special effects director Glen Robinson respectively, working on the problem. If the groups needed to speak with one another, they required an interpreter. Given the time pressures, and the technological challenge, the crew had considerable trouble building a forty-two-foot-high acting machine, which continued to malfunction throughout the shoot (Bahrenburg 1976, Morton 2005).

In keeping with his showman’s style and his blockbuster ambitions, De Laurentiis had initially boasted, “He will be the most expensive actor in the world. It will cost a million dollars to build him” (Bahrenburg 1976:9). The large creature’s fur was made of 4,000 pounds of Argentinian horse tails, much of which had to be dyed the correct color. Ten people working overtime sewed 1,500 panels of hair into 300 yards of netting to cover Kong’s aluminum “bones.” (He got fleas in the process.) Seven men working at a control panel were needed to animate the full-sized monster, and four crew members

were required to animate the enormous mechanical hand that held Dwan (Time 1976, Bahrenburg 1976, Morton 2005).³³

For Rick Baker's gorilla suit, six bear skins were required. His puffing mobile chest was made of water-filled condoms to show the moving muscle ridges. Baker had five different masks to convey different expressions. It was so hot in that suit, he sometimes lost five pounds a day working in it (Bahrenburg 1976).

Compared with the nine crucial members of the special effects crew in *King Kong* (1933), the expansion of film labor on the *King Kong* (1976) crew was remarkable: There were 107 miniature sets. "The cost of these sets and the labor hired to build them—hundreds of men and women during many weeks of production—became the single biggest expense of the film" (Bahrenburg 1976:23). Work on Kong himself ended up consuming \$3 million dollars, and labor costs were 65 percent of the budget (Bahrenburg 1976).

The Diminishment of Labor On-Screen

Compared with *King Kong* (1933), in *King Kong* (1976) work expanded exponentially for crews behind the scenes. At the same time, the role of labor onscreen was diminished in many ways. Management's attitude toward the crew is even less respectful than in the first *King Kong*. Like in the first film, Kong kills crew members who are pursuing him and the blonde on the island: Kong grabs the log the crew members are crossing, and then jerks the log around until the crew fall screaming into the abyss. However, unlike in the first *King Kong*, in *King Kong* (1976) no captain voices

³³ Given the tensions in the process, the crew found the following incident funny. When the giant hand was first completed, it locked into a fist. With great difficulty, technicians got the fist to open, "and then slowly, majestically, the middle finger [rose] straight as an arrow from the other bent fingers" (Bahrenburg 1976:105).

sorrow at their loss. Upon returning alone from the rescue expedition, Boan is asked “Where are the others?” The three lines commemorating the dead in the first film are reduced to one action: Boan draws his finger across his throat. A mention is reduced to a gesture. Loss of life does not even merit a spoken line.

In the plot of the film, aside from Dwan the star, Kong the star, and Jack Prescott the camera guy, there is no other film crew. These are the only roles for film labor that get reused from the original film. To paraphrase comedian Rodney Dangerfield, labor gets “no respect.”

Labor Power Behind-the-Scenes

During this period, below-the-line labor could still negotiate to be paid above scale (Bahrenburg 1976). Hollywood labor still had power. Entertainment remained a hugely profitable industry. In the years intervening between the 1933 and 1976 versions of *King Kong*, labor unions had formed in Hollywood and had maintained significant power in relationship to management. That power had been constrained by legislation enacted in the aftermath of World War II (Nicholson 2004), and previously discussed events related to the destruction of the Conference of Studio Unions and the HUAC investigations, which quieted the unions’ progressive voices (Nielsen & Mailes 1995). Unlike America’s organized labor in general, members of the Hollywood unions, especially above-the-line union labor, were influenced and empowered by the social changes of the 1960s.

However, Bahrenburg characterizes the general emotional state of the industry, which reflected on the set, as follows, “Everyone feels insecure, unwanted, fearful of having displeased the boss, fearful, maybe, even of losing his job. Insecurity is at the

root of the whole movie industry” (38). (Below-the-line film workers are by contract hired for the day only. They can be fired for any reason after a day’s work.) He attributed this insecure feeling to:

diminishing numbers of jobs in a depressed industry. Today movie work is sporadic; feature films are no longer the major entertainment source for the masses. Periods of unemployment can be anticipated by every one in the industry except a handful of stars and directors” (36).

Like in *King Kong* (1933), above-the-line crew, such as actors, would often go for months on end without working at all. Unlike the cast of the original *Kong*, the cast of this film had the union behind them. In *King Kong* (1976) actors were on salary for the entire eight-month shoot, whether they worked or not. Actor Rene Auberjonois commented, “At a time in my life when I had two young kids, that was just great” (Morton 2005:192).

Dwan’s Role: What Could Have Been

Despite the fact that De Laurentiis and Semple found the original premise too “silly,” in *King Kong* (1976) they replaced the gorgeous blonde actress Ann Darrow with a gorgeous blonde actress named Dwan. Instead of a resilient virgin, she’s a resilient whore (a lateral move toward the other end of the spectrum of stereotypes about women). In the new version, she is not an out-of-work actress desperate for a job. Instead, when she floats up to the Explorer, she wears a black “very clinging and alluring evening gown” (Semple 1977:35), and her make-up is perfect. Lorenzo Semple, the screenwriter, explained that in the outline, Dwan was a “classy semi-intellectual Camera Operator of a movie unit along on the expedition to film TV commercials for the oil company.” This character was eliminated because it was, according to Semple, “shamefully predictable” (Semple 1977: 9). From my perspective, that “predictability” would be welcome. By

1977 there were in *total* about ten camerawomen, nine assistant camerawomen, ten female sound technicians, five female still photographers and three female electricians in the entire IATSE (Maple 1977). In the original film, the “silly” Ann Darrow had loyalty and pluck. She had acted in films at Ft. Lee before the studios shut down. By contrast, Dwan considers horoscopes deep reading. She insists that her life was saved by the pornographic film *Deep Throat*: because she was not interested in watching it below deck, she was on deck when the yacht blew up. She only dimly realizes that she was being used on the yacht, “Harry had discovered me. He was going to put me in a movie he was making in Hong Kong.” Later she says, “Harry probably wouldn’t have put me in that movie anyhow.”

The changes brought about by the 1960s and 1970s social justice movement as well as the women’s movement, were in general not absorbed by the American organized labor. In part, because of the almost overwhelming institutionalized racism and sexism in the mainstream American labor movement, the unions were largely unable to incorporate progressive change. That inflexibility has contributed to the nationwide stagnation, and then significant decline of organized labor’s power (Nicholson 2004). I would further suggest that the combination of film workers’ day-hire status with the overwhelmingly white male presence of the below-the-line crew on major motion picture sets to this day (for example, over 85 percent of the camera people who are union members are white men) contributes to creating a local social climate that encourages the perpetuation of sexist and racist stereotyping in films (Glover and Guerriaro 2004).

Stardom as Labor

Considering the colossal amount of labor that went into this film, it is strange that the onscreen valuing of collaborative work has decreased significantly. With that devaluing has come a mystification about how things work. Perhaps for the audience, there is a loss of a larger understanding that film work, and most other work, gets accomplished collectively. Working together, like Jack and Ann and the crew worked together in the first *King Kong* (1933), is not depicted as part of the starmaking process. Films are explicitly *not* the medium through which stardom occurs. Becoming a star now means becoming an individual skill for the oil companies. It's not about work or adventure. It's about looking suitably like a revered object. While this is not new, the blatant admission of it is less familiar.

Teamwork and Loyalty in *King Kong* (1933)

Stardom has changed in other ways. In *King Kong* (1933), the making of the show was a collective effort, and a sense of team spirit pervaded. As was discussed in Chapter 2, Ann and Driscoll agreed to star at the New York theater to help Denham with the show. Driscoll worried to Ann, "Denham's such a fool for risks. No telling what he'll ask you to do." Her loyal response is indicative: "After what he did for me, I'll do anything he wants." Driscoll tries to talk her out of her conviction, "Don't talk like that. When it comes to getting a picture, he's crazy enough to try anything." Ann replies, "I won't go back on him." There was a sense of "we-ness," a team spirit that was lost by the 1970s, the so-called "me decade" (Wexler 2007 interview).

Stardom in *King Kong* (1976)

In *King Kong* (1976), stardom is bestowed by off-screen oil executives. On the oil tanker, headed back to New York, Wilson hands Dwan a faxed contract for her

upcoming work in the performance with Kong, or as he says, “Lights, camera, Kong!” (Again the “silly” cinematic trope returns to the film.) She silently reads the fax and then asks Prescott, with whom she has been playing a board game: “Do I look different?”

Prescott: Yeah, you shine.

Dwan: How can I become a star because of someone that was stolen off that gorgeous island and locked up in that lousy oil tank?

Wilson: It’s not someone. It’s an animal, a beast that tried to rape you.

Dwan: That’s not true, he risked his life to save me.

Wilson: He tried to rape you honey.

This exchange dictates the terms of stardom. If you frame the discussion as Dwan did at first, as exploitation of labor, “someone stolen off that gorgeous island and locked up,” then you violate the terms dictated by commercial interests. Wilson, personifying Capital, shapes the “truth.” Or as Stuart Ewen has said, “Truth = What Sells” (Ewen conversation 2008). Commercial interests may not be logical, but you must obey. For example, Kong has to be an animal, not a “someone,” and he has to be a “rapist” at the same time.

Blacklisting as Accepted Practice

Other things have changed during this period. For example, blacklisting is an accepted mode of on-screen business practice which Wilson employs successfully. After the ship lands in New York, the story moves backstage to the moments before Kong’s performance. In Dwan’s dressing room, she sits before the classic “star” mirror framed by lightbulbs. Wilson stands by her. Prescott enters. Dwan asks Prescott why he isn’t dressed for the show. He says he has changed his mind about exploiting Kong and instead

contributed his advance to charity. Prescott then declares his love for Dwan and tells her to come with him. Wilson interrupts, saying to Dwan: “You’ll never get a booking in your life. You’ll end up tap dancing at the rotary club.” She caves in to Wilson’s blacklisting threat and asks Prescott, “Don’t you understand?”

Prescott says, “Yes. I’m sorry. Stay well,” and leaves. Prescott can’t convince Dwan to stick with him. In this era, blacklisting threats work. Stardom does not unify, it divides. Labor solidarity has been killed as an issue.

Does the Desk Job Guy Get the Girl?

As has been previously mentioned, Jack Prescott’s role is similar to Jack Driscoll’s in *King Kong* (1933) but Jack Driscoll’s work as a sea-faring monosyllabic first mate was not considered fixed and iconic in subsequent productions. In the second and third versions of *King Kong*, filmed during the independent film era and the era of globalized studio ownership, the human male lead who woos the starlet is not an ordinary working-class man.³⁴

In the *King Kong* (1933), the officer (first mate) got the girl. It was still considered realistic for a non-middle-class non-college-educated guy to get the star. In *King Kong* (1976), Jack Prescott is a middle-class college professor. By 1976, the rank-and-file can’t be a star’s love interest.³⁵ No longer one of Carl Denham’s crew, Prescott

³⁴ We have learned to mask, even to ourselves, the vulnerability of our working class status. We call it “lower” “middle” and “upper,” as if “lower” and “middle” were so vastly different. Instead we would better be served by speaking it plain: “working” and “living off the working.” Maybe we should call the latter the “vampire” class.

³⁵ The writer toyed with the idea. Originally, Semple wrote Prescott as a working-class guy, Joe Perko, the oil drilling foreman. Because “I’d just read an interesting piece in *New York Magazine* alleging the liaisons between classy semi-intellectual female persons and roughneck blue-collar males were all the rage” (Semple 1977:8). Perko’s leading role didn’t last. When Dwan’s role of camera operator was deemed “too predictable”, all of a sudden, Dwan was a ditzy blonde whore. A working class hero didn’t make sense. The Joe Perko character became just another un-mourned worker hurtled off the log into the abyss.

is now at Princeton's department of Primate Paleontology. He makes jokes that reflect his middle-class status. For example, when he and Dwan are fleeing Kong in New York City, near the end of the film, he hears breaking glass and says, "The upper middle class rises, loots Bloomingdales windows." He then hears gunfire and says, "They pay the price, tough." As labor scholar Kim Moody has pointed out, "The working class never goes away; it is the vast majority; but it frequently goes unnoticed by the media that frame our perception of society" (Moody 1997:1). Based on this example, I would say that the working class more than goes unnoticed by the media, it gets erased.

Prescott does not get the girl. In *King Kong* (1976) the corporate "starmaker machinery" gets the girl. Dwan would rather be a commodity than be loved by a middle-class guy who tells her he can't afford to keep her in chinchilla.

“When the monkey die, everybody cries”

– Dino De Laurentiis (Kezich and Levantesi 2004)

To the credit of the filmmakers, both Dwan and Jack Driscoll do their best to save Kong from his death. While they are not successful, the film at least does not end by blaming the girl with the line, “It was beauty that killed the beast.”

The era of independent production was coming to a close, and Dino De Laurentiis’ *King Kong* (1976) production manager Terry Carr felt that De Laurentiis was, “[o]ne of the last of the old-time independent producers—men like David O. Selznick and Samuel Goldwyn, who understood the entire process of making movies from beginning to end, who went out and raised the money for their productions, and who were willing to risk everything to bring their projects to fruition” (Morton 2005:195). De Laurentiis is “one of the most prolific producers of this or any era.... [He has been] involved in the production of over 600 films” (Buchholz 2002:11). (He also has the dubious distinction of being the producer who helped catapult Arnold Schwarzenegger to fame in *Conan, The Barbarian* (1982).)

To capitalize on the burgeoning regional filmmaking in the United States and to take advantage of the lower labor costs, in 1984, De Laurentiis built his own studio in Wilmington, North Carolina. The most famous film he produced there was David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet* (1986). He comments, “When I was in Europe, it was easy to do 20 pictures a year for all those years. In American, it’s very tough, especially with the budgets up, up, up” (Buchholz 2002:45). De Laurentiis resigned from De Laurentiis Entertainment Group in February 1988. Six months later, the company went into

receivership, and its assets—the Wilmington Studios included—were sold and the company dissolved (Morton 2005). The shift of motion picture production in the context of the emerging globalizing studio ownership is discussed further in the following chapters. While for the producers, as mentioned early in this chapter, it was an advantage during this period not to be a “slave” to the studios, working conditions for the rank-and-file declined because people like De Laurentiis displayed little sense of responsibility toward the workers he employed in North Carolina. He moved back to Hollywood and took an office on a studio lot, leaving his former employees to fend for themselves.

The actual parts of Kong used in the film had diverging fates. After the final shooting scene in New York, when Kong falls from the top of the World Trade Center, the giant Kong was “disassembled and repacked into the three trucks to be taken back across the country. Nobody knows quite what to do with him, since he is not needed in any more scenes” (Bahrenburg 1976:232). A friend reported seeing Kong’s head several years ago. It was behind a fence, rotting in De Laurentiis’ former studio parking lot in Wilmington.

Chapter 6, Runaway Production, The Second Phase (1972 – 1998)

Introduction

Runaway production reportage changed during the second phase (1972-1998). Hollywood production—reported previously as “running” from the United States to Europe and Mexico, now usually “ran” from California to the other forty-nine states. In addition, both television and film work are consistently included in the reports. The stories also changed in ways that almost left labor out of the picture. Both what the term meant, and how the term was used, had altered. The meaning of the term shifted to refer to specific kinds of regional location shooting. How it was used is discussed at length later in this chapter.

In addition to the aforementioned changes in the laws, the technological innovations in film production, and the ever-evolving socio-political climate during this time, this second phase was supported by factors such as the growing ease of travel as well as the increased sophistication of interstate and international communication. Also, as discussed earlier, the aforementioned success of films like *Easy Rider* (1969), *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), and *Deliverance* (1972), which were shot on location, not at the studios, brought a new demand from the public for more realistic locations. This dovetailed neatly with the producers search for locations where they could hire less expensive non-union labor to make their pictures.

Contemporary reports’ units of analysis changed. The familiar participants were the producers and the studio representatives. New participants included state government officials and spokespeople from their state’s respective film commissions. Unlike previously, the unions’ response does not play a significant part. By 1974, recently

formed state film commissions “help[ed] find crews, technical and local talent often beyond the realm of union regulation.” The unions did not mount a significant challenge, such as those during the first phase. It would have been hard, for example for the unions to start a campaign based on their old claim that runaway production was “un-American,” since shooting was occurring in the United States. Productions sometimes got “caught” by the union locals where they were shooting and, as a result, had to pay more to the unions to rectify the situation, as Producer Ed Pressman experienced while filming *Phantom* (Funke 1974). However, the IATSE mainstream leadership, which had been outspoken in the first phase, now either chose to remain silent or was not invited to respond by the press.

By the 1970s, many state governments began to establish film commissions to support local production. (New York had established one of the first film commissions in 1966. In 1974, there were fifteen (Funke 1974), and by 1984, two-thirds of the states had film commissions (Hulbert 1984).) Because much production went to regions within the United States, runaway production became a regional story, not an international one, and became of far less interest to the general *New York Times* reader, than, for example, to the *Los Angeles Times* reader (for whom the loss of work was a local issue). The *New York Times* reported the story as one of inter-state tension, or reported about the subject insofar as film production came or did not come to New York City. The *Los Angeles Times* framed the story as California vs. the rest of the country, and charted the revenue losses to the state, as well as efforts to establish a California film commission (after thirty-one other states had already established commissions). In addition, there were reports of repeated efforts to establish a Los Angeles film clearance office in order to simplify the

Byzantine process of getting permits to film in the area, as well efforts by local communities and areas to attract film business, and reports of growing resentment of neighborhoods over the repeated and often damaging incursions of film crews (Murphy 1974, Jones 1976, Los Angeles Times 1984, Gladstone 1985).

American Labor History

Between 1950 and 1990, during the first and second phases of runaway production, American worker productivity went up over 100%. However, during the second phase of runaway production—between the 1970s and the late 1980s—in America, “part-time workers, adjuncts, contract employees and consultants became a fast-growing segment of labor” (Nicholson 2004:297). The general conditions that had been true for Hollywood workers for decades (the industry employed people on a project-by-project basis) became the general conditions of 25 percent of the American workforce. Also during the second phase of runaway production, the film industry was seeing work going to American right-to-work (non-union) states, or to states other than California. Meanwhile, workers in general were losing jobs to overseas manufacturing. Between 1977 and 1981 seven million manufacturing jobs, mostly union jobs, were lost in the United States (Nicholson 2004). The myth of the American dream, that if you work hard you will get ahead, was belied by the evidence. As American labor productivity increased, the work went away.

In 1980, former Screen Actors Guild president, Ronald Reagan, was elected President of the United States, ushering in an era of conservatism. Even though Reagan had been the Screen Actors Guild president (SAG 2007), Reagan as California’s governor supported legislation that was so anti-union that only two unions—the air traffic

controllers (PATCO) and the Teamsters—endorsed his candidacy for president. He would soon destroy PATCO. In 1981, the air traffic controllers struck, and President Reagan fired all of them:

Crushing the controllers' strike was a signal to the industry and the nation. The assault on labor that followed is one of reasons many of his fans would like to add Reagan's image to those already carved into Mt. Rushmore. That he did this, and actually increased his popularity and vote among unionists, and labor generally, is one of the reasons observers began to talk about the end of labor as a conscious force in the nation's life (Nicholson 2007: 301).

Hollywood Labor History

During the first phase of runaway production, the motion picture studios were still American-owned businesses. There was a sense that leadership in the business cared about moviemaking, whatever their point of view about organized labor. As Kim Fellner, a trade union activist who worked for SAG in the 1980s, put it, “Louis B. Mayer may have been a so-and-so but he helped them all make movies” (Davis 1982). The second phase took place during the period when multinational corporations began to take over the motion picture studios. In 1980 Coca Cola company bought Columbia pictures. In 1985, Australian media magnate Rupert Murdoch bought Twentieth Century Fox. In 1989 SONY bought Columbia from Coca Cola. In 1990, Matsushita bought MCA Universal (Campbell 2007).

Kim Fellner described the impact of that shift on the Screen Actors Guild, “When they sit down across a table to negotiate, they're dealing with this multinational corporation whose interest in movies as a craft doesn't exist anymore” (Davis 1982). The new owners sent attorneys to negotiate union contracts. They were a different sort of people than those the union had dealt with before. According to actor Pat Harrington, Jr. (*One Day at a Time*), “We found ourselves dealing with a powerful, well organized

production apparatus...with enormous amounts of money to spend. We simply couldn't stand up to them. We knew at that point we had to change" (Davis 1982). The above-the-line unions with a tradition of democratic participation had the resources to make changes. The IATSE, with a history of sweetheart unionism (the leadership made decisions that allied them with the producers' interests), also had resources to make changes, but made different choices.

Unlike SAG members who were outspoken, IATSE mainstream union leadership either lost their voices or sacrificed them in this discussion. In 1974, Walter F. Diehl became the president of the IATSE. He replaced Richard F. Walsh, who had been IATSE president for over thirty years (during the entire first phase of runaway production). Walsh was mentioned at least 138 times in the *New York Times*. This is more than ten times the number of mentions of the three subsequent presidents combined. Walter Diehl (1974-1986) was quoted five times. Alfred Di Tolla (1986-1994) was mentioned once (in the paid obituaries). Near the time of Di Tolla's death in 1994, Thomas Short was elected IATSE President. He was mentioned three times.³⁶ He served until 2008, with Di Tolla's son as his vice-president. Admittedly, *Times* mentions are not the gold standard for recording union activism, but this fact helps support the idea of relative union quiet.

By then, the IATSE, a union that in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s joined with above-the-line guilds and went to the President and Congress to fight for their peoples'

³⁶ In a Proquest search for Walsh mentions I searched "Richard F. Walsh" and eliminated all those references that were apparently for a different Richard Walsh. I also searched "Richard Walsh" and "International Alliance" AND NOT "Richard F. Walsh." For Walter Diehl, I searched "Diehl" and "International Alliance." For Alfred Di Tolla, I searched "Di Tolla" and "International Alliance." For Thomas Short I searched, "Thomas Short" OR "Thomas C. Short" or "Tom Short" and "International Alliance." The information was downloaded on 1/10/08.

jobs on a national scale, had become a union whose targets of protest were much smaller and misdirected. During this phase, many things come into question, including the popularity of Hollywood labor unions. For example, as early as 1970, a *New York Times* story about the IATSE asks in the title: “Was Big Business Right and the Union Wrong?” The *Times* reported that the IATSE was encouraging its members to turn in their Mobil gas station charge cards because Mobil was sponsoring a new public television program, *Masterpiece Theater*, which would shoot overseas in England (Gould 1970). The complex web of corporate philanthropy was perhaps not the best target for union outrage: despite recent oil spills, there was not yet enough anti-corporate, anti-big oil public sentiment to support this move.

The Second Phase: The “Love” Story

California has been like the husband who takes his wife for granted and when she finds a lover, wonders where he went wrong.

— California State Senator Alan Robbins on runaway production (Funke 1974)

Just as the Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers film *Shall We Dance* (1937) bears no relationship to the Japanese film *Shall We Dance* (1996), except the shared title and the fact that the plot’s action is initiated by a man in love with a woman who knows how to dance, so too the first phase of runaway production bears little relationship to the second, except that in both cases the story told includes films leaving Hollywood and costing workers their jobs.

During this phase, the nature of the rhetoric in the debate about runaway production changed almost entirely. Metaphors of war used by the unions in the first phase occurred rarely (Funke 1974). In the runaway production debate, a new story about love and slavery emerged. No longer were the labor unions key players in this

runaway production story, but rather the dramatic actors were individual states which were portrayed as ingenues in the drama. Each state had a sense of pride in its own unique character, and its belief in an ability to court Hollywood with something special to lure picture production there. While the history of runaway production clearly indicated that Hollywood film production is a fickle and mercenary lover, moving for the money, this did not seem to cross the minds of the reporters, who instead tended to plot each change in runaway production as something hopeful for the states (and nations) mentioned, and as a possible way for them to build permanent jobs and industry. The film commissions are cast as procurers in the new drama, who facilitate the seduction of the innocents, “By *opening up* their states, the commissions have enabled filmmakers to *penetrate* many places that otherwise might have been all but inaccessible” (emphasis added) (Funke 1974). Los Angeles is characterized as the jaded town that took Hollywood production for granted, and as such almost deserves to be abandoned. What’s goes unremarked by the reporters in the drama, as it played out across the pages of the *New York Times*, is that not everyone uses this language of love. When Hollywood studio representatives or producers talk about the advantages of shooting in specific locations, the language they use to describe conditions resembles the paternalistic language used by slave owners during the colonial period.

While California State Senator Robbins talked about California as the cuckolded mate to Hollywood production, the states actively “took steps to enhance their appeal” and wooed the motion picture industry, using “purple prose” penned by their film commissions (Funke 1974) and “singing ... siren songs” in advertisements in *Daily Variety*, a Hollywood trade paper (Harmetz 1985). State governments took it another

step. While Hollywood was shooting in rural Georgia, then-Governor Jimmy Carter offered his private plane on weekends to allow the crew to visit Atlanta, and further offered free hotel rooms there. In much the same way that an innocent invites in a libertine with whom she is smitten, Carter emphasized that no subject was “taboo,” while New York’s Mayor Lindsay issued a dictum that “no agency could refuse to cooperate with a production on the grounds that it didn’t like a particular script.” (Buried in the sixth column of the story is the information that many of these productions are beyond union reach, and union members are not quoted in the article.) Hollywood labor is cast as a menace to the healthy relations fostered by location shoots. Martin Jurow, a producer, said, “We’re beginning to break Hollywood’s strangulation of our business” (Hulbert 1984). The language of love extends to an acknowledgement that prolonged relations may prove untenable, “even in this quaint scene, there were hints that Texas filmmakers are enjoying a honeymoon period.”

The states never see Hollywood production as the Cassanova who will move on swiftly and mercilessly when a new seduction appears in the form of a better deal. During the second phase of runaway production, the state rhetoric is often about the state operating not as a “manufacturing outpost for Hollywood, but rather moving into ‘a more creative, self-sufficient role,’” and producing its own movies (Hulbert 1984). As of 2008, no states have achieved this goal on any significant scale with regard to motion picture production.

California which finally established its film commission in January 1985, is cast in a front-page *New York Times* report as the “jaded” lover who does nothing to keep production in town, because “it happens every day here” (Harmetz 1985). Under the

headline of “Plea From Los Angeles: Big Films, Come Home” (Cummings 1986), a later article discusses California’s “apathetic attitude ...California has not only taken film making for granted, but has often seemed actively hostile.” Complaining that each city had different permit requirements and high fees, production, as the spurned lover, was “going to go where it’s treated well.” Lisa Rawlins, California’s then film commissioner explained that her job description meant her job was to “stand at the border with arms outstretched and say to film makers, ‘Don’t go away!’” In the last column of the story is the fact that the Hollywood IATSE locals were facing 35 percent unemployment.

The romance ends. The reporters often do not mention that while Hollywood production is initially greeted by a community as a “fun” source of income (Hulbert 1984, Harmetz 1985), ongoing experiences with film crews, the “inadequate safety precautions” (Cummings 1986) and the general carelessness of production companies wear people down, and eventually communities. California’s “jadedness” is not without cause. For example, after a film production blew up a 63-foot yacht in Newport bay without permission, the resulting conflagration, unmoored and out of control, burned a wealthy local resident’s house and boat. There was no mention of compensation for damages to the \$6 million house. Newport, California licensing supervisor Glen Everroad said, “Tomorrow they’re gone and city administrators like myself have to deal with the gripes and complaints” (Cummings 1986).

While state boards both in California and in other states used the language of lovers to describe their relationship with the motion picture industry, by contrast, as mentioned previously, the film producers described the local labor and state location sites in language similar to that used in nineteenth-century narratives by slave owners about

“good” slaves. Producer Michael Hausman said about Texas right-to-work labor, “They’re not overexposed, they’re eager.” The “eagerness” also extends to locations where “starstruck property owners” waive or charge lower fees for filming permits (Hulbert 1984). “Eagerness to please” includes “helicopter tours for writers, cut-rate hotel rooms, no red tape, free permits to shoot anywhere and, in a few states, tax incentives” (Harmetz 1985).

In 1988—two years after the federal tax incentives ended—reporting started to come in about labor for Hollywood motion picture production outside the U.S. (Farber 1988). About countries including Australia, Canada, England, and even Yugoslavia, producers began again citing, “lower union salaries,” and “favorable exchange rates.” Canadian crews were being overused because of the limited number of skilled workers there (Farber 1988). Studio rhetoric continued to sound like the phrases that were used in the past about slave labor. About the Australian crews, Scott Siegler, the President of Columbia Pictures Television, said, “They aren’t as rigid as American crews ... You don’t hear anyone saying ‘I don’t pull cables; I only move cameras,’ They’re extremely cooperative and enthusiastic.” Siegler’s comments contain an implied critique of the featherbedding of Hollywood labor. John Ashley, an NBC executive producer, also echoed the “good slave” rhetoric. He called the crews, “very good and hard working” but added “they are not used to working long hours. They are not money-motivated, and you have to get special waivers to work overtime on Saturdays.” No one mentioned the risks and dangers that come with long hours, as well as the personal costs of working those hours. No one mentioned the reason that workers fought for decades for the eight-hour-day.

Capital doesn't exactly melt everything into air...

All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind.

—Karl Marx (1848), 248

Marx's famous metaphor is about the idea that the capitalist mode of production is capable of subsuming all previous social relations. The subsumption of runaway production, a labor issue, can also be traced as it occurred through language. Of the twenty-seven *New York Times* articles, twelve relate to runaway production as it has been defined in this thesis: as a labor issue. Fifteen do not. Of the 187 *Los Angeles Times* articles, 112 relate to runaway production as a labor issue. Seventy-five articles do not. Something had changed.

Perhaps Marx's metaphor was not exactly accurate. Maybe it all doesn't melt into air, and capitalism does not make everything in its path vanish. I found that instead of turning it to "air," capitalism morphs "all that is solid" to something else. I am not saying this is a conscious deliberate process. However, it is a mappable process. Over time, the phrase "runaway production" as a result of this morphing in newspaper articles gets diluted, and robbed of the power of its original meaning.

Perhaps in tracing such a minute thing as the changing meaning of a term in language can help us understand both how runaway production became "forgotten," and how history itself can become forgotten.

