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**Seductive Surfaces: The Portrayal of Women and
Los Angeles in Selected American Fiction.**

Jessica Blundy

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Introduction.

By examining the depiction of women and the city of Los Angeles with relation to the concept of “surface” in selected American twentieth-century fiction, I will demonstrate how a “performative” subject emerged as a consequence of the developing Hollywood film industry. In the first chapter, I explore the figure of the *femme fatale* from American *film noir* cinema with relation to the portrayal of women in selected works by Raymond Chandler, Nathanael West’s The Day of The Locust and Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita. I demonstrate how within the framework of Hollywood’s mass consumer culture, the female image came to exist as a commodity. Similarly, California came into existence by being marketed as a commodity, or “the land of sunshine and oranges.” The city of Los Angeles developed alongside and in accordance with the consumer relations of the Hollywood film industry. Consequently, this industry had a profound effect upon the architecture of the city and its very inhabitants. I explore the relationship between the city and its residents, as portrayed in selected California fiction ranging from James M Cain to Thomas Pynchon, as a part of the second chapter. The female image and the city of Los Angeles can be interpreted in terms of the “seductive surface” of the commodity fetish. Thus with reference to commodity fetishism, as well as postmodern theorists, I will demonstrate how the development of a performative subject occurred as a consequence of the developing Hollywood film industry and the particular cultural ethos that it had created.

Writers from the *noir* genre such as Nathanael West and Raymond Chandler, living and writing in Los Angeles in the late 1930s and 1940s, charted in their fiction the societal effects that were made by the city’s rapid development. The Southern Californian region grew astronomically within a very short space of time. Between 1940

and 1950 the State population increased by 52 percent, from 6.9 to 10.6 million (Starr California 238). Consequently, the industrialisation and societal growth witnessed in Southern California during the 1940s can be seen as a microcosm and forecast of similar patterns of rapid development that would be repeated throughout the world. Although such development was unique to California, the performative identity that resulted from the societal conditions caused by its rapid development, as well as its growing consumer culture, has wider implications when considering the effect of postmodern culture on the individual. My argument that a performative identity was created in response to the cultural ethos that developed around Hollywood can offer insights into understanding the consequences of other such examples of rapid societal growth within the mass-media age.

The city of Los Angeles and the society that developed around the Hollywood film industry had a profound impact upon the individual subject. This development was highly influential to postmodern theorists such as Jean Baudrillard and Frederic Jameson. I use these theorists, along with Judith Butler's work on gender identity, as a starting point for considering how a performative identity resulted from the developing film industry. A key text in this examination is Nathanael West's The Day of the Locust, first published in 1939, which constitutes an intimate portrait of the 1930s Los Angeles society that had developed around Hollywood. West's novel describes how, in order to exist within the emerging image-centred culture of Hollywood, the city's inhabitants changed their own personal image and behaviour according to the latest fashion by playing different roles and wearing various outfits. The better equipped "masquerade" migrants who are more adept at performing and manipulating their appearance, are contrasted with the less well-equipped "transplant" migrants. The latter group are transplanted from the Midwest, unable to cope within

their new environment and consequently had “come to California to die” (West 180). The transplants are unable to find satisfaction in the transitory fulfilments of consumerism where gratification is endlessly deferred and where to have an identity is to perform a role; they are consigned merely to stare at their better adjusted counterparts, with their “eyes filled with hatred” (West 180).

Masquerade and the Survivor:

In West’s novel, the two groups of migrants, the masquerades and transplants, are compared in terms of their clothing: the masquerades are described as wearing “fancy dress” that bears no resemblance to their day-to-day activities; whereas the Midwest transplants’ clothing is described as “sombre and badly cut, bought from mail-order houses” (West 180). The inhabitants of Los Angeles are thus defined in terms of their consumption, and for the masquerades their clothing is a part of the performance that constitutes their identity. In The Eye’s Mind, Karen Jacobs defines these two people in terms of their respective relationship to Hollywood. Unlike the Midwest transplants, the “native masqueraders” are active participants in Hollywood and “appear to be constructed by and continuous with the new image industry” (Jacobs 245).¹ These masquerades are at home in the commodity culture of Hollywood and by using their dress as outward performance, they actively construct their identity. Thus adeptly manipulating their appearance, the masquerades are able to not only survive but even find happiness within the seemingly superficial society of spectacle. Consequently, “the natives appear to have an almost evolutionary advantage, deriving satisfactions from the exchange that elude their transplanted counterparts, whose awakened desires

¹ The term “masquerades” comes from West’s novel. Whereas the terms “natives” and “transplants” are Jacobs invention, referring to the “native” Angeleno masquerades, who are more at home in the city in contrast to the mid-West “transplants” who are less at ease in their environment.

exceed the possibility of fulfillment” (Jacobs 250). The masquerades learn to find satisfaction in the midst of the seemingly false promises of happiness made by consumer culture.

The masquerade persona can be aligned with a postmodern conception of the subject and can also be associated with “survivors” Mariah Wyeth and Oedipa Maas, the protagonists of Didion’s Play It As it Lays (1970) and Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49 (1966). These survivors find a way to cope and exist within a postmodern, fragmented landscape of Los Angeles where ultimate meaning and fulfillment are illusory. The progression toward a postmodern performative identity that occurred as a consequence of the developing Hollywood film industry is demonstrated in the second chapter by comparing the character of Monroe Stahr in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Last Tycoon with Sammy Glick in Budd Schulberg’s What Makes Sammy Run? Both novels were published the same year, 1941, but Fitzgerald’s posthumously and unfinished. Both protagonists can be considered Hollywood “players.” Monroe Stahr represents an older model of a subject who is principally interested in pioneering the film industry as an artistic medium, whereas Sammy Glick represents a new model who is concerned solely with the industry as a means of self-advancement. Stahr’s old-world benevolence means he is unable to survive in the increasingly ruthless nature of the industry, unlike Sammy who has no qualms about using any means necessary to ensure his own success. The performative subject that Sammy represents can be further aligned with survivors Mariah Wyeth and Oedipa Maas from Joan Didion’s Play It As it Lays, published in 1970, as well as Thomas Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49, published in 1966. Mariah and Oedipa find ways to cope with the apparently meaningless postmodern city of Los Angeles. The writing of Joan Didion and Thomas Pynchon reflects the turbulent atmosphere of 1960s society and the changing cityscape of Los Angeles. An

examination of Didion's Play It As it Lays and Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 demonstrates the effect on the individual made by the peculiar ethos of Los Angeles society.

The concept of survival is exemplified in Carey McWilliams description of the successful migrant, in his account of California during its boom years, California: The Great Exception. According to McWilliams, the successful migrant is characterised in terms of their ability to easily adjust to their new life as well as their restless energy. This same energy "kept them in motion, jostling them about, and sweeping them here and there" (McWilliams 65). The restlessness and sense of anticipation that characterises the Californian mind-set is best described by Joan Didion in her essay "Notes From a Native Daughter," in which she identifies an awareness "that things had better work here," because California is the place "where we run out of ntingent" (Didion Slouching Toward Bethlehem 172). Due to the geographical position of California, being at the most Western extreme of the continent, the place and the people came to represent the culmination of Manifest Destiny. Consequently, the mind-set of the Californian migrant is a peculiar one, filled with the knowledge that they represent the apogee of the American Dream. With nothing to lose, the typical migrant acts out their dreams through consumption, in their outfits and housing, actively constructing their identity as performance. The successful Californian migrant is typified in the masquerade from West's The Day of the Locust. With relation to commodity fetishism and postmodern theorists as well as Judith Butler's theory of gender identity as performance, this project demonstrates how the Hollywood film industry created the environment for the creation of a new model of subject.

The Female Image, Los Angeles and the Commodity Fetish:

Within the context of the Hollywood culture that developed during the first half of the twentieth century, the female image came to exist as a commodity. The image of the female movie star projected on screen created a seductive surface, which is embodied in the figure of the *femme fatale* in American *film noir* cinema of the 1940s.

Laura Mulvey describes the power of the female image on screen:

Just as an elaborate and highly artificial, dressed-up, made-up appearance envelops the movie star in “surface,” so does her surface supply a glossy front for the cinema, holding the eye in fascinated distraction away from its mechanics of production. (Fetishism 52)

The feminine image distracts from the woman in a same way as the fetishizing of a product’s status as a commodity distracts from its value as a result of labour. Karl Marx describes a process of distraction at work in the creation of commodity, whereby due to the attribution of exchange-value the labour process is no longer visible, thus a “mysterious” and “transcendent” commodity becomes an object of fetish (42). The process of attributing exchange-value onto a work of labour separates it from man; disguising its use-value in the same way that the feminine image distracts from a woman. Like the woman taking on a feminine attire, the commodity takes on a “seductive sheen” as it competes in the marketplace (Mulvey Fetishism 4).

According to Marx, the attribution of value “converts every product into a social hieroglyphic” (45). The object of utility, by becoming a commodity and stamped with an exchange-value, is transformed into a social product that exists in relation to other commodities. Just as a structuralist view of language dictates that words exist in relation to each other separated from the objects they represent, by being an exchange-value a commodity relates to other commodities in a form of communication that is separate from their underlying object of utility. The commodity has autonomous and

objective status in addition to assuming an indecipherable and mystical nature. The enigmatic nature of the commodity is shared with the *femme fatale*. Raymond Chandler portrays his female characters and the city of Los Angeles as deceptive and artificial. Mavis Weld in The Little Sister (1949) is often described as expressionless, leaving Marlowe unable to interpret her motives. Furthermore, the city of Los Angeles is characterised by Marlowe in terms of its deceptive neon lights which fool the viewer. Similarly, Thomas Pynchon describes Los Angeles as indecipherable in his postmodern novel The Crying of Lot 49 (1966). Protagonist Oedipa Maas compares the sprawling houses to the circuit card of a transistor radio, the swirling pattern of the houses seen from above had “a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning ... an intent to communicate” (Pynchon 15). Accordingly, both the portrayal of woman and the city of Los Angeles in fiction from Chandler to Pynchon can be interpreted in terms of the commodity.

The population boom of the 1940s, caused largely by the aeronautical industry, meant that towns came into existence almost instantly. McWilliams describes how Westchester, originally merely a name on a map signifying a large vacant lot near Los Angeles Municipal Airport, emerged miraculously like a new product on the marketplace and can be associated with the appeal of a commodity:

Everything about Westchester was new and shiny: its streets, its homes, its growing shopping centers, its schools. It is trim and neat and painfully new. As cities go, it is about the newest thing in California. It is as though someone had waved a magic wand and a city had suddenly appeared. (14)

The city's shine can be paralleled with the seductive sheen of the commodity fetish, an attribute shared with the female cinematic image. The commodity acquires this attractive surface nature as it competes in the marketplace; losing all marks of production by shedding its use-value, the commodity becomes only an exchange-value

and thus a fetish. Furthermore, the magical nature of Westchester's emergence recalls Marx's description of the commodity as mystical. As I will explore in the first chapter, the cinematic figure of the *femme fatale* is defined in terms of her seductive surface and mysterious nature. These attributes are epitomised in the character of Faye Greener in West's The Day of the Locust, who is described as "taut and vibrant" (212). Once more, Faye is likened to a "shiny new spoon," with "pale, glittering hair" (West 212). Such descriptions associate Faye with the seductive surface of the commodity fetish which can also be seen in the towns and architecture of Los Angeles.

This project explores how both the female image and the landscape of Los Angeles, by sharing attributes with the commodity fetish, came to exist as spectacle. Because the feminine image of woman on screen functions as fetish, images of women are particularly susceptible to becoming spectacle. Mulvey describes how the image of a woman on the cinematic screen "achieves a particular spectacular intensity" (Fetishism 14). Similarly, Guy Debord's The Society of the Spectacle, published in 1967, testifies to the extension of commodification to every area of life including people and places. However, decades before Debord's work, such authors as West and Chandler explored the effect of mass culture upon society. Consequently, their novels provide early illustrations of the effects of consumer culture as well as spectacle in human and societal form. In his 1949 novel, The Little Sister, Chandler calls California "the department-store state," because it had "the most of everything and the best of nothing" (Chandler LLON 451).² Contemporaneous with West and Chandler is Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's critique of American consumer society, The Dialectic of Enlightenment, which warned of the de-humanising effects of mass culture upon the individual and society. In his essay "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass

² The Lady in The Lake and Other Novels.

Deception,” Adorno and Horkheimer write that “[c]ulture today is infecting everything with sameness” (94). According to these authors, the epidemic of cultural homogeneity and consumerism extended to town-planning in California. Adorno and Horkheimer describe how the new bungalows built on the outskirts of town are flimsy in structure and invite their users to throw them away after short use just like tin cans (Adorno and Horkheimer 94). Consequently, even houses function as commodities within the culture industry of California and their elaborate facades are indicative of the commodity’s seductive surface. The British architect Reyner Banham in Los Angeles: An Architecture of Four Ecologies (1971), highlights a tendency toward fantastical façade in Californian architecture, which is most apparent in commercial buildings that are structurally plain with elaborately decorated exteriors. Thus the image of the *femme fatale* and the architectural facades of houses in Los Angeles have in common with the commodity fetish their seductive surface.

Pastiche and Postmodernism:

The highly elaborate as well as eclectic architectural facades of Los Angeles and the fancy dress of its inhabitants can be related to Frederic Jameson’s concept of the postmodern practice of pastiche. This practice suggests that an original, personal style is no longer possible and that there can only be imitation, thus marking the disappearance of the individual subject (Jameson 16). Pastiche is “like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language” (Jameson 17). According to Jameson, originality is no longer possible and imitation is the only alternative. This conclusion has profound implications for considering the individual subject. For if one cannot be original, instead imitation and performance constitute one’s identity. In West’s The Day of the Locust,

femme fatale Faye Greener's existence is purely performative. She is described as performing a series of gestures which were "completely meaningless" (West 212). Faye's performance can be defined as postmodern pastiche, a type of parody devoid of deeper meaning. Faye's gestures are artificial and overly elaborate but it is the only way she knows how to behave.

Elsewhere in The Day of the Locust, West's description of a male cabaret singer's imitation of a woman, suggests that identity consists of performance, because "[t]his dark young man with his thin, hairless arms and soft, round shoulders, who rocked an imaginary cradle as he crooned, was really a woman" (West 261). Once more, "[w]hat he was doing was in no sense parody; it was too simple and too restrained. It wasn't even theatrical" (West 261). The man was not parodying a woman but he really was a woman. It is after the performance when the cabaret singer leaves the stage and "becomes a man" again that he is described as acting, because "[h]is imitation of a man was awkward and obscene" (West 261). The singer's performance as a woman *is* his identity. West's assessment of the cabaret singer's apparently artificial performance suggests that such surface performance previously thought to be signs of identity are in fact one's identity. Baudrillard similarly writes, with regard to the hyperreal, that "[i]t is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real" (Baudrillard 2). Such performative signs are the only reality available, and by extension, the apparent artificiality of Hollywood and its players can be questioned.

West's description of the cabaret singer and the revelation that performance is identity, can be used as a starting point for reconsidering Los Angeles and its inhabitants. Baudrillard similarly examines the concept of reality with regard to Los Angeles in Simulacra and Simulation. In his discussion of the apparently unreal

Disneyland and its relation to the nearby city of Los Angeles, Baudrillard questions the status of such categories as the real and the imaginary:

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to a hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus saving the reality principle.

(Baudrillard 12-13)

Although Baudrillard is stating that Los Angeles is not real, his logic implies that there is no real to which something artificial can be contrasted. As a result, Baudrillard's line of argument demands a re-evaluation of Los Angeles as well as reinforcing the concept of the self as performance. For if the surface signs of reality are in fact the only reality, then by extension the performative signs of identity *are* one's identity. Furthermore, this theory of self is confirmed by Judith Butler and her theory of gender identity. In Gender Trouble, Butler suggests that "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 34). As a consequence, the consumerist image culture of Hollywood helped create an environment where to perform a role is to possess an identity, and this is best illustrated by the suitably adjusted and adept masquerades.

Chapter 1.

Women and Image: Exploring the Depiction of Women in Selected Fiction

Through the Figure of the *Femme Fatale*.