As has been mentioned, during the first phase of runaway production between the post-war period and the 1970s, when "runaway production" appeared in the papers, it had

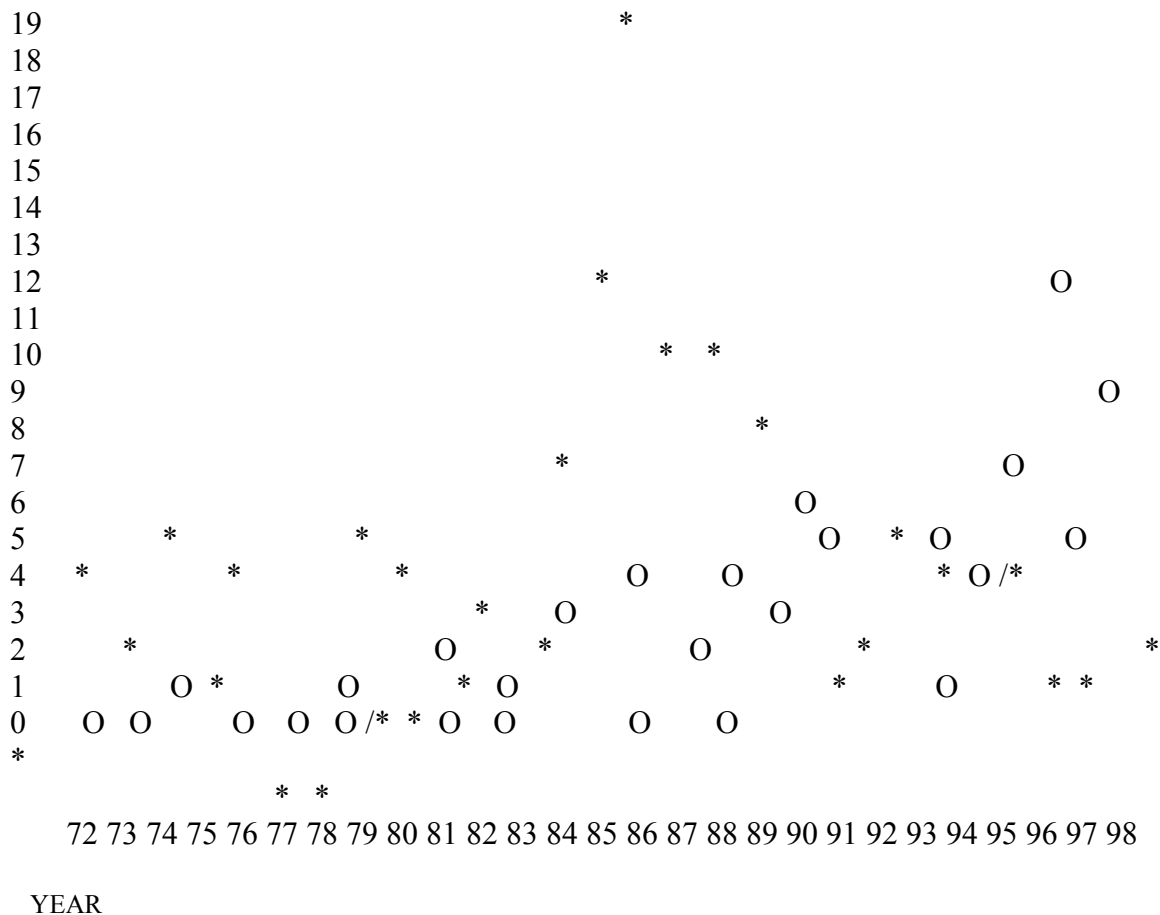
to do with the studios shooting on location, usually in Europe or Mexico in order to avoid organized labor costs. Runaway production was the term the workers' representatives and the studio representatives used to describe the problem, and it was almost solely used in this context.

In the early 1970s, this language slowly began to be absorbed into the language of capitalism. "Runaway" became a term to describe other Hollywood phenomena. Gradually, the use of runaway came more to describe corporate interests, than the workers'. In 1974, there was one "runaway success story" (Kilday 1974). In 1978, there was a "runaway comet" in a motion picture story (Petryni 1978). In 1981-2 there were three stories involving, "runaway studio budgets" and "runaway production costs" (Koenen 1981, Warga 1981, Pollock 1982). In 1986, the film *Runaway Train* was produced. In addition, new terms were used: runaway hit and runaway dottiness (Matthews 1986a, Matthews 1986b). After the tax credit was no longer in force, in 1987, we find runaway production costs (Broeske 1987, Cieply & Matthews 1988, Matthews & Cieply 1989), runaway hit or success (McMillan 1987, Vanderknyff 1989), and in a curious echo of the second *King Kong*, runaway oil production (Los Angeles Times 1988). Between 1990 and 1998, the number of article references to runaway matters in relationship to the film industry that did *not* involve labor issues far outnumbered those that did — fifty-three to nineteen. The proportion rose over time. The chart below shows this:

Los Angeles Times usage of the term “runaway” in relationship to motion pictures

(1972-1998)

NUMBER OF MENTIONS PER YEAR



KEY: * = runaway production as a labor issue
 O = the term “runaway” in relationship to other issues

As the chart shows, in the shifts in language occur slowly. If this is a microcosm of the struggle between labor and capital, the process is not always quick. When attrition is slower, and less easy to track, the compulsion Marx alluded to might be restrained by

both individual and collective doubt. If the erosion were quicker, there might be uproar.³⁷

Here, the meaning became blurred by many new usages. When the meanings of the terms of discussion twist over time, especially in widely-seen sources like newspapers, it's easy for the attention of those involved to stray.

It's important to note that the workers can re-enter the struggle consciously, as they would in the third phase of runaway production, which is discussed in Chapters 8 and 9. There they seized the language back, reclaiming its old usage. (See the chart in Chapter 8.) Then, runaway production again became a subject of national interest, and other uses of the term were limited.

The Undiscussed Impact on Film Workers

During this second phase, when the studios produced films in the United States at non-Hollywood locations, the productions could often be six-day shoots. Non-union labor meant a compliant labor force, blinded by a kind of eagerness that the studio representatives publicly encouraged. One result of this shift is a significant labor issue that went largely undiscussed in the newspaper reports. This change was obvious to many workers in the industry during the second phase, and obvious to any careful observer of *King Kong*. Once production moved off the studio lot, measures that insured a certain level of production safety were far less enforceable or enforced.

³⁷ When a union representative does speak about runaway production during this phase, it is again with that curious amnesia and a naïve belief that if you resolve the problems of the current conditions, you will stop runaway production. Much of the production in the United States during this period went to non-union labor in the so-called "right-to-work" states. In response, SAG public relations director Kim Fellner stated, that getting rid of right-to-work laws was "the answer to runaway production, whether it's in movies or the auto industry" (Davis 1982). Would that it were that simple. This ongoing dynamic social process requires eternal vigilance by workers to counteract each attempt by capital to run away.

One aspect of motion picture production that emerged during this new era of location shooting was an increased level of danger for the entire crew both due to longer working hours and to unsafe conditions on the set. These conditions have continued to the present day. Regarding the longer workday, in the 2004 membership survey, IATSE Local 600 members reported that 47.3 percent have fallen asleep at the wheel. Only 10.7 percent of members' workdays are shorter than ten hours. Eleven to fourteen hour days are the norm for 78.5 percent of the members (Glover 2004).

Film health and safety expert Romona Rossol says that non-studio working conditions are often unsafe. For example, "New York City leases abandoned buildings for one dollar. Those buildings often contain feces, used condoms, dead animals, lead paint and asbestos among other things. No third world country would ask its labor to work under such situations. These work sites are among the most dangerous in the world" (Rossol conversation, 2007).

At the end of this period, assistant camera operator Brent Hershman died during the filming of *Pleasantville* (1998). Hershman fell asleep at the wheel after a "normal" twenty-hour work day and was killed. As a result, filmmakers drafted Brent's Rule, a set of safety guidelines. The guidelines suggested a fourteen-hour cap on the workday, and later suggested that the producers provide hotel accommodation near the shoot if it goes over fourteen hours (imdb.com).

According to camera assistant Carisa Kaplan, who has almost fallen asleep driving home:

I remember the place – I remember where I just kind of went out for a second, and the fear got me home.... 'You were just at work. You have to do it....' They don't call lunch. "Oh, fuck it, okay." You work through it. And you get pissed off, and that adrenaline gets you going through it. And it keeps you going ... that's what the producers know. They know that.

Producers do this to “save money,” but the long run costs can be catastrophic. They take advantage of the shared beliefs of film workers. Monona Rossol says that, “performers and technicians alike commonly believe that suffering, risk-taking, and even dying for art is an appropriate price to pay for the privilege of working in the field” (Rossol 2000). This feeds in perfectly to the corporate value of profit above individual human survival. Rossol points out that it pays for the production companies to put workers at risk, if you hurt a worker, full disability only costs the company four hundred dollars a week. Regarding the producers she says, “They only talk about safety and environmental and human rights. They don’t provide it for their own people. Their little lower lips start trembling at awards ceremonies, but they don’t care” (Rossol, conversation, 2007).

In response to Brent’s Rule, what Carisa Kaplan saw on the sets where she worked was “fake courtesy.” If the crew worked over fourteen hours, someone would say, “Are you okay to drive?” She says, “It’s like after you’ve had seven beers:

‘Are you okay to drive?’

‘Yeah, I’m fine. No problem.’

‘Okay, see you tomorrow.’”

She laughs and says, “Everyone was still macho about it.” A lot of the crew—grips, electricians, camera crew—didn’t want Brent’s Rule enacted, because then they wouldn’t make overtime. And overtime is when they made money. People said things like, “No, fuck it, I need the overtime. I don’t want to give up my overtime.” This greed was operating against basic human survival. The producers say, “Yeah, it’s really tragic. Okay, let’s roll.” Every IATSE member I have interviewed knew at least one person

who died during the course of a shoot. It's rare that anyone complains. As Monona Rossol puts it, "People who complain in the film industry are called unemployed" (Rossol, conversation 2007).

Runaway Production, The Third Phase

Chapter 7. Global Kong

Introduction

King Kong (2005), a major motion picture, cost over \$200 million to produce (Denby 2007). How the film came to be made in a small town in New Zealand, has to do with more than the alleged \$50 million production subsidies Universal received from New Zealand (Sharp 2006). It has a lot to do with film commissions and their support of regional filmmakers, a subject which has been touched on in previous chapters.

However, like Merian Cooper's chronicle, it also has to do with individual stories.

Once again, this story begins with a small nine-year-boy encountering a gorilla.

In 1970, young Peter Jackson of Pukerua Bay, New Zealand first saw the 1933 film *King Kong*, an event which he has described many times:

I saw *King Kong* and the gorilla really sealed my destiny. I knew nothing about stop-motion animation: I'd never heard of Willis O'Brien before I saw *King Kong* and I had yet to see any of Ray Harryhausen's films, but I began finding out how it was done and started experimenting...(Sibley 2006:21-22),

No film has captivated my imagination more than *King Kong*...That's really the reason I'm making movies today, because I saw *King Kong* one Friday night when I was nine years old. The film literally changed my life. It made me want to become a filmmaker and got me thrilled about the magic of movies, their escapism and special effects (Woods 2005a:177).

Later, as a teenager, Jackson built a cardboard model of the Empire State Building and made a King Kong puppet out of his mother's old fur stole. He painted a backdrop of the Manhattan skyline. He also built a Triceratops, and using his parents' Super 8 camera made a stop-motion film of Kong and the Triceratops on a table top in his parents' living room (Sibley 2006). He got his own copy of the film *King Kong* (1933), which he

watched many times. While Jackson was baking monster masks in his mother's oven, New Zealand was in the process of establishing its first film commission.

Filmmaking in New Zealand dates back to the 1890s when silent movies were produced there. In 1914, New Zealand produced its first feature--George Tarr's thirty-three minute *Hinemoa*, about a Maori legend--but filmmaking has never been a thriving New Zealand industry. Between 1940 and 1970, only one feature film was produced each decade. In the late 1970s after vigorous lobbying by New Zealand filmmakers, a Film Commission was established for the purpose of encouraging, participating in, and assisting in "the making, promotion, distribution and exhibition of [New Zealand] film" (Pryor 2003, 2004:36). The effectiveness of the Commission's help was startling. By 1985, ten New Zealand films were at the Cannes Film Festival, four of which had received Commission funding (Pryor 2003, 2004).

In this environment, film fan Peter Jackson came into adulthood. Jackson did not go to college, instead he chose to go directly to work. He first interviewed at the Film Commission, and was so nervous that he brought his dad along to the interview. No jobs were available. Jackson then interviewed for an actual job as a photo engraver at a local newspaper (also with his dad in tow). He got the job. During his employment at the newspaper, he continued to make movies on weekends with his friends and a 16 mm camera he'd bought. While recovering from a spine operation--he was seriously injured when he jumped into rocky water during a movie stunt--Jackson had a two-to-three week convalescent period. Jackson says, "This was valuable time, not to be wasted, so I started chopping up foam rubber and began work on building a full gorilla suit which would later play an unexpected, but life-changing role in my future career" (Sibley 2006:52). He built

the suit out of carved foam, carpet glue and latex. One day, “for fun,” he wore it to work (Sibley 2006:103). His boss, Bob Lewis, said, “All of a sudden, out of the gloom, leaped this damn great gorilla!... I must have jumped a foot in the air!” (Sibley 2006:104). A staff photographer at the *Evening Post* took a picture of Jackson in the suit, which made the front page of the paper. Paul Dulieu, a television props buyer, saw the picture and phoned Jackson to ask if he would make some rubber voodoo dolls for a series he was working on called *Worzel Gummidge Down Under* (1986). This was Jackson’s “first contact with real film people [and] it was the most exciting moment for me.” Dulieu went to his house, met Jackson’s parents and saw the models. When he asked Jackson how much he wanted, Jackson was mystified. Guessing, he asked for twenty-five dollars. Dulieu pulled a wad of bills out of his back pocket, “peeled off a hundred bucks and said: ‘Now, look, here’s a hundred dollars—I’ve got this money so you might as well take it!’” (Sibley 2006:104).

This was Jackson’s first professional film income. On a visit to the set, in addition to meeting people who would become important to his career, he caught sight of Frances Walsh, whom he would later marry. At this time, he was also shooting his first feature film, which would eventually be titled *Bad Taste* (1987). The film was a hybrid genre called “‘splatstick’—gory horror movies more comical than they were dark or transgressive” (Woods 2005a:7). Jackson says of *Bad Taste*, “It’s a very Kiwi film with a very Kiwi feel—basically a Kiwi film about Kiwi jokers” (Pryor 2003, 2004:38).³⁸ Jackson had difficulties getting funding from the Film Commission:

³⁸ Kiwi is slang term for a New Zealand resident (Webster 1999).

[I]t was only because of cash injections slipped through the system by then executive director Jim Booth that Jackson's first movie *Bad Taste* ever got made. At the time, some Commission staff questioned the value of an amateurishly-shot home movie featuring aliens and chainsaws. But market reaction to the film helped calm them (Pryor 2003, 2004:219).

Jackson is a new kind of major filmmaker who has “broken the Hollywood mold in many ways—not least by having been a state-subsidized independent filmmaker” until his success propelled him into the ranks of Hollywood A-list directors (Woods 2005a:8). His films' combination of gore and humor mystified most members of the Film Commission, but because his films were commercial successes, they kept funding his proposals.

Jackson's next film *Meet the Feebles* (1989) received about \$500,000 in funding from the Commission (Pryor 2003, 2004). The film is a satiric look at what a group of puppets quite similar to the Muppets might do after work. According to unauthorized Jackson biographer Ian Pryor, *Feebles* makes “*Bad Taste* look like an exercise in pastoral lyricism” (Pryor 220). Jackson says that when Jim Henson's daughter saw the film, “she was quite shocked when she saw Kermit nailed on a cross” (Woods 2005a:8).

Eighty percent of the film that followed, *Brain Dead* (1992), was funded by the Film Commission. It would be his last solely New Zealand funded film. Like all his films, it was a commercial success. His next film, *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), was his international breakthrough picture. Based on a true story about a mid-twentieth-century matricide in New Zealand that had been committed by the woman's daughter and her close friend, *Heavenly Creatures* received forty percent of its funding from the Film Commission, and the rest from a German company (Pryor 2003, 2004). It received international recognition, and was also actor Kate Winslett's first major successful film role. Hollywood funded Jackson's next film, *The Frighteners* (1996). And then came the

Hollywood-funded blockbuster *Lord of the Rings* (2001). The filmed trilogy poured \$300 million into the New Zealand economy. The picture won eleven Oscars. At the 2002 Academy Awards, after the film had won several awards, emcee Billy Crystal said, “It’s official. There’s nobody in New Zealand left to thank” (Woods 2005a:173-5). (The population of New Zealand is about half that of Los Angeles (Pryor 2004, 2004).) Jackson’s insistence on staying in New Zealand to make his films, which is a very good thing for New Zealand, creates difficulty for American film workers dealing with runaway production. He has helped create an industry there, training people from the ground up. The implications of this are discussed in more depth in the following chapters. One by-product of the success of *Lord of the Rings* was that in 2003 the New Zealand Film Commission shifted its focus from nurturing local talent to attracting the hundreds of millions of dollars that a major Hollywood feature brought in (Pryor 2003, 2004). For regional filmmaking that celebrates “kiwi” culture, this may present problems: The door through which a local New Zealander like Jackson could enter the industry seems to be closing. However, the success of *Lord of the Rings* gave Jackson carte blanche to make any film he pleased. He chose to direct a re-make of *King Kong*.

The Era of Globalization

The term “globalization” has become a buzzword in recent decades. This project conforms to standard usage by applying the term globalization to the current period, while acknowledging that centuries of preceding history contributed to the development of a global economic system (Stiglitz 2002, Wallerstein 1974). The most recent *King Kong* (2005) was made during the current period of “global media empire building” (Campbell 2007:456). By 2004, “the number of corporations controlling most of

America's daily newspapers, magazines, radio, television, books and movies had dropped from fifty [in 1983] to five: Time Warner, the Walt Disney Company, News Corp., Viacom, and Bertelsmann" (Campbell 2007:470).

Due to foreign incentives, such as those in New Zealand, there has been a substantial increase in "Hollywood" production being exported to foreign countries. As has been mentioned, the producers of *King Kong* (2005) took advantage of foreign incentives. A New Zealand "Large Budget Screen Production Grant" gave the producers a 12.5% rebate of production costs (New Zealand 2007). Kong's New York street scenes and his fall from the Empire State Building were shot in New Zealand, as was most of the rest of the film.

Global Kong

Both the production process of *King Kong* (2005), and the content of the film exemplify significant changes in the use of time, the cost and scale of film making, as well as changes in the kind and quality of film management during this period.

Time: Taylorizing Leisure, or Three Hours and Eight Minutes Too Long³⁹

In June 2007, I visited Coney Island's Astroland amusement park prior to its demolition to make way for luxury condominiums. At the urging of my companion, we went on an old ride called *Dante's Inferno*, the exterior of which was painted with an assortment of different monsters (the paint was peeling). A large faded sign on the ticket

³⁹ In the early twentieth century, in order to instruct management about how to increase worker productivity, Frederick W. Taylor performed "time and motion" studies of how people in factories worked. He broke each job into components and indicated the most efficient way to complete each task (Kornblum & Smith 2002:329). This is called Taylorization. This efficiency has a cost. The resulting exhaustion and misery was well-satirized in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936). When we talk about the Taylorization of leisure, we are referring to the extension of Taylor's idea into our non-work hours. Specifically, a film watched constructs a viewer passively observing from a film seat or sofa. The viewer's leisure time has been monopolized into movie-length chunks.

booth window said, “No Refunds.” The ride did not begin with a solemn voice intoning Dante’s words (even in English), “In the middle of my life I found myself in a dark wood.” Rather, in our little “car” on a track, we raced through a series of swinging turns in a dark area, punctuated by vignettes of “scary” scenes, mostly involving skeletons and torture. In the middle of the ride I was surprised to see a vignette of a jungle scene with a large Kong-like figure beating his chest. The ride was short, varied, and silly. I could see how it might scare a four-year-old. I loved it.

The temporal economy of the first *King Kong* (1933) at 97 minutes long has not been repeated by any of the subsequent Kongs. *King Kong* (1976) was 134 minutes long. Peter Jackson’s *King Kong* (2005) was 188 minutes long.

In discussing the making of *King Kong* (2005), Peter Jackson said, “The real pressure is time.” In order to prepare sets for filming, some crews worked around the clock (Kong Diaries 1 2005). In addition to extreme hours, workers on *King Kong* (2005) were subjected to an additional layer of stress which is characteristic of the current era of film production. It’s now customary to film a “making of” movie as a major motion picture is being made. Performers and crew find this constant scrutiny exhausting. Actor Andy Serkis commented in the *Production Diaries* (filmed interviews with the cast and crew made during the production process which were published on the kongisking.net website, and later offered for sale by Universal):

These days you can’t just sign on and get a job, you can’t just get a part in a film, get offered a role and actually go carry it out. Oh no, you have to do this thing called B-roll, behind the scenes DVD footage. And it’s like living in Big Brother all the time. It gets to the point where it drives you absolutely insane. People can’t leave you alone. You can’t just go to the toilet. You can’t pick your nose. You can’t go anywhere. People just follow you. It just drives you nuts. They drive you crazy but no no no they keep going and keep going and they think it’s really interesting, every single living breathing thing that you do. Every single second of every day.

Peter Jackson added, “I have to slam the door in their face when I go to the toilet” (Kong Diaries 2 2005).

In terms of time in the film’s content, in comparison with earlier *King Kongs*, the film took a lot longer to move the plot along. The line, “Is this the motion picture ship?” which opened *King Kong* (1933), does not appear in *King Kong* (2005) until twenty minutes into the movie. It takes half an hour for the boat to leave New York. After almost an hour the boat arrives at Skull Island (by this time, the first *King Kong* (1933) had ended). A dinosaur chase scene runs over three minutes.

King Kong (1933) emerged from a culture familiar with amusement parks, the old-fashioned kind with ski-ball and freak shows, not the modern sort which my Astroland companion characterized disdainfully as the kind where you get to sit in a comfortable seat and admire how “brilliant” all the people are who make the rides.

In addition to Taylorizing our work day, over time, Capitalism has increasingly encroached upon our leisure. If you work an eight-hour day, and over three hours of your remaining time is spent at the movies, what other time do you have to be homo faber (man as maker), to be the maker or author of your own life? Should the corporations be paying us to sit through three-hour movies (Ewen conversation 2008)?

Costs

The original *King Kong* (1933) was considered an outstanding success. It made approximately two million dollars during its initial release. The second *King Kong* (1976) grossed over \$90 million (Morton 2005). *King Kong* (2005) was considered “disappointing” because it only made \$550 million. (As has been mentioned, the cost of making the film was over \$200 million) (Denby 2007).

I was curious about the relative costs of the three films, so I entered them into a calculator that adjusted them for inflation to 2005, the year of the most recent film. *King Kong* (1933) cost \$672,254.75 (that includes the \$100,000 of RKO overhead the studio added on) (Morton 2005). In 2005 dollars, the cost of the film would be \$9,292,083.44. In 1976, *King Kong* cost \$24 million to make (Bahrenburg 1976). Adjusted to 2005 dollars, the cost would have been \$84,016,445.⁴⁰

Some might say these steep increases in the costs of filmmaking are the costs of the marvels of progress. Others might say something has gone terribly wrong with budgets, and the sense of appropriate limits. In more ways than one, we have lost sight of the larger costs.

New York City, 20% Off!

On a spring day in 2008, I was sitting by a window in the second-floor library at the CUNY Graduate Center. I looked down at Fifth Avenue where Kong fell in the film. People were walking across the street, the light had just changed. Busses and cars moved across Thirty-Fourth Street, a Con Ed truck with a yellow arrow on its roof blinked as men worked in the area on the street taped off with orange plastic and white striped horses. The light changed and New York City busses went by with their bus identification numbers in big letters on their roofs. A downtown bus had a billboard on its side, "King takes queen," with a nine-foot-tall picture of actor Jonathan Rhys. His hand was around the throat of a woman actor I didn't recognize. She was wearing something so sheer that (as I noticed earlier that day) graffiti artists in my neighborhood subway stations could not resist marking her breasts and crotch on similar subway posters. On another bus was an advertisement for *Iron Man*, which looked sort of like

⁴⁰ I used the westegg.com website which adjusts dollars for inflation to calculate these figures.

mechanized lobster. On the sidewalk, a man worked at a Sabrett hotdog stand with a yellow and blue umbrella over it, and people kept moving through.

In *King Kong* (2005), New York City is always a place where everything stops, or at least this particular corner is a place where everyone in the film stops, for the death of the broken beast. If my life were the film, Kong would be lying on the street just below me. In my real life that day, everything just kept going on the street below: busses moved, people walked or ran, the “Don't Walk” sign (a red hand) flashed, the American flag flapped on the corner of the Empire State Building. In this life of continuity, this life in which we are resilient, we keep moving briskly, and there are a lot of us. From my vantage point, on the second story in the library, people still were distinguishable by outfits but their facial features were indistinct. I wanted something to happen that would make this moment distinctive. Nothing did.

In *King Kong* (2005), New York itself is a character, but one that does not resemble the bustling city I recognize from my experience, and from my research about 1930s New York City (Siegel 2004). The streets are often empty, but the film's lack is more than just fewer people on screen: unlike the first two *King Kongs*, the third *King Kong* was not shot in New York. When asked why they didn't shoot here, Peter Jackson responded, “Shooting in modern-day New York as 1933 is almost impossible” (Kong Diary 1 2005). It was considered more efficient to build "New York City" in Sea View, New Zealand, than to shoot on site. Because there were 100 km winds there, they anchored the sets with those icons of globalization--shipping containers--which can be rented for two dollars a day.

New York City changes when it is shot in Sea View, Wellington, New Zealand. Further, someone else's America is shown in this Hollywood feature when only a few of the crew are American. As I mentioned, the filmmakers of *King Kong* (2005) prided themselves on their attention to detail, "a team of researchers sought out every accessible photographic record of the period" (Wake 2005:30). They seem self-congratulatory about the job they did: Researcher Sarah Milnes says, "It's a little bit creepy because it's so real. You take photos on set and convert them to black and white and they look exactly like some of those original pictures." (Wake 2005:31). Peter Jackson claims that, "People will think that we've shot there. There won't be anything giving away the fact that it's not actually New York" (Wake 2006:33). He later claimed that it was an "absolute realistic New York" (Kong Diary 1 2005).

Maybe only a New Yorker would notice. Maybe I was the only one who noticed. Granted, there have been changes in New York City since the 1930s, and, granted, it's startling to have that period "colorized." *King Kong* (2005) is in color (the photographs I've studied from that time are black-and-white). Even given the factors, people in the film are simply distorted: they are taller in relationship to the plate glass windows than New Yorkers look in New York. What makes New York City itself is the scale.

According to the production designer Grant Major, "We scaled our New York sets down by about twenty percent... We just didn't have the space and the budget to build it full scale, but through a camera lens I don't think you'd ever know." They were allegedly limited by the ship containers: "Our sets are all two containers high, which is five meters...so there was a five-meter limit to all the sets we built," the rest was added-in digitally (Wake 2005:30). What is puzzling about their scaling down New York is:

since they were going to add in height and depth digitally, they did not need to shrink New York City.

King Kong is a film about scale. It features an oversized gorilla, and lizards grown to forty feet high. One critic argues that:

to read the film as being about scale, as about the relationship between the small and the very big, the viewer need only have the experience of what it is to be a very small person in a world in which everything is threatening and huge—and everybody has that experience, for that is the experience of being a child nipping through the jungle of early life with its bellowing, stamping, towering monsters called “adults” (Roberts 2005:138).

Similarly, in changing the scale of the city, the filmmakers made New York feel like a small-town idea of a big city. In real life, the scale of New York City, its vast impersonal movement and energy, can be terrifying and thrilling in an ongoing way that Kong’s brief cinematic presence at the city’s landmarks only faintly echoes.

Management

Flush from the billion-dollar success of *Lord of the Rings*, Peter Jackson had the mystique of what Max Weber would call “charismatic leadership.” Weber says, “The [c]harismatic leader gains and maintains authority solely by proving his strength in life” (Weber 1946a:249). At Jackson’s company, Weta, Jackson is known to come into workshops and rip up models that his crew have made. Jenny Wake wrote, “seeing weeks—sometimes months—of painstaking work so suddenly and drastically rearranged can be frustrating.” Bill Hunt, the sculpting room supervisor says, “It would be a lot more frustrating if Peter was ever wrong, [laughter] but pretty much every time you see the change, you go, ‘Well, he was right again!’” (Wake 2006:158).

The fictional leadership in *King Kong* (2005) has no such charismatic authority. (In the first *King Kong* (1933), a quasi-colonial adventure, Carl Denham had no bosses. In the second *King Kong* (1976), Fred Wilson speaks of his bosses who will have him

“wiping windshields” if he fails.) *King Kong* (2005), although set in the 1930s, in some ways reflects the modern state of large-scale motion picture production. Like in the film, today “the studio heads and production chiefs who furnish the multiplexes with movies are powerful figures in Hollywood. But in the giant conglomerates of which the movie divisions are a part, they are no more than high-level managers” (Denby 2007:57). In *King Kong* (2005), Carl Denham (Jack Black) is just one of many men in the supervisory food chain.

Sex, race, and capital are all entwined. Early in the film, the New York studio heads make an appearance while viewing the footage Denham’s already shot. They are pure capitalists, and they are ugly. One quips to Denham, “It’s not the principle of the thing, it’s the money.” The studio heads demand sexism and racism in the films. One studio executive demands that Denham make films with “boobies” or as he clarifies, “the undraped form of the native girls.”

Unlike Carl Denham in *King Kong* (1933), Denham in *King Kong* (2005) comes across as unreliable. When he says to Ann Darrow (Naomi Watts) in New York, “I’m someone you can trust, Ann. I’m a movie producer,” the viewer’s mind spins. The notion of a trustworthy movie producer is jarring.

Carl Denham orders the ship to leave the docks, even though the screenwriter, Jack Driscoll (Adrien Brody), who is not planning to join the trip, is on board. In other words, Denham kidnaps him. There is no cabin space for Driscoll, so he is “housed” in an animal cage below deck, where he is often seen typing his manuscript.⁴¹

⁴¹ It’s no longer Merian Cooper’s world. Denham, the capitalist, depends upon the writer, Jack Driscoll. When Driscoll gives him only fifteen pages, Denham says, “I gotta have something to shoot.” Merian Cooper was in charge at RKO. He would not have cared enough about a writer to kidnap him.