In this chapter I examine the fictional portrayal of women with relation to the *femme fatale* in selected works by Raymond Chandler, Nathanael West and Vladimir Nabokov. The *femme fatale* is a potent and powerful image representation of woman, and in her 1940s *film noir* incarnation she is an ideological representation of male societal fears and desires regarding female sexuality. I will explore the *femme fatale* with relation to fetishism, in order to illustrate how the image of woman on screen shares with the commodity its seductive surface that can be paralleled with Los Angeles' architecture. Paradoxically, it is the *femme fatale*'s likeness to the commodity fetish and her surface nature that allows for the possibility of empowerment. The *femme fatale* is a mythical figure subject to appropriation by different ideologies. Consequently it is within her existence as myth that the meaning of the *femme fatale* can change and subvert the ideology that it originally represented. Crucial to this chapter is a consideration of the interaction between visual media and fiction. In particular, I examine the impact upon selected fiction made by the burgeoning film industry in the 1930s and '40s with its mass-produced images of women. Such images of women function in terms of processes of desire and the deferral of gratification that are associated with mass culture. I consider the authors' relation to the film industry, which can be seen in terms of a cycle of resistance and complicity that can be paralleled with woman's relation to her own image. These writers implicitly explore the association between Hollywood and pornography to demonstrate how both industries turn women into commodities through the production of images.

The *Femme Fatale* as a Product of Changing Twentieth-Century Gendered Visual Relations:

Due to technological advancements, two World Wars as well as other factors, the twentieth century was a time when the traditional roles of men and women were called into question. Consequently the relationship between the two sexes, which is primarily a visual as well as a sexual one, was also in a state of upheaval. The visual relationship between the genders, as well as that between a woman and her own image became further complicated by technological developments in the area of photography and film. Whilst mass produced images of women could be a source of control over women, women themselves increasingly sought to manipulate their own image and consequently resist male containment and control. The development of photography during the nineteenth century created epistemological doubt regarding the relationship between vision and knowledge. Such doubt had an impact upon the visual relationship between the sexes. In Ways of Seeing, John Berger defines traditional, visual gender relations with the statement that “men *act* women *appear*,” thus contrasting the male, active gaze with female passivity (41). Berger explains that a woman does not merely appear in the eyes of others but she also internalizes the male gaze and learns to survey herself as she functions within society. In this way women are “almost continually accompanied by her own image” (Berger 40). Within societal visual relations, a woman possesses a type of double consciousness, because in addition to their own perspective, women are also aware of how they are perceived and the potential power their appearance can have over others. This chapter will explore how this double consciousness is exemplified in the *femme fatale*.

The opening of Chandler’s The Big Sleep, first published in 1939, foregrounds the visual nature of gender relations and the changing roles of the sexes

during the twentieth century, as well as foreshadowing a key theme in the novel. Philip Marlowe describes the ostentatious entrance to the Sternwood family mansion:

Over the entrance doors, which would have let in a troop of Indian elephants, there was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armour rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn't have any clothes on but some very long and convenient hair. The knight had pushed the vizor of his helmet back to be sociable, and he was fiddling with the knots of the ropes that tied the lady to the tree and not getting anywhere. I stood there and thought that if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him. He didn't seem to be really trying. (Chandler BSON 3)³

Marlowe's typically ironic description of a well-meaning but ineffectual knight echoes the story that follows. Through the stained-glass window the reader is presented with the familiar fairy tale of a knight saving the damsel by defeating some evil force, which is usually a dragon, and such a narrative is representative of traditional roles for men and women. However, as the novel illustrates, this paradigm has become obsolete because relations between the sexes are in a state of flux. As a consequence of the changing role of women within society, the grateful damsel-in-distress act is merely one of many that a woman can perform. In Chandler's novels women cannot or do not want to be rescued. Furthermore, the overtly visual nature of the stained-glass window emphasizes how relations between the sexes revolve around looking and being looked at.

Marlowe's contemplation of an ongoing chess game exemplifies his position within the novel and the dilemma facing men as would-be knights in the twentieth century. Significantly, Marlowe's attempt to grapple with an unsolvable chess problem comes after an encounter with Carmen, the Sternwood family's wayward daughter, who represents a problem that cannot be solved by a knight. Marlowe declares that "[k]nights had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights" (Chandler BSON

³ The Big Sleep and Other Novels

111). Marlowe's existential chess game that he plays against himself represents his inability to change the world in which he must act. Marlowe is surrounded by a corrupt society that is symbolized by the deception of women. Furthermore, he is powerless against these corrupt forces. However, despite this Marlowe "continues to play his game of knighthood; it is the only one he knows and there is no other game in sight" (Fontana 161). Marlowe's position is representative of a crisis in masculinity that has been caused by changing gender roles. Within the narrative of the novel, not only does Marlowe fail to complete his chivalric quest but Marlowe is implicated in the corruption he tries to defeat, as he becomes a part of the conspiracy to cover up the murder committed by Carmen. The uneasy ending of the novel signals the "failure of romance as a genre and chivalry as a personal code" (Fontana 160). Consequently, conventional gender roles no longer apply in Chandler's corrupt, post-romantic Los Angeles.

Out of place in this world where men can no longer be knights, Marlowe is characterized as a loner and cynic existing in an inhospitable environment. Marlowe's alien status becomes more pronounced in Chandler's later novel The Little Sister, first published in 1949. The novel is populated by female characters that cannot or do not want to be saved; once more, they are not what they seem. The seemingly deceptive nature of appearances that is a symptom of the uncertain world Marlowe inhabits, is displaced onto women:

The seductive power attributed to the figure of the femme fatale in film noir exemplifies the disparity between seeming and being, the deception, instability, and unpredictability associated with woman. (Doane 46)

Aspiring actress and deceptive *femme fatale* as well as Marlowe's principal love interest in the novel, Mavis Weld, is far from a damsel-in-distress. It becomes apparent that Marlowe is unable to help Mavis despite his best chivalric intentions. During one such

interaction Marlowe says to Mavis that ““You’re going to find this hard to believe. But I came over here with the quaint idea that you might be a girl who needed some help – and would find it rather hard to get anyone you could bank on”” (Chandler LLON 448). Marlowe’s noble instincts are confounded by Mavis’ icy demeanor and as the unfolding drama reveals, Mavis proves capable of looking after herself. After this encounter, Marlowe takes a drive and contemplates the corrupt, unreadable world he is surrounded by. Marlowe thus concludes that “something isn’t what it seems and the old tired but always reliable hunch tells me that if the hand is played the way it is dealt the wrong person is going to lose the pot” (Chandler LLON 451). The parallel is made between Marlowe navigating the city and the playing of cards, which emphasises the city’s deceptive environment, in which Marlowe struggles to read his opponents. As exemplified by the chess game in The Big Sleep, Marlowe faces situations where he is unable to identify what action is required. Marlowe inhabits a new and unfamiliar world where the old rules no longer apply. He describes his environment as “a cold half-lit world where always the wrong thing happens and never the right” (Chandler BSON 452). Marlowe’s pervading pessimism is symptomatic of a crisis in masculinity and his inability to fulfill a traditional male role.

In The Big Sleep, Carmen Sternwood is symbolized by the naked damsel in the stained glass panel. During Marlowe’s first encounter with Carmen she physically falls back into Marlowe’s arms, in a parody of the damsel-in-distress scenario. Carmen performs this action suddenly and catches Marlowe unawares, and he says “I had to catch her or let her crack her head on the tessellated floor” (Chandler BSON 5). There is a sense of violence rather than romance in this encounter between Marlowe and Carmen. As the narrative unfolds we realize Carmen cannot be saved despite Marlowe’s best efforts, because the evil force resides within her and is not an external evil, such as

a dragon that can be physically slayed. Carmen's internal monster is also autonomous and not fully in her control. Carmen's recalcitrant behavior is attributed to her epileptic condition: "when this internal monster of epilepsy possesses Carmen, it drives her, independently of her will, to acts of social excess and murder" (Fontana 160). Carmen does not remember her actions during her epileptic episodes. Evil is embodied by a seductive woman and this force has a power of its own, just like the power of the *femme fatale*, with whom Carmen is aligned. Carmen is repeatedly described in terms of animal imagery, for example when Marlowe first meets her he notes her "little sharp predatory teeth" (Chandler BSON 4). When Carmen turns on Marlowe during one of her fits she hisses and her face transforms; she thus becomes "[a]ged, deteriorated, become animal, and not a nice animal" (Chandler BSON 156). Carmen is described as bestial and primitive, almost inhuman. Such animal imagery suggests the dangers of unrestrained female sexuality, as well as the autonomous power epitomized by the *femme fatale*.

The *Femme Fatale*'s Power as Myth:

The *femme fatale*'s power is "of a peculiar sort insofar as it is not subject to conscious will, hence appearing to blur the opposition between passivity and activity" (Doane 2). The *femme fatale* possesses a power that is external to herself. The figure complicates the traditionally passive female role; although she may continue to be defined in terms of her image, she also resists the male defining gaze as she increasingly controls and manipulates her own image. The *femme fatale*'s power is ambiguous and complex, as well as never completely in her own control, nor is it ever fully controlled by others, as seen with Carmen in The Big Sleep. Similarly, Faye Greener in West's The Day of the Locust constitutes a powerful source of attraction for other characters.

Although aware of her own power, Faye cannot always control its effects, as illustrated by Homer's actions after Faye leaves him. The *femme fatale* figure has a powerful meaning that changes. *Femme fatales* such as Phyllis Dietrichson in *Double Indemnity* (1944) as well as Cora Smith in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946) were portrayed as mercenary and heartless. In contrast, the *femme fatale* Gilda, in the film of the same name *Gilda* (1946), saw a more sympathetic portrayal of a woman mistreated by men, struggling to survive and resisting the control of men. This resistance can be seen in the very nature of the *femme fatales*' respective images on screen. Whereas Phyllis and Cora are largely static, Gilda is the opposite. The first shot of Gilda on screen is her flicking her hair back, and throughout the film she is seen dancing and singing as well as concealing and revealing her body with such items as gloves and masks. *See figures 1, 2 and 3 in the appendix.*

In her essay entitled "Myths of Women in the Cinema," Claire Johnston outlines the division of women into types via their on-screen roles in the Hollywood film industry during the 1930s and '40s (407).⁴ At a fundamental level, this division categorized women into good and bad. The *femme fatale* was originally an incarnation of the latter and consequently a threat to the masculine status quo. Extensive film theory explores how the *femme fatale* of 1940s *film noir* cinema was a representation of a patriarchal society's fears regarding female sexuality. Many writers have argued that the figure was a product of a specific historical time and corresponding ideology.⁵ The *femme fatale* can be understood in relation to changing female roles as

⁴ Similarly, Erwin Panofsky's earlier essay "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures" defines the two types of women as "the Vamp and the Straight Girl," which developed during the silent movie era; he describes them as the "modern equivalents of the medieval personifications of the Vices and Virtues" (Panofsky 286).

⁵ The ending of the Second World War and beginning of peacetime represented a turbulent and formative period. 1946 is considered the pivotal year of *film noir* production, when the term was first used, although

well as real or perceived promiscuity during the Second World War; she can also be seen as a response to the economic need for women to return to their traditional position in the home in order to vacate the job market for men returning from war. The nature of myth is to respond to changing needs within society as it both expresses and reproduces the ideologies necessary for the existence of a particular social structure (Place 47). However, “the fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be appropriated” (Barthes 143). Myth is a second-order semiological system whereby that which is a sign in the first becomes a signifier in the second (Barthes 137). Even though the *femme fatale* functions as a sign in the first system, because it is myth she can become a signifier in another system and represent something different. The ability of myth to adapt to different ideologies also means that it is able to subvert them. Although the *femme fatale* was a product of a male-centered ideology and thus an object of desire, as a myth the *femme fatale* is able to change meaning and resist such objectification.

Due to her mythological nature, the *femme fatale* is able to change meaning and contradict the patriarchal ideology that she originally represented. The function of any representation is to suppress contradiction through a process of aesthetic subversion. However, it is possible for a representation to work against the very ideology it originally represented (Glendhill 25). As previously mentioned, Phyllis Dietrichson in *Double Indemnity* (1944), is depicted as callous and cold-blooded, an adulteress and murderer. Whereas in the film *Gilda* (1946), although still identifiably a *femme fatale*, Gilda is portrayed as a victim of circumstance, trying to survive in a society that favors strong men. In this way the *femme fatale* subverts the very ideology that it originally represented. The *femme fatale* Phyllis Dietrichson, according to the contemporaneous dominant patriarchal ideology, is bad and represents a threat to

film noir genre spans from throughout 1940s into the 1950s. As explored by Borde and Chaumeton ed.s, Cameron ed., Palmer, R. Barton, Alain Silver and James Ursini ed.s.

society, whereas *femme fatale* Gilda cannot be so easily identified as bad or a threat, thus she comes to subvert that same patriarchal ideology. Similarly, within a literary framework, *femme fatales* such as Faye Greener in West's Locust and Nabokov's eponymous *Lolita*, whilst existing within the male narrative and thus defined by the male gaze, paradoxically actively resist this very containment by their seductive surfaces.

The *Femme Fatale*'s Seductive Surface:

In addition to being a manifestation of societal fears regarding female sexuality, the *femme fatale* is a reflection of a crisis in the masculine identity, thus a projection of both male anxiety and desire. It is because of woman's essential difference that she is a source of anxiety and consequently she is turned into such a powerful figure of desire. According to Laura Mulvey, an elaborate façade or surface is created in order to mask woman's essential difference to man, which unconsciously poses a threat. The *femme fatale* is predicated on an "inside/outside topography" whereby a "seductive surface" distracts the male gaze from a deadly threat beneath (Fetishism 55). Mulvey identifies a "surface/secret opposition" at work in the *femme fatale* whereby her seductive beauty masks her dark secret and destructive powers (Fetishism 47). The constructed nature of this surface implies that the threat which lies beneath is imagined; this surface represents the denial of vision and inability to accept the different nature of women, which causes the fixation on a substitute object. Mulvey writes that "fetishism is born out of a refusal to *see* and to accept the difference the female represents for the male" (Fetishism 64). An idealized image of female sexuality is created that reflects male fantasy and desire. Thus woman is simultaneously transformed into a representational screen, whereby her image functions as a site of projection or reflection

whilst her body is left as an “enigma and threat, condemned to return as symbol of anxiety” (Fetishism 64). Following this argument, Mulvey explains that the prevalence of woman as fetish within media images illustrates how women are “simply the scenery onto which men project their narcissistic fantasies” (Mulvey Visual 13). Whilst Mulvey’s reading of woman in terms of castration anxiety is important, it is also useful to consider how such “narcissistic” fantasies are also socio-historically based.⁶ The *femme fatale* can be seen in terms of a feminine surface constructed in order to distract not only from woman’s essential difference but also fears regarding the changing societal role of women.

A woman’s essential difference to man and consequently the threat she poses to the stability of the male subject and the certainty of his vision, causes the transformation of a woman into a secret, and a site of uncertainty and mystery. The figure of the *femme fatale* constitutes “something which must be aggressively revealed, unmasked, discovered,” and is “fully compatible with the epistemological drive of narrative, the hermeneutic structure of the classical text” (Doane 1). This facet of the *femme fatale* is related to woman’s historic function within philosophy as the representation of an epistemological search for truth as well as resistance to it (Doane 62). The *femme fatale* character represents the locus of mystery within the plot structure of *film noir* cinema. The detective hero must decipher her in order to solve the murder and often uncover monetary goods. The vagaries of the relationship between the detective hero and the *femme fatale* figure constitute the twists and turns of the story. This can be seen in Philip Marlowe’s relationship with Mavis Weld in Chandler’s The Little Sister. During their interactions, Mavis is taciturn and expressionless, leaving Marlowe unable to read her and interpret her motives. Marlowe describes how “there

⁶Julie Grossman in Rethinking the Femme Fatale in Film Noir warns of the dangers of psychoanalytic interpretations that abstract representations of women from the social world (2).

was no emotion of any kind in her face” (Chandler The Lady in the Lake and Other Novels 445). In the mind of the detective hero, the *femme fatale* is “never what she seems to be” (Doane 1). The *femme fatale* is a chameleon figure, switching allegiance for her own aims. These aims are often the fulfilment of her own desires and ambition, which would be represented as bad within a patriarchal society where a woman’s aim should be the fulfilment of a man’s desires. Alternatively, the *femme fatale* can be seen as a consequence of male societal expectations not being met. Furthermore, her changeability and the frequent switching of allegiance can be viewed as a response to this male environment where women have little or no economic power of their own; consequently the *femme fatale*’s deceptiveness and indecipherability is a necessary tool of survival.

The seeming enigma of women as represented by the *femme fatale*, can be associated with hieroglyphic language: “[t]he woman, the enigma, the hieroglyphic, the picture, the image ... a writing in images of the woman but not *for* her. For she *is* the problem” (Doane 18). The woman thus constitutes a language of images. However her image does not exist for her but rather objectively for the benefit of others. And, although the hieroglyphic language is associated with indecipherability, it is also the most readable of languages. Its “immediacy” and “accessibility” are “functions of its status as a *pictorial* language, a writing in images” (Doane 18). Woman is not the enigma she first appears to be, in fact her image contains the possibility of wide social communication because the hieroglyphic language is “potentially the most universally understandable” of languages (Doane 19). Similarly, Marx describes commodity-fetishism as a hieroglyphic and a social language. When a product of labour becomes a commodity it becomes autonomous. Marx writes that “the commodity is a mysterious thing simply because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an

objective character stamped upon a product of that labour” (Marx 43). This relationship between a product and its exchange-value can be paralleled with woman’s relation to her feminine image.

Like the commodity, where the product of labour or physical object is separate from the exchange-value that is stamped upon it, woman’s image is autonomous and can be kept at a distance from herself. Exchange-value converts a product into a commodity and, as autonomous social entities, commodities exist with relation to one another. Similarly, spectacle constitutes a relation between autonomous images: “a social relation between people that is mediated by images” (Debord 12). Marx describes how the attribution of value “converts every product into a social hieroglyphic” (45). In this way a commodity is “mysterious’ but it also has an existence with relation to other commodities as a form of communication. To create commodity is to produce a social product just like with communication. Marx writes that “for to stamp an object of utility as value, is just as much a social product as language” (45). Woman and her image share with the hieroglyphic language and with the commodity-fetish a dual, contradictory nature of being at once indecipherable and yet possibly universally understandable. Thus paradoxically, a woman’s power lies in her commodified image-form, as epitomized in the *femme fatale*. Being indecipherable means she can resist the male defining gaze and yet the pictorial nature of her image also means she is a powerful female representation that can be understood by all.

The female image on the cinematic screen triumphs as spectacle, and it is because of her power as an object of fetish that a woman’s image is particularly susceptible to becoming spectacle, achieving a particular intensity (Mulvey Fetishism 14). The glossy seductive female image holds the eye “in fascinated distraction away from its mechanics of production” (Mulvey Fetishism 14). Marx describes a similar

process with regard to the commodity, whereby its marks of labour are rendered invisible. A commodity becomes “mysterious” and “transcendent” when it sheds its use-value and becomes an exchange-value (Marx 42). Like the fixation on a woman’s feminine surface, fetishism lies in the attribution of exchange-value to a commodity which eclipses its use-value. It is vital that a commodity’s marks of production are erased and that it takes on a “seductive sheen” as it competes in the marketplace (Mulvey Fetishism 4). A parallel can be made between a commodity’s seductive sheen and the image of the *femme fatale*. The fetish of the commodity takes on new and greater significance with regard to images of woman, especially on the cinema screen, and is best illustrated by the image of the *femme fatale*.⁷

Female Spectacle and Resistance within Chandler’s Fiction:

The eyes of women play an important role in Chandler’s fiction in terms of male-female relations as well as woman’s existence as spectacle. Eyes are associated with both seduction and deception. When Marlowe finds Carmen after Geiger’s murder, he describes how:

Her eyes were wide open. The dark slate colour of the iris had devoured the pupil. They were mad eyes. She seemed to be unconscious, but didn’t have the pose of unconscious. She looked as if in her mind she was doing something very important and making a fine job of it. Out of her mouth came a tinny chuckling noise which didn’t change her expression or even move her lips.

(Chandler BSON 25)

This description suggests a sense of uncertainty with regard to Carmen’s mental state and her consciousness. When Marlowe first encounters Carmen, and when she is definitely not in one of her epileptic episodes, a similar description is made. He says

⁷ Technological developments in film during the 1940s allowed for improvements in the quality of cinematic image. For example “special lacquers were developed to give film prints unprecedented sheen” and new processes reduced grain (Higham and Greenberg 7). Such improvements helped facilitate the advent of *film noir* and importantly the *femme fatale*’s image and its seductive power.

that “[h]er eyes were slate grey and had almost no expression when they looked at me” (BSON 4). Carmen’s blank expression means Marlowe is unable to read her. Carmen constitutes a puzzle and is impenetrable to the male gaze. Like Carmen, Mavis Weld in The Little Sister possesses a blank, unreadable expression. Mavis’s eyes are similarly described as empty and she is expressionless (Chandler LLON 445). The emptiness and lack of emotion is unsettling to Marlowe as it means he struggles to interpret Mavis’ motives. The vacant expression seen in Carmen and Mavis is typical of the *femme fatale* and her characteristic indecipherability which enables her to block the defining male gaze. Furthermore, the emptiness of her eyes and expression means she can assume different emotions or roles and even different identities. As an actress, Mavis is adept at assuming different roles and manipulating her appearance. The association between Mavis and acting is made clear when Marlowe says that “[s]he stared out of her own eyes for a brief instant before the act dropped over her again” (Chandler LLON 447). Such a description suggests acting is not just a career for Mavis but extends to her daily interactions, being adept at assuming different guises. Although a person’s eyes are usually considered a means of accessing their true character, in Chandler’s corrupt world they can no longer be relied upon as an indicator of honesty especially when it comes to women.

Marlowe’s first encounter with Carmen Sternwood in The Big Sleep is centred on her eyes. Marlowe describes how Carmen uses her eyes in an attempt at enticement and also manipulation: “she lowered her lashes until they almost cuddled her cheeks and slowly raised them again, like a theatre curtain. I was to get to know that trick. That was supposed to make me roll over on my back with all four paws in the air” (Chandler BSON 4). The comparison is made between her eyes and a theatre curtain, which reinforces the idea that the movement of her lashes is one of concealing and

revealing. The oscillation between bodily concealment and revelation is associated with desire, deception and with the allure of the *femme fatale*. Carmen is aware of the possible effect and power of her appearance, but Marlowe is experienced in dealing with such acts of female seduction. In The Little Sister Marlowe indulges in Orfamay's flirtations whilst suspecting that she is deceiving him. He calls Orfamay a "fascinating little liar," but the reason Marlowe takes the case is precisely because there was "something in her eyes that was much older than Manhattan, Kansas" (Chandler LLON 398). The deception of women is a part of the game that constitutes male-female relations. Marlowe is wise to woman's power of seduction but continues to play the game.

Marlowe's interactions with Orfamay illustrate the typical dynamic of male-female relations in Chandler's novels, which revolve around seduction as well as looking and being looked at. During one such encounter between Marlowe and Orfamay, he describes how "[h]er upper lids drooped, fluttered a bit, and her lips came open a little farther. On them appeared the faint provocative smile that nobody ever has to teach them" (Chandler LLON 418). The last line suggests that women possess an instinctual provocative smile that they have no control over. This smile represents a power that exists independently of women and which is never entirely in their control and can be linked to the nature of representation and the power of the *femme fatale*. Furthermore, Orfamay's gestures of seduction are film-like, which can be attributed to Chandler's particular literary style as well as an indicator of the influence of film upon human behavior and male-female relations. The influence of film is typified in the "up-from-under-look," which becomes a reoccurring motif in The Little Sister. During one rendezvous between Marlowe and Orfamay, he describes how she "gave me the up-from-under-look that made her eyelashes cut across the iris" (Chandler LLON 418).

Marlowe's description suggests that he has seen the look before. It is a gesture of flirtation, but the look reoccurs in an unlikely place, from Oppenheimer, the boss of the studio where Mavis Weld is employed. Marlowe thus reflects that "I figured it was just Hollywood" (Chandler LLON 486). This look exemplifies both the seduction of masses by film images and how Hollywood created new models of seduction.⁸ From Orfamay's use of this look one can conclude that she is acting, which Marlowe suspects all along. Orfamay's behaviour is modelled on the movies, and she imitates the gestures and looks of the *femme fatales* she has seen on screen. Similarly, in Nabokov's Lolita, Humbert imagines Lolita kissing him back "as Hollywood teaches" (Nabokov 48). The sharp, witty and at times seductive dialogue typical of the exchanges between the film noir hero-protagonist and the *femme fatale* can be seen as presenting a new model of male-female interactions. As will be discussed later in this chapter, such a dynamic is demonstrated by Humbert and Lolita's relationship within Nabokov's novel, in which they each take-on the role of *noir* hero and *femme fatale*.

In Chandler's fiction, the first meeting between Marlowe and a female character illustrates the dynamics of the male-female relationship as well as the function of women as spectacle. Marlowe's introduction to Orfamay in The Little Sister revolves around her appearance and Marlowe's assessment of her; he describes as "small, neat, rather prissy-looking girl with primly smooth brown hair and rimless glasses" (Chandler LLON 389). The impression given to the reader is that Orfamay is prim and provincial. However, Marlowe also declares that "nobody ever looked less like Lady Macbeth" (Chandler LLON 389). This comparison suggests Orfamay's appearance is at odds with

⁸ Chandler regularly describes how his characters exhibit behaviour which has been learnt from the movies. Such descriptions can be viewed as illustrative of the masses' seduction by consumer culture via glossy cinematic images. In The Big Sleep Joe Brody's voice is described as "the elaborately casual voice of the tough guy in the pictures. Pictures have made them all like that" (Chandler BSON 56). Chandler's description of the cinema's effect on human behaviour are usually disparaging but Chandler himself played a crucial role in creating the archetypal tough guy of the movies, through both the adaptations of his novels into films and his work as a screenwriter.

her true nature and hints at what that might be. The rimless glasses that Orfamay wears are important; Marlowe describes how the glasses give her “that librarian’s look” (Chandler LLON 389). A woman wearing glasses is a charged symbol and “one of the most intense visual clichés of the cinema” (Doane 27). It is a cliché loaded with signification, connoting intellectuality and undesirability. The image of a bespectacled woman has “a power so strong that it indicates a moment of ideological danger or threat – the woman’s appropriation of the gaze” (Doane 27). It signifies her ability to look as opposed to being looked at, thus constituting a reversal of visual relations. In the case of Orfamay her glasses indicate not only knowledge but deception. Marlowe suspects that her appearance is a façade, which can be inferred from his reference to her glasses as “cheaters” (Chandler LLON 390). Furthermore, when she makes a grammatical mistake he corrects her, saying to her “If you’re going to wear those rimless glasses, you might at least try to live up to them” (Chandler LLON 391). This not only suggests that her glasses are associated with intellect but that with regard to Orfamay there is a discrepancy between her appearance and her real self. The inauthenticity of Orfamay’s appearance is also illustrated in the way she unhesitatingly changes it upon Marlowe’s suggestion of a more Hollywood look. Finally, Orfamay’s glasses are removed when she kisses Marlowe, which according to the cinema cliché signifies that she is no longer a threat and thus transformed into a spectacle and object of desire (Doane 27).⁹

As with the wearing of glasses, the veiled woman also represents a resistance to the male gaze. Mavis Weld first appears in The Little Sister veiled and in fulfillment of the *femme fatale* role poses a physical danger to Marlowe. Mavis knocks

⁹ In The Big Sleep the association between women and glasses is complicated. According to the cinema cliché, glasses signify knowledge and thus undesirability. Interestingly, the woman in bookstore across the road from Geiger’s shop wears glasses and gives Marlowe a description of Geiger, thus she is presented as possessing knowledge as well as being an object of desire. With the use of the glasses motif Chandler plays with such cinematic clichés, as well as illustrating how such cinematic symbols can be appropriated and change meaning (Chandler BSON 20).

Marlowe unconscious, causing a literal disturbance to his gaze as well as his ability to investigate. Mavis' veiled appearance is significant, because the veiled woman exemplifies the "precariousness of vision" (Doane 46). The veil has a contradictory function as it constitutes a deception in itself but also makes visible the deception that cannot be seen because it stabilizes the unstable – female sexuality (Doane 46). Furthermore, if femininity is conceived of as surface, the veil introduces a "supplementary surface" (Doane 48). It creates a profundity and a depth-surface binary where there is none. The veil creates a deception that is illusory, concealing the fact that woman has in fact nothing to conceal (Doane 57). Whilst the veil is characterized by its opacity and ability to frustrate the gaze, it also provokes the gaze. When used to represent the seductive power of femininity, the veil simultaneously conceals and reveals. Veiling represents both the deception and seduction of female sexuality, thus paradoxically both facilitates and blocks vision (Doane 49). Marlowe's encounter with Mavis is characterized by this juxtaposition of frustration and enticement of the male gaze, as exemplified by the trope of veiling. Although inconvenienced by Mavis' actions, Marlowe also finds enjoyment in them. Despite Marlowe's inability to see her he still flirts with Mavis, telling her that he likes looking at her and likes the sound of her voice. Furthermore, as Marlowe is knocked unconscious he describes how his "hand touched a leg in a nylon stocking, but slipped off, which seemed a pity. It felt like a nice leg" (Chandler LLON 425). The attention paid to Mavis' legs is important as it represents her existence as spectacle as well as a danger.¹⁰

¹⁰ Janey Place interprets the exhibition of a woman's legs in a *film noir* as phallic, symbolizing her ability to be a match for the male hero (Place 55). Lengthy screen-time is given to female legs whilst introducing the *femme fatale* figure in *films noir*, such as *Double Indemnity* (1944) and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946). For example, see figure 2 in appendix.

The descriptions of female characters in Chandler's novels revolve around their existence as spectacle. As with Mavis Weld, when Marlowe first meets Vivian Sternwood in The Big Sleep, his attention is focused on the display of her legs:

She was worth a stare. She was trouble. She was stretched out on her modernistic chaise-longue with her slippers off, so I stared at her legs in the sheerest silk stockings. They seemed arranged to be looked at. They were visible to knee and one of them well beyond. The knees were dimpled, not bony and sharp. The calves were beautiful, the ankles were long and slim with enough melodic line for a tone poem. (Chandler BSON 13)

Marlowe describes Vivian's legs with intricate detail and goes so far as to compare the line of her legs to music, like a "tone poem." Later Marlowe even personifies her legs, saying that "[t]hey're very swell legs and it's a pleasure to make their acquaintance" (Chandler BSON 14). The detailed description compounds Vivian's existence as spectacle. The way her legs are described as "arranged to be looked at," suggests she is a part of the furniture! The introduction to Vivian exemplifies the concept of woman's "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' 11). Vivian is also aware of her own existence as spectacle and the power of her appearance. It was Vivian who had invited Marlowe to her room. Vivian presents herself seductively to Marlowe, in order to get him to do what she wants. The attention paid to the amount of her leg that is revealed also highlights a revealing-concealing movement which is associated with deception, and the stockings themselves constitute a type of veiling. As with the *femme fatale*, Vivian constitutes both spectacle and danger, and once more Marlowe's description seems to suggest that Vivian is not just worth a stare but also worth the trouble.