In *King Kong* (1933), the crew was loyal. In *King Kong* (1976), only the stowaway, Jack, speaks out against the leadership; Boan grumbles, but he keeps doing his job. In *King Kong* (2005) the multicultural crew is on the verge of mutiny. There is continuous bickering between workers and management. This is resonant with aspects of the state of film labor/management relations today (the following chapters discuss this.) Denham says to the German ship's captain, Englehorn (Thomas Kretschmann), "I have risked everything I have on this." Englehorn, with a German accent, corrects him, "No, Denham, you have risked everything I have." Denham asks what he wants. Englehorn says, "I want you off my ship."

Later, Denham offers to pay Englehorn another thousand dollars, and Englehorn snaps, "You haven't given me the first thousand yet." Contrast this with *King Kong* (1933) where Englehorn remarks about how well Denham pays the crew. In *King Kong* (2005) the crew threatens Denham. In *King Kong* (1933) they had gone out with Denham on two previous expeditions. They were familiar with and affectionate toward him. This echoes shifts in real-world film production. The 1930s studio system provided the workers with steady work and pay checks (not great money, but money nonetheless). The new era of globalized-studio ownership guarantees no such steady work, and thus no steady pay.

Later, Englehorn says with disgust about Denham, "That's the thing about cockroaches. No matter how many times you flush them down the toilet, they always crawl back up the bowl." Denham replies, "Hey buddy. I'm out of the bowl. I'm drying off my wings and trecking across the lid."⁴²

⁴² Maybe New Zealand cockroaches differ from New York ones, but in New York, cockroaches stay flushed, and they don't fly. According to a reliable source, cockroaches do fly in the Caribbean.

Denham also exploits his film crew, deliberately placing them in life-threatening danger. On the island, Denham sees a group of Brontosaurus eating in a meadow. He says to his star, Bruce Baxter (Kyle Chandler): “Walk forward Bruce”

Baxter: What?
 Denham: You’re the star of this picture. Get into character and head toward the animals.
 Baxter: Are you sure about this Denham? Don’t we have a stand-in for this type of thing?
 Denham: I need you in the shot or people’ll say they’re fake.
 Baxter: Nobody’s going to think these are fake.

In the 1933 *King Kong*, even though Ann Darrow had no idea what was ahead of her, at least she had the opportunity on board the ship to practice her terrifying encounter with the monsters. Bruce Baxter is ordered to go in cold. Their interruption of the brontosaurus results in the death of Herb the cameraman (John Sumner), who is killed during the interminable spectacular chase scene.

Carl Denham rationalizes the deaths of the crew members as an excuse to continue filming. After the lethal first encounter with the tribespeople, Denham says, “We got away.” A crew member asks, “What about Mike?” referring to the sound guy (Craig Hall) whom the native people killed. Denham replies, “Mike died doing what he believed in. He didn’t die for nothing. And I’ll tell you something else. I’m going to finish this film for Mike. I’ll finish it and I’ll donate the proceeds to his wife and kids.” Both Denham’s crew and the film’s viewers don’t know whether to believe him. As reflected in the shifts in *King Kong* films over time, in the present era, the boundaries which used to define our loyalties are compromised. Both for the characters in the film and the audience, Denham’s authentic commitment to his men is questioned.

After Herb the cameraman is killed during the Brontosaurus chase scene, Denham says, “Herbert didn’t die for nothing. He died believing there was mystery left in the

world and we could all have a piece of it for the price of an admission ticket.... We'll finish this film for Herb... and donate the proceeds to his wife and kids." At that point, it's obvious that Denham means none of it. This 2005 movie is set in the 1930s.

Stereotypes: The Horror, The Horror

King Kong (2005) is unfaithful to the pacing of the original film; and it is hyper-faithful to the stereotypes, with a few token exceptions. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Peter Jackson has stated that *King Kong* (1933) was central to his life: "That moment of seeing *King Kong* was the moment I decided I wanted to become a filmmaker" (Wake 2006:1) He said he made this version because kids have little "patience for watching a film that's in black and white" with "old effects and old styles of scriptwriting and acting." He wanted to re-tell the story set in the same period as *King Kong* (1933), so it's "accessible to kids [which] I think is a good thing to do." He promised: "the original film will still be there. There's nothing that we're doing that's going to threaten the original film. It's a classic film and will always remain so" (Wake 2006:12). Jackson went on to say, "it's a wonderful move, the original, it's a great story. If we can get close to capturing that, then we'll be very happy" (Wake 2006:19).

In part his reassurances prior to *King Kong*'s (2005) release may have had to do with the disappointment many *King Kong* fans expressed about the 1976 version. As one critic commented, "Thanks in part to the less-than-amazing Dino De Laurentiis *King Kong* remake of 1976, die-hard fans shudder at the idea of another potentially calamitous remake" (Eggleton 2005:83). Ray Bradbury called *King Kong* (1976), "The Turkey That Attacked New York" (Vaz 2005:406). In analyzing the "failure" of the film (and ignoring its commercial success), a critic commented, "the audience wanted to return to

childhood... the disappointment was immense” (Rubio 2005:31). Another critic said, “Dino De Laurentiis’ 1976 remake failed, not especially because of the lousy acting or poor direction, but because it took Kong out of *when* he belonged and tried to put him into a then-contemporary setting. The story of Kong requires innocence: it requires *terra incognita*” (Bethke 2005:3). As critic Adam Roberts echoes, “It’s a film about the perspectives of childhood” (Roberts 2005:139).

Some of the initial negative audience reception of *King Kong* (1976) may have had more to do with the childlike demands of the audience than the quality of the film. It is hard to tell a love story when the crowd clamors for battles, hatred and the resulting bloodshed. The grownup tongue-in-cheek flirtation and sensuality of *King Kong* (1976) exposed some sexual stereotypes for all to see. This jokey knowingness may have angered the public. Dwan is aware of the nature of her relationship with Kong. When he picks her up, she says, “You put me down you chauvinist pig ape.” As he continues to pursue her she flirts with him about his astrological sign and says to him, as if he were a suitor, “This will never work.”

In *King Kong* (1933), Fay Wray fulfilled a compact with the audience by remaining the innocent ignorant virgin: she never recognized that Kong liked her, and the whole episode is remembered by her as a terrible nightmare-like incident, “that horrible day on the island.” She is blameless, and does not return his affection.

In addition to the romance of *King Kong* (1976), the violence of the film disappointed fans. Kong only saw and only fought one other monster. A snake interrupted Kong’s strip tease of Dwan. Kong rolled her off his palm into the moss ... and in this quasi Garden-of-Eden moment, she saw the giant snake. The snake was a

slow special-effect monster, a phallic failure. As Steven Spielberg said, good editing in shark sequences in *Jaws* (1975) made the difference between: “something really scary and something that looked like a big white floating turd” (Apple 2004). Better editing could have helped the giant snake. Further, what the audience experienced as the dispiriting lack of monster fights, and the phallic failure of the snake, took the viewers out of the paroxysms of joyful violence that Walter Benjamin discusses, where the audience “experience[s] its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order” (Benjamin 1968:242); and it transported them to the gates of an unfamiliar and hence more terrifying realm, that of grown-up love.

As sociologist Erving Goffman wrote, “He who would combat false consciousness and awaken people to their true interests has much to do, because the sleep is very deep” (Goffman 1974:14). In addition, you awake them at your peril. The *King Kong* (1976) filmmakers didn’t please some members of their audience, who were perhaps hungry for the ecstasy of violence that underlies the stereotypes supporting capitalism. Adult fans including Eggleton, Rubio, Bradbury, Bethke (quoted above) were angered when forced to consider other possibilities, such as the flirtation and love depicted in *King Kong* (1976). By making stereotypes explicit (as that film did) they are robbed of their power. Perhaps Kong’s story does not require innocence, the fans do. They want to maintain their ignorance of the stereotypes to which they have so easily succumbed, and to which they are unconsciously loyal.

King Kong (2005) fulfils the old compact with the audience. It has satisfactory monsters, whose gruesomeness and violence outdoes even the first *King Kong*. There is not even the remotest overt hint of an intimate encounter. Kong, who stripped the blonde

in the first two films, and gave her a bath and blow-dry (he actually blows on her to dry her after dunking her in a pond to wash her) in the second, does nothing of the kind in *King Kong* (2005). He likes to watch her juggle rocks or take pratfalls. Sometimes he ignores her if she hurts his feelings. Ann teaches Kong American Sign Language. They watch the sunset together and then she falls asleep cradled in his arm like a baby. Their most charged intimate moments occur when he is already safely riddled with bullets and dying atop the Empire State Building. There they have a series of intense shared gazes. *King Kong* (2005) is faithful to its understanding that the audience wants to stay unconscious--in Goffman's deep sleep.

Both Violence and Stereotyping Increase

The escalating violence in American blockbusters is old news. Given Peter Jackson's history as a director of horror films including *Bad Taste* (1987), *Meet the Feebles* (1989) and *Brain Dead* (1992), one could expect that aspect to be emphasized. Peter Jackson said, "The moment you step onto Skull Island, it is a horror show" (Wake 2005:101). The horrific natives can be read perhaps in a general context of an attempt to horrify.

It would follow that Jackson would hire people who share his joy about destruction to work on *King Kong* (2005). Destruction Supervisor Gray Hosfield specialized in blowing things up: "If it breaks, I've had something to do with it... It's fun! I like breaking things, and on Kong, there's so much stuff to break." Through computer technology, he helped create the illusion of destroying buildings, cars, planes, trains, and even cliffs with stampeding Brontosaurus on them. "It would cost way too much to build so many items as miniatures and then blow them apart, so Gray ... and his

team, nicknamed the Bomb Squad, are developing software to enable them to destroy digital versions at the push of a few buttons” (Wake 2005:239).

Just as the metaphor for labor relations most used in reporting during the second phase of runaway production was the metaphor of love, similarly *King Kong* (1976) was a love story, and Skull Island was a tropical paradise with lush greenery and clear mountain lakes. Recognizing that Dwan’s sacrifice to Kong would be traumatic for her, the natives were civilized enough to give her drugs. By contrast, on Skull Island in *King Kong* (2005), the sets were supposed to be scary. The era of peace and love was over. Sculpture supervisor Ra Vincent says, “They wanted a hard volcanic look, so everything was pointy and nasty” (Wake 2006:55).

In the film, when the crew comes upon the gigantic wall on Skull Island, they also see many skulls and evidence of human remains. Skulls are everywhere on the screen: “The gruesome job of making and mangling human remains for the set fell to the Weta Workshop. About forty generic body shapes were cast in urethane from two different molds, then chopped and changed for individualized looks.” Workshop supervisor Jason Docherty said, “You just cut the head off, turn the head, cut the arm off, change the orientation of the arm, and put latex and tissue all over it to give it this mummified look.” There were about a hundred bodies’ worth of human (plastic) bones set in the “bone fields where the remains of Kong’s past sacrificial victims lie.” (Wake 2006:55-56) *King Kong* (1933) and *King Kong* (1976) did not speculate about the remains of victims past.

King Kong (2005)’s monsters also had to be scary. Greg Broadmore, Peter Jackson’s Weta workshop concept designer said,

We quickly realized that Peter wanted the most evil, diabolical, monstrous V-Rex (*sic*) you could imagine....It wasn’t about making it a real dinosaur. It was about making it the most terrifying thing that Kong could fight. We worked on making the eyes scary,

and making it nasty and smelly—which is a recurring theme in this movie (Wake 2006:63).

Conceptual designer Christian Pearce added,

Infected-looking was what Peter kept mentioning. Right from the start we were talking about naked mole rats, which are hideous looking little creatures. That was a basis for the coloring and the skin texture—that real saggy, baggy, loose skin just kind of dripping off the musculature of the creature. Peter wanted it to have skin diseases and disgusting wetness... You try to think of every trick that makes it disgusting, what grosses you out, and what grosses Peter out (Wake 2006:65-66).

They Spray Painted the Black Extras Blacker

King Kong (2005) takes stereotyping to new extremes. The Nias Islanders, who, as has been mentioned before, are Asian, are still cast as black people. As Ewen & Ewen noted about *King Kong* (2005):

[The] “natives” ... are far more primordial, menacing and atavistic than those seen in the original. In a world in which racial stereotyping has come increasingly under attack, Jackson’s horrific portrayal of dusky “natives” is astonishing (Ewen & Ewen 2006:441).

The first of the tribal people the crew comes upon is a child (credited at the end as “Feral Child”, she was played by Jacinta Wawatai). She resembles a horror movie zombie. Her eyes are rolled up in her head so that the whites show. Her hair is stringy, unkempt, wet, and dirty. She is clothed in rags. Her arms are out in front of her, palms angled down, so her fingers hang down. Denham attempts to give her half a chocolate bar. She bites him.

The crew then sees more of the tribal people sitting down as if exhausted and devastated. They are nearly naked. Many are wrinkled with age beyond imagining. Some are shaking as if in a trance. The whites of their eyes are bloodied. They have bones through their nose bridges, nostrils and chins. Their long wet hair is a dirty,

stringy mess. Their teeth are in terrible shape. Like the “feral child,” they are clothed in rags.

After Denham assures the crew the natives are harmless, a spear pierces the crewman’s back, and its point emerges from his chest. The crew and the natives are swept into a blur of violence, and the crew are captured. The ship’s captain Englehorn, arrives with a gun, shoots a native about to kill a crewmember, and saves most of the crew’s lives, for the moment.

Unlike in the previous *King Kongs*, the natives are so violent that after this incident, the crew plans to leave the Island without exploring it. Only the kidnapping of Ann and the call to rescue her brings them back to land. This is the first film in which the natives are not merely people who sacrifice a woman to Kong for their survival, they are outright killers. They violently murder members of the Venture, both on the Island, and onboard the ship when they kidnap Ann. The *Official Guide* to the making of *King Kong* speaks about how the filmmakers envisioned the natives. It reads like Mr. Rogers teaching kids how to be an unconscious racist:

A photograph in *National Geographic* magazine leapt out at Peter Jackson as having something of the look he wanted for the Skull Island inhabitants. It was a portrait of a man with ultradark skin and bright red eyes. The image was unsettling—just as Peter wanted the Skull Islanders to be (Wake 2005:109)

The man in the *National Geographic* photograph was from an African tribe. Skull Island, again, is in Southeast Asia. Jackson is a New Zealander, a die-hard Kong fan, and a serious collector of *Kong* memorabilia who brought one of the original gas bombs from *King Kong* (1933) to a recent *Kong* screening. He must have been aware of his dislocating race and place.

Over one hundred actors and extras played the natives. The actors and extras were characterized in the *Official Guide* as, “a mixture of races—some African, others Maori, Polynesian, or Asian.” They all had to strip down to G-strings so that the makeup crew could spray-paint them to make their skin darker. “Peter really liked the color of the Sudanese people,” says Gino. “They have the most beautiful black skin. It’s almost purple” (Wake 2005:111).

While I was surprised by the increase in “otherness” over the three films, I was deeply surprised that they spray-painted the actors to make them blacker.

In *King Kong* (2005) there is an additional level of racist portrayals. In the scene where Kong is enchained at a New York City theater, Denham calls Kong’s performance “the climax of a savage ritual.” Prior to Kong’s getting the girl, “natives” onstage dance like they did in *King Kong* (1933). They are dressed in an “homage” to the original natives in *King Kong* (1933). The women wear the notoriously uncomfortable coconut shell brassieres. (In order to research this allegation, the author purchased one. This is indeed a most uncomfortable garment.) Everyone’s hair is in afros, and they have a lot of face paint and grass skirts. They look nothing like the Skull Island natives in *King Kong* (2005).

What exaggerated blackness does is exaggerate Dawn’s platinum blonde dressed-in-white whiteness. Instead of existing on a spectrum from pale pinkish mustard to dark blue-brown, human skin tone is portrayed as either white or black, helping to reinforce the idea of an “us” and a “them” (Bay 2000, Fredrickson 1971).

A Tacked-on Subplot

Peter Jackson said, “we didn’t want to over-invest it with too much baggage, too many messages and themes and weighty stuff...” (Wake 2005:12). Even so, Jackson’s idea of a light subplot is a story deeply entwined with racist stereotyping. He chose Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, as an ongoing motif. Conrad’s novel tells the story of a white man who goes upriver in Africa to find out what has become of another white man who has allegedly “gone native” and become so “degraded” in the process that he is, like the dark-skinned natives, a bloodthirsty, insane killer. A sub-plot of *King Kong* (2005) is a discussion of the novel between the token black crewman, Mr. Hayes (Evan Parke), and Jimmy (Jamie Bell), a young white crewman. Mr. Hayes is protective of Jimmy and urges him to get an education. Jimmy reads the book and gradually comes to understand, “It’s not an adventure story, is it Mr. Hayes?” To which Mr. Hayes replies solemnly, “No Jimmy, it’s not.” At the point in *King Kong* (2005) when a rowboat full of motion-picture people is headed toward the island, Jimmy asks Mr. Hayes why the novel’s protagonist does not turn back from his boat journey. Mr. Hayes tells Jimmy that “part of him needs to know, to defeat the thing which makes him afraid.” Mr. Hayes then, in a leaden voice-over, reads an edited portion of the uncredited novel,

We could not understand because we were too far. We could not remember because we were traveling in the night of first ages and those ages have gone, leaving hardly a sign in the memories. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there, there you could look at the thing monstrous, free.⁴³

The original *King Kong* (1933) referenced American black experience in its depiction of natives. *King Kong* (2005) is referencing the primordial other (Ewen conversation 2008). This connects with globalization because *King Kong* (2005), in a

⁴³ The film leaves out the line about “the suspicion of their not being human” on the same page (Conrad 1997:108).

deeper, denser, more emphatic way than the previous *Kong* films, recreates the false us-them, white-black dichotomy that undergirds the rationalizations for capitalist exploitation. (In relation to the camera unions, which will be discussed at greater length in the following chapters, it is noteworthy that a recent survey of their membership showed that 1.7% of their members are African-American (Glover 2004)).

Violence and Women

Violence against women has also escalated in *King Kong* (2005). When Ann Darrow is on the altar awaiting Kong, her footing is pulled out from beneath her. When Kong sees her, the first thing he does is touch her blonde hair. Then, at the altar, he roughly pulls her free of the ropes with a violence that would have dislocated both her shoulders. (The previous two Kongs were much more gentle with her when they unbound her from her captivity.) Kong then carries her across the island in a way that would kill a normal person.

Exaggerating Gorilla Stereotypes

In this version, the filmmakers were aware that gorillas are basically peaceful creatures. Animation supervisor Atsushi Sato, said, “We have footage of gorillas quite agitated. They threaten, they intimidate others to protect the group, but they don’t really fight for life ... they are kind of hitting each other, but they’re just playing” (Wake 2006:71). The filmmakers rationalize their exaggerating the stereotypes. Animation Director Eric Leighton says, “It’s an exaggerated reality ... so we want the power and believability underneath, but then we want to entertain on top.” The “entertainment” ethic puts in violence where none is in reality (Wake 2006:71). Bear in mind, Jackson has stated this movie is for kids.

In this version, Andy Serkis, “played” Kong. He did the movements that the Motion Capture computers recorded. These were the basis for the computer animation of Kong. While researching his role, Serkis visited Rwanda and observed the great apes in their habitat. Serkis comments:

It’s very peaceful. They live in this huge salad bowl. They’ve got food all around them, so a lot of their day is quite relaxing. They eat, they sleep, then the silverback gets up and signals to the rest of the group and they move off.... And then, suddenly, a helicopter flew over very low to the ground, and you could see terror, and these beautiful, slow-moving graceful creatures suddenly panicking and freezing (Wake 2005:188).

In other words, in real life, the terror of their lives is created by modernity; they don’t terrify the modern world (each version of *King Kong* has insisted upon the latter). With full knowledge of this, the filmmakers created the most violent Kong in the history of the film, using the facts learned in the jungle to support that. Serkis comments: “We’ll earn the audience’s belief in the character if we honor the truthfulness of gorilla behavior as much as we can” (Wake 2005:197). The portrayal of the other as “savage” serves the purpose of deflecting our awareness of our own brutality, just as our “past” is always violent: as if somehow, our war and nuclear-weapon-filled present, by comparison, is civilized.

Perspectives on workers

As we have seen, in *King Kong* (2005) workers are depicted as more outspoken in relationship to management. The workers are also more knowledgeable about issues and dangers, and have a solidarity based on that. At the same time, there is more divisiveness between different kinds of labor. Labor itself is actually divided—roles that were played by one person in *King Kong* (1933) have been split into more than one role in *King Kong* (2005).

King Kong's island is no surprise to the crew. The workers have useful knowledge that management does not. Mr. Hayes and Lumpy the cook (old shipmates from past voyages) tell Driscoll about a stowaway they picked up on another trip. The man told of a visit to the island where he saw a creature "neither beast nor man" "something monstrous." The workers also have threatening prophetic power: For example, Mr. Hayes says to Denham, "If you find this place. If you go ashore with your friends and cameras, you won't come back."

In terms of the struggle of the workers in the real world film industry today, the story is old, but pertinent. While the workers are angry about being exploited, instead of working together to improve their working conditions and working against their common antagonist (the corporate capitalists), in *King Kong* (2005) the film workers turn on each other. The actor and writer bicker throughout the film. After Kong takes Ann Darrow, Baxter heads back to the ship saying, "Miz Darrow was a great gal and we're going to miss her."

"I always knew you were nothing like the tough guy you played on screen. I just never figured you for a coward," the writer says.

Baxter replies, "Hey pal, wake up. Heroes don't look like me, not in the real world. In the real world they got bad teeth, a bald spot and a beer gut. I'm just an actor with a gun who's lost his motivation. Be seeing you." Baxter later saves the day, and Driscoll's life, by returning to the place where he abandoned the crew. Baxter brings along backup men and guns. He swings by vine into the abyss where the crew are getting eaten (the famous spider sequence which was cut from the original *King Kong*). While on the vine, Baxter uses his machine gun to kill the predators sucking the brains out of

members of the crew trapped in the crevasse. We will see in the following chapters the extent to which the deceitfulness of management and the bickering of workers among themselves are characteristic of today's film workers in the face of globalization.

Seventeen crew members are killed in *King Kong* (2005), more than in the first two films combined (twelve were killed in *King Kong* (1933) and four in *King Kong* (1976)). Peter Jackson decided to re-create the celebrated lost "spider sequence," which was edited out of the first *King Kong*. Conceptual Designer Charles Pearce says,

It was cut from the film and unfortunately that footage was lost. But Peter wanted to reinstate it in his version of the film because he thought it was a great terrifying moment. So we got to design lots of creepy, crawly, insecty creatures. I'm really looking forward to the pit sequence. It's really scary (Wake 2006:67).

In 1932, Merian Cooper had specific, good reasons for editing it, "It ... just stopped the picture cold," Cooper said with a shrug. "It broke every rule that Monty [Schoedsack] and I knew about picture making... Our whole theme, which we did on *Chang*... is to start a picture slow and get everybody to know the characters and to get the feel of what we're going to tell. And once you start moving, never let it stop, just drive it on" (Vaz 2005:228). In 2005, that gets re-framed. According to Matt Aikden, pre-production computer graphics supervisor, "It was dropped because it was too horrific. Peter's put it back in" (Wake 2005:167). There's a curious side-stepping here: Pacing has been sacrificed for increased violence, which is now re-framed as a virtue... for the kids. In a period when the politics of fear are more prevalent than the politics of facts, terror is more important than the story.

The Fate of Love

As mentioned before, after battling all the monsters, Kong brings Ann Darrow to the top of his cliff at sunset. She smiles. He looks away. She juggles. He's a tough

audience, and won't pay attention. "It's beautiful," she says. He offers his hand. She climbs in. Cradled like a child, she falls asleep. Kong's not seeking sex in this brutal world but gentleness.⁴⁴ A further avenue of research suggested by *King Kong* (2005) is the theory that Hollywood supports a modern myth that real tenderness can only find expression in the context of extreme violence. (By contrast, in everyday life, the only feasible response to extreme violence is numbness and exhaustion—not human kindness.)

What has become of our now twenty-five-foot tall hero? The sexualized ape of *King Kong* (1976) has become the huggable ape of *King Kong* (2005). He and Ann have a lovely duet on a frozen pond in Central Park before he climbs to the top of the Empire State Building to be killed. Ordinary men change as well. In *King Kong* (2005), the working-guy first-mate doesn't get the girl. Instead, the intellectual Jack Driscoll does. Once again, like in *King Kong* (1976), an ordinary man can no longer get the girl.

The fate of ordinary love for filmworkers has likewise changed. Because of film work conditions today, relationships have a different set of possibilities. Tim McHugh, a union film worker whose story is drawn in more detail in the next few chapters, talks about how the new working conditions today--long periods of unemployment and eleven-to-fourteen hour work days with long additional commutes--create what he calls the "family killer." In the real life of camera workers, if they find a partner, the nature of

⁴⁴ This is also reflected in the non-sexuality in the lines of the shooting script at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences library: "In this moment an UNFAMILIAR feeling wells inside him...a half-formed emotion he hasn't experienced much in his long life: he feels a connection to this tiny creature. The spark of rage goes out in Kong's eyes. Kong stares at Ann as a confusion of feelings wash over him. Kong pulls back from Ann...overcome by sudden uncertainty. He knows only that she has somehow disarmed him... and this has in turn diminished his power (p. 82) ... there is a vulnerable expression on his face...fear and sadness well in his eyes (p. 92)."

film work as it has been constructed by the new multinational corporate owners, insures that workers are severely hampered in their ability to get work and, if they have work, they have little of the time required to maintain a loving relationship.

Technical Work

Behind the scenes, the crew recognize the value of collaborative art-making.

Weta supervisor Richard Taylor says of collective work:

It's suggested that a lot is lost if you don't have an individual's inspiration in a piece... We disagree here at Weta. We believe that there is a lovely enhancing of ideas by having a collaborative process. We'll have five or even six people—I liken them to hyenas around a carcass—sculpting on the one sculpture. And they rotate around they sculpt, so the sculpture stays as a live entity as it develops (Wake 2005:157).

In *King Kong* (1933), Kong was created mostly through the stop-motion work of Willis O'Brien and his crew of nine. There was also a giant Kong arm and hand, a foot, and a head. In *King Kong* (1976), Kong was mostly created through the work of Rick Baker in an ape suit. A full-sized Kong and Kong's arm and leg also had cameo roles. In *King Kong* (2005), Kong was created through an elaborate process that involves "motion capture." Andy Serkis, who also played Lumpy the cook in the film,⁴⁵ and Gollum in the *Lord of the Rings* "plays" Kong:

His leading lady is a disheveled Barbie doll. His costume is a blue-and-black, figure-hugging bodysuit, bulked out by padded knees, elbows, gloves, and headgear. A thick wad of foam padding rounds out his belly. Heavy weights are strapped to his arms, thighs, and ankles, to give his movements the momentum of a larger, heavier creature. In his mouth is a set of fake Kong teeth, and a microphone is taped to one cheek. He is dotted all over with silver spots (Wake 2006:81).

These spots capture Serkis's movements which are fed into a computer.

King Kong (1933) was covered with rabbit fur. Rick Baker in *King Kong* (1976) wore bear skins. *King Kong* (2005) wears computer-generated fur: "for seven months

⁴⁵ In keeping with the greater emphasis on a black-and-white racial world in this film, Serkis (a white man) was cast in the role. Asian actors were cast in this role in the previous *King Kongs* (1933, 1976).

now, a digital effects team has been totally engrossed in creating Kong's fur and skin 'We've got three guys doing fur,' says Guy Williams, Kong CG supervisor. 'One guy's doing the legs, one's doing the back and the arms and the others doing the head. And we've got six guys doing textures, two or three writing shaders, which describe how surfaces should respond to light'" (Wake 2006:95-96).

King Kong (2005) was largely made by people working with computers. In the era of globalization, using highly sophisticated tools, hundreds of people worked to create a film that was much too long, cost way too much, and despite the hundreds of millions it generated in profits, a film that was viewed as a financial failure. In addition, it brought racist stereotyping to a whole new level. The rate of using resources and people was extraordinary. "Thousands" were thanked in the credits at the end of the film. As has been mentioned, some would call these technological wonders progress (Ewen conversation 2008).

Conclusion

"Each of us has *been* the stubborn ape."

-- David Brin, *King Kong is Back* (2005:8)

Naomi Watts, who played Ann Darrow in *King Kong* (2005), said, "So much of their relationship is really quite like any other relationship...He's ferocious, angry, but he's also loving. He takes care of her, he's protective. She's in this environment that is completely wild and dangerous, and she trusts him: I feel safe with you...He's the ultimate man. Don't you think?" Naomi laughs, "He is! Although he is perhaps lacking in social graces at times!" (Wake 2005:201).

King Kong is a computer-generated gorilla but he also shares qualities with many people I spoke with over the course of this project. These people did not get these qualities from Kong, Kong merely reflects a state of modern humanity.

In this world of astonishing technological achievements, Kong has curiosity and a sense of wonder. Despite his power and cleverness, he is prey to the sophisticated betrayals of the modern world. He has loyalty: he's caring and protective toward Ann beyond reason. He does not know his own strength and is quick to anger. While he shows great intelligence, it is easy to despair over how he chooses to use it. He has wildly different notions from my own about good ways to use time and settle disputes. And after he screws up, the system shows no mercy. He gets no second chance.

Like many of the union people I interviewed, he's bewildered, hard-working, intelligent, and betrayed.

As we will see in the final chapters, thematic issues raised by *King Kong* (2005) are reflected both in the non-fiction journalistic reportage, and in the union member life-story narratives. Management is fraught with problems. Racism and sexism are still so extreme in Hollywood labor relations that they get front-page reportage in the motion picture trade dailies (DiOrio 2007). Racism also plays itself out in the lived experience of union workers struggling for democratic trade unionism. Labor acts for self-preservation, and does not necessarily fall in with management's dictates, however, the obstacles to forging effective democratic participatory below-the-line unionism are complex and multileveled. There are severe dangers to workers who pursue this path, in addition to the new work-related dangers that face film workers during the third phase of runaway production.

Chapter 8. Runaway Production, The Third Phase (1999-present)

Introduction

By the late 1980s, the American idyll of U.S.-tax-incentive-supported American film production was over. During the third phase, due to film production incentives in foreign countries and other regions, jobs in American films for workers in the Hollywood labor unions decreased drastically.

It could be argued this period started in 1986—the year the United States tax incentives ended. Also, it could be argued the period started in 1988—the year when currency exchange rates, specifically the weak Canadian “loonie,” started luring larger numbers of film productions up to Canada. I chose 1999 because the years following the implementation of the Canadian tax incentives saw a drop in American film work that was catastrophic for a majority of the members of the Hollywood labor unions. Thousands of working-class film workers, from actors to truck drivers, found themselves out of work for months at a time.