The *Femme Fatale* Faye Greener in Nathanael West's The Day of the Locust:

Faye constitutes a magnetic spectacle that causes the male characters to become fascinated by her. When Homer Simpson, the simple-minded Midwesterner, first meets Faye, his good manners desert him and he cannot help but stare. However, as is stated unequivocally in the narrative, “Faye enjoyed being stared at” (West 212). Faye is aware the effect her appearance and behaviour has upon others, especially men such as Homer, because “[w]henver he looked at her, she smiled intimately and tossed her pale, glittering hair first forward, then back” (West 212).¹¹ Crucial to Faye’s identity is her awareness of her own image, which recalls Jacques Lacan’s mirror-stage whereby the subject becomes aware of oneself as a viewable object.¹² Homer is mesmerized by Faye: “[h]e thought her extremely beautiful, but what affected him still more was her vitality. She was taut and vibrant. She was as shiny as a new spoon” (West 212). This description of Faye fits Mulvey’s concept of the “seductive sheen” of a commodity. Faye’s likeness to a shiny new spoon and the description of her “pale, glittering hair,” associates her with the seductive, feminine surface of the commodity fetish (West 212). However, although she functions as a fetish, unlike the women in Chandler’s fiction, Faye is not defined in terms of stasis. Faye is instead characterised by her vitality and animation, suggesting that she is constantly moving and changing just like the mythical *femme fatale*. In this way Faye resists the masculine gaze and men’s efforts to control her.

Like Mavis Weld in The Little Sister, Faye is an actress and adept at manipulating her appearance. Faye’s daily interactions consist of acting and putting on a show, which can sometimes have an unintended response in viewers. Whilst being

¹¹ The movement of Faye’s whereby she tosses her back and forth recalls Gilda’s introduction in the film of her name, where she first comes onto the screen by tossing her hair back. Both Faye and Gilda are *femme fatales* who are defined in terms of their animation and resistance to male containment.

¹² Lacan defines the mirror stage as an identification, which constitutes the transformation that takes place in a subject when he assumes an image or *imagos* (4).

captivated by Faye, Homer is described as being puzzled by her “odd mannerisms and artificial voice” (West 212). In an attempt at seduction, Faye holds her hair up and twists her body causing her snug dress to become tighter, and “[t]his elaborate gesture, like all the others, was so completely meaningless, almost formal, that she seemed to be a dancer rather than an affected actress” (West 212). There is nothing natural in her posing, but rather it is artificial, rehearsed and overly elaborate. The gesture is instinctual, suggesting that is not the gesture of an actress but a dancer. Although the use of her body, in this way comes naturally to Faye, it is superficial and without deeper meaning. Faye’s other suitor Tod Hackett, who is similarly enamored with her whilst being aware of her artifice, describes her affectations as “so completely artificial that he found them charming” (West 221). Tod is attracted to her partly because of her artificiality. Tod suspects Faye is aware of her own insincerity: “[h]e believed that whilst she often recognized the falseness of an attitude, she persisted in it because she didn’t know how to be simpler or more honest. Faye was an actress who had learned from bad models in a bad school” (West 221). Whilst having critical awareness and the ability to recognize her own ridiculousness, Faye is also able to laugh at herself. However, Faye continues with her behaviour nonetheless because she is unable to be any other way, illustrating that such performative behaviour is fundamental to Faye’s identity.

Faye was brought up in an acting environment and her father Harry Greener similarly conducts his everyday life as if in a vaudeville show. Harry continuously clowns around, and like Faye, he is described as possessing “a set of elegant gestures” (West 196). Both Harry and Faye are only able to function in terms of these exaggerated gestures, with their inability to distinguish between acting and natural behaviour causing a blurring between the two. The characterization of Faye and Harry

in terms of these seemingly meaningless gestures illustrates how, within mass culture, “no straight forward relation between inner and outer realities can be assumed” (Rhodes 35). Faye and Harry Greener are aligned with the masquerades, in contrast to the transplants such as Homer who moved to Los Angeles from the Midwest. The native-masquerades are described in terms of their showy attire or “fancy dress” (West 180). There is a disjunction between the masquerades’ outfits and the day-to-day activities they are engaged in. Although dressed for yachting or playing tennis they are really just shopping or returning from work. The connection is made between the masquerades’ ostentatious dress and the architecture of the houses in Hollywood, which are described as plaster façades exhibiting every possible combination of styles (West 181). Such eclecticism and detachment from original meaning points to the postmodern practice of pastiche, as well as identity as performance, which are complicit with the new technologies of the emerging film industry. In contrast to the masquerades, the mid-West transplants are unable to masquerade. Instead they “loitered on the corners or stood with their backs to the shop windows and stared at everyone that passed” (West 180). The transplants are ill-adjusted to their environment and they are watchers rather than doers. The masquerades are instead active participants in the emerging Hollywood and happily partake in the illusory fulfillments of consumer culture. Unlike the Midwest transplants, the native masquerades are adept at manipulating their appearance through their dress, thus actively constructing their identity through performance.

The two sets of people represent different models of subjectivity. The transplants represent “conservative, humanist assumptions about subjectivity, language, and history,” whereas the masquerade is closer to the “fractured models of language and history that Frederic Jameson identifies with postmodern practice of pastiche” (Jacobs 245). Jameson’s description of pastiche suggests that original, personal style is no

longer possible and marks the disappearance of the individual subject. Thus Jameson defines pastiche as “like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language” (Jameson 16). Pastiche is “blank parody” because it is “without any of parody’s ulterior motives” or deeper meaning (Jameson 17). Consequently, Faye’s “meaningless gestures” and “surface animation” are a kind of blank parody (West 212 and 223). They are detached from what they are supposed to signify as they exist on the surface, devoid of deeper meaning. Tod describes how “[t]he strange thing about her gestures and expressions was that they didn’t really illustrate what she was saying. They were almost pure” (West 273). Pastiche involves the loss of authenticity, where language or image becomes detached from its signifying function. Jacobs relates pastiche to the “levelling equivalence” of exchange value, for “if exchange value masks the original meaning of an object, or its use, pastiche here masks the *absence* of that original meaning; indeed, it seems to have no intrinsic relation to any meaning whatever” (Jacobs 246). Pastiche is a universal practice and indicates the extension of commodity fetishism to every area of life, including human behaviour and interactions, as well as representing the loss of original meaning.

The new model of subject that is represented by the masquerades, and is an example of postmodern pastiche is illustrated in Faye’s dreaming. She describes to Tod how “[s]he had a large assortment of stories to choose from. After getting herself in the right mood, she would go over them in her mind, as though they were a pack of cards, discarding one after another until she found the one that suited” (West 221). Faye’s stories are crucial to her character and responsible for her characteristic surface animation. Tod observes how “[a]ll these little stories, these little daydreams of hers, were what gave such extraordinary color and mystery to her movements” (West 224).

Faye herself admits that her method is “mechanical,” especially when she forces herself to choose a dream but insists that this was better than not having a dream at all (West 222). Faye’s methodical approach suggests that dreaming is essential to the personality of native masquerades like Faye because it allows them to overcome difficulties through the power of their dreams. Furthermore, Faye is described as “manufacturing” her dreams (West 222). The connection can be made to Hollywood’s pseudonym, the dream-factory, as well as the “dream dump” passage in the novel, where Tod comes across discarded film sets where “no dream ever disappears entirely,” as they are destined to be “reproduced” (West 248). This passage in the novel describes the strong relationship between people and their dreams to Hollywood movies. This connection suggests that “[t]exts do not make subjects,” but rather “subjects have dreams that then become texts” (Rhodes 40). West’s description of the “dream dump” questions the notion of the film-industry as an indoctrinating influence or “an ideological institution that makes dreams and those who dream” (Rhodes 41). Alternatively it suggests that Hollywood is “a product of the dreams – however mediated – of the people that precede the movies” (Rhodes 41). As Karen Jacobs argues, Faye’s dreams can be seen as part of a dream-making collective consciousness, “Faye’s daydreams arise, not from an individuated consciousness, but from the collection of cinematic conventions which substitute for it” (252). Tod notes the similarity of Faye’s dreams with popular movies and one of the stories she tells him is inspired by the poster on her wall (West 223). Masquerades like Faye share the same material for their dreams and for their identity, as they conduct a process of “manufacturing themselves from a stock of available cultural images” (Jacobs 253). Consequently, one can see how the emerging image industry of Hollywood affected not just people’s dreams but the formation of identity.

The masquerade persona is a result of the consumerist, image-centred society of Los Angeles that requires the individual to manufacture their own identity through performance. The masquerades “function as productive machines as well as avid consumers” (Jacobs 253). Interestingly, West’s protagonist Tod shares characteristics of both native-masquerades and Midwest transplants, because “despite his appearance, he was really a very complicated young man with a whole set of personalities, one inside the other like a nest of Chinese boxes” (West 180). This description suggests Tod has more than one personality to choose from, which is similar to the native-masquerades who possess “multiplying surfaces of self” (Jacobs 250). However, the way in which his personalities are described as “one inside the other,” suggests a traditional, interior-exterior, depth model of subjectivity that can be aligned with the transplants. Furthermore, like the transplants, Tod is seduced by mass culture and the illusions of the image-industry embodied in the seductive commodity Faye Greener with whom he is enamored. Similarly, as Karen Jacobs points out, like the other masquerades, Faye is at home in her environment: “[t]he resourceful and apparently indestructible native, actress/whore Faye Greener, remains the lone success story of the novel, whose survival seems predicated on her indissociability from the strategic allures of Hollywood culture as an autonomous object of desire” (245). Consequently, the archetypal *femme fatale* Faye is perhaps most representative of the masquerade persona and best illustrates the performative model of self that developed as a consequence of the Hollywood film industry.

Like all indecipherable *femme fatales*, Faye is defined in terms of her “misleading external signs” (Jacobs 259). Faye is characterised by her seductive, seemingly superficial nature, and her ability to endure is based upon her very “absence of conventional depth, her smooth, resistant surfaces” (Jacobs 259). Similarly, Faye is

ambitious and unsentimental, interested in men only if they can somehow help further her career. West's protagonist Tod Hackett, who has neither money nor looks, struggles in his advances toward Faye and the narrative unequivocally states that "she wouldn't have him. She didn't love him and he couldn't further her career. She wasn't sentimental and she had no need for tenderness" (West 187). Yet Tod is not perturbed by Faye's refusals and it is precisely because of her impenetrable surface that he finds Faye so alluring: "[i]t was her completeness, her egg-like self-sufficiency, that made him want to crush her" (West 224). Significantly, Faye's seductive surface is also characterised by its resistance. Within Tod's fantasy is also a desire to penetrate her surface, which is an urge that is almost violent, since "[n]othing less than violent rape would do" (West 224). Faye's autonomy and ability to resist the male gaze constitutes a threat and a temptation to Tod. It is her very completeness and self-sufficiency that he wishes to destroy. Furthermore, as an artist Tod is literally trying to capture or "contain" her with his gaze in order to depict her in his drawings and painting. Tod and Faye's relationship can also be conceived of in terms of the divide between high art and mass culture, with Tod representing a modernist aesthetic and Faye as representative of feminine mass culture.¹³ Faye's resistance and survival is epitomized in her likeness to "a very pretty cork, gilt with a glittering fragment of mirror set in its top" (West 288). And like a cork Faye will always "come out alright" (West 287). Whatever happens, she will always be able to remain afloat, and as with the fragmented mirroring cork, Faye resists and reflects back the male defining gaze (Jacobs 260). Thus it is Faye's impenetrable, resistant surface that ensures her survival within a masculine world.

The way in which Faye's image-form functions within the novel, in terms of seduction and desire, illuminates a new paradigm of voyeuristic male-female visual

¹³ Andreas Huyssen outlines the connection between mass culture and the feminine in *The Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism*, as discussed later.

relations within the emerging image-culture of 1940s Hollywood. The reader is introduced to Faye via the autographed photograph of her. Tod keeps in the corner of his mirror. Tod compulsively looks at this photograph and is often unable to take his attention away from it. In the picture, Faye “lay stretched out on a divan with her arms and legs spread, as though welcoming a lover, and her lips were parted in a heavy sullen smile. She was supposed to look inviting, but the invitation wasn’t to pleasure” (West 187). Faye’s invitation is a deceptive one, her pose is purely tempting but does not signify the fulfillment of desires. As with the *femme fatale*, there is the presence of danger as well as pleasure. Tod imagines that fulfillment of her invitation would not be pleasurable but rather painful: “[h]er invitation wasn’t to pleasure, but to struggle, hard and sharp, closer to murder than to love. If you threw yourself on her, it would be like throwing yourself from the parapet of a skyscraper” (West 187). As with Tod’s fantasy of “violent rape,” his desire for her is accompanied with an urge for destruction. However, “[i]f she would only let him, he would be glad to throw himself, no matter what the cost” (West 187). Tod is willing to endure anything to fulfill his desire. Despite the picture’s connotations with pain and frustration, Tod is compulsively drawn to this image of Faye. The display of pleasure present in Faye’s photograph is also exemplified by her other poses of seduction. For example, when the screenwriter Claude Estée compliments her dress she repays him by “smiling in a peculiar, secret way and running her tongue over her lips. It was one of her most characteristic gestures and very effective. It seemed to promise all sorts of undefined intimacies” (West 273). As with Faye’s photograph, this gesture contains the promise of intimacy but not necessarily its fulfillment. Such a false promise echoes a theme present in the wider Hollywood culture that deals in the currency of pleasure, promising fulfillment but never honoring that promise. Consequently, in Hollywood culture the pleasure on offer is purely voyeuristic and its physical realization inevitably postponed.

The association between Faye and processes of production is made clear within West's narrative as Faye is portrayed as complicit with the production of her own image. Faye is involved in producing her own identity through her performance and dress. Faye seems happy to prostitute herself in order to further her career and gain material wealth. Her complicity with the production of herself is exemplified in the "business" arrangement between her and Homer, whereby "he board and dress her until she became a star" (West 251). Homer and Faye's arrangement is "analogous to that of the film industry in general" (Hegeman 156). Within the novel Tod's writer friend Claude Estee describes what the average movie-goer expects when he goes to the cinema, which is "amour and glamour" (West 191). Thus the arrangement between Homer and Faye can be likened to the culture industry as a whole: "Homer, the sponsor of Faye's dubious acting career, now gets his share of 'amour and glamour' in a kind of sham marriage where in return for her mere presence in his drab life, he provides her with a home, clothes, food and a servant" (Hegeman 156-7). Homer gains the seductive presence of Faye in his everyday-life in exchange for looking after her. It is easy to pity Homer and similarly the masses who are so easily seduced by glamorous images. However, West does not necessarily encourage this assessment. Instead he writes that "[i]t is hard to laugh at the need for beauty and romance, no matter how tasteless, even horrible, the results of that need are. But it is easy to sigh. Few things are sadder than the truly monstrous" (West 181). This statement suggests that West had an ambiguous relationship with mass culture and was unable to condemn people's need for beauty even if it sacrifices good taste.

Homer and Faye's situation ends disastrously when she leaves him, and Homer's subsequent emotional unravelling acts as a catalyst for the tragic ending of the novel. The angry-mob episode at the end of the novel can be seen as illustrative of the

increasing dissatisfaction felt by the masses in response to the culture industry's empty promises. West describes how these people "have been cheated and betrayed ... slaved and saved for nothing" (West 292). Yet the violence can be seen as a consequence of the transplants' inability to cope with a new model of consumer fulfillment that is associated with the emerging image industry of Hollywood. West describes how these masses are the same people who have moved to California for the oranges and the sunshine but discover it is not enough. Consequently, "[t]hey don't know what to do with their time. They haven't the mental equipment for leisure, the money nor the physical equipment for pleasure" (West 291). These transplants are from the mid-West, ruled by the Protestant work-ethic and unable to adjust to a life of leisure and cope with a modern consumer culture. As Adorno and Horkheimer explain, the culture industry "endlessly cheats its consumers out of what it endlessly promises" (Adorno and Horkheimer 111). In the 1930s and '40s, Los Angeles was at the epicentre of this emerging culture-industry in which material fulfillment is illusory and gratification endlessly deferred. West's novel illustrates how in order to cope with this model of consumerism and find happiness, one must transform one's identity into performance and become a masquerade.