In 1998, Canada enacted a “production services tax credit” (Collins 2002) allegedly to promote Canadian film and television production (Pollack 1999). This national provision was exploited by the Hollywood studios to get back 11 percent of labor costs. In 1999, American film workers started mobilizing at the grassroots level, in a significant way, to fight the sudden job loss they experienced (Pollack 1999a, 1999b, Collins 2002, ftac.org). Newspaper coverage of these incentives was initiated by a report issued by a new grassroots labor coalition, the Film and Television Action Committee (FTAC). Brent Swift, a production designer rendered unemployed by runaway production, and a member of the Hollywood Art Directors Guild (an IATSE local) and

others, was one of FTAC's founders. He said about the Canadian policy, "Immediately it was apparent [the Canadians] were enticing foreign companies, who create shell companies to generate a Canadian product that magically becomes an American product." Ninety-five percent of the productions that qualified for the credits had copyright holders originating in the United States (Vaucher 2004). Most of the Canadian provinces offered additional subsidies bringing the credit to over 20 percent. Hollywood productions moved to Canada in record numbers, to take advantage of these incentives (Collins 2002).

The Canadian regulations had an unprecedented requirement: "Only the top people on a production—including the director, the producer and the stars—are allowed in. The rest of the film crew must be Canadian, with rare exceptions." The incentives, coupled with the ongoing depreciation of the Canadian dollar, made filming in Canada much more attractive for the producers and made job prospects for the majority of American film workers bleak. Regarding the subsidies, Ed Lammi, executive vice president for production at Columbia Tristar Television said of Canada, "Everyone in town is there...It obviously works." There was a significant effect on Hollywood workers. In 1998, 27 percent of television series were filmed abroad. The United States lost 23,500 full-time jobs and over \$10 billion (of approximately \$74.3 billion spent on film and television production). By 1999, 55 percent of TV movies and mini-series had moved production abroad, mostly to Canada (Pollack 1999a).

Runaway production also had a large impact on United States regional economies. The United States Commerce Department reported runaway production devastated American production in the "much smaller film markets in Chicago and other cities

between the coasts” (Bernstein 2003). According to Richard Moskal, director of the Chicago film office, “It’s not just a Hollywood issue...It’s a small business issue, a lunch-bucket Joe issue. A lot of people less visible than Julia Roberts are trying to make a living” (Bernstein 2003). Other states that lost production included North Carolina, Washington, Texas, and Illinois (Pollack 1999), Iowa, Colorado, Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona, Ohio, and Massachusetts. In Chicago, local unions took 30 percent cuts in pay to keep productions in the city. Even with those concessions, production spending had not been as low since 1977 (Bernstein 2003).⁴⁶

Runaway production also had a serious impact on the quality of domestic film working conditions. Globalization cheapened the values of film workers and diminished their protections everywhere, including the United States. Time and money constraints, that are in part a product of the globalizing economy, contributed to degraded production standards, which are discussed in depth later in this chapter as well as in the next chapter. Examples include shooting in abandoned—and inexpensive—unsafe buildings, long work days that extend beyond the limits of safety, and unsafe helicopter camera shots, all of which contributed to injuries and deaths among American unionized film workers.

In addition to these sudden changes in conditions for film workers, there were also larger changes in the American workforce during this period. By 2000, the fastest growing group in the United States was the working poor, while the fastest growing segment of organized labor was service people, and overall manufacturing dropped off “sharply” (Nicholson 2004:299). This acceleration of labor problems is consistent with

⁴⁶ Most of these locations had not been major feature film production sites previously, and these locations had not been runaway production sites during the first phase. They developed their film-making in part with the help of state film commissions which emerged during the second phase.

David Harvey's theory of time-space compression. Harvey argues that during this period the labor problems sped up in part as an inevitable side-effect of flexible specialization and outsourcing (1990). (It is significant from the point of view of runaway production scholarship that the historical roots of this phenomenon are in the 1920s, far earlier than Harvey's starting point.)

Statistics about job loss among Hollywood workers were, at the time, hotly disputed by the producers and studio representatives. In a front-page story, the *New York Times* cited "many experts" without saying who those people were or what they did, who claimed that the "amount of offshore production is tiny, compared with Hollywood's overall output" (Pollack 1999). Those experts cited no statistics. However, by 2004, the worker-reported data that runaway production was costing the American economy \$10 billion a year, was confirmed by United States Department of Commerce (Vaucher 2004).

Despite a *New York Times* article which began, "Blame Canada," blaming Canada was shortsighted (Collins 2002). By 2004, even Canadian film production was down 40% from the 1999-2000 peak. A number of explanatory factors could be cited, namely the decline in the value of the US dollar, the impact of reality TV (the ultimate cost-cutter for producers; they claimed to require neither actors, nor writers, nor editors, although this was later proven untrue), and Canadian subsidies resulting in low labor costs were falling behind those of other places such as Eastern Europe (Austen 2004). Also, states other than California, and, as detailed in the previous chapter, English-speaking countries like Australia and New Zealand, soon responded. They increased incentives already in place, or started providing tax incentives to filmmakers. In turn, other countries with incentives

in place, increased their amount. In Canada, for example, these incentives grew to the point where, if you included Canadian national and regional incentives, some Canadian tax credits were now in excess of 50 percent of the film labor costs (Vaucher 2004).

During the third phase, the workers were no longer quiescent. In keeping with a general national trend of grassroots union resurgence (Milkman 2006), new players took the stage: coalitions comprised of members from different Hollywood labor unions commissioned studies on runaway production and organized to take action against it. The most prominent was the aforementioned Film and Television Action Committee (FTAC) (Vaucher 2004). In 1999, FTAC initially focused its attention on bringing about mass protests of thousands of Hollywood film workers in “Bring Hollywood Home” labor rallies in Hollywood and Sacramento, California’s capital (Pollack 1999). After attempting to support state-wide measures including tax incentives for the film industry and finding that path not-productive, FTAC members turned their attention to efforts on a federal level: filing a petition with United States Government. FTAC argued that the Canadian tax incentives are in violation of international trade agreements, specifically the Trade Act of 1974. FTAC claimed that Canadian subsidies are inconsistent with their obligations under the World Trade Organization (Collins 2002), and requested the United States implement countervailing tariffs as a way to combat runaway production (Vaucher 2004). This was not simply a “blame Canada” technique. It was viewed by FTAC as a first step in addressing all nations’ use of illegal subsidies. What is FTAC fighting for? FTAC leader McHugh says, “This is not xenophobic...It’s about the level playing field and playing by the same set of rules and not having a corporation decide who the victim’s going to be.” If the rules are fair, McHugh and other people who work in the

industry have a fighting chance of making a living and being able to keep their families together. McHugh continues,

We have to learn that an attack on one is an attack on all, and that the workers in Canada ultimately are going to be as abused by this, when someone says, “You know what? Canada's not the flavor of the month. Let's see if South Africa is. Let's all go there. And we'll abuse those people for a while...” It's a race to the bottom. I don't know who coined the phrase, but I think it's very accurate (McHugh interview 2007).

FTAC was funded by a coalition comprised of many groups, including the Teamsters locals, SAG, the DGA, and IATSE locals without the support of the main body of IATSE (the runaway production battle is fought in part in opposition to IATSE leadership—this is discussed further in the next chapter). FTAC represents over 200,000 film workers and vendors (Collins 2002). As Brent Swift noted, “Everything we're getting is coming from the ground floor up” (Vaucher 2004).

Independently of FTAC efforts, the Screen Actors Guild has been working on a campaign called Global Rule 1, which “seeks to require SAG members to refuse to act in foreign productions if they aren't offered a SAG contract. Members who violate it risk sanctions, fines, or even expulsion from the union” (Bates 2002a). Academy Award winning actor Kevin Spacey says, “An actor should never have to be put in a position where someone can say, ‘By the way, we're not going to pay your health benefits or give you residuals, and you're not going to have a SAG contract.’” He summarized the producers' position simply: “It comes down to greed” (Bates 2002a).

A Problem of Perception

Without the tax benefits, the horrible truth is this movie would probably be made in Kabul, or you know, wherever it's the cheapest place in the world for us to shoot.

--Mel Brooks on filming *The Producers* in New York City (Collins 2005:B1)

It is not even clear that 'runaway production' actually exists.

--Elizabeth McDonald, chief executive of the Canadian Film and Television Production Association, a group of 400 producers (Collins 2002:1)

Among the many obstacles runaway production activists have to overcome, are those of public and official perception. Views of runaway production range from the suggestion that runaway production is a "fantasy" that doesn't exist, to the idea that runaway production is the critical problem facing Hollywood workers.

Part of that difference of perception has to do with the idea that runaway production should be a zero-sum game. In other words, if the jobs are leaving California and the United States, there should then be fewer industry jobs available in California or the United States. As we have seen in previous periods, job growth can occur in one area of film production, for example the new television jobs that flooded into Los Angeles during the first period of runaway production, at the same time many motion picture production jobs are lost. The *Los Angeles Times* noted, "the impact of runaway production has been masked during the extended boom of the last decade that has driven healthy production growth in Los Angeles.... however, the growth in shooting overseas is not due to a 'rising' tide of overall growth, since the percentage of work being done overseas is increasing" (Bates 1999). During the present period, many of the long-term experienced below-the-line Hollywood film workers do not have the specialized skills required to transfer to the new jobs that are being created in high tech areas involving computers and digital film work. This will continue to be an ongoing issue for film workers. However, this differs from the past job creation, for example, during the

transition to television jobs mentioned earlier in this paragraph, workers could easily shift from film to television jobs because the skill sets needed were similar.

Related to this problem about the perception of runaway production was the difficulty workers had proving their point about job loss. In part, this was caused by the lack of available statistical data about runaway production.⁴⁷ Especially in an industry as public as Hollywood, it's challenging to muster collective political will for change without having hard statistical evidence that shows the workers' grievance is part of a larger systemic issue. The 1999 Monitor Report about runaway production, commissioned by the Screen Actors Guild and the Directors Guild of America was an early attempt to rectify the situation. Both the studios' representatives and the Canadian representatives then disputed the data in this report because the report claimed the verifiable idea that if you pay a worker X dollars, those dollars will have a "ripple effect" that benefits the community in which the worker lives and does business (Bates 2001). It was not until the United States Department of Commerce validated the report's \$10 billion estimate of the loss to the U.S. economy that those figures were less disputed (Kristof et.al 2001). (My study of over fifty years of newspaper reports on runaway

⁴⁷ No one knows the real size of the industry. At an FTAC meeting with the Commerce Department, the MPAA challenged FTAC in several ways, saying that FTAC didn't have standing in the industry. The issue of standing was interesting, because Brent Swift, FTAC's chairman, worked in film as a production designer. He was not an international trade attorney. The FTAC committee that traveled to Washington, D.C., was comprised of production designers, camera people and editors. It was the only group in the room whose members worked directly on motion pictures. When the MPAA attorney told Swift he had the wrong number of signatures, Swift asked what the right number of signatures was. The trade attorneys and the Commerce Department became quiet. They said they didn't know. Tim McHugh points out, "No one knows, because it's not really one industry. It's many industries glued together" to make movies and television. Swift gave the example of the Screen Actors Guild which had passed a resolution in support of FTAC's work. FTAC had the support of 100,000 members in the Screen Actors Guild. The MPAA representatives replied, "You can't count actors. My God, they're all – 90% of them are waiters. They don't even work in the business." Swift said that by that criteria, the industry must be much smaller than the producers claim it is. The MPAA representatives then denied that was what they were saying (McHugh interview 2006).

production has led me to conclude it is an historic tactic of studio representatives to publicly dispute facts that make the studios look bad, and to continue to do so long after those facts are beyond dispute. This is not a problem exclusive to the motion picture industry.) Further, the Commerce Department report on runaway production noted that “our official statistics are woefully deficient” (Bates 2004).

State government officials, especially in regions where their constituents were hard hit by job loss, wanted to support their constituents, but the officials, too, were hampered by lack of adequate data. Reports about the California state legislators’ efforts regarding runaway production stated, “hard job numbers have long proved elusive... Critics have long complained that the lack of data makes it harder for policymakers to detail the effect of such problems as runaway film production” (Bates 2004). The state government officials responded to this problem by commissioning their own survey which showed that runaway production was a significant problem that cost the United States approximately 25,000 jobs per year (Collins 2002).⁴⁸

In addition to the zero-sum game problem, and the statistical problem, there is another problem: how the runaway production struggle was defined varied depending on

⁴⁸ The data problem is attributed to many factors, “economists don’t always agree on how broadly to define entertainment jobs, and ... historic ways economists count workers don’t include numerous independent contractors that permeate today’s Hollywood. For example, the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp estimates entertainment employment in Los Angeles County at 242,000, more than 100,000 higher than the state does” (Bates 2001b). Other issues affect the availability of hard data. A federal anti-trust lawsuit in the mid-1990s proved that studio accounting practices result in showing successful movies like *Batman* and *JFK* as money-losers. “There’s little hard data on the profitability of film production companies.” In the third phase, production companies were usually created for the purpose of making one specific film (Lifsher and Halper 2005).

The Screen Actors Guild successfully negotiated for the producers to keep track of data on hiring based on race. If the union contract negotiators of all the below-the-line and above-the-line unions demanded that the producers kept publicly available and verifiable statistical data on the location of union and non-union hires, then there would be fewer problems obtaining the data. It is most likely that the producers’ associations would bitterly fight efforts to make this a contract provision, because it serves the interest of the producers to keep this information unavailable.

who was quoted. Representatives from different groups perceived runaway production differently.

California state senator Sheila Kuehl (D-Santa Monica), took the side of film workers. She knew of what she spoke, she is a renowned former actress.⁴⁹ In a letter to the editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, she said, “I ... cannot explain away the voices of my constituents—hard-working, self-sufficient people who have built stable careers in entertainment, the last people who would ask for help if something was not seriously wrong” (Kuehl 1999). She later said, “I know a lot of people in the industry who are third-generation sound guys and grips who have been out of work for six or eight months or a year” (Rau 2004).

The studio representatives expressed a different perception, which was both openly anti-Hollywood and, at the same time, anti-union. The *Los Angeles Times* cites, “the anti-LA feelings of many prominent industry figures. Many New York-based executives and too many in Los Angeles, are openly contemptuous of Tinseltown. Others, like USA Networks Chairman Barry Diller and film producer [George] Lucas, disdain what Diller calls, ‘the way L.A. is organized’” (Kotkin 1999).

As has been true throughout runaway production history, Disney is mentioned as the least supportive of local California workers, “Few LA based studio executives, moreover, express a strong commitment to maintaining the region’s entertainment complex. Nowhere is this clearer than at Disney” (Kotkin 1999). Despite the fact that Disney was not conglomerate-owned, Disney was a pioneer in the draconian shifts which characterize the globalization of Hollywood. In 1987, Hollywood film workers

⁴⁹ Sheila Kuehl worked as an actress mostly in television from the 1950s to the 1980s. She is perhaps best known for her role as Zelda in *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* (1959-1963). She also worked on the *Beverly Hillbillies* and *The Donna Reed Show* (imdb.com).

experienced a forerunner of the suddenness of overall job change during the third phase. Forty-seven percent of American animators lost their jobs to outsourcing. The animators' work went to Asia and Australia where producers, mostly Disney, could "get it done cheap" (Culhane 1987). While this issue would not come to the large-scale attention of other Hollywood labor groups until 1999, this latter change would be equally swift and sudden. The globalizing of studio ownership during the third phase continued apace, with Vivendi buying Universal in 2000. General Electric bought Universal in 2003. In 2004, SONY bought MGM/UA (it had previously purchased Columbia in 1989). In 2007 the main studios, Columbia, Disney, Fox, Paramount, Universal and Warner accounted for 90% of commercial film revenue (Campbell 2007).

Unlike the previous phases of runaway production, during this phase, at no time did newspapers report even the pretense of the corporate owners attempting conciliatory action with regard to runaway production. Senator Kuehl said simply that runaway production is of less interest to the studios, "because they're the ones running away to save money" (Rau 2004). The attitude of the studios is evident in the fact that producers are waging a very public multi-million dollar public relations campaign to combat "piracy," the illegal copying of films. At the same time, they do not even offer suggestions to help solve the runaway production problem (Goldstein 2003).

Attempts to pass statewide tax incentives in California to compete with those of other states or nations, even with the support of movie-star Governor Schwarzenegger, were defeated in part using rhetoric that framed the incentives as "a giveaway for a favored industry" (Lifsher and Halper 2005). In a way, Hollywood was defeated by its own hype. According to Los Angeles County Economic Development chief economist

Jack Kyser, “People see this as an industry that’s very glamorous and exciting, but it’s an industry that’s going through some major inflections” (Verrier 2005b). He later added with regard to state-financed incentives, “People in Sacramento approach it as, ‘Oh, this is welfare for big corporations,’ ... They don’t understand the way the business works” (Collins 2007).

California state lobbyists for other causes questioned the validity of film industry incentives, “If proponents think this is worth \$1 billion, they ought to say what they think should be cut... They ought to say it’s a higher priority than health coverage for children or education” (Lifsher 2005). Republican opposition also helped defeat incentive attempts: “An analysis by Republican Senate staffers questioned whether [Assembly Speaker] Nunez’s tax proposal was a giveaway for a favored industry” (Lifsher and Halper 2005). It is noteworthy that opponents of incentives rarely offer alternative viable ideas about what could be done to stem the tide of runaway production.

Even though tax incentives failed, California started to take other actions to help slow runaway production during the third phase. The California Film Commission, in efforts to sustain the \$32 billion that the film industry contributes annually to the state’s economy, began to offer incentives including free, unusual, film location shot sites, such as condemned properties in the path of planned freeway expansions, and even an abandoned mental institution (Bates 2002b).

Both grassroots leaders and some members of mainstream California union leadership came to see runaway production as a federal problem. According to then-Screen Actors Guild President Richard Masur, “This isn’t just about Hollywood ... This is a nationwide industry.” In the same article, the *Los Angeles Times* reported, “The

guilds are trying not to stress the consequences specific to California because they need to convince lawmakers in Washington that it is a national problem” (Bates 1999).

However, there were problems of perception in the presentation of runaway production at the federal level: “In Washington, hostility toward Hollywood is the norm” (Garvey 2001a), especially in the current political climate. A critic of federal tax incentives said, “The biggest benefactor may be the adult film industry,” even though pornography did not qualify for the proposed benefit. (This quotation was attributed to a “senior House GOP aide who asked not to be named.”) (Ryavac 1999). Despite this, national incentives were lobbied for and won during this period.

As with previous phases, workers outraged over American stories filmed abroad galvanized public sentiment, and helped influence legislation both at the state and federal level. Flashpoint productions included a 1999 film about then-New York Yankee manager Joe Torre made in Toronto (Bates 1999), a feature film about the 1969 Woodstock music festival shot in Montreal, and the *Blues Brothers* sequel shot in Toronto. (The original was shot in Chicago.) Then the film *Chicago* was shot in Toronto. According to Rep. Xavier Becerra (D-Los Angeles,) who co-sponsored a federal tax incentive bill with Rep. Jerry Weller (R-Ill.), “Even more embarrassing were the telephone calls from the Toronto film office to the Chicago film office asking advice about how to make Toronto more Chicago-like” (Hook 1999).⁵⁰

In 2003, not one best-picture nominee for the Academy Award was shot in the United States (Bates 2003a). This was followed by the filming abroad of American-

⁵⁰ In a classic producer “unclear on the concept” moment about authentic settings, *Chicago*’s co-producer Don Carmody said “I like shooting films in Canada, but right now *Chicago* would probably be made in New York” (Collins NYT 8.17.04).

themed films such as *American Dream* (James 2003), *Cold Mountain*, and *Hollywood Wives* (Bates 2003b). At the state level, New York legislators were influenced by the outrage over the filming in Canada of New-York themed films including *Rudy!*, a television movie about former New York Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani shot in Montreal (Vaucher 2004). This helped influence substantial New York state incentives (Murphy 2002, Horn 2005).

A federal film production tax credit gathered enough bipartisan support that HR 4520, the American Jobs Creation Act of 2004, included a provision for independent films made domestically for less than \$15 million. However, the provision was flawed (I would suggest possibly sabotaged) by its phrasing. It went largely unused by filmmakers because the wording was not clear. In clarifying the provision in 2007, the Internal Revenue Service's ruled that participation and residuals "must be included as original production costs." There is no way to predict the success of a film at the time of production, and residuals, for example, are contingent on income. This ruling "gutted" it, and rendered the provision worthless (Triplett 2007, Verrier 2007c).

Metaphors

As we discussed in Chapter 4, during the first phase of runaway production, the most frequent metaphor used to describe runaway production was war. During the second phase, the primary metaphors through which runaway production was discussed were love and slavery. During the third phase the most frequently-used metaphors were those of sport. All the different participating groups mention a "level playing field," the idea that larger forces such as government incentives have made this "game" of motion picture production unfair. The metaphor emerged from the grass roots: it was first used

by David Long, a prop maker in the Los Angeles Area, who said, “I feel it’s important to level the playing field and keep this great group of people contributing to one of the main things that makes Southern California such a great place to be” (McGreevy 1999). It was then taken up by the politicians. Federal Representative Mark Foley, the chairman of the House Republican Caucus’ Entertainment Industry Task Force said, “We’re all for free and fair trade, but what Canada is doing isn’t fair and we have to do something to level the playing field” (Gettleman 2000). Then, mainstream above-the-line union leadership took up the cry. According to Jack Shea, Directors Guild president, a federal tax credit would “help the American motion picture industry compete in the international marketplace on a level playing field” (Garvey 2001). Grassroots leadership moved attention away from the “playing field” of tax credits to attempts to impose countervailing tariffs on United States films made in Canada with Canadian incentives. FTAC’s Brent Swift, who was requested by the Commerce Department to provide more documentation for FTAC’s case, responded that FTAC’s temporarily withdrawing their petition “in no way [indicated a] weakening of our resolve to level the playing field” (Garvey 2002). Bruce Doering, executive director of IATSE Local 600, appointed by IATSE President Tom Short, even briefly used the term before the mainstream appointees of IATSE retreated again into their sweetheart union status (Jones 2002). After some production started to shift back to the United States in 2005 (the alleged cause was the United States’ “weakening dollar”), the Australian Film Commissioner Tracey Montgomery said, “the playing field has changed absolutely.” Steve MacDonald, the president of the nonprofit agency in the city of Los Angeles that coordinated local permits, said of allowing free filming in buildings, “This is something to put us in a better

playing field with other jurisdictions [sic]" (Fauset 2005). With the exception of the producers, who have no interest in a level playing field, the term was used in all aspects of the debate.

The next-most-used metaphor was that of war. This was used during the first phase of runaway production, and had been little used during the second phase. It reappeared first in a letter from California state representative Howard Berman who wrote, "The film and television industry has been a vibrant and vital part of our economy for decades. Down the chain of production, including suppliers and service companies, these jobs are the lifeblood of tens of thousands of our households. We must do battle for them" (Berman 1999). The terminology was then picked up in reports about the grass roots organizations' defense of filing for countervailing tariffs against Canada. Attorney Joel Joseph, who drafted that petition said, "Canada fired the first shot in this trade war" (Garvey 2001c). By 2005, the Los Angeles County Economic Development corporation was highlighting the rise of "union militancy," at the Writers Guild of America West, and the Screen Actors Guild after their recent elections put into office leaders "who have vowed to take a tougher line in negotiations with studios" (Verrier 2005b).⁵¹ In addition to the metaphors of war, there are other images of violence, such as looking for a "silver bullet" for a solution (Bates 2001a), seeing runaway production as a "slow motion train wreck" (Haffner 2004), and likening the process of runaway production to nails in the coffin of organized labor (Coffey 2000, Goldstein 2003b). The renewal of this war and violence terminology, which had lain largely dormant during the second phase, both

⁵¹ Militancy is a term familiar to labor scholars but the term had essentially vanished from usage during the second phase of runaway production.

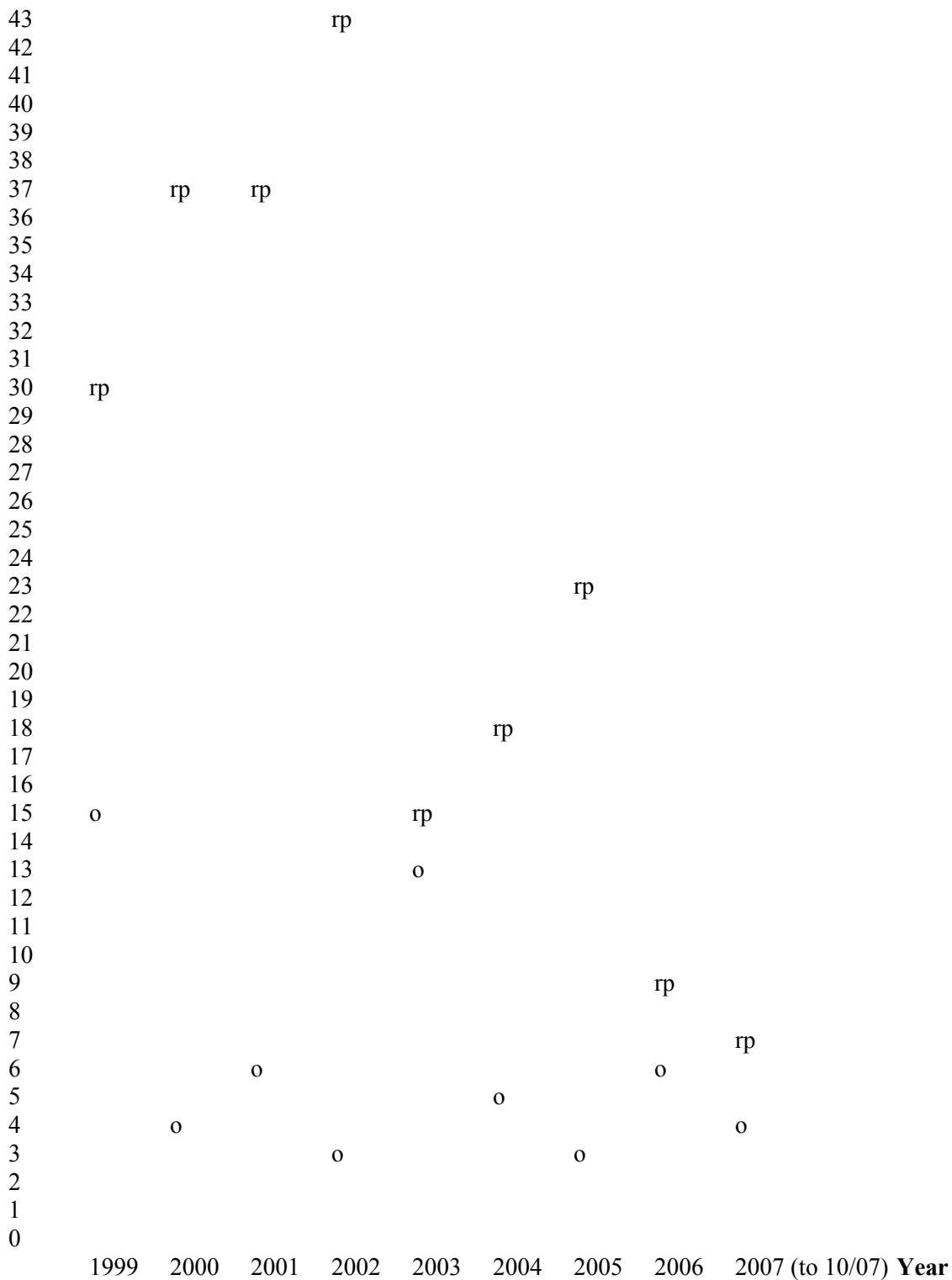
reflects the gravity of the situation and may also suggest something positive—film workers were waking up to the problem and taking action.

Again, as in the second phase, these are metaphors used to describe the workers. They are no longer good slaves; the process has been reduced to pure consumption and the workers are fodder: the metaphors indicate that the beast needs to eat. The images used to frame the issue from the producers point-of-view had to do with feeding the monster of capitalism. Incentives were “sweeteners” (Bates 2003b, Lifsher 2005, Verrier 2005a, Verrier 2007d) and the tempting “carrots” (Bates 2003b, Verrier 2005a). (The beast is not on a healthy food plan. Its diet resembles that of a binge eater.)

Tracking All That is Solid

Different uses of the term “runaway production” also contributed to the blurring of perception discussed earlier in this chapter. This section continues the discussion of “All that is solid melts into air,” Marx’s metaphor for the progress of capitalism (used during the second phase of runaway production), and charts the mentions of the phrase “runaway production” and the term “runaway” in relationship to motion pictures. You will recall that during the second phase of runaway production, the evidence showed that the term was used less and less to describe work loss due to the studios moving production away from Hollywood to save on labor costs, and was gradually used more for other purposes. During that period, the film worker activism related to runaway production either did not happen or went largely unreported. Obviously, significant labor activity can correlate with mentions in the newspaper. It is not obvious that labor activity can contribute to slowing capitalism’s consumption of labor even at the level of the language used to describe labor. During the third period of runaway production,

characterized by grassroots worker organization and protest, all that language that had melted into air during the second phase, began to “unmelt,” as seen in the chart below. The use of the term runaway production, for purposes other than labors’, declined significantly and remained at low levels. It would seem, at least on this micro level, that labor activism correlates with a decline in corporate power.

LOS ANGELES TIMES MENTIONS OF RUNAWAY PRODUCTION 1999-2007**Mentions**

rp = mentions of runaway production as a film labor issue

o = other usage of runaway or runaway production in relationship to motion pictures

Conclusion

During this phase, when workers understood their condition vis-à-vis management as a sport or as a battle, it led them to greater labor activism and hence more effective influence on the government and the studios. Similarly, labor activism is correlated with a significant impact on the shifts in language usage.

This language shift is important both because the language used indicates the relative state of power of the groups involved in this matter, and because the Hollywood producers are especially sensitive to public opinion. Even though the final decisions about runaway production are made behind closed doors, the language used in posturing for the mass media can influence the outcome of Hollywood labor disputes. Further, I believe that because of the public visible nature of Hollywood organized labor, these changes can influence other organized labor matters, and be at least a source of inspiration or disappointment for workers in other unions.

The runaway production story reflects a meta-story of workers' resurgent power and their standing at a threshold: if it's a game, if it's a war, as the metaphors suggest, they have a chance. But they must act, because capital no longer sees them even as human slaves, they are merely fodder.