The Commodification of Women through Image:

As discussed, Faye Greener is the lone success story of West's novel. Through the self-production of her identity, Faye is able to cope with the consumer culture of Hollywood that revolves around image, and where fulfillment is transitory. As well as her "business" arrangement with Homer, Faye prostitutes herself quite literally; she works at Mrs Jennings' call house and uses the money she earns to pay for her father's funeral as well as the outfit she wears to attend it. When Tod finds out that

she is working as a prostitute, he contemplates paying for Faye in order to fulfill his need to possess her, which further illustrates his desire for her in commodity form. West's description of Mrs Jennings and her call-house makes explicit the connection between women and commodities. Thus Mrs Jennings "ran her business just as other women run lending libraries, shrewdly and with taste" (West 192). The women who work at the call-house are "lent out" just as a book would be from a library. Similarly, in Chandler's The Big Sleep a bookstore is the front for Geiger's pornography racket. Women as sexual objects, in their physical as well as image form, have become commodities like books. Although Chandler's The Big Sleep is not explicitly about Hollywood, Geiger's pornography racket is representative of the film industry. Marlowe says with relation to pornography that "[e]verybody knows the racket exists. Hollywood's made to order for it" (Chandler BSON 58). This suggests that Hollywood is not just similar to the pornography industry but is modelled on and even reliant upon it. In The Little Sister, Marlowe describes how the coloured neon lights of Los Angeles mask its bad smell (Chandler LLON 452). Chandler is using this metaphor to illustrate how the glamour of Hollywood hides its seedy and corrupt nature. West and Chandler make clear the association between the film industry and pornography or prostitution, suggesting that both industries market women and her image in pursuit of profit.

As suggested by Marlowe's comment about Hollywood being "made to order" for pornography, the association of sex with the film industry is undeniable. Quite simply, sex and celluloid have been linked from the beginning (Slade 76). In his essay on style and medium in film, Panofsky emphasises the importance of sexual or pornographic folklore to early film (285). The association between pornography and the film industry becomes apparent when one examines their mutual history.¹⁴ The

¹⁴ The history of pornography is difficult to research as it operates on the margins of culture and often in secrecy. But as Joseph Slade notes, pornography's history is largely capitalist, and thus the industry is a

development of both industries was reliant on the same photographic technology. Unlike many other older art forms, such as painting or drawing, film was created as a direct result of technological advancement; Panofsky describes how “it was a technical invention that gave rise to the discovery and gradual perfection of a new art” (279). The development of pornography was simultaneous with that of photography. No sooner was the first photograph or *daguerreotype* made in 1839 than a pornographic one followed (Dwyer 2). Consequently, the history of pornography follows the history of media technology, since “whenever one person invents a new communication technology, another person will invent a sexual use for it” (Slade 44). The beginnings of the two industries were not dissimilar, as the Hollywood film industry had dubious origins from which it subsequently struggled to escape. Its early period was characterised by shady investors, criminal elements, and importantly, a lack of legislative control over the content of films. World War One and the post-war period saw a loosening of morals and social change. In post-war Hollywood, there were a number of scandals involving stars which caused the public to associate the movies with licentiousness, and consequently there was a wide-spread call for censorship that culminated in the Hays Code.¹⁵ The close association between the legitimate film industry and the pornography industry suggests that the distinction between the two is an arbitrary one. Both revolve around the commodification of fantasies and desires through images of women.

part of the inescapable commodification of everyday life (38).

¹⁵ Will Hays, as head of the MPPDA (Motion Picture Producers and Distributors) from 1922, was Hollywood’s chief censor until Joseph I. Breen took over in 1934. The Production Code, or Hays Code, officially dates from 1934. The “basic premise of the code is that the movies as entertainment and as art, affect the moral life of a people,” it saw the imposition of strict rules on what could and could not be depicted on screen (Brady 378).

Photography enabled both the film and pornography industries to develop, and caused the inevitable commodification of people in image form via the medium of photography and film. Pornography and by extension the film industry marks “the logical conclusion of the capitalist enterprise – the reduction of persons to merchandise that can be bought, sold, and even rented for a time – a transformation that, in this case, was facilitated by the evolving technology of the camera” (Thomas 427). Guy Debord’s conception of the society of the spectacle describes the inescapable commodification of everyone and everything through images. Consequently, “commodities are now all that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity” (Debord 29). This process can be paralleled with Walter Benjamin’s description of the loss of authenticity due to mechanical reproduction: “what shrinks in an age where the work of art can be reproduced by technological means is its aura” (Benjamin 17). Once more, in taking on an image-form, the subject becomes an imperfect mechanical reproduction, a copy that is out of register with the real thing (Thomas 416). The transformation of the individual subject into an image, represents a crucial factor in determining the nature of Chandler and West’s fictional depiction of Hollywood and its inhabitants. Chandler’s Farewell My Lovely depicts “a world in which the entire society has been made into a form of pornography, where everyone seems to have been reduced to a series of images to be gazed at and fantasized over, and where any sense of authentic identity has all but disappeared behind a veil of deceptive photographic images” (Thomas 428). As a result, we can see how Chandler’s Farewell My Lovely depicts a Los Angeles that has become a pornographic society of the spectacle. Furthermore, it is a place where everyone is merely an image or set of images, where the individual becomes primarily an object of spectacle and voyeurism.

The pornographic photos of Carmen in Chandler's The Big Sleep, in addition to functioning in terms of female sexuality and power, represent the inevitable consequence of capitalism and its "relentless commodification of everyone and everything" that was facilitated by photography (Thomas 427). The fight for control over the photos of Carmen can be seen as a metaphor for the struggle to contain Carmen's sexuality. Carmen herself attempts to gain control of the photographs and thus of herself and her sexuality. This is because "[t]o possess a woman's sexuality is to possess the woman; to possess the image of woman's sexuality is, however mass produced the image, also in some way to maintain a degree of control over, woman in general" (Kuhn 6). Consequently, the association can be made between power and images of women, and this power does not necessarily decrease when that image is mass produced. Adorno and Horkheimer similarly write that "the mass production of sexuality automatically brings about its repression" (111-2). Thus control over a woman's sexuality is achieved through her depiction in mass-produced media images, as epitomised in the struggle to obtain the photos of Carmen in The Big Sleep. However, I argue that there is something implicit within the nature of the photographic image and epitomised in the power of the *femme fatale* that allows woman to resist attempts to control her.

Carmen Sternwood's relation to her image-form and her struggle to maintain control over it can be contrasted with the situation in Chandler's Farewell My Lovely, in which Mrs Grayle, formerly Velma Valento, successfully manipulates her image to enable her own empowerment. The publicity still of Velma Valento signed with the words "Always yours," functions in the same way as Faye Greener's photograph in Locust which is similarly autographed "Affectionately Yours." The respective photographs give the illusion of availability, suggesting that the woman depicted exists

for the male viewer and that she is capable of being possessed and contained by only him; but in fact “Velma can *only* exist in this form – as an image, a fleeting piece of entertainment, a fantasy figure who is only as real as her publicity photo and as fraudulent as that turns out to be” (Thomas 430). The publicity still turns out to not be Velma Valento but another showgirl, thus illustrating the interchangeable nature of women and their image-form within the movie industry. When Marlowe first sees the photo, he describes Velma as having “a very ordinary face, and its prettiness was strictly assembly line” (Chandler BSON 188). Such a description refers to the mechanical and homogenous nature of not just the photographs but also the women in them. Adorno and Horkheimer describe how in the culture industry, “[e]veryone amounts only to those qualities by which he or she can replace everyone else” (116-7). Through the commodification of her image, a woman becomes infinitely replaceable. However unlike other women, Velma Valento is aware of the commodified nature of her image, and is able to use it to her own advantage.

Velma Valento transforms herself from showgirl to Mrs Grayle, the wife of an “enormously rich” investment banker (Chandler BSON 228). Both identities are an invention and only exist as images. Furthermore, crucial to Velma’s transformation into Mrs Grayle is her image. Marlowe is introduced to her via the picture of her in the newspaper, which prompts Marlowe to imagine that “[w]hatever you needed, wherever you happened to be – she had it” (Chandler 229). Velma Grayle exemplifies the *femme fatale*’s changeability and her “seductive image displays her protean power to adapt to the fantasies of the one looking at her” (Thomas 430). Her ability to change and adapt helps her survive. Unlike Carmen Sternwood, who loses control of the pornographic photos taken of her and becomes a passive victim, Velma Grayle is successful at manipulating her image-form and maintaining control over it. Velma is aware of the

power of her own image as a commodity and “has learnt the lesson of her own commodification” (Thomas 436). Once more, “she has skilfully managed it by presenting herself in different images to different persons at different times” (Thomas 436). Velma actively manages herself through her image and maintains a distance between herself and her image. Paradoxically, it is *through* her image that she gains the ability to resist male containment. Velma Valento and later Mrs Grayle resists male possession by reinforcing her image (Thomas 435). Velma’s ability to change identity, which is facilitated by changing her image, allows her to resist male control. Thus Velma’s image-form is both the source of possible repression but also the means by which she can achieve liberation.

The Function of Woman’s Image-Form in terms of Processes of Modern Consumerism:

In West’s The Day of the Locust Tod consoles himself with Faye’s image-form because she is physically inaccessible to him. Furthermore, he is happy with her copy as opposed to her real self. Similarly, in The Little Sister following a difficult meeting with Mavis when Marlowe’s attempts at chivalry and flirtation are unsuccessful, he goes to see her film. Like Tod with Faye, Marlowe placates the frustration incurred in trying to possess the physical Mavis, by seeking the comfort of her photograph. As actresses, Mavis and Faye’s respective images come to define them, their copy supersedes their physical being and they themselves become mere copies of their screen selves. Adorno and Horkheimer describe how, because of their existence on screen or in photographs, movie actors and actresses are in fact themselves copies of their images: “[b]ecause of his ubiquity, the film star with whom one is supposed to fall in love is, from the start, is a copy of himself” (112). This process whereby the copy

becomes superior and replaces the original the precession of the simulacra (Baudrillard 1). Similarly, in Nabokov's Lolita, the eponymous character functions as simulacra. Before meeting Lolita, Humbert was in love with another "nymphet," but "[a] little later, of course, she, this *nouvelle*, this Lolita, *my* Lolita, was to eclipse completely her prototype" (Nabokov 40). Lolita comes to not only replace but to supersede Humbert's previous object of infatuation. These instances illustrate how within mass culture, women have become replaceable objects, and suggest the power of woman's mass-produced image to eclipse the woman herself.

The image-forms of Faye and Lolita function not only as a superior copy but also as an invitation to a pleasure that will not necessarily be fulfilled, which is a part of the culture industry's process by which sexual gratification is endlessly deferred. As previously mentioned, Adorno and Horkheimer describe how the culture industry "endlessly cheats its consumers out of what it endlessly promises" (111). The "promissory note of pleasure ... disdainfully intimates that there is nothing more to come, that the diner must be satisfied with reading the menu" (111). Within the culture industry, the film-goer or consumer is like a diner at a restaurant who is allowed to read the menu but never allowed to actually eat the food. Pleasure is perpetually promised but never fulfilled. Consequently, the culture industry is both "pornographic and prudish," because there is "no erotic situation in which innuendo and incitement are not accompanied by the clear notification that things will never go so far" (111). However much one is tempted by the food on the menu, fulfillment of that desire is never possible, and one must be content with merely looking. The culture industry presents the needs and desires of individuals as capable of being fulfilled; but they are "eternal consumers," and "the supreme law of the culture industry is that its consumers shall at no price be given what they desire" (112-3). This is why Adorno and Horkheimer call

the culture industry a corrupt “cathedral of higher gratification” suggesting the worshipping of an illusory god of gratification (115). Mass-produced images of women function similarly and Tod’s worship of Faye’s picture is like that of a religious icon but his reverence represents a gratification that will never be fulfilled.

The function of woman’s image-form in the novels discussed, particularly Faye and Lolita’s invitation to pleasure, epitomizes the plight of the modern consumer. However, this situation is not necessarily a desperate one. Adorno and Horkheimer’s description of the deferral of gratification can be equated with the process of pleasure-seeking associated with what can be called “modern autonomous imaginative hedonism” (Campbell 77). This is a process whereby pleasure is sought and gained through emotional rather than sensory stimulation, thus placing an emphasis on day-dreaming or fantasy and the importance of the imagination. Consequently, “pleasure-seeking in its distinctly modern form is not in opposition to the practice of deferred gratification but its basic ally” (Campbell 88). Contrary to Adorno and Horkheimer’s analysis, a postponement of gratification does not necessarily cause the frustration of desire but in fact allows opportunities for extracting more pleasure (Campbell 88). The opportunity for pleasure created by the postponement of gratification can be seen in Tod’s attitude to Faye and her photograph whereby he is content with her image-form, and in Humbert’s idealization of Lolita as a celluloid still, as well as Marlowe’s relation to Mavis Weld and her movie. Finally, this process of modern consumerism can be seen as part of a new model of subjectivity. In relation to the two contrasting groups of people within West’s novel, the Midwest transplants are those unable to cope with the denial of gratification, whereas the masquerades have found a way to gain pleasure from the process of endlessly deferring gratification which characterizes consumer culture.

Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* as a *Femme Fatale*:

Faye employs a seductive pose of reclining on a sofa in the photograph Tod keeps of her in West's Locust. This is a characteristic pose of the *femme fatale* and is typical of 1940s movies and pin-ups. Vivian first appears in The Big Sleep stretched-out seductively on a chaise-longue when she invites Marlowe into her bedroom. *See figure 4 appendix*. When Humbert dreams of Lolita she appears in such a pose, which provides further evidence of Lolita's existence in Humbert's mind in the form of a *femme fatale*. Humbert describes how he seldom dreamed of Lolita as he remembered her but instead "she appeared there in strange and ludicrous disguises" (Nabokov 254). Just like the chameleon *femme fatale* Lolita has an unstable, shifting identity:

That complex ghost would come to me shifting shift after shift, in an atmosphere of great melancholy and disgust, and would recline in dull invitation on some narrow board or hard settee, with flesh ajar. (Nabokov 254)

Lolita's changing image-form haunts Humbert like a ghost.¹⁶ There is a strange mixture of emotions in Lolita's pose of seduction that include melancholy and disgust, and which are illustrative of Humbert's regret. Lolita's pose and the mixture of emotions it engenders is similar to the juxtaposition of violence and desire present with Faye's pose in the photograph Tod keeps of her. Lolita reclines in a gesture of invitation with "flesh ajar," suggesting that her arms and legs are spread-out in a pose of seduction. But like Faye, this is an empty invitation that is "dull," suggesting boredom and even routine. Furthermore, the pose can be seen as indicative of a lack of sincerity or meaning: an empty gesture. The pose consists of a woman conforming to male sexual expectations and is synonymous with both pornography and the Hollywood film industry. Similarly,

¹⁶ Elsewhere in the text Humbert refers to Lolita as a ghost, most notably at the beginning of their road-trip not long after he first had sex with her: Humbert describes having a feeling "as if I were sitting with the small ghost of somebody I had just killed" (Nabokov 140). This can be interpreted as indicative of Humbert being aware of his dubious treatment of Lolita and that he may have robbed her childhood.

the pose adheres to the abiding principle of Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry and represents the promise of a pleasure that is never fulfilled.

Nabokov presents Humbert's consciousness as a photographic lens and the photographs that Humbert keeps in his mind are linked with eroticism (Jacobs 266). Despite the eventual physical relationship between Humbert and Lolita, "the narrative's erotic drive is generated by an emphasis upon spectacle, on ways of seeing, inspired principally by film" (Jacobs 171). Humbert's relationship with Lolita is primarily, and most importantly, a visual one, modelled on the male-female visual relations of cinematic voyeurism. Prior to their physical relationship, Lolita sits on Humbert's lap and he experiences sexual climax but insists that Lolita is unharmed.

What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another fanciful Lolita – perhaps more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no consciousness – indeed no life of her own.

(Nabokov 62)

This other Lolita that exists in Humbert's mind is an ideal fantasy, a perfect copy that is to Humbert "more real," and thus a simulacra. This creation allows Humbert to congratulate himself on having "affected her as little as if she were a photographic image rippling upon a screen and I a humble hunchback abusing myself in the dark" (Nabokov 62). The parallel with pornography is clear. Humbert "legitimizes this episode by equating it with pornography, negating Lolita's presence by consigning her to a two-dimensional image on screen and reducing his role to that of an anonymous voyeur" (Wyllie Nabokov at the Movies 144-5). Such an assessment highlights the fine line between cinematic voyeurism and pornography. In this episode Lolita functions as a "virtual prop" (Jacobs 267). As an image or prop, the virtual Lolita is used by Humbert to reach a level of gratification which he believes is achieved without affecting the physical Lolita.