Missing from this discussion thus far is the impact of runaway production on the everyday lives of workers in the industry, and the decisions that workers make as a result of that. The next chapter is a *mélange* of oral history narratives by members of the IATSE about their lives during this period of runaway production. Their stories bring new insight into the runaway production story and fills in the outlines suggested by the newspaper coverage.

Chapter 9. Voices from the Union Ranks

Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital and deserves much the higher consideration.

--Abraham Lincoln, 1861(Nicholson 2004:91). An actor killed him in 1865.

It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

--Robert Kennedy, Former U.S. Attorney General, 1966

The external forces are absolutely phenomenally huge. Globalization. We can't compete dollar to dollar with labor anywhere in the world. The technology is going to make it such that films could be shot anywhere. I don't think that it is a done deal. I think that if we were together internally ... we could weather that storm, as a trade union. But the problem is that we are so scattered, disenfranchised, intellectually lazy as an organization. We'll cut each other's throats for a job. That happens way too often, and that needs to be reversed, and that's the biggest issue that we face as a union in the future. If we don't get that together, we can kiss it goodbye.

--Gary Dunham, IATSE Local 600 President, 2006

Sociologist Herbert Gans studied the biases in newsroom reporting and found that journalists generally tend to assume that capitalism is a “responsible” force, that “business people compete ... not primarily to maximize profits but ... to create increased prosperity for all” (Campbell 2007:484). This bias in reportage contributes to the assumption that capitalism’s progress is inevitable. This is reflected in newspaper reports during the current phase of runaway production, and can be correlated with worker attitudes. During this phase, when film workers again began to take action against job loss, the rhetoric of the rights of big business had so pervaded the general mindset that *The New York Times* reported, “many say the studios are merely reacting to economic forces”, as if there is no recourse to counteract economic forces, and as if there are no people behind those forces. Correspondingly, many members of Hollywood craft labor

unions had embraced the ethic of business success at any cost, even if it meant loss of their own livelihood. *The New York Times* quotes Richard Ludt, a grip, saying, “I can’t blame the studios; they’re a business.” Ludt then left the film industry to go back to construction work (Pollack 1999a).

There is not a lot of public sympathy for film workers for a number of reasons. Among those discussed in this project are beliefs about the wealth, glamour and privilege of those who work in the industry. Film worker Tim McHugh adds, “Why would anybody care about us? We’re middle aged, slightly overweight white guys from the middle class. Nobody really wants to take up that cause” (McHugh interview 2006).

However, as has been mentioned, not everyone dealt with the runaway production problem by giving in. As seen in the previous chapter, grassroots activism had an impact. This chapter looks at the subject through the perspectives of individuals in order to bring to light otherwise unexplored issues.

This chapter draws largely from accounts by two leaders in the fight against runaway production, Gary Dunham, IATSE Local 600 president, and Tim McHugh, a leader of the Film and Television Action Committee (FTAC). Also included are accounts from other filmmakers and IATSE members including Douglas Hart, Carisa Kaplan, Haskell Wexler, and people I spoke with under conditions of anonymity. What these people have in common is the stand they have taken for humane-ness. Anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker, in her study of Hollywood, was adamant about the problems that result from dehumanization: “the denial of one’s human characteristics is the most degrading insult that can be offered any man or woman” (1950:305). She was equally adamant about the importance of humane-ness in the motion picture world:

The really important people in the development and growth of the movies, as a popular art form and as a profitable industry, are the small groups of artists who continually struggle to function as such, and the occasional executive who appreciates their goals because they are partly or wholly his own.... It is these men and women ... who are responsible for any human creativity that there is in Hollywood. They have a point of view, the expression of which is important to them; they have a capacity for sustained hard work, and they prefer thoughtful planning to constant crises. They regard people as human beings. Although comparatively few, they can be found in all parts of movie production. They struggle constantly for power within the Hollywood system, power not to dominate other human beings, but to bend the system so that creation becomes human (Powdermaker 1950:293).

In addition to speaking with members of the rank-and-file, I also made best efforts to speak to the key representative on the “other side” of this discussion, IATSE President Thomas Short. President Short was the only person I contacted directly for this project who declined my request for an interview.

As Gans has shown, the mass media’s default position is that of defending corporate capitalism. Although I can not speak for Short, this position is one with which Short seems to be allying himself as evidenced by examples throughout this chapter. The “other side’s” perspective was summarized humorously by Tim McHugh, “Their argument seems to be, ‘But we like money... you know, the market's global now. If somebody wants to give us lots of money, we should take it.’”

IATSE cameramen have historically been the most vocal and active against going along with mainstream IATSE leadership.⁵² Among the most resistant to joining the IATSE, which has existed since 1893, they finally joined in 1928 (Nielsen & Mailes 1995). The cameramen’s outspokenness is consistent with the idea that the more highly

⁵² For example, in August 1952, regarding runaway production, the Cameramen (then local 659, now 600) “approved a more vigorous protest and urged that drastic action be taken” at an IATSE meeting (Spiro 1952). Perhaps in part as a result of this agitation, the IATSE presented its first threat to the studios: that they would prevent the studios from using IATSE label on pictures, “and projectionists will not run any film without this label.” Later, in 1960, the cameramen stood up to protest, calling for mass picketing and publicity “to combat widespread chronic unemployment” (Schumach 1960e).

skilled workers are, the more difficult they are to control (Marx 1977 [1867]:490).

Going against mainstream IATSE leadership is significant because, as has been mentioned, the IATSE has over a century of history as a “sweetheart” union, meaning that members of the mainstream paid leadership are known for being in the “pockets” of the studio executives, and historically have been discovered to have taken massive kickbacks from the studios (Nielsen & Mailes 1995).

The long-term IATSE control over the technical workers has usually allowed the studio producers to have a largely controllable workforce. Leadership roles in the mainstream IATSE organization, such as Tom Short’s, are well-paid positions with numerous perks. At the local level, all the democratically elected officer roles, such as Gary Dunham’s, are unpaid positions. However, the local business agent--also sometimes called the executive director--of each IATSE local well- paid (some business agents are elected, some appointed). The president of the entire IATSE, once elected, tends to stay in office until his death. The IATSE’s sweetheart status in combination with IATSE internal problems have contributed substantially to the runaway production problem, as shown in the following examples.

How the Union Creates the Non-union Workforce

People join the IATSE to get better work, more money, overtime, and health insurance. One requirement for joining is that the worker has enough days working non-union, and has letters from production companies saying, “So-and-so worked thus-and-such days on this production” (Kaplan Interview 2007). There are unintended consequences to these conditions for membership. It helps create a surplus army of non-union workers which in part can contribute to the runaway production workforce.

Culture of Silence: More on Creating the Non-Union Workforce in the 1980s

In the 1980s, many provisions in the IATSE contracts made union jobs good ones. The wage scales started changing for the worse especially in 1985 and 1988 (contracts are negotiated every three years). In each contract bargaining period, the union negotiated concessionary contracts while the producers were making record amounts of money (Dunham interview 2006, Christopherson et. al. 2006). For example, after working a twelve-hour day, you'd be in "golden time"—earning 2.5 times your rates. The IATSE started giving these provisions away. The basic agreement turned into a multi-tiered wage scale—work on features, television movies, and television half-hour episodes earned different amounts.

The issue of less expensive labor elsewhere was influencing the outsourcing of American organized labor as a whole (Harvey 1990). However, this was not, at that time, a significant financial consideration for the American motion picture business. Hollywood had the strongest film work force. Movies of course were made in England, France, and other places, but those countries didn't have the infrastructure of technical expertise that Hollywood had. At the same time, the IATSE was negotiating about three percent wage increases, the inflation was approximately seven percent, and the union negotiators also gave away "double-double time." In giving these concessions, the negotiators were succumbing to false pressures. While the producers used the growing "non-union" workforce as leverage in negotiations, "Everybody knew that the non-union work force consisted of union members." The union was unwilling to call on its members to stop this (Dunham interview 2006).

The union lost ground during that period in part because of the non-union work being done. Yet, one reason for the non-union work was had to do with the exclusionary nature of the union itself. The entertainment business was growing exponentially in the United States, and the west coast Local 659 under George Dible's leadership did not effectively expand their ranks to meet the growing need for trained labor (Hart interview 2007).

For union workers, non-union work was desirable because it paid over scale, and paid cash. The people who did non-union work started bringing in their friends who were not able to get into the union. They became trained to do the work, but the union wouldn't accept them. Dunham says, "And all of a sudden, we had a non-union force that we created. It grew larger and larger, and it started taking our jobs away" (Dunham interview 2006).

Scholars have discussed union passivity in the face of loss of benefits and good working conditions in other industries. One of the IATSE's enduring traditions is a "culture of silence." The following research may seem far afield, but it circles back to a central point. Thomas Beamish's study of union member silence in the case of an unreported thirty-eight-year-long California coastal oil spill, discusses the causes, costs, and consequences of a union's problems with the "culture of silence." The silence about the spill (that every union member working out in those oil fields knew about) had a distinct trajectory. A worker couldn't tell at first it was a problem. By the time the worker knew it was a problem, the worker was complicit: speaking out would implicate all fellow workers who for years hadn't said anything, and would make the worker a pariah (Beamish 2000). Likewise in film production, union members turn their heads in

silence, and directly benefit financially from the members' tendency to work non-union jobs and train other non-union members. This is one of many "look the other way" practices that have contributed to the problems facing the IATSE today. Gary Dunham says, "To this day, we're training our replacements. We're training them in Romania, in Canada, in Australia. We just can't do enough" (Dunham interview 2006). The practice creates workers who are morally complicit in the problem, and who, as a result, have significant problems speaking out. Union labor trains the workforces worldwide that Hollywood runaway productions use.

Multinationals in the 1990s and the Sweetheart Union

As has been discussed, with the 1990s also came massive changes in the structure of the industry. Multinational corporations and groups with little or no experience in the financial management of the business of producing motion pictures, bought up the studios and attempted to implement changes. The most public and egregiously disastrous example was Jon Peters' and Peter Guber's mismanagement of SONY which ended up costing the stockholders close to \$3.2 billion. This was approximately 25% of the shareholders' equity (Brownell 2000).

Gary Dunham comments about the new management, "They started listening to stories that they wanted to hear." Prior to that time, senior production managers knew how a production worked. They had all come up through the ranks, and everybody was on the same page. When the business changed, management started hiring grossly inexperienced production managers. Nepotism can work when the people hired have talent and training, and make the effort to do the job well. The new-hires weren't from inside the business. Corporate management started tying down budgets and it became

difficult for rank-and-file to negotiate over scale deals, even on big films (Dunham interview 2006). (Their inefficient practices extend to their demanding the extreme hours discussed in Chapter 6. That the studios actually lose money by insisting on sixteen-plus hour work days is discussed later in this chapter.)

At this point, the IATSE allowed the incompetent production people to violate the terms of the union contracts. The union did *not* stand up for itself. They should have said in response to the inexperienced producers, “That's not our problem. We're there. We're lit. We're ready to go. We can't help it if you guys can't schedule your day.” Instead the union gave in to producer demands, such as eliminating the work week that was five days out of seven, and the “golden hour” after twelve hours (even though the fault lay with inexperienced management who could not shoot their day in fourteen hours). The corporate flacks took the position: “We don't value experience any more. You're going to work for scale,” and divided work into three tiers. For example on a feature film, the worker would be paid \$35 an hour, but on TV, he did the same job for \$25 an hour (Dunham interview 2006).

Did any of the rank-and-file protest? “Well, I did,” Dunham replies with a laugh. “And that's when I started getting in trouble.... I had never been fired in my life, and I was fired in prep on two big shows for doing what I needed to do, standing up for, ‘No, we're not going to do this without.... This is what we do.’ It was like, ‘Well, we'll get somebody to do it our way.’” A Director of Photography (DP) said, “A lot of us were getting fired at that point for standing up. This was not an anomaly. This was a change in the paradigm. You either said, ‘Okay, fine,’ or you stood up for yourself.” The DP added that this was a period when film schools started graduating record numbers of

students, and so, “the sheer numbers of people who came into the business” made the “surplus army” larger. When someone stood up, it was simple for the production company to fire them and hire another person. The DP said, “My guys would all get fired for standing up” (Anonymous interview 2006). IATSE members have no recourse. The provisions of the contract say they are daily hires—they’re only hired to work one day at a time.⁵³ When Dunham called his union to ask for help with this he was told, “We’re not a hiring hall.” Dunham says, “That was one of the rude awakenings that I had... the realization that the union’s issues are not my issues” (Dunham interview 2006).

Even though “Appreciation of the Photoplay,” an early film studies class, was taught at University of Southern California in the winter and spring of 1929, and a few years later, Dino De Laurentiis studied at the first Italian film school, large numbers of trained American film workers did not graduate from film schools until the late 1980s and early 1990s. Until that point, American union film work was largely passed from father to son. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a trickle of film-school graduates (including my former employer, George Lucas) began making in-roads into the industry. Of the enormous surplus labor pool created by film schools today, few film students ever eventually make a living making Hollywood feature films. However, the cachet of film programs functions as a kind of “blind alley,” drawing in students who are enraptured by the allure or charisma of filmmaking and are eager to work for nothing, or to contribute their own moneys to film-making. This creates a labor culture where “making a living”

⁵³ As one cameraman put it, “You make one mistake; you're done.” The work is screened daily for those in charge. Dunham says, “Your mistakes go on a big screen, and everybody in the room looks at it and hoots and hollers and yells and criticizes. They can look at fifteen hours of perfection. They see one thing wrong, and it's like, ‘Hey, get rid of that guy,’ and they do. And they'll fire you... There are no excuses. You do everything perfectly every time every day. That's what you do. And that's what you have to do.”

is not about wages. It is about an “added value” which cannot be measured by working conditions or financial remuneration. The eagerness of workers to participate in film is exploited by film productions taking on free interns and using them until they get a new batch of free interns. A few make it into the union ranks, but even that does not guarantee work. There are not enough feature films made to provide work for this army of eager college graduates.

The Cultural Costs of Machismo

While many crew members are now college educated, with middle-class backgrounds, on the set there’s an almost “over-macho” spirit, a joining in to the working class ethic. This is part of a larger issue common to unionized men in traditionally male work enclaves:

Convinced that staying employed is contingent on completing work within tight timeframes set by supervisors and inordinately compelled to be esteemed the only “real men” deserving of steady [work, white men frequently feel] compelled or chose to ignore and compromise safety and health regulations designed to protect all ... workers including themselves. In so doing, [they] put themselves and the labor movement in harm’s way. (Royster 2007:453).

Scholar Kris Paap talks about this behavior giving them the sense of being “real men,” and occurring at the cost of the real power they could gain as active participants in the shared power of collective bargaining (Royster 2007:454).

In part as a result of this, “fatal accidents and serious injuries still occur with astonishing frequency on film and TV sets.” The official entertainment industry injury and fatality statistics are relatively low compared with other industries because entertainment statistics also include thousands of people who work in offices. Rana Plat-Petersen, the business representative for the Motion Picture Studio First Aid Employees, discusses the fact that injuries are under-reported because of the testosterone-heavy

atmosphere on film sets, “They’re macho guys... They won’t report an injury. You basically have to drag it out of them.” According to Louis Therrien, an independent safety consultant in Pasadena, people are afraid to speak up. “You’re looking at a whole production company sitting there, and you’re going to tell them they’re going to have to wait and do something different?...That’s time and money” (Longwell 2002).

In addition, the “macho” culture diverts the energy of would-be protesters from other real issues. California state law mandates a maximum sixteen-hour work day. While a majority of “deal memos”—negotiations between the producers and the unions—are based on the twelve-hour work day, “sixteen hour days are common. Being on the clock twenty or more hours is not unusual” (Scarborough 2006). In the 2004 membership survey, Local 600 members reported that 47.3 percent had fallen asleep at the wheel. Only 10.7 percent of members’ workdays were shorter than ten hours. Eleven to fourteen hour days were the norm for 78.5 percent of the members (Glover 2004). As was discussed in Chapter 6, the costs can be terrible: “sleep deprivation affects the body and mind in the same way as alcohol intoxication, which means the high voltage electricity, pyrotechnics, cranes, Condors [a hybrid crane], car stunts and firearms are all in the hands of workers whose judgment may be seriously impaired” (Scarborough 2006). The irony of this is that, of course, nobody does their best work in the sixteenth hour. A study by veteran line producer Robert Schneider disproved the long-held myth that “movie crews have to work a 12-hour minimum day to counter the high daily costs of stage, location, and equipment rentals.” Schneider showed that an eight-hour shooting day is less expensive than a longer shooting day, which is inefficient because the production has to pay premium rates. He budgeted a \$40 million dollar studio feature film and showed a

\$1 million dollar savings shooting the shorter day (Scarborough 1998). This empirical evidence, published in 1998, had no impact on film shooting schedules.

The Union Avoids Organizing Shows and Blunders the Shows They Try to Organize

In the early 1990s, when Gary Dunham witnessed firsthand the behavior of the IATSE organizers, he started to seriously question the union's priorities. Union members' working non-union was epidemic at the time. Dunham rarely worked non-union, "I was very fortunate. I had a lot of very good jobs, and did a lot of big projects very early on." In this case, Dunham took a job on a non-union project and tried to help organize the show. The crew worked in Alaska, and when they came back to Arizona to shoot, they got together and decided that they wanted better wages, terms and conditions, and health benefits. The French production company was, "not at all enamored with our move." This was unpleasant, but the crew had the support of the director and the actors. The company agreed to pay benefits and union scale. At that point, the crew invited the IATSE to send an organizer. Instead of speaking first with the crew, the organizer went straight to the producer, and offered a deal. The producer agreed. The IATSE organizer's deal undercut what the crew and production company had already agreed on.

After the organizer and the production company made the deal, the organizer came to the crew. Dunham says, "We were just shaking our heads. And that's where I knew we as a union--there was something seriously wrong--that there was no communication, no understanding." Other people I interviewed discussed different types of IASTE organization problems including non-responsiveness to calls to organize shoots in Los Angeles (even if the shoots were just blocks from the IATSE office) (Hart interview 2007). If the organization of a shoot was not completely popular with the crew,

IATSE organizers and the whistle-blower have been known to collude to lay the blame for organizing on another crew member (Kaplan interview 2006).

Runaway Production

As was discussed in chapter 8, a number of major shifts occurred in the motion picture industry during the 1990s, including the Canadian subsidies of film production. How individual IATSE members experienced this differed.

Tim McHugh, who works on Motion Control for films,⁵⁴ did a promotional film for a Jim Henson project. He worked about two weeks around the clock on all kinds of CGI (computer generated imagery) for them, and animation and title graphics. “They were very excited about it. They couldn't possibly have done the show without us, thanked us profusely.” McHugh sent them on their way to sell the show, and heard nothing for six months. Then, he happened to read in *Variety* that the show was going into production in Canada. When he called Henson's, they said Warner Brothers insisted it be made in Canada. The director was upset they had cut McHugh out, and worked with him to get the budget to where they'd accept it, and bring the show back. McHugh met the numbers, but Warner Brothers still said, “No, we're not interested. It's going to Canada” (McHugh interview 2006).

⁵⁴ The opening shot of *Star Wars* -- a giant spaceship that goes on forever-- is classic motion control. Motion control is attaching the camera to a computer so that a computer controls the motion of the camera. The normal things an operator does, such as panning, tilting, zooming, etc., are done by a computer. The idea is to take that motion and either speed it up or slow it down (for example, allow a camera to create a five second move, but take twenty minutes to film it so that you can race the camera around a room and not destroy the models). You can close – stop the lens way down -- so that a miniature doesn't look two feet long, but looks 300 feet long. Another application is to play that exact same move twice. If you want an actor playing two people in the same scene, you do the camera work. You block out your acting. The actor walks through the left side of the frame. Then, you press a button, and the camera does the exact same move, only the actor's now on the right side of the frame in different wardrobe. Suddenly, there are two identical actors in the same shot.

There is one clear small gain for the producers. When they use IATSE crews in Canada, the Canadian IATSE contract does not include participation in the residuals—the 5.4% of 20% of the gross of feature films’ home market of feature films the producers have contractually agreed to give to the IATSE health and pension plan with jobs shot using IATSE crew in the United States.

McHugh notes that, “All of a sudden no one I knew was working anymore.” They were losing jobs either to Canadians who were non-union, or who were also members of his union, or Canadians who were joining the IATSE as they got jobs. Although the Canadians have a separate craft union that supports Canadian labor, American film craft labor only has the IATSE. The IATSE has a built-in conflict of interest—the more Canadian film production grows, the more new members join IATSE with its large membership initiation fees and its annual dues payments. So, every time Hollywood IATSE labor loses jobs to Canada, the IATSE leadership wins more initiation fees and dues. For example, when the IATSE signs on a new Canadian director of photography, they get a \$10,000 initiation fee. Not surprisingly, IATSE mainstream leadership is silent about this conflict of interest.

The mainstream IATSE leadership’s priority, like most bureaucracies’, is its own financial survival. As has been mentioned, the IATSE’s “international” status includes *only* the U.S. and Canada. When Tom Short took office in 1994 the IA had 76,000 members (Robb 1994b). By 2005, there were over 105,000 members (Hiestand 2005). The Canadian locals have grown by tens of thousands of members in the last ten years. That money goes directly to IATSE headquarters. With that kind of cash flow, if you

only have a short-term vision as President Short seemed to, there is no reason to worry about the Hollywood locals. McHugh says,

But we are foolish enough that we pay our union dues every quarter whether we're working or not. Now you'd think that the IA's job would be to make sure that their members are working and happy and getting their health plans and everything else, but the reality is one of the last things you'll do is give up your union card. Because you can't work without your card. You're essentially retiring from the business if you give up your card. So, guys down here will pay, working or not, hoping that that next job's going to come along. And while we're continuing to pay down here without jobs, in Canada, they have, I believe, just about tripled the number of Canadian members in the last ten years. That means lots of initiation fees and lots of new membership dues.

These dues go right to IATSE headquarters in New York, thousands of miles from Hollywood. I argue that a labor union, the IATSE, is performing curiously like a transnational corporation in the sense that they're outsourcing their labor, but they don't care, because they're still making their money. McHugh adds, "They're making more money. They truly look at us as their little ATMs, their little ready teller cash machines." Every quarter, each union member sends them a check, whether they're working or not, paying up so that in case a job comes by, the member can take it (McHugh interview 2006).

The bureaucracy receives one percent of every cameraperson's check, as well (up to a ceiling of \$4,500), which leads to which leads to, as another Local 600 member put it, "the union chasing and protecting those who need it least: the big cameramen, those that work all the time, the hotshots in the business." So, it is in the interest of the mainstream IATSE leadership to coddle the big earners and disregard the rest—they lean on the big cash producers who don't need the union's help to make their millions. The IATSE's behavior goes a long way toward explaining why workers have not been able to work with IATSE to organize internationally against runaway production.

Subsidies

In its fight against runaway production, the Film and Television Action Committee (FTAC) had spent many months trying to get a bill for subsidies through the California legislature, so that Hollywood labor could compete with other workers in other locations that offered subsidies. McHugh says, “They got their political education. They went to Sacramento and got beaten up.” They were unsuccessful at getting state subsidy legislation passed. McHugh doesn’t think that was a bad thing, “I think subsidies are going to burn themselves out, because they’re designed to do that. They’re predatory in nature. Everyone’s excited today in New York City, but when Pennsylvania kicks in five percent more, the work will run down there. And then ... it will go to Chicago.” In essence it’s corporate welfare. McHugh says, “And it’s so beautifully done. You invest twenty percent in our products, and we’ll give you nothing.” He points out that when companies or individuals invest twenty percent in a film, they expect twenty percent of the profits. However, when states invest twenty percent of the cost of a movie, they get some glamour, “and I’ll get my picture taken with Julia Roberts or Tom Hanks, and we’re happy.” He admits there is some local job stimulation, but emphasizes a key point: full-time, permanent jobs, “are not created by the subsidies. They’re moved from place to place. They’re relocated by the subsidies.”⁵⁵ McHugh has an argument for people who love the idea of subsidies, especially when they’re getting them. “If you look at the Center for Entertainment Industry Data and Research (CEIDR) report, it says there are less movies being made now in total, and of those, less are being made in the States in spite of the subsidy program in the States. So, overall, it’s failing, because more work

⁵⁵ One could ask if those jobs exist in the film industry. This question can be answered with the fact that despite the “one project at a time” nature of the work, for decades many people built solid middle class lives for themselves and their families while working in the Hollywood unions.

has left the country even with the paid subsidies” (CEIDR 2006, McHugh interview 2006).

As we saw in the first stage of runaway production (Chapter 4), the negotiations about residual payments for which both the actors and the writers went on strike in the 1960s were about ownership of a “piece of the pie.” What they won (and continue to fight for and win in contract negotiations today) was an individual check going to each person who worked on a film or television project. That check is a percentage of the earnings on work they created, each time the work appears on television subsequent to its initial release. Unlike the directors, the actors, and the writers, individual IATSE members do not benefit directly from their work on a movie. Instead, from every major feature film, , the aforementioned 5.4 percent of 20 percent the gross of the home market goes into the Motion Picture Industry Pension and Health Plan (MPIPHP), which is supposed to benefit all. However, fewer and fewer members qualify for that pension, and as of 2004, over thirty-five percent of McHugh’s IATSE Local 600 members couldn’t get enough work, even using banked hours from previous years, to qualify for health insurance (Glover 2004).

McHugh’s comments suggest something which has not been discussed by any newspaper article or scholarly work I’ve found, something that in retrospect seems transparently obvious: subsidies often give the studios, in addition to cash back at the end of production (the benefits of which are not immediately obvious) a non-union labor pool which means that the studios get to keep the whole pie when it comes to profits beyond the initial release of the film. Why is this significant? As Edward Jay Epstein has demonstrated, when you clear away all the hoopla and the glamour, most of the profit

from film production today is not in its initial release (Epstein 2005). So the profit from moving production to countries where residual payments do not apply, has the added benefit for the studio of their keeping a maximum percentage of the profits where the real money is made. This relates to ownership of the fruits of labor. If one keeps one's eye on the money, one sees that the IATSE, unlike the Screen Actors Guild, Directors Guild or Writers Guild, at each contract negotiation, continues to give up its members' claims to ownership of production.

IATSE Bureaucracy--Apathy in the Face of Individual Catastrophe

In Chapter 6, we touched briefly on Brent Hershman's death in 1997. While driving home from work after a nineteen-hour work day, he fell asleep, ran off the road, and was killed. He left behind a wife, two kids, family and many friends. Gary Dunham says, "In the history, that's when everything started getting out of hand. We were working these long hours, and these inexperienced producers, and all that crap was happening." Dunham called Local 600's executive director and asked what he was going to do about it. According to Dunham, he said he would do nothing because he did not want to "piss the producers off." Dunham said, "Whoa, wait a minute. What do you mean? We have a man who has left a wife and two children. We'd better get pissed off about this." "Well, you don't understand." Click (Dunham interview 2006).

A second incident motivated Dunham to become active. Dunham's friend, Mikhail Glattes, was working on a commercial in Canada. The shoot involved helicopter work in the Llewellyn Glacier. The trained Hollywood pilot on Glattes's shoot refused to fly his helicopter the day of the shoot because he had work he needed to do. The production company said they couldn't lose a day of production. By contract, the

original trained pilot had the right not to fly, and he invoked that right. In his stead, the production company hired a local tour guide pilot, which was their right, put him in the helicopter, and sent him up to do the shot.

The use of untrained personnel during the third phase of runaway production exacerbates the risks to all. Craig Hosking, who has done film flying shoots for over twenty years says, “A new guy who has his one time chance in the Hollywood limelight may push it to try and prove himself. Non-film pilots will fixate on the shot and forget to fly the helicopter” (Winogrand 2000).

The Canadian federal aviation report said that during the first pass, the pilot came “uncomfortably close” to the ice climber, “about five feet over his head, at a high speed” (Aviation 2007). The pilot was going too fast, and he did not know any better. As a tour guide, he had no experience with work of this kind. During the second pass, “the rotor clipped it, and he went sideways, went down into a crevasse, exploded, killed the pilot, a grip, my friend, and the director/cameraman” (Dunham interview 2006). The rescue and recovery personnel determined that “recovery would present a high risk to personnel. There was no recovery” (Transport Canada 2000).

When Dunham found out about the accident, he wanted the union to file a wrongful death suit immediately, because there was clear negligence. He called the union and said, “We can’t allow these people to get away with this.” The union representative told him, “Butt out.” In the present-day environment, the rank-and-file have no recourse, and find no sympathy from mainstream IATSE leadership, about circumstances that are actually killing the membership. In response, Dunham started

reaching out to people he knew, including other members of FTAC and concerned union members. They started meeting and organizing.

For people who joined them, the message was compelling. One camera person told me,

I was like one of those bees that finds this little home of other bees. It's like, 'Oh my god! There are people who...' I had no idea these people existed... These were people that were concerned about working conditions and about the individual and how people are going to survive and pay their mortgages and have health insurance and take care of their families" (Anonymous interview 2006).

They developed a platform involving combating runaway production, acting with democratic values, such as workers' rights, economic transparency, budgetary accountability, integrity of self and organization.

Yet Another Thing That Drove Some Members to Activism

Local 600, with about 5,700 members, is among the hardest hit IATSE locals when it comes to the impact of the third phase of runaway production. On December 4, 2001, IATSE International President Tom Short sent a letter to the Commerce Department stating the IATSE official position was that the membership was not affected by runaway production: "Members of our union are not being harmed by the imports (economic runaway productions)" (iatse.org). The arguments in Short's letter are a curious throwback to the first phase of runaway production: without citing the producers directly, he summarizes *their* arguments of the 1950s and 1960s as if they were those of the union rank-and-file. As has been stated previously, the Commerce Department's findings differed from Short's. Their report stated that over \$10 billion was lost annually, which included losses to IATSE members (Kiefer 2001a). In order to fight job loss, the workers have to confront their own industry, a condition which even the United States Commerce Department finds unusual (McHugh interview 2006).

How Dunham became the Presidential candidate

Dunham never saw himself as the leader, “I’m a soldier.” He talked to scores of people about being president. No one else who was working with him on the campaign wanted the job. They said, “Are you out of your mind? It’s the kiss of death.” Dunham says that you have two choices as Local 600 president. If you want to support the “status quo, and sit in the office and smoke cigars and put on your tux and go to all the events, it’s a great job,” and you’ll get as much work in the industry, “as you can imagine.” Dunham adds, “If you want to come in and exact any kind of change, and if you want to go against the machine, it will kill you. Your career is gone” (Dunham interview 2006). Several Local 600 members corroborated this account. One said, “It’s career suicide” (Anonymous interview 2006).