Lolita's comparison to "a photographic image rippling on a screen," demonstrates how she exists not only as simulacra but also as spectacle (Nabokov 62). She is an object of fetish and voyeurism as well as a screen onto which desire is projected. Although their relationship has a physical dimension, throughout the novel Humbert is primarily in love with Lolita's image-form. Wyllie notes "the particular relationship, in Humbert's Humbert's imagination, between sexual stimulation and image," which is "in other words voyeurism" (Wyllie Nabokov at the Movies 130). When Humbert tries to describe Lolita, he is blinded by his overwhelming desire for her and can only describe her in terms of a fragmented cinematic still. Humbert says that "[i]f I close my eyes I see but an immobilized fraction of her, a cinematic still, a sudden smooth nether loveliness" (Nabokov 44). As a static spectacle, Lolita exists as a fraction or fragment with the smooth, seductive sheen of a photograph. Lolita takes on many forms in the novel, but it is in the form of a cinematic still that she is most precious to Humbert, because in this state "he can possess her entirely" (Wyllie Nabokov at the Movies 133). In this form, Lolita is completely contained by Humbert and unable to hurt him. As an image, Lolita "will never leave him, she will never die, and she will remain forever just out of reach, perfect and invulnerable" (Wyllie Nabokov at the Movies 133). Lolita's ability to hurt Humbert, albeit emotionally, means one can draw parallels between Lolita and the *femme fatale*. Significantly, Humbert's desire for Lolita carries the possibility self-destruction, as seen with Tod's desire for Faye in West's novel. But as a cinematic still and as a "nymphet," Lolita remains at a safe distance.¹⁷ In this idealized and contained form, Lolita exists as a perfect object of desire within Humbert's imagination.

¹⁷ In designating "nymphet" status to Lolita, Humbert classifies her as a mythical creature who must never grow up which is his attempt to stunt both her growth and her freedom (Pifer 192).

Like Chandler, Nabokov describes the effect of movies upon people in terms of behaviour and consciousness as well as desire. During one of his fantasies, Humbert imagines how Lolita would accept his advances: “I knew she would let me do so, and even close her eyes as Hollywood teaches” (Nabokov 48). Both Humbert and Lolita are affected by the movies. Despite his apparent hostility, Humbert is similarly seduced by Hollywood as is evident in his fantasies and the wider narrative itself. On their travels Humbert and Lolita are described as consuming movies “voluptuously and indiscriminately,” suggesting this was an indulgence that they both enjoyed (Nabokov 170). Lolita is an example of an emerging post-war youth culture that has been thoroughly immersed in consumer culture and exposed to Hollywood movies. Lolita is described as a student of Hollywood, “an avid reader of movie magazines, an expert in dream-slow close-ups” (Nabokov 49). Lolita is the perfect, gullible consumer who “believed with a kind of celestial trust, any advertisement or advice that appeared in *Movie Love* or *Screen Land*” (Nabokov 148). It was Lolita, “to whom ads were dedicated: the ideal consumer, the subject and object of every foul poster” (Nabokov 148). Although Humbert disapproves of Lolita’s penchant for such articles of mass culture, he also readily takes advantage of it. For example, he is aware of his resemblance to a screen idol on a movie poster on her wall (Nabokov 69). When he picks Lolita up from summer camp after her mother’s death and throughout their lengthy road-trip Humbert showers her with material gifts in order to keep her pliant, buying her clothes, sundaes and magazines. Humbert uses their attendance at the movies as a ruse for fondling her in the dark where no one can see and when she is distracted by the on screen action (Nabokov 171). As the novel unfolds, Humbert’s apparent concern for the influence of mass culture upon Lolita is shown to derive instead from jealousy and a selfish desire to keep Lolita for himself. Humbert’s taking advantage of Lolita can be seen metaphorically as a lecherous, old Europe corrupting a

young, naive America. Alternatively, the relationship could be seen as old-Europe being seduced by a consumerist, image-centred, American culture. As Humbert explains, “it was she who seduced me” (Nabokov 132). Lolita’s seduction of Humbert can be viewed in relation to the wider cultural seduction of the masses through images. Notably however, Humbert is seduced by Lolita’s image-form, from which she is largely detached and has no control over. As a mere child, Lolita cannot be held responsible for this seduction. Although it can be said that Lolita seduces Humbert, he is in large part seduced by the image-form that he has created in his mind. Like the *femme fatale*, Lolita is not fully aware or in control of her image or her seductive power.

Although Lolita seems to be defined by Humbert, within the confines of his narrative, there is the possibility of resistance in Lolita’s similarity to the *femme fatale*, as well as through her detachment from her own image-form. Lolita has an unstable, slippery, chameleon-like identity, just like the *femme fatale*, appearing within Humbert’s mind in “shift after shift,” taking on “strange and ludicrous guises” (Nabokov 254). In addition to assuming the role of the *femme fatale* within Humbert’s narrative, Lolita plays by turns a gangster moll and the screwball heroine (Wyllie Nabokov at the Movies 144). Lolita’s array of guises are further evidence of how Humbert’s own consciousness is saturated by film, but also demonstrates how Humbert never gets to know the real Lolita as she is eclipsed by her image and her primarily role as an object of his own voyeurism:

Lolita’s guises, or rather those assigned to her, are significant not only in terms of his immersion in movie lore, but also, paradoxically, the level of his detachment from her. The variety and number of roles she plays and the fact that she is portrayed as everything but her real self are indications of Humbert Humbert’s inability and failure to achieve any meaningful intimacy in their relationship and confirm that she is never more than an object of desire, fed by his imagination. (Wyllie Nabokov at the Movies 144)

Humbert's desire for Lolita prevents him from having a genuine relationship with her.¹⁸ Paradoxically perhaps, the detachment from Lolita which Humbert suffers, also offers Lolita the possibility of resistance. The variety of roles Lolita takes on is indicative not only of Humbert detachment from her, but Lolita's own detachment from her existence in Humbert's mind. As is repeatedly shown in the novel, Lolita has a separate existence as a "cinematic still" and a "photographic image rippling upon a screen" (Nabokov 44 and 62). Except from Humbert's encounter with Lolita's married-self at the end of the novel, within the context of Humbert's narrative Lolita exists solely as an idealized image-form. Nabokov suggests images themselves are meaningless outside of such contexts of narrative construction, and Lolita is so memorable to Humbert precisely because her image is adaptable to the discursive frameworks he favors (Jacobs 265). Lolita's image functions as an autonomous entity, a perfect copy, which Humbert utilizes in his fantasies. To a large extent, her simulacrum eclipses Lolita's true identity. However, her detachment from her image-form allows her to shed Humbert's control and take on new forms and corresponding meanings. The detachment of Lolita from her image which facilitates empowerment, is echoed within the narrative when Lolita physically runs away from Humbert to take on a different identity. Furthermore, the ability of Lolita's identity and image-form to change and take on new meanings, as well as shed narrative frameworks, can be paralleled with Barthes' concept of myth and the figure of the *femme fatale*. As a myth and consequently a sign in the first system, the *femme fatale* can become a signifier in the next system, thus transcending its original meaning and taking on an alternative one.

¹⁸ The poignant realization that Humbert never really knew Lolita is reached within his own narrative, "it struck me" he says "that I simply did not know a thing about my darling's mind and that quite possibly, behind the awful juvenile clichés, there was in her a garden and a twilight, and a palace gate – dim and adorable regions which happened to be lucidly and absolutely forbidden to me, in my polluted rags and miserable convulsions" (Nabokov 284).

The Authors' Contradictory Relationship to Film and Mass Culture:

Nabokov's attitude to cinema, as with other writers' relationship to the film industry, is a contradictory one and characterized by ambivalence and antagonism. To Nabokov, "[o]n the one hand, cinema epitomizes the worst of commercially driven, populist and yet, on the other, it generates a compelling dynamic of excitement and wonder that is inarguably, and perpetually, fascinating" (Wyllie "Nabokov and Cinema" 215). From most accounts Nabokov was an avid film-goer. However on some occasions he professed to know little of particular films, actors and directors (Wyllie "Nabokov and Cinema" 215). Such a contradiction is present in *Lolita's* "twofold nature" which Humbert describes as a mixture of "tender dreamy childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity, stemming from the stub-nosed cuteness of ads and magazine pictures" (Nabokov 44). For Humbert, *Lolita's* innocence is tainted by a vulgarity derived from mass culture, yet she is still infinitely desirable and fascinating. The whole novel is testament to Nabokov's intense familiarity with American culture and especially Hollywood films. An intricate portrait of American post-war consumer culture is painted by Nabokov. His novel thus "provides an incisive account of American culture, including advertisements, jukeboxes, roadside attractions, movies, comics and so on" (Sweeney 71) Once more, Nabokov's assessment of this culture can be interpreted as both condescending and eye-opening. This ambiguity characterizes Nabokov's relation to movies and mass culture, and his ambivalence toward cinema is reflective of America's "preoccupying and highly contentious fascination with image" (Wyllie Nabokov at the Movies 260). Similarly, although appearing to be disparaging of movies, Humbert's narrative is evidently affected by them. Wyllie describes how Nabokov "manipulates the modes, styles and techniques of film to communicate the overwhelming force of his desire, in a deeply cynical and highly complex act of

deception, designed to transform the horror that he perpetrates into an evocative and compelling scenario of tragic romance” (Wyllie Nabokov at the Movies 171). Humbert uses filmic techniques to engender sympathy, and successfully turn his crimes of pedophilia into a love story.

Like Nabokov’s contradictory attitude to mass culture and film, both Chandler and West had an ambiguous relationship with Hollywood as illustrated in their fiction. As screenwriters, Chandler and West depended upon the film industry for a wage but both writers suffered whilst working within the industry. Although West was less financially successful than Chandler in Hollywood, West devoted himself to screenwriting and always tried to satisfy the producers. West’s letters contain both cynicism and admissions of his desire to succeed (Rhodes 26). Chandler’s letters also document contradictory attitudes toward the industry. Chandler criticized the film-making process for being creatively stultifying and merely “grinding out a product” (Selected Letters 62). In one vitriolic letter, Chandler complains that “[t]o them a picture is just as much a manufactured product as a can of beans” (Selected Letters 73). Under the studio system, whereby writers like West and Chandler were contracted, “screenwriting was a form of standardized labour no different from assembling an automobile” (Rhodes 25). Such a description fits Adorno and Horkheimer’s assessment of the film industry and the transposition of art into the sphere of consumption. However, Chandler was greatly aware of his own financial dependence upon the film industry. In another letter, Chandler describes how he was attempting “to simplify my life so that I need not depend on Hollywood so much” (Chandler Selected Letters 124). Chandler was unable to extricate himself from the industry that was not just a meal ticket, but also allowed for the lifestyle that he had become accustomed to. In his letters Chandler also writes about his fear of offending Hollywood, which would have had

financial consequences (Selected Letters 148). West and Chandlers' fiction was not only enabled but shaped by their careers in Hollywood, because it gave them invaluable experience and material for their writing. Chandler and Wests' relationship to the film industry can be seen in terms of a pattern on resistance and complicity. Whilst being highly critical and resentful of Hollywood, they were also reliant on the industry both financially and artistically. This dynamic of resistance and complicity can be paralleled with woman's relation to her image. Whilst being complicit in the production of herself and her image, contained within such representations of woman is the potential to resist the male defining gaze, as epitomized in the figure of the *femme fatale*.

Conclusion:

In this chapter, I have explored female characters' fictional representation in terms of image and the cinematic figure of the *femme fatale*, and how inscribed within such representations of women is the possibility of resistance. Image-representations of women have the potential to function as myth, thus to be appropriated and change meaning. In Chandler's fiction female characters actively resist the male defining gaze and their image-form plays a pivotal role in this process. An example of women using their image to resist male containment is provided by Velma Grayle from Chandler's Farewell My Lovely, whose ability to change her identity is predicated on the manipulation of her image-form. The potential power of woman's image is further exemplified in Faye Greener's impenetrable surface and self-sufficiency, which allows her to resist masculine attempts at control and also enables her to survive and thrive within the image-centred environment of Hollywood. Similarly, Lolita is likened to a photograph from which she is detached, which suggests the possibility of distance between a woman and her image-form. Lolita's detachment from her image-form also

illustrates the ability of both the woman and her image to take on different meanings. Not only can female characters, such as Velma, Faye and Lolita, change their identity and achieve an autonomy from their image-form, but these characters can resist the authority of their creators and take on a life of their own. This is perhaps best illustrated by Nabokov's relation to his creation Lolita, whom he claimed was more famous than himself (Sweeney 82). In this way, Lolita has taken on mythical status, like that of the *femme fatale* figure. Consequently, one can see how woman's image, whilst being a source of possible repression, can paradoxically allow the opportunity for resistance and empowerment.

By examining the fictional depiction of women and her relation to her image, with reference to the *femme fatale*, I have demonstrated how the Hollywood image-culture was crucial in the formation of a performative model of self. This subject is based upon the masquerades from The Day of The Locust, to whom *femme fatale* Faye Greener is strongly aligned. The survival of *femmes fatales* like Faye is predicated on her changeability and her seductive surface, which means she is resistant to the penetrating and objectifying male gaze, and it is the *femme fatale*'s existence as a commodified image that allows her the possibility of empowerment. The masquerade, by successfully manipulating their appearance in terms of their fancy dress and pervasive role-playing finds a way to survive within the image culture of the Hollywood film industry. *Femme fatale* and masquerade Faye is especially adept at using the power of her image to her own advantage. Masquerades are able to find contentment within the transitory nature of Hollywood's consumer society, and even gain pleasure in the culture's endless deferral of gratification.

Chapter 2.

Los Angeles: from the Land of Sunshine & Oranges to a Postmodern City.

In this chapter I explore the role that Los Angeles and the Hollywood film industry played in creating a performative subject by examining selected California fiction from the 1930s to the 1960s. The consumer culture that grew during the 1930s, in addition to the film industry's paramount importance to the city, created a particular image centred culture that shaped the region's identity and correspondingly its inhabitants. I will demonstrate how the city's accelerated pace of development, as well as its close association with the Hollywood film industry, had a formative impact upon its physical development. The highly elaborate facades within Los Angeles architecture allow for a reading of the city in terms of feminine surface that can be related to commodity fetishism. By interpreting the city and its architecture in terms of the "seductive sheen" of the commodity fetish, I draw further parallels between the region's peculiar identity and the creation of a performative model of self. As explored in the previous chapter, this identity can be aligned with the masquerades in Nathanael West's The Day of The Locust. The masquerades, with whom *femme fatale* Faye Greener is aligned, are characterised by their fancy dress and pervasive role-playing, which is conducive to the Hollywood image culture that they are surrounded by. In opposition to the masquerades, are the Midwest transplants who are consigned to merely stare at their more well-adjusted counterparts.

This chapter begins with an exploration of James M. Cain's portrayal of the California landscape in terms of myth, paying particular attention to the importance of the road and the ocean as symbols of characters' dreams. Novelists of the *noir* genre such as James M. Cain and Raymond Chandler were reacting to the preceding

Californian “booster myth.” During the late nineteenth century and first few decades of the twentieth century, California developed rapidly thanks to a group of speculators and promoters who “boosted” California into existence.¹⁹ Once more, as a consequence of the developing film industry, the “Hollywood novel” emerged, which explored how the influence of movies on Los Angeles’ culture caused the confusion of illusion with reality. Nathanael West’s The Day of the Locust could be considered the first of this genre because at the time of its publication in 1939, it offered the closest literary examination that had yet been made of the city and its inhabitants, as well as making an apocalyptic forecast for this society of spectacle. Further examples of “Hollywood novels” are F. Scott Fitzgerald’s unfinished and posthumously published novel The Last Tycoon and Budd Schulberg’s What Makes Sammy Run? Both these novels were published in 1941 and by comparing the two in terms of their respective treatment of Hollywood and its players, I will show a progression toward a performative identity. As explored with relation to the figure of the *femme fatale*, this subject is synonymous with the image culture of Hollywood, and actively constructs its identity through its consumption and everyday performance. The concept of a postmodern city and a performative identity becomes fully realised in Joan Didion’s Play It As it Lays (1970) and Thomas Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49 (1966). The respective protagonists of these novels, Mariah Wyeth and Oedipa Maas, represent a new generation of survivors who find a way to exist in the fragmented, commodified landscape of Los Angeles, where meaning and fulfilment is illusory.

¹⁹ The development of Los Angeles during the “booster” period was largely due to a mixture of real-estate capitalism, for instance the Pacific Railroad Company and other developing industries, which is described by Mike Davis in The City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles, as well as Kevin Starr’s Inventing the Dream: California Through The Progressive Era.

California as a Commodity:

Southern California's rapid development during the first part of the twentieth century was based upon its being marketed as a commodity: "the land of sunshine and oranges."²⁰ In City of Quartz, a portrait of Los Angeles through the twentieth century, Mike Davis describes how a group of developers, bankers and transport magnates, known as the "boosters," assembled and would have a formative impact upon the development of Los Angeles. These boosters were headed by the owner of the *Times* newspaper Harrison Gray Otis and its editor Charles Fletcher Lummis. They "set out to sell Los Angeles - as no city had ever been sold - to the restless but affluent babbity of the Middle West" (Davis 25). As a consequence, the "booster myth" of California came about. However, the intense significance of California within America's collective imagination pre-dates the twentieth century and even the 1849 Gold Rush. Carey McWilliams, in California: The Great Exception, published in 1949, describes the imaginative power that California had long-since held:

Deeply encrusted with myth and legend, the name is historically associated with a hoax, Marco Polo's mention of a fabulous isle "near the coast of Asia" no one had ever saw or mapped or set foot upon. Although its derivation is unknown, California has a meaning which is as clear today as when the word stood for a place not yet discovered. It is the symbol of the mountain of paradise; the fabulous isle; the dream garden of beautiful black amazons off the Asia coast; "the good country" - the Zion - of which man has ever dreamed.

(McWilliams 3)

California was an idea before it was a place. Since its conception, California has been associated with man's dream of paradise on earth and representative of a promised land.

²⁰ Los Angeles entered the century with a population of 102,479 but within the first three decades more than a million people would settle in the state making its population by 1930 to be 1,238,048 (Starr California 178). The Second World War brought further unprecedented growth: 1.6 million Americans moved to California during this time (Starr California 237). The war years and the post-war period saw the state grow astronomically: between 1940 and 1950 it increased by 52 percent, from 6.9 to 10.6 million, mostly settling in the Los Angeles and Southern California region (Starr California 238).

With its Mediterranean climate, California lured migrants with the possibility of better weather and lifestyle. Added to this, was the promise of employment made by the huge expansion in industries, such as aircraft during the 1930s and '40s.²¹ California came to exist within the country's cultural imagination as the culmination of Westward expansion and manifest destiny – the American dream realised. However, with the realisation of any dream comes a sense of loss. Such feelings of anticipation and desire, which are involved with the hope of fulfilling a dream, are eradicated upon realisation. As demonstrated in West's novel, by comparing the masquerades with the less well-adjusted transplants, few people were able to cope with the realisation of the Californian dream. Furthermore, the Hollywood film industry played a huge role in the creation of the California myth as well as the physical development of Los Angeles. Kevin Starr describes how, by the 1930s, "Hollywood had emerged in the national imagination as one of the most intensely symbolic, emotionally valent landscapes in America" (Starr Inventing The Dream 334). Consequently, Hollywood became not only a physical town or industry, but a state of mind and a "self-actualizing myth" (Starr Inventing The Dream 334). Due in large part to the Hollywood film industry, Southern California found its identity and function as the place of dreams reinforced by the Hollywood film industry.

Perched precariously on the edge of the Pacific, California's geographic position created a particular mind-set that Joan Didion identifies as "some buried but ineradicable suspicion that things had better work here, because here, beneath that immense bleached sky is where we run out of continent" (Slouching Toward Bethlehem

²¹ The population boom was in large part due to the acceleration of the aircraft industry during World War Two with many people moving to Los Angeles area to work at the plants; California based companies such as Lockheed and Douglas were vital to the rearmament of America and allied countries: "World War II was one of the major turning points of California history. The war speeded up industrialization, aided by an outpouring of urban growth" (Rolle 449-550). However, Carey McWilliams is quick to note that the wartime extension of industry in California merely accelerated a long-term trend (234).

172). The culmination of westward expansion and the apparent realisation of the American dream, created a sense of immediacy and ultimatum within the Californian psyche. Similarly, the exceptional migration to California, beginning with the gold rush of 1849 and that increased year by year, created a sense of restlessness amongst the state's population. McWilliams describes how "[n]ot only were the emigrants in a great hurry to reach the gold fields, but once there, the same energy kept them in motion, jostling them about, and sweeping them here and there" (McWilliams 65). McWilliams also notes how these migrants "quickly and easily adjusted to the condition of their new life in California" (McWilliams 24). The motion and energy as well as the ability to adjust easily to a new environment, characterised the successful Californian migrant's mind-set, and can be associated with the masquerades in Nathanael West's The Day of the Locust. The masquerades, in their attempt to live out their dreams through performance, wear an array of elaborate costumes and consequently seem comfortable in the emerging Hollywood image-industry. The masquerade persona is strongly aligned with the *femme fatale*, and epitomised by Faye Greener from West's novel, whose identity consists of her changeability as well as animation and performance. The pervasive role-playing of the masquerade is a reflection of people's awareness that by living in California, they represent the fulfilment of the American dream. As a result, Californians are burdened with the knowledge that they are living the dream. Consequently having nothing left to lose they must realise their dreams by acting them out in any way possible.

Perhaps because it was identified as the land of dream and promise, in addition to its believers, California also had its detractors and sceptics. Consequently, there have always been those who have doubted the tangibility of the California dream: "[n]aturally people have always been wary of this great golden dream, this highly

improbable state; this symbol of cruel illusion” (McWilliams 3). The promise of California is associated with magic and deception: “[f]or there is a golden haze over the land – the dust of gold is in the air – and the atmosphere is magical and mirrors many tricks, deceptions, and wondrous visions” (McWilliams 4). The connection between California and the magical is reinforced by Hollywood and its role as creator of cinematic fantasies. However, amongst those wise to the deceptions of California were those who helped create such cinematic fantasies: the writers who worked for the Hollywood film industry such as James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler and Nathanael West. Their *noir* vision of Los Angeles represented a response to the California booster myth and began a dialectic between myth and anti-myth within California fiction. The exponents of the original California myth, such as the boosters, conceived of Los Angeles as centred, a place where dreams can be realised as part of a coherent narrative, and which can be associated with traditional models of the subject. The booster-myth view of California dictates a view of Los Angeles and consequently the subject as unified. Whereas the anti-myth views the city as fragmentary and the subject as equally fragmented, because “at the heart of the anti-myth is the assumption that Los Angeles embodies a spatial paradox” (ed. Crow 27). The anti-myth accepts the geographic nature of the city as decentred, and correspondingly takes this as its starting point for a new conception of the subject. The conception of the city and subject as fragmented, is articulated by post-modern theorists such as Jean Baudrillard and Frederic Jameson, as well as evident in the later fiction of Didion and Pynchon from the 1960s.

Myth and Symbolism in James M. Cain's Fiction-

The Pacific Ocean is a reminder that the American continent ends with California. As a result, the ocean figures significantly within the American imagination and Californian fiction. Because it helps create its magnificent coast, the ocean is the source of Southern California's allure, but it also serves as a reminder of the dream's fragility. The Pacific creates "a sense of arriving at the end of the line, the border of dreams," and consequently "the place where the road and hope runs out" (Fine Imagining Los Angeles 59). The literary critic Edmund Wilson's essay "The Boys in The Back Room," written in 1940, derided Californian novelists as well as the Pacific Ocean. Wilson associated America's other great ocean, the Atlantic, with culture and history due in part to its connection with Europe. Wilson saw the Atlantic as altogether superior to the Pacific, which he instead saw as vast and un-interpreted, without metaphor (Starr California 282-3).²² Wilson characterised the whole of California as big and beautiful but empty. He described the Californian writers as possessing a simplistic relationship to their environment and consequently having a minimalist writing style, which Wilson found altogether lacking (Starr California 282-3). Alternatively, the Pacific Ocean and California itself can be viewed as a *tabula rasa* onto which a people's dreams and fantasies, as well as fears and nightmares are projected, thus following in an American literary tradition that can be traced back to the Puritans.²³ Such a simplistic relationship to environment as well as minimalist style can be seen in the fiction of James M. Cain.

²² The title of Wilson's essay "The Boys in The Back Room," refers to the back room of Stanley Rose's bookstore, opened in 1935 and located downtown on Hollywood Boulevard, opposite the offices of the Screen Writers Guild. This was where writers such as West found an escape from the world of Hollywood and their day jobs as script-writers for the studios (Martin 270).

²³ The literary treatment of the landscape in terms of *tabula rasa* follows an American tradition that is both geographic and psychological. For example, Puritan forefather William Bradford's account of the hostile environment upon arrival in America in "Of Plymouth Plantation." Bradford describes the landscape as a "hideous and desolate wilderness," thus expressing the Puritan community's trepidation upon encountering the new continent (168).

In Cain's The Postman Always Rings Twice, the ocean fulfils a dual, contradictory, and symbolic function. The ocean offers the possibility of absolution to Frank, when he and Cora visit the beach after they marry. They swim in the ocean in an attempt to start a new life and forget the murder of Cora's husband that they have committed. As they enter the waves of the ocean, Frank explains its regenerating power:

It seemed to me that all the devilment, and meanness, and shiftlessness and no-account stuff in my life had been pressed off and washed off, and I was all ready to start out with her again clean, and do like she said, have a new life.

(Cain Postman 111)

Like California itself, the ocean represents the possibility of starting over again. However, soon after this episode the ocean becomes the place of their ultimate demise: "Cora's death at the edge of the ocean signals the inescapability of history, of acts committed in history" (Fine Imagining Los Angeles 96). In Cain's novels, the dream inevitably turns to nightmare, and as a result, life cannot start anew with past crimes forgotten. In a cruel doubling of events, Cora dies in car accident on the ocean highway not far from where the murder of her husband was committed. In this manner, Cain capitalises on the symbolic resonance of the road within Californian and American mythology. At the beginning of the novel, Frank is an unencumbered drifter on the open road, and with this incarnation Cain presents a powerful Depression-era image analogous to that of the Joad family in John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath (1939). The road represents freedom, mobility and the hope of a better life, but it is precisely the drive to attain a better social position that motivates the characters' violent actions within Cain's fiction. In Postman, the road comes to represent not escape but rather an inescapable trap for Frank and Cora, who become entangled within the circularity of events that take place on the highway. Consequently, "the road, with its deceptive promise of mobility and freedom provides the chief metaphor for the betrayed promise

of the West” (Fine Imagining Los Angeles 45). With such symbols, Cain demonstrates the possible dangers entailed in realising the Californian dream.

The powerful symbolism of the road and the ocean, as well as the new technology of planes and cars, infiltrates the language used by Cain’s fated protagonists. Frank says to Cora after the murder that there is “tough road ahead” (Cain Postman 46). Cora likens their passionate love to the power of an airplane engine struggling to be contained within an old Ford motor car:

“We had all that love, and we just cracked up under it. It’s a big airplane engine, that takes you up through the sky, right up to the top of the mountain. But when you put it in a Ford, it just shakes to pieces. That’s what we are, Frank, just a couple of old Fords.”
(Cain Postman 85)

Cora is aware that the love and ambition they possess is too great for their ordinary lives and that it is dangerous for them to harbour such dreams and desires. Interestingly, Cora uses technological terminology to express her thoughts, referring to the industrialisation that underpinned the Californian dream.²⁴ Similarly, Cora’s analogy suggests the potentially tragic consequences of achieving that dream, especially a dream that is driven by inhuman technological forces. Frank does not heed Cora’s warning that God is laughing at them, and his response to her thoughts is similarly peppered with symbolism:

“The hell he is. We’re laughing at him too, aren’t we? He put up a red stop sign for us, and we went past it. And then what? Did we get shoved off the deep end? We did like hell. We got away clean, and got \$10,000 for doing the job.”

(Cain Postman 85)

Using the terminology of the road, Frank describes how they both ignored a “red stop sign,” in carrying out their murderous plans, but because they have not yet been

²⁴ Cora’s analogy refers to the aeronautical industry, which was fuelling the state’s economic progress during the 1930’s and ‘40s. Furthermore, the reference to “old Fords” highlights how during the 1920s Ford motor cars had become affordable for much of the American population.

“shoved off the deep end,” Frank believes that this means they will get away with their actions. The “deep end” evokes the nearby Pacific Ocean and inevitably the murder they have committed by having tipped the car over the cliff edge. Furthermore, it foreshadows the ending of the novel when they are both finally, metaphorically, shoved off the deep end: with Cora dead and Frank awaiting his execution. Within the novel, “shoved off the deep end,” becomes a recurring motif and highlights how such symbols as the road and ocean function in terms of a dialectic between dream and reality. The road and the ocean contain contradictory meanings as they represent both the promise of fulfilling the dream as well as the potentially tragic consequences of its realisation.²⁵

In Cain’s fiction, architecture plays a similar symbolic role to that of the ocean and road. For example in Postman the main location of the novel, The Twin Oaks Tavern, as its name implies, symbolizes the doubling of events in the novel, in addition to the twin paths of Frank and Cora that converge at the Tavern and cause the action of the novel. Housing, or more specifically real-estate, also plays an important role in Cain’s Mildred Pierce. Mildred’s husband Bert formed the company “Pierce Homes Inc.” with himself as President during the real-estate boom of the 1920s California. With the land in Glendale that Bert inherited, the company built Spanish-style houses for ordinary “folk.” The novel describes how one of these houses became the Pierces family home and from which Bert is forced to leave after his marital infidelity with a neighbour. Their home is introduced to the reader as “like others of its kind: a Spanish bungalow ... as good as the next and perhaps a little better” (Cain Mildred Pierce 1). This description encompasses the Californian dream of owning a one-family, detached

²⁵ The circularity of symbols and events in Postman is epitomised in the echoing voice of Cora’s husband, Nick, when he is murdered. Like the echo, symbols reoccur but with different meanings, just as every action has a counteraction within the novel. In relation, Thomas Pynchon’s later novel The Crying of Lot 49 makes reference to this motif in the name of the motel in which protagonist Oedipa Maas stays, called Echo Court.

house with a plot of land. Furthermore, the Pierce's home is in the most popular style of architecture at this time "Spanish," which had become ubiquitous and mass-produced; the style is definitively Californian as it is purely imitative, bearing little relation to California's original Spanish heritage, thus akin to Jameson's definition of pastiche as meaningless parody. The reader of Cain's novel learns that the house, the Pierce Company, and consequently the Pierce family itself, suffered as a result of the 1929 stock-market crash and ensuing Depression. The house "was a mockery now, and the place had been mortgaged and re-mortgaged, and the money from the mortgages long since spent" (Cain Mildred Pierce 7). The Pierces represent "a profile of withered 1920s middle class elegance, the good life shattered by the depression" (ed. Fine Los Angeles in Fiction 98). They are emblematic of the economic slump that occurred amongst the middle classes during the 1930s, who began to feel let down by the promise of the California dream.²⁶

The symbolic significance of housing is further illustrated in Cain's Mildred Pierce, when after Mildred has become a successful businesswoman, she moves from middle-class, suburban Glendale to the more gentrified Pasadena, in order to inhabit her a mansion belonging to her new husband Monty Beragon. This migration represents social mobility and the fulfilment of Mildred's desire to become upper-class and finally transcend her middle class beginnings. Mildred's ambition is primarily caused by her aspirational and spoilt daughter Veda. However, transcendence of her middle-class origins is not possible for Mildred. This is metaphorically illustrated in the novel when Mildred becomes trapped between Pasadena and Glendale in a severe flood and is forced to walk home to Glendale. In this episode, Cain brings together two symbols of

²⁶ Mike Davis describes how "the Depression in Los Angeles was foregrounded and amplified in the middle-classes, producing a political fermentation that was at times bizarre." According to Davis, the effects of the economic situation on this group was reflected in the fiction of Cain and Chandler where "[t]hese Depression-crazed middle classes of Southern California became, in one mode or another, the original protagonists of that great anti-myth usually known as *noir*" (Davis 37).

social mobility, the road and housing, to illustrate the transitory and potentially reversible nature of dream fulfilment. Consequently, such symbols represent the fragility of the California dream. In Cain's other novel, The Postman Always Rings Twice, the ocean, the road as well as housing, contain contradictory significance as they represent both the promise and the failure of that dream. However, unlike Cora and Frank, Mildred manages to survive the collapse of the dream, because she is able to successfully return to her middle-class suburban life. Mildred is a precursor to the heroines of later Californian fiction such as Mariah Wyeth in Didion's Play It As It Lays. Like Mariah, Mildred indulges in fast-driving but similarly discovers that the freedom promised by the road is ultimately illusory. Furthermore, both Mildred and Mariah are "survivors," overcoming adversity and finding the means to navigate the contradictory nature of Los Angeles and the capriciousness of the California dream.