How did he become the presidential nominee? “Everybody stepped one step back [laughs] and I was left standing alone. [laughs] And that’s just about – that’s pretty much it” (Dunham interview 2006).

In April 2004, Dunham’s group, called the “Coalition for Democratic Union” (CDU), ran for office. They ran for office on a platform related to members’ key concerns about “a more assertive stance” on combating runaway production, getting more member health care, finding sufficient work for members, and on implementing democratic processes and transparency within the union (McNary 2004). They challenged Stephen Lighthill, the chosen successor of the retiring incumbent of nearly two decades, President George Dible and his officers. They won a surprise victory (Hiestand 2004). Dunham and his entire slate—five officers—won five seats out of the seven national officer positions and about 30 seats on the Local 600 National Executive Board. Soon afterward,

Screen Actors Guild progressives also swept out the incumbents in a surprise victory (HR 2004).

Blacklisting in the IATSE today

The 2005 convention for the entire IATSE was held in Hawaii. (President Short claimed they should change the convention from every three years to every four years to save money (Kiefer 2001b). Then, he held the convention at one of the most expensive resort areas in the country.) Tim McHugh, way down on the list of delegates, was not supposed to go. He was in New York where his son was going to perform at Carnegie Hall. He started to get panicked phone calls saying, “Everybody's dropping out. You're going to the convention, if you want to go.” It seemed suspicious to him that suddenly so many people could not go. Just before he left, he got a fax from IATSE President Short. This fax, sent to all the IATSE Locals, made untrue statements about McHugh, claiming he was a hypocrite fighting runaway production since (the fax claimed) the only shows McHugh worked on were shot in Canada. An example given was *Return to Oz* (1985). That film was shot in England, during the second phase of runaway production, when this was not being contested. (In the fax, Short did not mention McHugh's Emmy awards or the fact that McHugh's production company was in Los Angeles.)⁵⁶

McHugh was forced to respond, because the fax also claimed he worked on many non-union shows. President Short did not acknowledge that the work McHugh had done was all in the union. McHugh worked in California at the Walt Disney Company, on the union lot in the union visual effects division. Disney could also produce shows, of course, that were non-union. The fax also claimed that McHugh had worked on a film in

⁵⁶ McHugh did not mention his Emmy awards either. I read about them in the newspaper (Los Angeles Times 2001, 2003).

Tennessee, as if this were wrong. McHugh points out, “The Tennessee in question is actually the one in the United States.” FTAC only opposes production outside the United States. (Given the International’s aforementioned look-the-other-way policies regarding non-union work, this fax is particularly noteworthy.) (Dunham interview 2006, McHugh interview 2006).

A blacklist, as previously defined in the introduction, is “a list of persons who are disapproved of or are to be punished or boycotted” (Webster’s 1999:119). Blacklisting is putting someone on such a list. This incident falls well within the boundaries of that definition. In this case, it is a blacklist of one. The newspaper people started calling McHugh not to hear about FTAC and their fight against runaway production, but asking if he was going to respond to all the charges that he was a “non-union scab.”

It put McHugh on the defensive. By the time he arrived at the convention (he found, as he suspected, IATSE leadership had arranged for him to get there), he was being “flyered.” People were distributing flyers about him outside the convention center, and outside of meeting rooms. The flyers repeated the untrue statements about McHugh’s work record. Because in the motion picture industry jobs come by word-of-mouth, being flyered can be considered a modern-day form of blacklisting that leads to job loss. The flyers marked McHugh as a man not to be hired. At the convention, in front of the entire delegation, Local 600 President Gary Dunham asked who was responsible for the flyering going on outside.⁵⁷ IATSE President Short claimed responsibility (Everett 2005).

⁵⁷ Dunham’s account of the incident is as follows: “I asked the president, Tom Short. I said, ‘Who’s responsible for these flyers? ... These are delegates to this convention. These are union brothers and sisters.... These flyers are derogatory. They’re blacklisting, and they’re everything that we stand against, and I want to know who is responsible for them.’ And [Short] said, ‘Well, if you want to know what it is,

Short said it was, “Free speech,” and the crowd roared. In the IATSE, as with many unions, the principles of democracy are mostly used as rhetorical tropes in demagogic practices (Nicholson 2004). It’s a well-known and horrifying twist that unions, which emerged to protect workers, have become a machinery that helps destroy them (Nicholson 2004).

A few months later in the *Los Angeles Times*, President Short alleged Local 600 leadership was out of touch because its people are “chronically unemployed.” He neglected to mention his role in their difficulty getting work--his blacklisting (Verrier 2006b).⁵⁸ Most of President Short’s officers, and Short himself, do not work in film, nor do they live in the Los Angeles area. The IATSE headquarters is in New York City. It would be more accurate for Short to say that he and his officers are “out of touch.”

Since the convention, McHugh’s phone has rung a lot less.

As was discussed in Chapter 4, in the 1950s, the IATSE leader Roy Brewer directed blacklisting toward writers, directors, actors and below-the-line workers whom he alleged were communists and threats to the state; and this fanned a conflagration of media attention. Today blacklisting from IATSE leadership is directed toward its own

Gary, it's called free speech.’ And the whole auditorium [yelled], ‘Yah!’” Dunham replied, “No... I want to know who – are you aware of this and do you condone this, as the president of this organization?” Short said he did. Dunham said, “Fine.” Another man from New York, one of Short’s “New York cronies,” stood and said, “Well, is it true?” Dunham says, “That's where I lost it. I had gone back to the table, and we were sitting in the back of the convention hall. And I stood up and I held up my hand and I said, ‘It doesn't matter if it's true or not. This is unsigned sleaze. I want to know who the fucking coward is that would put this stuff out. Who is the coward that does not sign their work?’ And I screamed it loud enough for the entire floor to hear it. And Tom Short at the podium said, ‘Well, I'll take pride of authorship in those.’ And I said, ‘Okay.’ And then I sat down” (Dunham interview 2006).

⁵⁸ Short recently tried this bad-mouthing technique again with the president of another union, Patric Verrone of the Writers Guild, saying the leadership was out of touch with writers because it was run by “certain officers who don’t work in the industry.” Verrone replied, “our board of directors for the first time is made up almost entirely of people who are currently working members in the industry.” (Hiestand 2006, Verrier 2007).

members who are trying to save their fellow workers' jobs. Those blacklisted workers only threaten the bottom lines of the transnational corporations. This behavior in the film industry gets no mass media attention possibly because it targets below-the-line labor (and unlike the blacklisting that occurred during what are commonly thought of as the "blacklist years" in Hollywood, it doesn't look like the government is complicit). It has received only passing mention in scholarly literature (Wright 2006).

The Clash of Art and Craft

Among scholars, the debate about what is art and what is craft is widely viewed as academic hairsplitting. In the film world, the distinction between art and craft is not merely semantic. It is political. In discussing the paradoxical relationship between artistic production and the nature of the work, one camera assistant commented,

It's blue collar work, but it is artistic – it's a craft. And people are asked to do very beautiful pieces of construction or whatever, and then it's ripped apart and thrown away the next day. So, it's really – it's disposable. And in fact, your job is disposable. There's a saying, "You're only as good as your last movie." You have to be able to kill your darlings – that's a saying that editors say on takes and all that, "Kill your darlings." That's what people do all the time. It's like you spend your day starting from zero, building these things, pulling them down, building and pulling them down, and then doing the same thing over and over again. It's like you're clean, you get messy. You clean up, you mess up. You clean up, you mess up. You clean up.... Nothing really exists ... when it comes down to it (Kaplan interview 2006).

There's nothing permanent to film production. According to union rules, as was discussed, every film job is a day hire—the producers can fire you, without cause or explanation, at the end of each day. Everything is so transient, the job, the staff, the sets, even the image moving in the product. The actors, the writers, and the directors get public credit for being artists, and a great deal of mass-media attention. Some below-the-line IATSE workers, including cinematographers and sound effects specialists,

sometimes receive Academy Awards, but there is a costly tension within the union, a kind of snobbery that comes out of the tension between art and craft.

Film production is a strange world. People can work alongside others who know an enormous amount, or who have even invented some of the lighting or special techniques that are then used by camera crews worldwide. These knowledgeable and creative workers rarely get credit for that, “and it makes the movie.” A person who is famous within film production, may still be earning \$23.50 an hour, while by comparison a drug-addicted star who spends most of the shoot passed out in a trailer is paid millions. The crew may act deferential on a set toward the inventor, and at the same time, the creative workers can be very “passive aggressive,” with a “Nobody gives me any credit for what I do” attitude. A camera assistant noted that, “There are the people who rise above it, but those are the really good people. And when you get to work with someone like that, it is just like a little slice of heaven, because they really know what they're doing. They've gone above and beyond all the crap that doesn't matter” (Kaplan interview 2006).

There are social costs to the theories of art-making that hold sway in Hollywood production. These have to do with the “human consequences of institutional relationships” (Nielsen 1983:48). The collaborators in the art of filmmaking who are below-the-line go largely un-credited. People need to be acknowledged both with respect and with appropriate compensation for the contributions they make to work. The lack of this can be deeply felt as an injustice which can be corrosive to worker morale in the everyday work environment. Very few people can rise above this (Kaplan interview 2006).

They often take it out on each other with larger consequences. At the time of the research for this project, the IATSE local 600 had recently elected Gary Dunham as president. Dunham had always worked as an assistant cameraman. In the hierarchy, Directors of Photography supervise camera assistants. In his local, the director of photography is “top dog,” followed by operators, first assistant, and second assistant, and loaders. Dunham faced difficulties based on the hierarchies within the union local membership (Hart interview 2007). For example, one cinematographer I spoke with mentioned that the American Society of Cinematographers (an organization of DPs), most of whom are Local 600 members, refused to let Dunham in the door the first time he tried to speak with them as their president. Their Board did not want Dunham there. The tension between art and craft is not merely an abstract concept. It impedes those who would shift the focus to larger issues including making progress in the fight against runaway production.

Lack of Diversity

The Hollywood janitors union has had extraordinary recent public success in their campaign for justice. The strength of their union grew exponentially as they encouraged diversity in hiring. It may again be snobbery that allows the IATSE to ignore this success: janitors work in non-prestigious Hollywood jobs. However, their overlooking the janitors’ example seems shortsighted. (It is noteworthy that the janitor’s success was supported from the top: AFL-CIO leader John Sweeney actively encouraged diversity hiring (Frochtzwajg 2006, Erickson et. al. 2002, Erickson et. al undated).)

The IATSE lacks significant interest in having the strength of diversity. In the 2004 membership survey, Local 600’s members--over 85% of whom are white males--

were given an option about encouraging diversity in hiring. Over half--50.9 percent--reported that they did not want to encourage diversity (Glover 2004.)

To this day, the larger IATSE International leadership actively suppresses data about the lack of diversity in below-the-line work (Glover correspondence 2007).⁵⁹ The membership is 85.9 percent white and 86.5 percent male. Of the 511 people who reported experiencing discrimination (of any kind), 211 did not report it out of fear of reprisal. Forty-six percent of the women reported that they had been discriminated against or harassed. The odds were two to one that if a member reported the harassment to Local 600, the member did not receive any help from the union (Glover 2004).

Lack of diversity creates problems. The following example is just one small instance of a systemic problem. From the top down, in the IATSE organization, the behavior and actions I describe below are socially accepted by many. President Dunham attempted to rein in an abusive regional business agent, and get him help for his ongoing problem with sexual harassment. The agent, a paid employee of IATSE, was out of control, alienating the film community, harassing people, angering everybody, and giving Local 600 a bad reputation. He had acted unchecked for years under George Dible's presidency. Local 600, under Dunham's leadership, arranged a settlement agreement with the member and his attorney which included the member getting counseling. Rather than dealing with his problems, the member quit his job, and wrote Dunham a letter blaming him and calling him and his staff "evil" and "the devil." In keeping with the practices of business unionism, namely protecting the members of the bureaucracy at the expense of the rank-and-file, the mainstream IATSE leadership, under the direction of Tom Short,

⁵⁹ 1,923 people responded of the approximately 6,000 members who were sent the Survey.

then arranged for the former business agent to work for a different IATSE local. The man received neither counseling nor help (Dunham interview 2006, anonymous interview 2006).

Culture of Fear

Fear is also an issue in union member inactivity. After Dunham began working on the problem with the out-of-control business agent, people who had been harassed thanked Dunham for what he is trying to do. On a one-to-one basis, many people understand and express gratitude to Dunham for his efforts. As a group, they are chastened by what Dunham calls a “culture of fear” (Dunham interview 2006). Another IATSE member I spoke with said, “They’re so afraid and they’re so apathetic, and they’ve been so conditioned and beaten, they quiver when you suggest [democratic values and speaking up for themselves.]”

This fear also manifests at the local level. At the time of the Tim McHugh interview, FTAC was in final phase of fundraising to file a petition with the World Trade Organization that could help lessen runaway production. Local 44 (the prop makers, set dressers, etc.), the largest Hollywood IA local in terms of membership, gave \$150,000. They divided it into quarterly payments of \$37,500, with the idea that the second, third, and fourth quarter would be matching funds. This would challenge other unions to get involved. Because an element within Local 44 was afraid of President Short, they never issued a press release. Tim McHugh has had more than one conversation about the usefulness of a secret matching fund, “The whole idea, guys, we laid this strategy out for a campaign. You were going to get there. We could do a big press release, and let the whole town know that this was there, and that was going to generate all this money.”

Local 44 representatives replied, “Yeah, we can't do that.” They refused to make it public. Recently, Electricians IA Local 728 at a general membership meeting voted to kick in \$37,500 to the fund, knowing that they were matching Local 44. However, the executive board of 728 overruled their membership, and voted not to send the check. Apparently President Short told their business agent, “Whatever you do, don't cut that check” (McHugh interview 2006).

Many people I spoke with would not put their names on the record for fear of blacklisting. The culture of fear has to do with the implied threat that if you speak up, you will not get work in the industry.⁶⁰ Gary Dunham is a-typical. He says of President Short, “I am the only one in the room that he doesn't intimidate. What are you going to do? Ruin my career? [laughs]. I don't have a career [anymore].” Dunham adds, “It's a huge battle to win the hearts and the minds, to empower people to say, ‘Your voice does count, and you won't die. You will not die in this country if you speak your opinion.’”

Tim McHugh said of Dunham, “He's paid a very heavy price for standing up for us.” I asked Dunham about what it has cost him. He put in thousands of unpaid hours. He spent about \$1,000 a month out of pocket to be president (for gasoline, phone bills, odds and ends). He had no income, and no health coverage. During their term, Dunham and members of his staff were hospitalized for stress-related illnesses: Dunham had pneumonia.

Dunham adds, “It's cost my family a tremendous amount. I am on call 24/7. I put in about sixty hours a week in the union business.... I will sit on the phone in the back yard discussing something and watch my family through the patio prepare dinner, eat it, clean up, and move into the other room. It's surreal.” As another example of the

⁶⁰ See also Rick Fantasia and Debra Friedman on collective identity and activism.

cost to his family he mentions a derogatory document recently faxed to his house. His daughter picked up the fax, “It’s my daughter reading this stuff about her dad.” I ask him what the spouses say in response to incidents like this, “I want a divorce [laughter]. I didn’t sign on for this sort of thing.”

What about his career? He says, “What career [laughs] No, I mean, it’s done. My phone stopped ringing, and I knew it would stop ringing when I became active years ago.” Why is he doing it?

Because it’s the right thing to do... One of my biggest peeves is if you’re going to complain about something, you’d better do something about it. Otherwise, just shut up, because nobody wants to hear you cry...I think that we’re making some serious mistakes, long term mistakes at this moment, and that’s my responsibility to bring that to the table. There are some fundamental things that are right and wrong. [For example,] you don’t pocket money and tell people lies. Because this has been happening, it needs to be exposed.

He continues, “We are our own worst enemy. The IA is killing itself. Local 600, the staff we have, when they’re in it for their own gain, when they’re in it for the bureaucracy, they keep the membership at arm’s length, and they’re destroying themselves.”

As an interviewer, I was struck by Dunham’s lack of concern for his own survival. He says, “When I left home when I was sixteen, and I slept in the bushes, you know what? Either you die or you live. And I’m a guy that’s going to live.” He adds about making change within the union,

The more people that stand up ... I don't see any other way of doing it. That's the issue. I don't do it because I think it's noble or anything. It's bigger. It's really the only way I can see that works. When you cave, then they've got you. If you can't say no, you can't negotiate. You lose your ability to command your own life (Dunham interview 2006).

The professional bureaucrats within the system are chained, and that chain insures their adherence to the practices which seem so (to understate it) counterproductive.

Dunham’s “unchainedness” gives him a peculiar freedom. He can walk away. He says,

“It wasn’t that good of a career if I’m going to lose it over speaking my mind. It’s not a career I want. I’d rather pump gas and be free than be a coward and be in the movie business.” Among the film works Dunham helped create during his career were *Matchstick Men* (2003), *Hannibal* (2001), *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), *The X-Files* (1998), *Face Off* (1997), *Air Force 1* (1997), *One Fine Day* (1996), *Outbreak* (1995), *Waterworld* (1995), *Cape Fear* (1991), and *Baywatch* (1989), and many commercials (imdb.com).

More IATSE Threats

The IATSE flyering does not limit itself to the people who are active in the CDU. They also recently included the domestic partner of a member of the CDU. The partner worked in the industry but was not politically active. She left the industry. Some threats are even more serious. People I spoke with under conditions of anonymity reported threats of violence and death as a result of their work for democratic transparency in Local 600 (Anonymous interview 2007).

What he tried to do: Successes

Dunham counts as his biggest success the fact that the victory of his slate brought to the table important ideas about the future viability of the union in light of its own dealings and runaway production. Before his tenure none of these central issues were raised in a substantive way.

Leadership success also takes place on a micro-level. The “IA Way” is shouting and bullying, not reasoning, and has been that way for at least fifty years (Hart interview 2007). Because there had been no democratic participation within the Local up to that

time, at Local 600 meetings under Dunham's leadership, he implemented the use of *Roberts Rules of Order*,⁶¹ so people had the tools to have a voice at meetings. "Now they know that the minority has rights, that there are ways to do things... And they've used it a lot to torture me, but I think in the long run, that's good... I don't get away with anything, which is brilliant, because... the last president would say, 'You're out of order. Sit down and shut up,' and that would be it. End of conversation. That will never happen again." In this way, Dunham has made sure that at least on the micro-level, members understand how to implement democratic processes.

In our interview, Dunham was modest about his successes. The trade papers were more forthcoming about other successes of Dunham and CDU. The local officially reversed the guild's previous policy and supported federal investigation into runaway production (McNary 2005a, 2005b). In addition, Dunham and his team took the first steps to implement transparency by sending out a membership survey, in order to gather real data about the membership, including diversity statistics (the data from this survey is reported throughout this project). A survey had never been considered, much less implemented (Glover discussion 2008).

The end of Dunham's term

In 2006, the Local 600 National Executive Board abruptly removed Dunham from office, allegedly because Dunham allowed information to be posted to the Local 600 website that the loss of the camera operator position in the contract was harmful to the membership (McNary 2006a, 2006b). Further, Dunham urged members to vote against the contract for that reason. President Short himself had actually negotiated away the

⁶¹ This is widely considered the "bible" of correct procedures in running meetings.

camera operator position in the contract.⁶² In the report of this incident, *Variety* wrote that Short's negotiation of the camera operator concession, "was widely viewed as a rebuke to Local 600 for electing leaders in 2004, including Dunham, who ran on a platform opposing longtime IATSE President Tom Short" (McNary 2006a).

Dunham sees this as the cost of speaking up, "the nail that sticks up gets hammered down." What does Short want?

If it looks like Local 600 is gaining power within the bargaining unit [the Hollywood locals] ... he will cut us off at the knees. He does not want us to be powerful. He wants complete control. He wants the ... Hollywood locals to just be whipped into submission, and never to challenge anything that he does (Dunham interview 2006).

Short allegedly did this to secure the IATSE status with the producers as a bought-and-paid-for sweetheart union, in order to maintain, "the systems that the IATSE works out to most efficiently deliver a work force" to the studios, no matter the cost (Wexler interview 2007).

Because Dunham believes that his removal from office is a travesty that should be brought to the attention of a court of law, he sought out an attorney. Lawyers he spoke with were gung-ho until they heard the name "Tom Short." Then they recused themselves. One said to Dunham, "This conversation never happened." The "culture of fear" reverberates widely in Hollywood (Dunham interview 2006, Verrier 2007, Robb 1995).

Frames of understanding

Even though George Lakoff discussed Republicans and Democrats, his insights about the family-style allegiance of members of large social structures may also shed

⁶² Neither I nor union members with whom I consulted (who were familiar with the contracts), could find a union regulation stating that allowing a letter to be posted to a website telling membership about a potential danger, is just cause for removal from office.

light on union issues. Lakoff talked about the Republican "strict father" and Democratic "nurturant parent" frames. According to Lakoff, if you think within the "strict father" frame, you believe the world is dangerous, difficult and competitive, and what the world needs is a strong, strict father to protect and support the family, and teach children right from wrong. Union members who think according to the strict father model were content to go along and do what they were told by President Short. Dad has always taken care of them, and they have no need to think for themselves, read their contract, or understand the terms under which they are working. It must be emphasized that despite the many concessions in union contracts with the producers, many members of the Hollywood locals have made a great living, for many years, by just following along and doing what they're told. A not-questioning attitude has paid off. It's hard to change and wake up to realize too much has been bargained away by "Dad" and one has to be an adult responsible for one's own actions.

Part of the reason Dunham and his slate were elected was because the union members were starting to understand how much they had lost during the Dible years by just letting everything slide, and letting "Dad" take care of it.

By contrast, in Lakoff's model, in the "nurturant parent" frame, both nurturant parents take responsibility for child-rearing. They believe in practicing empathy and responsibility, that children are "born good and can be made better" and that their job is to make the world a "better place." They believe in "open, two-way communication." Out of empathy comes protection of children, and of the environment. Out of empathy also comes the values of freedom, opportunity, prosperity, and fairness (Lakoff 2004:7-13). At his best, Dunham works from the nurturing parent frame. He believes it is the

duty of members to participate in democratic processes within the union, to speak for themselves, to read their contract and learn what they are fighting for, what they have lost, and most important, to work together to recover it.

Lakoff argues that, "People think in frames. The strict father and nurturing parent frames each force a certain logic. To be accepted, the truth must fit people's frames. If the facts do not fit a frame, the frame stays and the facts bounce off" (Lakoff 2004:17). I think that the "frames" Lakoff mentions also relate to the receptive categories in peoples' psyches where stereotypes "stick," take hold and are nurtured.

Lakoff's model may apply to issues that emerged in the conflicts Dunham faced within his own union. The membership benefited from the "strict father" model. Those who believe in that model have trouble hearing inconvenient facts about the nature and future of the organization of which they are a part. Their behavior shows a childlike attitude. They think it's enough that they elected Dunham and now it's his job to make everything transparent and democratic, and do what he can to fight runaway production. The habit of thinking for themselves has not taken hold, and they are not interested in expanding and broadening their world view. Another of Dunham's innovations was to provide all members of his National Executive Board (NEB) with the facts, the documents and contracts. The NEB basically makes the policy of Local 600. "My position," Dunham says, "has always been that they need to have as much information as possible to make the proper decisions." In one information binder he also included Plato's allegory of the cave. (In a prescient critique of mass-media culture, Plato describes people who sit in a cave and look at pictures on the wall cast by shadows from the outside world, rather than experiencing the world directly.) Dunham acknowledges

he was probably the only union leader in history to hand that out. Nobody read it. Nor did they read the contract. Their attitude was, “I don’t want to be bothered with it. I’ve already got my mind made up. Don’t confuse me with the facts.” Most of the non-CDU members of the Executive Board are adamant non-readers. Dunham says, “When you question them about issues, they don’t have a clue. They’ve never read the contract.... They don’t have an argument on any issue. All they have is venom.” In a post-modern twist, everyone has a computer and has email. “Flaming” is rampant. If the membership receives an email sent to the entire list from a respected elder, they don’t check the facts or their contract, but instead they simply attack verbally and sometimes physically whomever was identified as a bad guy, regardless of whether the information is true or false. The “IA Way” is to “shout down anyone you don’t like—large grown men scream like spoiled children” (Hart interview 2007). The internet provides a new venue for this.

Speculation about rank-and-file passivity or about boiling frogs

In addition to the obstacles to change related to member’s hard-and-fast frames, there is also what Tim McHugh calls the problem of boiling frogs. McHugh always worked before the runaway production took off, “The jobs were there. We were in demand. It was a wonderful business to be in, ten to twenty years ago.” Most IATSE members didn’t pay attention during that time, as, slowly and methodically, their leadership gave away benefits at the bargaining table. McHugh says, “We were kind of like boiled frogs... If you take a frog and stick it in some lukewarm water, he’ll be happy. You turn it up a degree, and you turn it up a degree, and if you do it slowly enough, the frog’s not going to realize it’s being boiled until it’s too late.” McHugh’s report of this

“frogboiling” is significant because it is such an incremental process that it is never reported in the newspapers.

During the second phase of runaway production, although the IATSE leadership did not need to do so, they conceded valuable bargaining points. In 1988, as was mentioned, before Tom Short became president, President Di Tolla “gave away weekends.” Weekends were no longer Saturday and Sunday. IATSE members worked any five days out of seven, which means a film worker might start on a Friday and work until Tuesday. McHugh refers to that as a “family killer,” because all of a sudden, film workers now were on a totally different schedule from their spouses and kids. Getting work meant they never saw their families. According to McHugh and others I interviewed, that destroyed many relationships and a lot of families.⁶³ When union leadership gave that away, the rank-and-file didn't know it at that time, because none of them were deeply involved in the negotiations. “We just read the *Variety*, and like clockwork, every three years, yet another contract was signed.” They did not get a copy of the basic agreement before it was signed. They were not consulted in a meaningful way about the desired outcome of negotiations. And finally they received a copy about a year after it went into effect.

Granted the agreements are not simple to understand. They are written in legalese, and they're hundreds of pages long. It takes a certain kind of temperament to want to read through it. Unfortunately, that kind of temperament is necessary to keep unions strong.

⁶³ This is consistent with the general findings of sociologists about work, “The way in which a man makes a living and the kind of living he makes have important consequences for how the man sees himself and is seen by others; and these, in turn, importantly shape his relationships with family members, lovers, friends, and neighbors (Liebow 1967:136).”

If you ask most IATSE members, “What contract are you working under? What are the provisions of those contracts?” you hear back, “My union takes care of that.” You get a check, and that's it. The closest the membership ever came to revolting, actually paying attention, occurred when they changed the dues structure at the merger (in the late 1990s, Local 600 was formed out of three separate camera guilds from the west coast, the east coast and the central region) so members would have to pay their dues annually. McHugh says, “The people went nuts over that. They decided to make it automatically taken out of your check each week so you wouldn't feel the pain.” When it's automatically deducted, individual members do not have to pay a lump sum of thousands of dollars at the end of the year. People don't notice. They don't feel it as much. “It's the boiled frog again. Another version of it” (McHugh interview 2006).

Conclusion

[Trade Unions] have not only improved the economic position of the worker, but have also had the important psychological effect of giving him a feeling of strength and significance in comparison with the giants he is dealing with. Unfortunately many unions themselves have grown into mammoth organizations in which there is little room for the initiative of the individual members. He pays his dues and votes from time to time but here again he is small cog in a large machine. It is of utmost importance that the unions become organs supported by the active co-operation of each member and of organizing them in such a way that each member may actively participate in the life of the organization and feel responsible for what is going on.

--Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, 126

It's very difficult to maintain union principles and values in this industry ... The most difficult is to take care of one another and to basically not work outside the union contract. I think fundamentally that's the most important. [Union principles involve] taking care of one another. That's what unions are about. ... You agree at what rate, what conditions you will work under. You don't undermine that, so that everybody's on a level playing field. And if everybody is singing the same song, they've got no place to go... If everybody's asking for the same amount and you look at ten different people, your decision will be based on qualifications, not who works for the least amount of money.

--Gary Dunham, IATSE Local 600 president (2006)

Dunham says the CDU's biggest failure was they could not seem to get the members as a group to "engage in their own future...." Dunham muses, "I know that as a union, we will never survive if the members don't take responsibility for themselves, and actually show up at meetings, actually read their contract, honor their contract, and talk with one another about issues." He used to think member inactivity occurred because they weren't allowed to participate, but his opening up the possibility of participation did not change that inactivity. He thinks two factors are involved: laziness and fear.

He could see this when he went to east coast union meetings involving members of what used to be Local 644 (and is now part of Local 600), "It's a different union. It's a real union. People are interested. They know one another. They honor the contract. They read the contract."⁶⁴ West coast members, even those on the National Executive Board, don't do these things. Dunham thinks it may only be, "pain and suffering" that will get them to act. If they were willing to strike during contract negotiations, they could make change, because the producers are "not going to shoot a movie without our cinematographers and without our crews. They still can't get the insurance...The amount of work that's out there...at this point in time, they do not have the work force to fill that up. They have to have us. That's not always going to be the case" (Dunham interview 2006, Hart interview 2007). (President Short foreclosed the possibility of a strike by starting contract negotiations ten months prior to the expiration of the contract (Kiefer 2002)).

⁶⁴ The East Coast local 644 had a tradition of independent leadership and a strong active membership. It is alleged that part of the reason the locals merged was to bring the autonomous East Coast local under mainstream IATSE control. It has cost East Coast members in wages and benefits. The Local fought the merger in court and lost (Hart interview 2007).

The work is in their hands, from the top of the union to the bottom. For example, the IATSE President has the power to stop runaway production, “All he’d have to do is say something and the insurance companies wouldn’t insure those pictures.” A major motion picture could not be bonded, or get insurance, unless they budgeted for a union crew. No film would get bonded if there was a possibility of a work stoppage. Dunham points out that the unions to this day underestimate their power. Runaway productions, many of which are partially staffed by American union crews, would have the power to shut down productions if they had a sense of their own power, and their union behind them.

Of the key people I interviewed for this project, Douglas Hart is still working in the industry. Carisa Kaplan was permanently injured on a Burt Reynolds production at a non-studio location shoot--a truckload of camera equipment fell on her and nearly killed her. Gary Dunham has moved to Wisconsin and started a new life with his family. Tim McHugh is working in Los Angeles. Octogenarian Haskell Wexler is still working in the industry. The people I spoke with under conditions of anonymity are still working, sporadically. Runaway production, still a terrible problem, has been temporarily slightly offset by multi-billion-dollar subsidies in the states, and the weak American dollar.

Chapter 10. Conclusion: The Cost of America Exporting its Creative Labor

We were warned about this situation by philosophers...It's too bad we weren't warned by celebrities, or we would have listened.

--Choire Sicha, Managing Editor, *Gawker*

When a nation or a state enters into the incentives “racket,” and hosts a Hollywood filmmaking project, they use taxpayer revenues to subsidize production in their area. Over and over, we see that what they get for this subsidy is temporary employment for some workers who want film work, and the fantasy--for until now it has always been a fantasy--that they are planting the seeds of an indigenous film making community that will aid in the preservation of their local culture. To this date, no investing nation or region has negotiated for a percentage of the gross in exchange for their investment.

In the United States, the regional costs of runaway production vary, depending on which part of the industry you are speaking about. For example, in New York, incentives currently make it possible for film workers not to have to worry much about runaways. The taxpayers cough up half a billion dollars, and New York union labor continues to work. For now. Until some state offers the studios a better deal.

The issues are similar in foreign production. For example, in the Botswana government's recent deal to make *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* on location rather than on a back lot, the government contributed \$5 million to financing the film. In return Botswana received, “not only the economic benefits of housing and servicing a major film but also hands-on training in moviemaking that officials hope will sow the seeds of a film industry” (Wines 2007). *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* arguably was not a runaway production (made largely to escape organized labor costs), because the film used

the authentic location from the original book. However, this film project followed the usual pattern of studio exploitation of new areas: they used non-union workers and talked about them in the customary warm paternalistic manner. Minghella told *The New York Times* that filming did not always go smoothly largely because the process was mostly new to Botswana crews and extras. “These are generous people ... You ask for a chair, and they’ll bring you three tables.” The locals, as always, had a resource—themselves—that had not yet been exploited, but the very act of filming, as usual, ruined this resource. “There was an upside to making a film with novices, [the late Minghella] said, including a natural purity of expression that most Western actors must manufacture. ‘We know too much about the result of being photographed.’” In this way, the exploitation cycle begins again (Wines 2007).

The cost to America

In order to define “the cost to America,” one must specify which America one is referring to. In the America where “the business of America is business,” nothing has been lost, because people don’t matter, profit does. We need go no further. It is valid to destroy the American creative labor force for that reason. This is a highly instrumental view, one that is shared by many producers. For example, Jack Grossberg, who was in charge of the production of *King Kong* (1976) said, “The most important thing is getting the picture done. All the rest is bullshit” (Bahrenburg 1976:189).

There are other costs if you think of America differently. I care about keeping American labor making American movies. I do not claim to be a knee-jerk lover of America or labor unions. Rather, I believe America’s commitment to democratic values, and the dignity of each person (as embodied in the Declaration of Independence,

Constitution, and Bill of Rights) stand for what is finest in the human experiment. At its best, the content of American moviemaking demonstrates that commitment. In those movies the creativity, hope, humor, courage, enthusiasm, and entertainment make for an emblematic product, one that contains within in it the possibility of global transformation for the betterment of all. And in that creativity lies America's prosperity. As Ray Harryhausen said about *King Kong* (1933), "Inspiration is a quantifiable commodity. It spawned a tidal wave of creativity...The snowball begins with *Kong* and leads to *Star Wars*..." (Bonus 2005).

When we talk about cost, other factors contribute to the discussion. We can go beyond *King Kong* to discuss the costs at the general level of film content, and at the level of the film workers' lives. They are intimately connected.

In terms of film content, when American creativity leaves a film, there are more general costs and losses that are hard to quantify. According to Gary Dunham:

When you look at a French film or you look at an Italian film or German film, it's not about what's said. It's about how it's said. It's about the lighting. It's the feel. It's the movement. It's everything. It's the nuance. And that is what we're going to lose, that interesting part of us that represents us as the melding of all the different cultures, of who we are and what we are and how young we are and what we are becoming and what we have been from the 1940s, the 1950s, and the 1960s. When we take that away we take away the subtext of it, which is the crew, which is the directors, which is all of the actors and everybody that's coming up through the ranks.... We're going to lose that subtlety that is uniquely ours (Dunham interview 2006).

Tim McHugh adds,

We're storytellers. And every culture has their story. We tell them over and over again, and I think this is the first time in the history of time that a nation has decided to outsource its storytelling to other nations. I mean, what would Japan have been like ... if they said, "You know what? We're not going to tell our stories. We're going to hire Chinese to tell stories for us." What would that have done to their culture over a couple of hundred years? (McHugh interview 2006)

I imagine a ladder as a metaphor for how the American movie industry used to be: you could actually climb up and "make it," make a middle-class decent living in the industry.

But when the film jobs between janitor and producer go to non-American workers, runaway production cuts out all the rungs from the ladder except at the very top and bottom. There's no longer a way to get up the ladder. About the runaway production incentives that require Hollywood productions to use local talent in the countries where they shoot, McHugh says,

We're currently giving away ... our next generation of storytellers and actors and writers [to] the people [in other countries] that are currently getting a job as extras and bit players that could have graduated to being the next Humphrey Bogart two generations ago, or even one generation ago. We're not going to have that next generation. So, whatever level of art you want to ascribe to motion pictures and television, we're not going to have it (McHugh interview 2006).

This employment problem in the ranks is reflected in the content of film. The analysis of *King Kong* showed that during the studio system period in American filmmaking, working people were valued as characters. The successive re-makes of *King Kong* continued to diminish the depiction of the power of solidarity and of working people. In film content, as studio ownership has globalized, we have seen a steady progression, a shift in values, in terms of who gets honored. In *King Kong* (1976 and 2005), the regular working guy can no longer get the girl. Because the working guy does not get a break, and eventually the normal “working guy” character does not even get a leading role, the possibility of a kind of democratic solidarity is lost. This hope vanishes from the agenda of the mass media, and hence from the public imagination.

In addition to these costs, there are other costs correlated with the rise of globalized studio ownership. These involve general trends in violence and racism in the films which this project has traced. Obviously, not every film is *King Kong*. But there is work to be done in studying what our blockbuster re-makes tell us about the broadly popular stories we “buy,” what the image-makers believe the market will bear, and what

changes we are willing to pay for over time. We see escalating levels of violence with each re-make of *King Kong*. Of course, concern over the violence in films is almost as old as films themselves (and, again, not all recent films are violent).

Throughout this project, we discussed many ways that labor fought the production of specific types of films, such as spectacle pictures, because those runaway productions threatened the workers' livelihood. Because labor did not speak out on this issue, one thing was not discussed: the fact that in the late 1960s the motion picture industry, in competition with the emerging television industry, attempted to differentiate itself by turning to graphic violence (Baran 2007). This was a studio-management-driven moment when violence in films escalated, and since the globalizing of studio ownership, violence has escalated still more. As a result, we get movie reviews like this recent one for a film called *The Condemned*: "This movie is an unrelenting onslaught of savage, stomach-churning violence for the sake of savage, stomach-churning violence" (Museho 2007:43).⁶⁵

Today's studio globalized business models rarely allow for sophisticated projects (Cieply 2007). The group of consumers with the most free time and available income are males between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four. As a result, that is the group for whom most mainstream Hollywood movies are made (Arquette 2002). This trend has become more prevalent during the current phase of runaway production (Cieply 2007). There are consequences to pitching violent films to young men. The escalation of violence in cinema both profits corporations and effects everyday life. While violent

⁶⁵ Directed by Scott Wiper and written by Rob and Andy Hedden. Imdb.com calls *The Condemned*: "An adrenalin-charged action thriller [that] tells the story of Jack Conrad, who is awaiting the death penalty in a corrupt Central American prison. He is 'purchased' by a wealthy television producer and taken to a desolate island where he must fight to the death against nine other condemned killers from all corners of the world, with freedom going to the sole survivor" (imdb.com downloaded 1/13/07).

films certainly do not cause all viewers to become violent, studies have shown that “prolonged viewing” of these films “desensitize[s] them to violence” (Wronge 2007: 432). Those males, desensitized to brutality, are more susceptible to the pitches of the Military Industrial Complex. They are being socialized to be the cannon fodder used in the war machine. Corporations thrive on America’s belief that we need this war machine.⁶⁶

Another cost we have seen in the era of globalized studio ownership, is increasing racism, as was discussed about the *King Kong* films. Again, I am not saying this occurs at a conscious level. This project emphasized the natives on Skull Island in each version of *King Kong*. They are not major players in the film. Aside from Ray Harryhausen and, few care that these “South Sea Islanders” are not Asian. The reason I showed the increase in racist stereotyping throughout the three films was that the stereotype’s role is to help support a rationale for capital’s exploitation of the “Other” (Ewen & Ewen 2006). Racist stereotypes help uphold beliefs that have no basis in fact. The fact is “crime in the United States is committed by all races in near proportion to their presence in the population” (Baran 2007:421). The stereotypical portrayals of black people as violent and degraded may help sway the American public to hold untrue beliefs about them (Fredrickson 2002). With regard to *King Kong*, it is possible that in the limited-spectrum racial color blur (from black to white) of the movie, the islanders become the missing link along a “humanizing” continuum that separates white people from King Kong. If the

⁶⁶ Films present the identifying viewer with a potential agenda in which their death by gunfire or in some ecstatic conflagration is a logical possibility. Further, as we discussed in the theory section, humans are playful animals. By putting violence in movies, by giving soldiers war games to train with, we are blurring a boundary. This use of films is consciously exploited by the military. Recruiters “hand out free graphically violent video games like the U.S. Army’s own *America’s Army* or Kuma’s *Fallujah: Operation al-Fajr* to potential recruits. It is here that teenagers first learn of the thrill and satisfaction of ‘getting my kills,’ as our soldiers-in-arms put it these days” (White 2007:103).

agenda is set such that there is only a sliding scale from civilized “white” humans to savage gorillas, the natives become a degraded form of white. In this spectrum, King Kong is inextricably linked with the supposedly savage violent black man (especially when the natives wear gorilla suits). I argue that if the black man were not twenty-five feet tall--and dangerous--in the collective psyche of the Western white workers supporting capitalism, then there would be less of an unconscious, powerful rationale justifying the monstrous exploitation and depredation of people of color.

I wonder if there are optimistic possibilities embedded in the changes this project has documented. If you're building a labor force in Canada, in Australia, in Botswana, you're building sound stages, and a more multicultural workforce. If you are “seeding” a new industry, you might also be building the possibility of different world views being produced, and, maybe a greater, more democratic world in the long haul. When I suggested this to Tim McHugh, he said, “I am hoping that what we're feeling now is some kind of a growing pain, that I just can't see beyond the pain part of it ... the pain that says everything you thought your life was going to be ten years ago, five years ago is wrong, and you're going to lose everything.” Looking beyond that, he continued:

But it was a birthing process [laughter]. Now, isn't it great that we're not just going to have *X Men 3* followed by *X Men 4* followed by *X Men 5*? There [are] going to be great movies made all around the world, and you'll have access to those wonderful French comedies you used to love that you can't find any more. Then, okay, great. But I'm not seeing the corporate model as having the slightest interest in art or information. And what it seems to be – especially if you look at Clear Channel and Fox – they don't really want you to have any information that's not favorable to them (McHugh interview 2006).

Runaway production, by costing the United States billions of dollars in revenue and tens of thousands of jobs does not just hollow out the Hollywood labor force, it also contributes to the ideological hollowing out of film content, and the general hollowing

out of America's middle class. As such, it undermined this democracy's power to fight the voracious power of corporate conglomerates. The bureaucracy of democracy, however flawed, is preferable to the bureaucracy of totalitarianism, which does not value the dignity and diversity of the many. When capitalism's current avatars, the multinational corporations, own the studios, the vision of possibility changes and creativity loses. We all lose. Even capital. As Richard Florida put it, "greed alone cannot innovate" (Florida 2007:76). Rather, he found democratic values, "openness, tolerance, self-expression as sources of economic growth" (Florida 2007:75).

Not all is lost. There is still time. According to Gary Dunham, this is how it starts:

If the unions got together, we could take care of ourselves. We could take care of our retirement. We could take care of our health plan.... We have the ability. We have the infrastructure to do that. We're just not utilizing it. We're not using it wisely. ... If we could do that ... as a nation, it would be great. But we'll never achieve that. This nation's going to go down the tubes long before that ever happens ... But I think if you start with a small thing like Local 600 or the IA – you know, 1,000, 1,200 members – and if you can make the system work there, it will work anywhere. And it's a lot easier to make it work on a small level than it is a big one.

For this to work, the unions locally and eventually as a global group will have to stand together against the multinational corporations. The unions' basic starting argument is: "We have been making films for over seventy years, and we know what we're doing. You bought this company without knowing anything about filmmaking. Your scheduling has to respect the flesh-and-blood needs of human beings. We are not machines. You are no longer allowed to use illegal subsidies to finance your films, and kill our livelihoods and our art. Despite the fact that the eight-hour-day was won decades before, we are willing to concede, because of filmmaking's special needs, a work day no longer

than twelve hours. In addition, we demand twelve hours off for every twelve hours we work. No more use of artificial fog. Rather than killing us with it, you can generate fog on a computer in post-production. No more helicopters. It is not worth human lives to use them. You can generate helicopter-like effects by computer, too. You'll be surprised to find that your films will be better (though you don't care about that), and will make more money, overall....

Conclusion

Currently, workers appear to have made some gains in the runaway production struggle. I would suggest there is cause for celebration, but agree with labor leader Noel Beasley, who spoke about the current progress of resurgent labor activism in general. He suggested workers “celebrate with one hand on the champagne glass and the other on the holster” (Mort 1999:217).

America's film labor is part of the creative and economic future of our society. If we continue to export our talent needs, we're eviscerating the life from an extraordinarily deep and talented group of American workers. We're opening the drain. We're emptying ourselves out; and we're passing nothing on to our next generation. Given that probability, I suggest something which the people I interviewed did not endorse, which the studios do not sincerely want, and which, during the last few decades, Washington, D.C. politicians have thwarted or opposed. As shown in this project, throughout the history of runaway production—from the 1920s and 1930s British Cinematograph Films acts, the 1940s Frozen Funds, the 1950s U.S. tax loopholes and foreign incentives, the 1960s and 1970s U.S. tax incentives, and the more recent Canadian production services tax credit and those that followed from other nations—government regulations have been

a major factor in shifting the course of runaway production. Starting from the notion that federal funding for the arts benefits the greater good, and remembering that many great filmmakers, for example, actors Jack Nicholson and Dennis Hopper, did some of their best work in films made using the 1971 tax incentives, I recommend an intelligently crafted, effective U.S. tax credit for low-budget (less than \$15 million dollars) independent feature films made with American film workers, in order to foster supporting our talent and our creativity at home. Production of a big spectacle is not the sole definition of our national cinema. Hollywood film production embraces formulas of filmmaking which have excluded a number of ways of seeing. For example, the exploitation story of the blockbuster *King Kong* is our story, about racism, sexism, and capitalism, which we tell and re-tell on ourselves with an astounding frankness. However, there are many American stories worth telling. Our independent American films tell a different story, one that is also important to our vibrancy and vitality as a nation. Independent films revive and create new ways of seeing. Of course, aspects of the work that succeeds get continually translated and absorbed into Hollywood production, and the cycle must continually renew. Subsidies for low-budget work could allow to us tell stories other than the explosively violent blockbuster ones which, as we have discussed, encourage us to see our ongoing mass-destruction as good, clean fun.

Theory, Methods, Reflexivity and Minutiae

Within the constraints of my academic training in sociology, it is customary in a work of scholarship such as this one to discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the research, and describe in detail the research methods and reasons for using them. It also is customary to provide a history of the scholarly literature about the subject in question. In response to well-founded criticisms of the omniscient impartial stance historically claimed by academic scholarship, it has recently become accepted practice for the scholar employing ethnographic or oral history methods to reflect upon her or his place in and impact on the people she or he has studied (Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle—grossly oversimplified as “You can't look at something without changing it by looking” —has broad application). For those interested in such details, the following appendix is provided.

The theory section of this appendix is divided into several sections which discuss why we study the mass media, the connections of the project's topic to mainstream sociology, the history of the scholarly discussion of runaway production, and finally, globalization, labor and runaway production.

The methods section discusses the warrants for this project's multi-sited methodology, as well as specific matters relevant to each site: newspapers, film, and oral history.

This appendix concludes with sections on reflexivity and some fine points of formatting and process specific to this project.

Why we Study the Mass Media

We study the mass media because the products of the entertainment industry are inherently political and the images onscreen have “real ideological content” (Parenti 1992:1). The mass media propagates “images and ideologies that are supportive of imperialism, phobic anticommunism, capitalism, racism, sexism, militarism, authoritarianism violence, vigilantism, and anti-working-class attitudes” (Parenti 1992: 2). Given this power of the mass media, scholars argue that it is imperative that we pay close attention.

Most scholars study the media as if media were a self-contained product. This sociological study puts production back into the actual product, and argues that the work context that creates a film is significant to the impact of the film itself. Also, that context, when looked at in conjunction with the resulting film, can provide a springboard for discussion about the larger world in which the film was released.

Connections to Mainstream Sociology

A sociological framework for the study of film production and content would seem to be a natural fit. Sociology from its beginnings has been concerned with labor, and the impact of mass culture in which “film itself played a historically crucial formative role” (Tudor 2000). Yet work that embraces film production and content has been infrequent and piecemeal.

Why so little sociology of film? Sociology’s absence from the study of film and film production has been recently noted, and the history of the sociology of film is characterized by an ongoing lament about the paucity of work in the field, as well as speculation as to the reasons why (Dowd 1999, Tudor 2000, Shiel 2001). The speculations are wide-ranging. Tudor mentions other disciplines’ monopolization of the

field, especially Film Theory in the 1970s, some of which focused on an ahistorical film “text” constituting its subject viewer, leaving scant room for sociology. Scholars in Cultural Studies and Media Studies have made substantive contributions to the study of film, especially with regards to media consumption, where Sociology is, again, often curiously absent (Tudor 1974, 2000). Some sociologists speculate that Sociology’s reification of “the scientific” makes the sociology of film a suspect undertaking. “In our endeavors to gain approval as a science, we have neglected the major issues of human existence” (Huaco 1965). Further, in the scientific vein, in sociological analysis, when film makers such as Eisenstein, De Sica, and Rossellini become “dependent variables,” this “creates difficulties that in turn lead to embarrassments” (Silver 1965). Sociology’s quantitative scientific emphasis has perhaps led practitioners to study film’s “measurable” impact on groups, especially children (Shiel 2001). In a related larger complaint, sociologists talk about the basic difficulty we have documenting what’s real, and the public’s lack of regard for our efforts, leading to a disciplinary aversion to “the fictional nature of the stories told in the movies” (Dowd 1999). Further, in our attempts to study film sociologically, the popular myths that surround film production create significant obstacles to discovering what the actual processes are (Tudor 1976).

Nonetheless, as evidenced throughout this project, there have been some significant contributions to the sociology of film, by sociologists and by those subsequently claimed as our own. These provide useful information and analytical frameworks. Further, where sociology has not been present in the study of film, scholars in other disciplines, including the aforementioned cultural and media studies, as well as labor relations, history, and economic geography have made significant contributions.

In the extant sociology of film, there is a curious division. The sociology of film is looked at in terms of labor (Rosten 1941, Powdermaker 1950, Bielby & Bielby 1996, 1999 etc., Hunt 2007). Usually, with the exception of studies of the 1940s and 1950s, sociology has largely concerned itself with above-the-line labor (Faulkner & Anderson 1987, Baker 1991, Bielby 1996, 1999). Below-the-line labor is often conspicuously depersonalized. For example, when describing film production, Faulkner writes, “their work is facilitated when they can obtain human capital on more favorable terms, especially when there are armies of qualified bidders for their films” (Faulkner and Anderson 1987:887).

Non-scholarly writers, such as Lillian Ross (1952) and John Gregory Dunne (1969), have also done commendable studies of the process of film production, again emphasizing the above-the-line labor involved in the process. The popular press has of course produced endless discussion of the elite echelon of actors’ labor, the movie stars and their “private lives” (Gamson 1994).

Other non-sociological scholarly and serious works on Hollywood labor tend to focus on specific periods, such as the period when above-the-line unions were organizing (Ross 1941), or periods of labor upheaval (Lipsitz 1994, Horne 2001), or the blacklist era (Ceplair and Englund 1979, Navasky 1980, Cole 1981, McGilligan and Buhle 1997, Lardner 2000, etc.) Still others focus on specific unions.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Comprehensive histories and specific case studies of individual unions have been written for the Screen Actor’s Guild (Prindle 1988, Clark 1995), the Screen Writers Guild (Schwartz 1982, Fine 1993) and the IATSE (Aller 1972, Nielsen & Mailes 1995). However, these works were all completed before the obvious pressures of globalization began to bear down on Hollywood labor. In addition, because these works, and

With the breakup of the studio system came changes in the structures of production. Economic geographers⁶⁸ and others have contributed to discussions about Hollywood labor and runaway production in research about the impact of flexible specialization, the mode of production that emerged subsequent to the studio system⁶⁹ (Christopherson & Storper 1986, 1987, 1989, Storper 1986, 1989, 1993, Aksoy and Robins 1992, Gray & Seeber 1996, Scott and Storper 2003, Luckinbeal 2004, Scott 2005, Elmer & Gasher 2005). While they have done good work in showing how wealth gets created, and how businesses grow and change in relationship to national and regional economies, a sociological approach can include the cost of runaway production both to working people and to the final product. While Miller et. al. [2005] express concern for the people whose lives are affected by runaway production, most research shows less interest in the agency of workers and the consequences for workers than the situation seems to call for:

While indeed 50 to 70 percent of all motion pictures today are shot outside the Southern California area, that is not necessarily a cause for concern. Los Angeles is no longer the undisputed center of the production phase of the motion picture industry, but this is nothing really new, having been the case since the early 1960s (Storper 1986).

others, usually do not look at Hollywood Labor as a macro-system with challenges that labor confronts as a whole, issues such as runaway production are not discussed.

⁶⁸ According to Michael Storper, economic geographers who have studied runaway production define their field as studying “the forces that affect the way the economy organizes itself in geographical space.” They are interested in “the geography of economic activity” in order to understand how cities and regions grow (Scott 2005:76).

⁶⁹ “Despite its glamorous image, motion picture production was for much of its history a routinized factory-like process, under the control of large, vertically integrated firms. In the 1950s, however, all this began to change, and by the late 1970s, the industry had been dramatically transformed. In the contemporary motion picture industry most films are made by independent production companies, which subcontract work to small specialized firms. This type of production organization can be described as ‘flexibly specialized’” (Storper & Christopherson 1987:104).

Scholars usually address film content as a separate phenomenon (Mayer 1946, Wolfenstein and Leites 1950, Belasz 1952, Barthes 1957, Huaco 1965, Debord 1967, Jarvie 1970, Tudor 1974, Deleuze 1983, Jameson 1992, Dowd 1999, et. al.) Sociologists have also studied the audience, as an issue separate from labor, but not always from content (Gamson 1994, Bielby & Bielby 1992, 1995, 2001, 2004). Those focusing on cultural product or media consumption usually include the media studies and communications scholars (Acland 2003, Crothers 2007).

As previously mentioned, as early as 1965, scholars called for analysis that included production and product: “examining the functions, what the films mean to the society and how film makers made the meaning” (Callenbach 1965). Finally, Tudor set forth a sociological rationale for the study of film content and film production:

Film, after all, is more than mere celluloid. It is socially constructed within a three-cornered association between filmmakers, film spectators, and the film texts themselves, and at every point in that nexus of relationships we encounter negotiation and interaction involving active social beings and institutionalized social practices. Sociology is the intellectual resource best suited to probing that particular complex of activity (Tudor 2000:192).

While there has been some sociological work on the place where labor meets content (Bielby and Harrington 2000, Shiel 2001) these studies focus on specific areas such as geographical production. Other significant contributions include an historical analysis of the interaction between the working class and film content during the silent film era (Ross 1998). Bordwell et.al.’s study of the studio system from the owner/manager point of view, emphasized the influence of technological changes and labor’s powerlessness to do more than “reinforce” the production system (Bordwell, Staiger & Thomson 1985:311).

However, the issue of connections between labor and product over the long history of Hollywood narrative film, from the studio system to the present day, has not been addressed.

This project studied process and product through film. In studying on film as a source of information, I looked at how people create the fictions, how that changed from period to period, how those fictions reflect or comment upon processes and events this project explores, and what the films suggest about the context of each period from which runaway production emerged. To relate this study to runaway production, while examining the content of each version of *King Kong* I looked at what happened to the working person, what management/worker relations were like, how related stereotypes changed, and what this might be telling us about the specific period.⁷⁰ As I also studied the extensive published materials about the making of each film, I asked similar questions. I was interested in the decision-making process in film production. I looked for the place where people claimed responsibility for making parts of the film that had stereotypical representations, in order to understand how stereotypes were constructed. A stereotype is, “something conforming to a fixed or general pattern; esp: a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment” (Websters 1999:1153). A stereotype, like a metaphor, is a compressed story. Unlike metaphors, stereotypes are not overt, and are perhaps most effective when they are assimilated unconsciously.

⁷⁰ I had seen all or parts of the three *King Kong* films previously. The first time I watched each film for the purpose of this project, in each case, I watched it straight through while I jotted notes. The multiple subsequent viewings of each film included considerable pausing on frames, “rewinding,” and note-taking.

The power of film also has to do with its technical methods of storytelling. The cinematic use of the close-up and the flashback create narratives that operate in ways similar to the way our minds function, (psychologically intimate with our own process in ways fundamentally different from and far more immediate than theater or literature.) This helps explain how films bypass the critical faculty of the untrained spectator (Munsterberg 1916). Film is an influential vehicle through which stereotypes reach us.

The History of the Scholarly Discussion of Runaway Production

My thesis, that runaway production is a dynamic social process which began in the late 1920s, emerged from findings from the three sites. My questioning how long runaway production has been going on first came from primary sources: film workers told me it had been around “forever.” However vague, this assertion led me to question the scholarly claims that runaway production was significant starting in the 1980s (Pendakur 1998), in the 1960s (Goldsmith and O’Regan 2005, Hozic 2001), in the 1950s (Scott 2005), and in the 1940s (Storper Christopherson 1986). One source mentions 1938, “when MGM was establishing an English studio, unions in Los Angeles were expressing concern about job losses overseas”, but then goes on to discuss the late 1940s runaways without commenting on this 1930s moment (Miller et. al. 2001:56). As a result, I investigated historic newspaper records as well as archival records to try to find out how far back I could find evidence of runaway production. As was discussed, I found the phenomemon significantly predated the naming of it.

Runaway production’s nature as a dynamic social process became apparent to me first through the interviews I conducted. Participants made it clear that there were key players (the union leadership, activist workers and groups, the state and federal

government representatives, foreign country representatives, and always the studio representatives) who were contesting this issue. Through the historic newspaper records, I learned details about how this process had been occurring over the last eight decades.

Globalization, Labor and Runaway Production

When we talk about runaway production and globalization, we have to attend to slightly different definitions which contain within them some useful ideas. Given that the term globalization was coined almost simultaneously with the term runaway production in the late 1940s, it is curious that the terms which respond to related phenomena are not discussed together in scholarly literature until very recently.

Since the late 1980s, an enormous social science literature has emerged, engaging in critiques of globalization using a wide variety of methods, and different levels of analysis. For the most part, this literature argues that current globalization methods, employed both by the governments and the corporations involved, emphasize narrow economic benefits for those corporations and rich people involved, and nearly always disregard broader human needs of billions of people, including food, shelter, education, work, and often survival. Most critics emphasize the need for a broad-based, global, democratic reform involving activism from the local to the global as well as transparency and accountability in government and corporate actions. Almost invariably, this literature discusses the impact of economic policies on third-world nations and workers (Chossudovsky 2003). Until recently, if the impact on first-world nations was discussed, it was largely about the manufacturing and heavy industry sectors, such as the garment industry and the so-called American "rust belt" (Moody 1997).

While extensive sociological research has been done regarding the decline of American union power in the rust belt, and the impact of globalization,⁷¹ little sociological research has been done about the erosion of labor power in one of America's strongest industries, the Entertainment Business. The entertainment industry is often seemingly—puzzlingly—studiously avoided. For example, prominent labor sociologist Ruth Milkman's recent book *L.A. Story, Immigrant Workers and the Future of the U.S. Labor Movement*, did not mention the Entertainment Industry, despite its hegemonic position in the California economy, and despite the recent, prominent, very public and successful Justice for Janitors campaign in that industry (Milkman 2006).

Also missing until recently from scholarly analysis is the impact of globalization on American cultural labor and the middle class. Where the U.S. middle class was mentioned in academic discussion of globalization, it was framed as the perpetrator of racial oppression through globalization tactics, rather than as a new member of globalization's casualty list (Barlow 2003). If the middle-class felt the consequences of globalization, it was the middle class of the debtor nations, "swept away" by globalizations' power (Giminez 2002). Middle-class high-technology job loss (such as computer programmers and engineers) has begun to be discussed in the mainstream media. Recent scholarship has discussed globalization and the middle class by distinguishing "creative" middle-class labor, from lower-class third-world-type labor, and rust-belt manufacturing labor. These discussions have focused on the regional allure of specific areas and how that is created, "The competition for talent is not just between nations, the real battle is among cities and regions" (Florida 2007:154). However, when

⁷¹ For a fuller discussion of general issues in globalization, see Chossudovsky (1997), Moody (1997) Greider (1997), Sassen (1988), Tabb (2001), Stiglitz (2002), Aronowitz and Gautney (2003), Klein (2003), Lourdes (2003), Bhagwati (2004), Cavanagh & Mander (2004), Harvey (1990, 2005).

middle class labor enters the new academic discussion of cultural labor, those workers are now framed as the fortunate “creative class” who will be able to take advantage of the new regional localization of cultural labor (Florida 2007). Richard Florida, who describes this group as the “creative class” makes a significant contribution by showing evidence of how federal actors, specifically framers of United States federal policy, help to construct the creative talent drain from the United States, especially through immigration and education policy. Other researchers call this middle-class group the “New International Division of Cultural Labour” (NICL), and frame runaway film production, as “the journalistic, governmental and industry shorthand for Hollywood productions undertaken overseas,” and shows, “how Hollywood reproduces and regulates the NICL through its control over cultural labour markets, international co-production, intellectual property, marketing, distribution and exhibition” (Miller et. al. 2001:18). Like Florida’s work, the NICL discussion pays special attention to the “socio-spatial conditions.” Unlike Florida’s work, their “goal is to thicken existing theories of global Hollywood’s power and modify current thinking about cultural policies that both enable and resist it.” While their work is valuable, this project’s contribution to the discussion has to do with the power of enlarging the complex historical web of understanding, about the richness that film content analysis contributes, and about the re-entry of actual workers into the discussion: re-contextualizing, re-historicizing and repopulating runaway production.

There is much more work to be done here. The costs of a lack of socio-historical analysis are great. We lose sight of the aforementioned “human consequences of institutional relationships. A full critical view must merge dispassionate analysis of structures with the real life stories of those most affected by the workings on the

industry—the workers themselves” (Nielsen 1983:48). If we don’t see how runaway production works, we won’t see how we can change it, and further, we may continue contributing to the false idea that capitalism is an inevitable force before which all must bend, rather than seeing capitalism as an ongoing negotiated struggle in which our survival depends on the conscious work of individuals and groups such as those working to stop runaway production.

Throughout the course of writing this project, many individuals I spoke with have asked me why we should care about unions, about runaway production, about the middle class or about America as the global hegemonic power.

The American Labor Movement is in crisis. Despite the fact that 58% of Americans approve of labor unions (Gallup 2005), the percentage of Americans who are members of labor unions has declined from an all-time high of 33% in 1960 to 12.5% at the present day. Today, approximately 16.1 million Americans belong to unions.

When we talk about what labor union solidarity emerges from, we can begin to understand what is being lost. According to Joshua Freeman, a labor historian, this can be characterized as an “ethic of solidarity and mutuality.” Freeman said,

[S]ome of it grows out of necessity; you’re living on the margin, you need to turn to other people, whether it’s extended family to watch your kids, or whether it’s neighbors. That mutuality is part of the way of life for working-class people. The labor movement is something that grows out of that. This notion of solidarity, this notion that to improve yourself and promote the values you have, you have to stand with other people, it’s a necessity and an ethic and a value system. And I think that’s a very civilizing notion. I think that that notion is one that labor, at its best anyway, has embodied and promoted (Freeman 2006).

Another good reason to care about the unions is that the unions, like our government, are manmade structures that can stand in the way of the rationalized destruction wrought by capitalism. The unions “hinder the strict carrying through of the sheer market principle” (Weber 1946a:185). (Max Weber was talking about other social structures but his idea easily applies to unions.) Unions are often problematic organizations that serve at least as a partial bulwark of protection for large groups of people. Capitalists often consider them inconvenient because unions, in principle, value the preservation of human life and dignity over the acquisition of ever-increasing amounts of money. Given the dehumanizing power of capital, which results in a human being alienated in a “steel hard casing” as Weber so famously put it (Weber 1946b), and given the civilizing power that Freeman discusses, these labor union structures are worth our renewed consideration and intelligent, eternally vigilant, support.

However sensible unions’ avowed purpose, direct experience of union leaders’ activities like those discussed in this project (or publicity about them) makes it difficult for many to consider unions as a viable option for protecting working people.

To the above generalizations about unions, I will add another: all unions are different, and every individual within every union is different. One aim of this project is to show that within the unions and within individuals, there are possibilities for awareness and for social change. I argue that labor unions, however flawed, vitally serve the public interest by providing bulwarks against the ravenousness of corporate greed, to the extent that their membership and the public hold the unions accountable.

Similarly, the existence of the middle class is a bulwark which transnational corporations are in the process of “hollowing out.” Runaway production is part of that

process. If any other industry were losing \$10 billion a year and over 23,000 jobs, this would be front-page news. There are many issues involved, including the fact that the multinational corporations who own the movie studios also own many of the newspapers. It is not in the corporate interest to report on this subject. One other issue may be the American public's belief in the "American Dream." To many early twenty-first-century citizens, the concept of the American Dream feels eternal. It is a common, albeit logical, fallacy to assume that something has always existed just because one has always known it to exist (Tversky 1982). It is as fragile as the eroding union solidarity discussed earlier.

I believe that we can play at moral relativism and take an "impartial" "scientific" stance by saying there is no good or bad in this situation. But as a sociologist who draws from both quantitative and qualitative evidence, I cannot in good conscience argue that relativist position. The only beneficiaries of that position are corporate interests. That stance is only possible with a depopulated world view, where you count statistics and forget individual talented flesh-and-blood people who are, often enough, making an American product so spectacularly unique that it is irreplaceable. This project, through the study of newspaper reports and of *King Kong*, and the use of individual case histories argues against such moral relativism.

Methods

Using a multi-sited methodology appropriate to studying a globalization phenomenon, this project tells the story of runaway production through three perspectives: newspaper reports, oral histories, and film content. I analyzed 809 newspaper articles about runaway production from the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* over the last seven decades. I conducted in-depth oral-history interviews with

eleven current or former labor leaders and central figures in the runaway production struggle. These interviews occurred over several sessions, sometimes over many months, and ranged from a total of two-and-a-half to fourteen hours each. I also conducted shorter interviews with twenty-four other individuals involved with this issue. I studied the film content and production processes of three *King Kong* films (1933, 1976, 2005). Overall, I examined related forms of storytelling: direct narratives (in newspaper reports, film plots, and oral histories), as well as the compressed storytelling forms of metaphor and stereotype.

I am specifically interested in changes in the runaway production process that are evidenced in conventional narrative forms (such as newspaper reports), as well as in more “compressed” narrative forms used in mass media representations, such as metaphors to describe runaway production used by people quoted in newspaper reports and stereotypes used in motion pictures.

A superficial look at this project might make one think of the methods employed as some postmodern pastiche, a hodgepodge. For example, here is film content analysis; there are metaphors tracked quantitatively (?!); and here is an oral history or three.⁷²

Also, the materials used in this project are of what Goffman would call “mixed status.... Some are taken from respectable researches where qualified generalizations are given concerning reliably recorded regularities; some are taken from informal memoirs written by colorful people; many fall in between” (Goffman 1959:xi). The mixed-status

⁷² Labor scholar Kim Moody calls postmodernism as “an intellectual fashion that sees class as passé.” A central postmodern idea is that, “lean production, outsourcing, casualized labor, workplaces with fewer workers, the feminization of the workforce, etc. are producing a working class that is or will be too fragmented to compose a labor movement in any real sense, much less take on the broader task of social change” (Moody 1997:143). Moody says that the evidence argues against this: “given the central role of the working class in the political upheavals of the past twenty years, it is all the more remarkable that theories like ‘postmodernism’ should have such a resonance among intellectuals of the left” (Moody 1997:206).

materials are used for two reasons: First, although sociology has from its inception concerned itself with labor, and from the Frankfurt School forward concerned itself with culture, little scholarly work has been devoted to cultural labor, especially “below-the-line.” Therefore, I have had to rely on sources from other disciplines and non-academic sources. Second, it would be difficult to write about Hollywood labor without referring to the colorful people, and, even more importantly, it would be misrepresentative to do so.

I am a sociologist. Labor issues have been of sociological interest since the field began, and there is much in our literature that provides insight into my findings. However, sociology’s almost complete absence from the study of motion picture labor and the impact of motion pictures, necessitates an interdisciplinary approach to this project.

Regarding the overall methods, this project takes the overarching frame of its research methods from George Marcus's hypothesis that a multi-sited space for research is necessary in any project that studies a globalization phenomenon. Marcus focuses on ethnographic work. I am extending his hypothesis to work that is not ethnographic.⁷³ He states:

Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the [researcher] establishes ... an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact define the argument of the [research]... Multi-sited [researches] define their objects of study through several different modes or techniques. These techniques might be understood as practices of construction through (preplanned or opportunistic) movement and of tracing within

⁷³ Runaway production, as I am studying it, is about the collectively experienced absence of work, and hence, of the job site, rather than a site where one could be a participant-observer. It would be difficult to do an ethnography of an absence. (The idea makes my thought process hit a wall, or I think of *Waiting for Godot*.) Although runaway production leaves no geographic space to mark where it has left, a paradox of capital is that it leaves an invisible wake, conspicuous only in the devastation of lives affected by work’s absence.

different settings of a complex cultural phenomenon given an initial, baseline conceptual identity that turns out to be contingent and malleable as one traces it (Marcus 1998:90).

I employ many of Marcus's "modes," which are "follow the people, follow the thing, follow the metaphor, follow the plot, story or allegory, follow the life or bibliography, and follow the conflict" (Marcus 1998:90).

The people I follow over time, by phone, by email, by news report, and in person, are Gary Dunham, Carisa Kaplan, and Tim McHugh, who are filmmakers.

The thing I follow is amorphous. Runaway production, is no object (rather, from the Hollywood workers' point of view, it is an absence) but it can nonetheless be tracked through newspaper coverage.

I follow the metaphors about runaway production, "This mode involves trying to trace the social correlates and groundings of associations that are most clearly alive in language use and print or visual media" (Marcus 1998:92). As Marcus points out, "this mode of constructing multi-sited research is ... especially potent for suturing locations of cultural production that had not been obviously connected and consequently, for creating empirically argued new envisionings of social landscapes" (Marcus 1998:92).

I also follow the plot, story or allegory. *King Kong* is a, "shared social landscape" a common modern myth (Marcus 1998:93). The practice I do, of comparing the filmmaking and the film product, was called for by Marcus, although he did not refer to filmmaking specifically: "[R]eading for the plot and then testing this against the reality of ... investigation that constructs its sites according to a compelling narrative is an interesting, virtually untried mode of constructing multi-sited research."

I briefly follow the lives of Gary Dunham, Carisa Kaplan, and Tim McHugh because, "Life histories reveal juxtapositions of social contexts through a succession of

narrated individual experiences that may be obscured in the structural study of processes as such. They are potential guides to the delineation of ... spaces within systems shaped by categorical distortions that may make these spaces otherwise invisible" (Marcus 1998: 94).

Finally I follow the conflict among different players in the runaway production struggle through mass media and interview. Marcus states, "the most notable contested issues in contemporary society involve simultaneously spheres of everyday life, legal institutions, and mass media.... [S]tudy of these issues thus requires multi-sited construction, perhaps more obviously than do any of the other above modes" (Marcus 1998:82).

It's important to note that the computer search engine Proquest was not available until recently, nor were historic newspaper records available on line until recently. The earlier method of newspaper research, through the use of printed volumes of newspaper indices, would not have revealed the wealth of newspaper articles that my recent nuanced Proquest search revealed (the database search engine, though not perfect, catches almost all the references to the term in every article, not just the main subjects of a printed index). In other words, my work benefited from recent improvements in the sophistication of research tools that were not available to scholars only a few years earlier. Because of these tools, I was able to see the players and the action as it unfolded throughout the decades, in a way that would have been much more difficult for previous researchers.

I read 809 newspaper articles I found in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* about runaway production. I was surprised by several things: The articles showed

that runaway production had three distinct periods, described more fully in the main body of this project. Corresponding to those periods were consistent uses of types of metaphors. The articles also gave clear, ongoing evidence of runaway production as a dynamic social process. This was not indicated by previous scholarship.

Even though I was a subscriber to the *Hollywood Reporter*, the *Daily Variety* is available on-line, and back issues of both are available locally at the Lincoln Center Performing Arts Library, this project did not rely on the Hollywood trade papers, even though that would at first glance seem to be the primary source for information on this topic. Issues of bias and unreliability in these sources emerged immediately. I found, for example, that William Wilkerson, owner and publisher of one of the main Hollywood trade papers, the *Hollywood Reporter*, stopped his paper from printing stories about labor and called Willie Bioff, “the type of man the IATSE should be grateful for” (Nielsen & Mailes 1995:80, Aller 1972:105). He was also well-known for showering Bioff with expensive gifts. Bioff, of course, went to prison.

Further it would seem obvious that the *Los Angeles Times*, would be the first source to seek information from about the early years. Seventy-nine *New York Times* articles, and 220 *Los Angeles Times* pieces (including seventeen letters from people who worked in the film industry) mentioned runaway production during the first phase. However, the notoriously anti-union *Los Angeles Times* first mentioned runaway production three years after the *New York Times* did (Anonymous 1953). The early *Los Angeles Times* references to runaway production often were puns or reports on runaway jokes, presented without commentary. For example, the paper mentions an episode of the Dean Martin Show, where a sketch about movie credits listed the production company as,

“United States Production, Inc.” Underneath that, in small type, it read, “Filmed in Europe” (Ames 1961). Bob Hope joked at an Oscar awards ceremony that, “This telecast is being taped for later viewing by our actors overseas” (Anonymous 1962a).

For those reasons, and in order to begin to map the issue, I relied more heavily on the *New York Times* for this chapter. As “the paper of record,” it serves as a good tool in this first step toward a thorough study. Further, it initially seemed to me that perhaps because the *New York Times* is intended to reach and educate a non-insider audience, and because of the distance from Hollywood, the lines of the arguments became more clearly delineated.⁷⁴

The *New York Times* reportage lacked the solipsistic “chit-chat” quality that local Hollywood community newspapers often foster. Perhaps, because those quoted knew they were talking to the New York financiers who funded Hollywood films, they had a stake in wording their propaganda right.

New York financiers had played a significant role in motion picture finances since the advent of sound movies in the late 1920s (Puttnam 1998:111). It is noteworthy that the articles usually appeared during weeks or days prior to critical negotiations between

⁷⁴ As of July 2007, the computer search engine Proquest was the most effective research tool. The computer search engine Infotrac yielded a handful of results when “runaway production” was put in the search engine, whereas Proquest provided hundreds.

If you wish to replicate this search, or do a search of your own using Proquest, note that Proquest does not recognize words broken by hyphens (including words that are hyphenated for space reasons at the end of a printed newspaper column), and all hyphenates must be searched individually. So, in order to get as complete a group as possible of articles about runaway production, which also appeared as run-away production in the text, I searched those terms, as well as, “runaway pro-duction” “runaway produc-tion” “run-away produc-tion” “run-away pro-duction.” In addition, I searched the groups of terms: “motion picture” AND “runaway”, “motion picture” AND “run-away”, “runaway film production”, “runaway film”, as well as “run-away film”. These searches yielded additional articles.

Since the *New York Times* improved its availability and its search engine by January 2008, I would suggest further research also incorporate that source (nytimes.com).

workers and management, such as labor negotiations, union meetings, and at one point the Oscars (a producer seeking labor votes for a best-picture award).

That is different from having a stake in getting the facts right. The *New York Times* recorded the claims about runaway production, mixed in with facts provided to substantiate those claims. In part bluster, in part truth, these assertions both reflected and helped shape attitudes toward changing film labor conditions in the United States.

The results of a most significant factor during one period that had an effect on runaway production went unreported in the *New York Times*. The late 1960s/early 1970s Federal tax incentives were reported in relation to runaway production only while labor and management were intensely lobbying for it (Anonymous 1971a, Endicott 3/16/71, Anonymous 1971b), and when the credit was lost in 1986 (Gendel 1986). Newspaper reports tend to emphasize dramatic stories at the expense of peaceful conclusions. In this case, they saw no need to report on a shift in the tax code that resulted in everyday film worker employment.

I found twenty-seven articles in the *New York Times* and 187 articles in the *Los Angeles Times* published between 1972 and 1998 that mentioned runaways in relationship to motion pictures or runaway production. This became categorized as the second phase for reasons detailed in the main body of this project. (The *Los Angeles Times* often ran the same articles in different regional versions of the paper, and sometimes ran the stories on different days. These multiple uses of the same work are counted as one mention.) During this phase, the shift of runaway production to the United States may go a long way toward explaining scholars' attitudes toward runaway production as largely a recent phenomenon with few historical antecedents. Because

scholars began exploring runaway production in the mid- to late 1980s, during the second phase (Storper & Christopherson 1986), in the midst of a relatively quiet period, they may have been influenced by Tversky's aforementioned logical fallacy (Tversky 1982). In other words, the experience of the relative quiet of the runaway production issue, may have influenced scholars to assume it had always been that way.

In what I categorized as the third phase of runaway production, I found eighteen mentions of runaway production published in the *New York Times* between 1999 and 2005, and 278 mentions of runaway production in the *Los Angeles Times* between 1999 and October 2007. Despite the fact that international competition re-emerged during this period to take Hollywood film production away from the United States, the *New York Times*, which provided a good basic overview of the situation, largely covered runaway production as a regional problem affecting the New York filmmaking industry (Collins 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, etc.) By contrast, the *Los Angeles Times* coverage broadened and deepened.

For the historical discussion of runaway production during this period, both the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* are used in addition to other sources. At the time of this research, I was limited by the limitations of the Proquest database: *New York Times* data was not available after 2005. Because of how few articles the *New York Times* published during this period, and because the *Los Angeles Times* provided a much larger sample size, my analysis of metaphor use applied, unless otherwise indicated, to the *Los Angeles Times* data, for both the continuation of the discussion of Marx's "all that is solid," and for metaphors used to describe the struggle.

Film Content Analysis: King Kong's Warrants

Film analysis is often trivialized. The public largely considers *King Kong* “good clean fun” or as my friend Robert put it, “Big ape, half-naked girl, dinosaurs. Fun!”

King Kong scholar Cynthia Erb is often asked, “Why analyze *King Kong* at all?”

She responds,

[T]he constant repetition of this figure in American culture, even as the figure is generally consigned to the realm of the trivial, is not accidental. Academics, of course, are invariably pressed to legitimate our objects of analysis. And yet the trivialization of *King Kong* has become a kind of censorship that prevents us from looking at the figure’s cultural stakes, which...are quite high (Erb 1998:13).

While *King Kong* has never been analyzed from the labor-and-content perspective of this project, the richness of *King Kong* as a scholarly source is evidenced by the fact that the film has been the subject of many critical writings (see Peary, D. in Woods 2005:69 for more information).

On the other hand, the filmmakers urge us away from analyzing *King Kong*.

Usually they do this in the context of providing their own “acceptable” analysis.

Acceptable forms of analysis and discussion involve how the film was made technically, and how a (severely edited) version of incidents in the lives of the filmmakers influenced the film’s dramatic episodes, especially how “real” the filmmakers previous adventures were in Asia and the Middle East.

Special effects genius Ray Harryhausen while providing voice-over commentary on the DVD release of *King Kong*, said of the *Girl in the Hairy Paw*, a book about the film’s psychology, “you can read anything [into *King Kong*]. A film is like an ink blot. It tells you more about the person who’s watching it than it does about the film itself.” Harryhausen added that Merian Cooper, the producer, “just set out to make a damn good piece of entertainment.” Cooper himself insisted that the things being read into Kong were not what he meant at all (Glut in Woods 2005:67).

Some analyses of *King Kong* are silly. For example, the extensive discussions of his lack of genitalia seem redundant (Brin 2005). However, others' analyses are substantive and worthy of attention. The filmmakers may be urging us away from some discussions and analyses because of the unflattering light that is shed on themselves. They may fear a significant analysis of the film, in which *King Kong* can be seen as the epitome of the promulgation of racist and dehumanizing typecasting about:

the superiority of Western Civilization, the necessity of conquering the savage beast, the lust of dark brutes for fair women, and the heroic account of white man's burden [...] combined with the ancient assumptions about the proper place of male and female to present a comprehensive way of seeing (Ewen & Ewen 2006).⁷⁵

In this project, I use the film *King Kong* (1933) to help place key film labor issues of that era in historic context. I discuss this iconic film in terms of the facts of the filmmakers' lives, and the influence of those facts on the fiction produced on film. Relationships between the facts and the fiction help us understand the conditions for workers of the period.

By approaching films for evidence, I take a risk, joining some scholars who have previously studied *King Kong*. *King Kong* scholar Cynthia Erb warns of the "risk of

⁷⁵ Just as Cecil B. De Mille made *Intolerance* as a form of amends for the racism of *Birth of a Nation* and the destruction it wrought through virulent racist stereotyping, I argue that Kong's producers, Cooper and Schoedsack, made two subsequent films to try to make amends for *King Kong*'s racism (despite their protestations of innocence). Both the *Son of Kong* and *Mighty Joe Young* are Cooper and Schoedsack films about gorillas. The *Son of Kong* was released shortly after Kong, an underfunded and blatant effort to exploit the success of the first film. In it, Robert Armstrong, again playing Carl Denham, the exploitative film producer, understands he has done wrong, AND Kong's son is albino! [99 morton] *Mighty Joe Young* (1949) was a later unique effort, which also employed Robert Armstrong as the showman going to get the ape in the wild, and also employed the stop-motion animation skills of Willis O'Brien (who finally won an Oscar for his efforts). In this film, Armstrong eventually helps the gorilla get back to Africa where he lives happily ever after in harmony with his white friends. Both films can be seen as an attempt on the part of the producers to take responsibility for the havoc the producer, in all cases played by Robert Armstrong, caused, and the racism implicit in the first film.

falling into a type of ‘reflection’ approach, based on an assumption that films directly reflect key social issues of their times.” Of course, films are “fictions” and don’t directly state historical fact. Because *King Kong* has been remade several times (1933, 1976, 2005), during distinctive periods (the studio system, the post-studio era, and the period of globalizing Hollywood), and grossed hundreds of millions of dollars, the different Kongs are uniquely representative, and well-situated for analysis. Each chapter that discusses *King Kong* contextualizes Hollywood union issues by discussing the facts and fiction of each film relative to labor issues. I argue that fiction—or at least the relationship between fact and fiction—gives us a richer picture of a period than simple facts do, at least if we are talking about motion picture production.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes used in film mark a place where the microcosm links with the macrocosm. My interest was in exploring the means by which film labor projects the monstrous onto the black male jungle ape, reinforcing a stereotype, and other dangers involving film labor and motion pictures. I researched archival materials, books, recorded interviews that addressed the moviemaker’s lives, and the film itself and found many instances where their work experiences reflected incidents in the film. These depictions help shed light on work and labor union issues of the period in relationship to content.

I was especially interested in elisions: moments during the moviemaking process when facts were smoothed in such a way that they conformed with stereotypes, and when labor issues were deliberately edited out of the film.

I am also interested in beginning to explore relationships among film making, film content and audience reception. For example, there are numerous instances where historical fact of the film worker's life experiences (which contributed much to the plot of the film) were altered in such a way that the film promulgated stereotypes that reinforce racist perspectives. This relates to labor issues because when a film uses stereotypes in the name of "innocent entertainment," it may help foreclose viewer reception to facts. The period when *King Kong* was released was a time of great racism in the United States. Labor historian, Philip Yale Nicholson argues that: "many racist lynchings attributed to sexual advances were actually job conflicts and wage disputes" (Nicholson 2004). In other words, stereotypes help support false justification for labor-related murder. I am not arguing that labor is always consciously complicit in manufacturing stereotypes. I am exploring places where stereotypes became part of the storytelling, and discussing what facts were changed to make the stereotypes smoother.

Interviews

In the social sciences, we take a risk that when we talk about "populations" we may lose sight of the real lived experience of people. This might in turn cost us the insights which could help resolve the very problems we set out to explore. Social psychologist Michael Billig points out that if one is claiming that, "existing social and cultural forces are alienating," then if one uses a "dehumanized language to make such a claim, then, in certain respects [one is] reproducing a dehumanized culture through [one's] text," resulting in work that is "textually and intellectually stunted" (Billig 1994: 312,324). He also says, "there is a limit to what can be said about thoughts, feelings, or other forms of mental activity if they are presented as belonging to no one in particular."

(Billig 1994:323). (He further points out that the idea of populating a text with real people was suggested by Marx and Engels.)

In employing the words of people to tell part of the story of this project, I had to choose between what Ruthellen Josselson calls a “hermeneutics of restoration,” or a “hermeneutics of demystification” (Josselson 2004). The “hermeneutics of restoration,” as a process means that as the interpreter, I am “trying to unearth and highlight meanings that are present in the informant/participant’s communication... trying to represent to ourselves and the readers of our work, clearly and accurately, the message our participants are trying to convey to us” (Josselson 2004:4-5). This is in contrast to research that is interested in investigating a “hermeneutics of demystification,” “those aspects of self-understanding or meaning-making that operate outside of the participants’ awareness” (Josselson 2004:15). For the purpose of this research I am largely interested in the “hermeneutics of restoration.” Because the kinds of voices that are transcribed here have largely gone unheard in the larger discourse about Hollywood labor, I want to understand what these people are trying to say. My working hypothesis is that individuals and larger social processes work in dialectical relationship. In this sense, an oral history contains information about “the primary level at which individuals now experience, live out, and react to the totality of social transformations and structures in the world around them” (Harvey 1985:251).

To each interview, I brought between one and nine pages of questions. This resulted in what Smith calls, “semi-structured interviews” in which I “attempt to establish rapport with the respondent.” “The ordering of questions is less important” than in structured interviews. By not using the structured interview process (in which the

investigator has decided “in advance exactly what constitutes the required data and constructs the questions in such a way as to elicit answers corresponding to, and easily contained within, predetermined categories which can then be numerically analysed”), I am “freer to probe interesting areas that arise” and “can follow the respondent’s interest or concern” (Smith 1995:11-12). My questions were usually modified based on what I knew about the backgrounds of the different people with whom I spoke, and what I had learned thus far about my research. I usually asked people to consider my basic questions before they consented to the interview. These questions were about their background and how they became involved in the movie industry and the unions, and their perception of the greatest challenges facing the unions today. These questions, asked again while I listened with a tape recorder, resulted in a wealth of interesting information.

My overall study depended on interviews with key participants. These include leaders of IATSE local 600, workers with histories of activist union involvement, and others involved with the film industry. Among those I spoke with were Gary Dunham, President of IATSE Local 600, Tim McHugh, a leader of FTAC, a single-issue grassroots organization devoted to combating runaway production, Haskell Wexler, former Local 600 Vice President, and presidential candidate, Douglas Hart, former President of IATSE Local 644,⁷⁶ Local 600 member Carisa Kaplan, and shorter discussions with Camera Assistant Kristen Glover, film and theater health and safety expert Monona Rossol, and those who chose to remain anonymous.

⁷⁶ Conversations with members of other unions about their experiences and history quickly made it clear that a larger project than this project is called for. Those included conversations with Del Reisman, a former Writers Guild president and their ad hoc historian, and Don Mankiewicz, a former Writers Guild vice-president and second-generation member (his father and his uncle wrote films including *Citizen Kane* and *The Wizard of Oz*), Valerie Yaros, the Screen Actors Guild archivist/historian, Colby Chester of SAG, the late Roy Brewer’s daughter, Romona, and others. I hope these interviews will be part of a later larger project involving Hollywood labor union history.

The interviews deepened my understanding of the complexity of runaway production, and provided concrete day-to-day examples of globalization's impact on labor, and the costs both for the individual and for the larger society.

I also engaged in what Bestor calls "inquisitive observation" (Bestor 2007:10), conducting about two dozen informal interviews with people who work on location shoots and other film-production sites in the New York metropolitan area. I geared these informal interviews to "down times" when crew members are more willing to speak with locals in the areas where they are shooting. However, when I saw a crew member, during a break, sleeping on the concrete after a nights' shooting, I let him sleep (August 2008 *Entourage* shoot in Woodside, Queens).

In each case where an individual is quoted, I have given a copy of my final version of their edited words to the person I interviewed to make sure that they are quoted accurately and that they believe their stories have been told correctly. I have done this with each of my book projects, because my first concern (related to my concern about repopulating sociology with human beings) is to respect the integrity of the individuals with whom I spoke. To that extent, the case studies are selective portraits painted contingent upon the final approval of their subjects.

Reflexivity

[W]hen a subject is highly controversial...one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker.

--Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 4

I come to this project with biases. I am an American citizen ardently in favor of the democratic values embodied in the Declaration, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, including the right to speak freely, to freely assemble, and the right to protest. I also come to this project wanting Americans (and by extension, the unions of working people), to be able to work to earn a decent living so they can support themselves and their families. (In certain postmodern circles, this is rapidly becoming a radical position).

I disagree with Marx about the necessity of forcible revolution to create decent working conditions (Marx 2001 [1848]). Yet I also recognize that often what has caused the elites to provide concessions to the working class was not reason, but rather their fear of angry organized masses of workers' willingness to go to any lengths to try to make a more level playing field. I hope that my reasonable efforts aid in the attempt to create decent working conditions. I also believe that a change in working conditions will make a radical change in the content of film, for the better. I think many lovers of movies would agree this could be a good thing.

During the interview process, I imagined I did not stand out as sharply different from the people with whom I spoke. I also imagined that the ways that I seemed different were to them associated with stereotypes which are comforting rather than threatening.

The American-based business of Hollywood motion picture production is almost entirely staffed by white, American, Christian or Jewish men. In Hollywood today, minority and women workers only predominate in niche categories such as janitorial work for minority workers; and “women’s work” such as hair and makeup arts.⁷⁷ I stepped into this conversation as a former film-studio employee who worked there in another “woman’s role,” the secretary. As an American Jewish female, I was at least a familiar “type” to everyone with whom I spoke.

I am also an egghead. Regardless of the egghead’s sex, in stereotyped portrayals in Hollywood films, the egghead is a usually a benign figure who is overly intellectual. This amusing type usually takes notes and asks irrelevant questions, using long incomprehensible words. To the extent that this stereotype eased my reception with people I interviewed, I am grateful.

I am just over 5’1” tall. Most of the people whom I met to interview were large, strong, intelligent people. I am guessing I didn’t come across as threatening. Conversely, the stories that unfolded as we spoke led many people I interviewed to inquire if I ever wanted to work in Hollywood. All assured me that if I did, this project would kill my chances.

The runaway production conflict reflects the central problem of the unenlightened capitalist approach: a continuous short-term gain emphasis is in direct conflict with the long-term sustainability of human life and life on earth. In observing how, over decades, shifting alliances of forces have struggled over runaway production, it is my hope that this project might provide support for strategies that encourage long-term sustainability.

⁷⁷ In early Hollywood, women were film editors, writers, and directors (Cook YEAR, Murch 2001).

Fine Points

Part of my goal is to share the stories of people whose stories usually go unheard. An hour of interview transcribed is approximately sixty pages of text. From thousands of pages of transcripts, I have selected short narratives and materials from the interviews that illustrate parts of life stories relevant to this project. To present the stories more effectively I edited out the “um”s, “you know”s, and stumbles of normal speech. When a three dot ellipses [...] is used, that signifies that I omitted text from an interview (or a text source). I also left out names and identifying details to protect individuals who requested anonymity.

Wherever possible, facts from interviews were cross-checked against written records. I was surprised to find that the most outrageous stories, such as those involving present-day blacklisting and violence (see Chapter 9) were usually substantiated by a published record. Those sources are cited. I relied on professional transcription services. The interviews took place in person and by phone. I used a Marantz portable cassette recorder PMD 222.

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