The significance of housing in Cain's fiction is further illustrated in the mediocre but highly popular Spanish-style houses depicted in Double Indemnity and Mildred Pierce. However, these ordinary houses harbour people leading, or wishing to lead, extraordinary lives. Cain's characters commit adultery, murder and extortion in pursuit of their dreams. For example, in Double Indemnity the narrator-protagonist Walter Huff describes the Nirdlingers' house, which comes to be called the "House of Death," as "just a Spanish house, like all the rest of them in California" (Cain Double Indemnity 1). Walter himself similarly lives in a nondescript bungalow that had become very common during the 1920s and 30s. Walter notes how all these Spanish houses came "right out of the same can" as if they are another mass-produced commodity (Cain Double Indemnity 3). Adorno and Horkheimer describe how "the culture industry" causes the infection of "sameness" to every area of life (94). This was demonstrated in California's housing, where the new bungalows built on the outskirts of town invited

“their users to throw them away after short use like tin cans” (94). In California, housing functions in terms of an all-pervasive consumer culture, suggesting that even those who reside in these houses become similarly commodified and transient. Consequently, Cain’s fiction illustrates how these ordinary, identical houses conceal their inhabitants’ frustration, which is caused by the broken promises made by the California dream, as well as by their underlying suspicion that they too have become mere commodities.

Through a largely sympathetic portrayal of ordinary people pursuing the California dream, Cain’s fiction takes symbols of the booster myth and explores them in terms of a complex dialectic between the dream imagined and the dream realised. Influenced by the repercussions made by the Great Depression amongst the middle-classes in California, Cain demonstrates how powerful Californian symbols, such as the road, the ocean and housing, can represent both dream and nightmare. These symbols’ contradictory nature point to a conception of the city that is similar to postmodernist writers such as Pynchon, who’s The Crying of Lot 49 depicts a city where ultimate meaning proves elusive to protagonist Oedipa Maas. The ability of the symbols used in Cain’s fiction to possess contradictory meanings recalls Barthes’ myth, which is defined by its ability to be appropriated as well as shift in meaning, whereby the signified in the first system becomes a sign in the next. Barthes characterises myth in terms of fluctuation and even duplicity. Paradoxically, myth resists the meaning that it is dependent upon, for “[i]t is this constant game of hide-and-seek between the meaning and the form which defines myth” (Barthes 142). The ability of the road and the ocean to contain opposite, contradictory meanings is explored in the later writing of Didion and Pynchon. Furthermore, such an appropriation by these later writers further illustrates their mythological valence, as “the fundamental character of the mythical

concept is to be appropriated” (Barthes 143). Cain’s Spartan style lends itself to such symbolic significance and mythological appropriation.²⁷ This examination of Cain’s work with reference to symbolism, demonstrates how Cain helped to shape a dialectic between myth and anti-myth within Californian literature. Cain’s fiction demonstrates how the California dream, and its unstable realisation, impacted upon the mind-set of those who pursued and attained it.

Raymond Chandler’s City of Deception:

Both Cain and Chandler’s fiction provide an insight into Los Angeles’ society through their fictional portrayal of housing. For example, the geographical position of the Nirdlingers’ house in Cain’s Double Indemnity is highly significant. Located in Hollywoodland and perched on the hillside, the house represents social mobility. The changing demographics of the city during the twentieth century illustrate how an increase in status was accompanied by a move to a better neighbourhood that was on higher ground. British architect Reyner Banham, writing in the 1960s, describes the connection between socio-economic status and geographical position which became exaggerated during the post-war period. Banham notes how “the financial and topographical contours correspond almost exactly: the higher the ground the higher the income” (Banham 79).²⁸ In Chandler’s fiction, the wealthy characters inhabit mansions on hilltops, such as the Grayles in Farewell My Lovely. Furthermore the Grayles’ house

²⁷ Because of his concentration on action or lived-experience as well as strong images and metaphors, Cain’s writing often reads like a screenplay, and indeed his novels have been successfully adapted into films. Cain’s minimalist style has invited the description by Kevin Starr that Cain leaves everything but plot on the cutting room floor (Fine Imagining Los Angeles 94). Similarly, somewhat disparagingly yet possibly with a hint of jealousy, Raymond Chandler described his fellow writer as “a Proust in greasy overalls,” suggesting perhaps that Cain’s unpretentious writing style concealed literary genius (Friedrich 163).

²⁸ Los Angeles’ geographic development adhered to the wider national tendency of westward expansion as it spread into the hills away from the centre or downtown of the city. Furthermore, the city experienced increasing geographical demarcation along the lines of social class that foreshadowed its post-war development.

is positioned precariously close to the ocean edge, with the ocean serving as a reminder not only of the fulfilment of the ‘California dream,’ but also its instability. Marlowe describes how from within the Grayle house, the ocean could be felt but not seen (Chandler BSON 247). Whilst exploring the house, Marlowe describes how “[a] French window showed a gleam of blue water far off and I remembered almost with a shock that we were near the Pacific Ocean and that this house was on the edge of one of the canyons” (Chandler 249). The ocean’s proximity comes to Marlowe in the form of a sudden realisation. Wealthy mansions like that of the Grayles symbolise social ascent but also the precariousness of such a societal position based upon criminally gained riches. Similarly, the Sternwood mansion in The Big Sleep stands next to their oilfields, which act as a literal reminder of the source of their wealth. The fields are also the location of the family secret: the body of Vivian’s murdered husband Regan, which constitutes “the crime lying hidden in history and buried deep in the landscape” (Fine Imagining Los Angeles 123). Marlowe’s role is to metaphorically dig into the landscape and correspondingly the Sternwood family’s history in order to uncover their secrets.

Within Chandler’s fiction the houses of the rich, both physically and metaphorically, represent a means of separation from the rest of the world. In his role as detective, Marlowe is able to penetrate beyond that boundary. In his essay “On Raymond Chandler,” Jameson notes how the detective functions as “an organ of perception” (72). Marlowe’s occupation allows him an unusual access to the full spectrum of different social groups that were emerging at this time. Jameson writes that due to Los Angeles’ socially fragmented nature, “a figure must be invented who can be superimposed upon the society as a whole, whose routine and life-pattern serve somehow to tie its separate and isolated parts together” (69). Thus Chandler is able to offer a unique social portrait because Marlowe is “an involuntary explorer of the

society,” who “visits either those places you don’t look at or those you can’t look at: the anonymous or wealthy or secretive” (70). Due to Marlowe’s privileged access and unique perspective, Chandler’s novels depict all elements of Los Angeles’ society in the 1930s and ‘40s, paying particular attention to the seedier and more corrupt aspects of the city at that time. Consequently, Chandler’s vision of Los Angeles counteracted the glamour of Hollywood as well as the California booster-myth.

Chandler’s later novel, The Little Sister published in 1949, a decade after The Big Sleep (1939) and Farewell My Lovely (1940), is illustrative of the societal impact of the unprecedented growth Los Angeles experienced during the war and the immediate post-war period, as well as the effects felt by the developing film industry. Of all Chandler’s novels, The Little Sister offers the closest examination of Hollywood in addition to providing an intimate portrait of Los Angeles as a whole. During one of his drives through the city, Marlowe declares a nostalgia for a time in Los Angeles’ history before its rapid development and transformation:

‘I use to like this town ...A long time ago. There were trees along Wilshire Boulevard. Beverly Hills was a country town. Westwood was bare hills and lots offering at eleven hundred dollars and no takers. Los Angeles was just a big dry sunny place with ugly homes and no style, but good hearted and peaceful.’

(Chandler LLON 537)

Marlowe describes how Los Angeles had turned into a “neon-lighted slum” that contained all “the riff-raff of a big hard-boiled city with no more personality than a paper cup” (Chandler LLON 537). The novel contrasts Los Angeles during its preceding booster period with its present time of the late 1940s. The contrasting description indicates not only Chandler’s intense familiarity with the city during its infancy but also his dislike of what it had become, especially the effects made by consumerism and mass culture.

Seen through the eyes of Marlowe as he drives at night, the reader is subject to the gaudiness of the city's bright neon lights. Chandler defines Los Angeles in relation to these deceptive lights:

I smelled Los Angeles before I got to it. It smelled stale and old like a waiting room that had been closed too long. But the coloured lights fooled you. The lights were wonderful. There ought to be a monument to the man who invented neon lights. Fifteen stories high, solid marble. There's a boy that really made something out of nothing. (Chandler LLON 452)

In Chandler's typical acerbic irony he describes how the brightly coloured neon lights mask the city's bad smell. The garishness of the city disguises the city's corruption as well as its lack of meaning. The neon lights mask a vacuum. Los Angeles as a void is a theme explored by postmodern writers such as Thomas Pynchon in The Crying of Lot 49, published in 1966. This latter novel depicts a protagonist struggling to decipher and find meaning in an enigmatic city. To Chandler, the neon lights are a symbol of deception and artificiality, they are representative of the influence of consumer culture due to their ability to turn buildings into mere advertisements. Marlowe's Los Angeles is a place where something has been made out of nothing, and all is mere movie-made sham.

The impression of the city in Chandler's novels is one of aesthetic gaudiness and it seems Chandler took enjoyment in documenting the seedier aspects of Los Angeles. Chandler's dislike of Los Angeles and resentment of the Hollywood film industry is illustrated in his letters. It was an industry that Chandler was reliant on for a pay cheque and yet which he accused of lacking artistic merit, because as a mass industry it treated movies as indiscriminate products. In his letters, Chandler regularly lamented the Hollywood studio's Fordist approach to making films, to whom "a picture is just as much a manufactured product as a can of beans" (Selected Letters 73). Similarly, in Chandler's The Little Sister, California is described as "the department-

store state,” because it had “the most of everything and the best of nothing” (Chandler LLON 451). In comparing California to a department store, Chandler is referring to the consumer’s illusion of choice. California is a place where one can choose from various roles to play and live in whatever style of house one wants, and yet it is all sham. Chandler’s vision of an artificial Los Angeles extends to its people, and his novels depict a world of deception which Marlowe has to navigate. Furthermore, a deceptiveness of city can be paralleled with the portrayal of women, as epitomised in the figure of the *femme fatale*. The female characters are often actresses or dancers and consequently associated with the Hollywood film industry. Consequently, both the city and the women in Chandler’s fiction are not what they seem and can be defined in terms of their seductive yet deceptive surfaces.

However, within the overriding “cheapness” that characterises Chandler’s description of Los Angeles lies a sense of democracy. The rich are as vulgar as the poor and Marlowe remains the privileged exception. Just as Chandler saw himself as separate from movie industry and its artistic shortcomings, Marlowe is distanced from and even *above* all those he interacts with. The concept of Los Angeles as a “democracy of trash,” can be associated with Adorno and Horkheimer’s account of the culture industry, where everyone is equal but only as duped consumers. The mass culture that Adorno and Horkheimer describe gives people a false sense of individualism, but in reality all are subservient to capitalism, creating an epidemic of sameness. Much like Chandler’s description of California as the “department-store state,” Adorno and Horkheimer describe how within the culture industry, “[s]omething is provided for everyone so that no one can escape; differences are hammered home and propagated” (97). Adorno and Horkheimer described an American society that although politically democratic, was experiencing the homogenization of its culture resulting from consumerism during the

1930s and '40s. Consequently, they drew parallels between America and the fascism they had experienced first-hand in Europe.

Adorno and Horkheimer questioned the seemingly democratic nature of Hollywood's promise of stardom to the ordinary person. Adorno and Horkheimer critique the myth of re-invention promoted by the film industry that promoted itself as "unceasingly in search of talent," and describes how the masses are "too astute to identify with the millionaire on screen" yet "too obtuse to deviate even minutely from the law of large numbers" (116). The film-goer is quick to identify with the idol on screen but is slow to calculate the probability of becoming that idol. Similarly, the female movie-star on screen represents both identification and separation to the ordinary film-goer: "[t]he female starlet is supposed to symbolize the secretary, though in a way which makes her seem predestined, unlike the real secretary, to wear the flowing evening gown" (116). Like Adorno and Horkheimer, Chandler in The Little Sister took an alternative view of the re-invention narrative that was promoted by the movies:

Wonderful what Hollywood will do to a nobody. It will make a radiant glamour queen out of a drab little wench who ought to be ironing a truck driver's shirts, a he-man hero with shining eyes and brilliant smile reeking of sexual charm out of some overgrown kid who was meant to go to work with a lunchbox.

(Chandler LLON 516)

Chandler de-glamourizes movie stars and the promise of self-transformation made by Hollywood. He describes how Hollywood's ability to transform the individual can also have very sinister effects, so that "it might even take a small town prig like Orrin Quest and make an ice-pick murderer out of him in a matter in months, elevating his simple meanness into the classic sadism of the multiple killer" (Chandler LLON 526). The democratizing effect of the culture industry means that it is equally as possible to become a murderer as to become a star on screen. Chandler was aware of the darker

side of Hollywood and through his fiction illustrated what he perceived to be the more sinister consequences of the dream factory.

As illustrated through his writings, Chandler was an outsider to Hollywood and also to American language and culture. His experience in the oil-industry before his literary career gave him an alternative perspective on Los Angeles in its early development. Jameson emphasises how Chandler was a stylist in the American language and calls him a “painter of American life” (67). The real content of his novels, according to Jameson, is a scenic one and they are concerned with the depiction of the American landscape (66-7). What is particularly important about Chandler’s portrait of Los Angeles is that it predicts the fragmentation of American cities and societies which took place in America after the Second World War. This societal fragmentation had already begun to occur in Los Angeles during the 1930s and 40s. Consequently through his fiction, Chandler anticipates the social realities that were to follow. Between the wars, the city as portrayed in Chandler’s fiction “is a kind of social microcosm and forecast of the country as a whole: a new centerless city, in which the various classes have lost touch with each other because each is isolated in his own geographical compartment” (Jameson 69). During the post-war period, other cities followed the example of Los Angeles in terms of greater suburbanisation at the expense of a central downtown, as well as increased segregation in terms of social class and race. Chandler was one of the first writers to take a critical view of a city that was still seen popularly at the time as a kind of Eden. Importantly, Chandler portrayed Los Angeles in terms of hollow consumerism as well as social fragmentation. As a result, Chandler foreshadowed post-modern writers such as Didion and Pynchon who would illustrate the connection between the meaningless nature of the city and a new postmodern model of self.

The *Noir* Vision and Mass Culture:

Influenced by the atmosphere of the Depression years as well as the false promises of consumerism, Cain and Chandlers' *noir* vision represents a reaction to booster myths of California as the land of sunshine and oranges. Mike Davis describes how "*Noir* was like a transformational grammar turning each charming ingredient of the boosters' arcadia into a sinister equivalent," and consequently "through a succession of through-the-glass-darkly novels they repainted Los Angeles as an urban hell" (Davis 37-8). Much of this vision can be attributed to the authors' experiences as outsiders as well as their perception of mass culture, which also marks these writers as 'transplants.' These writers moved to Los Angeles to work for the film industry as script-writers, where they often struggled to become successful or valued for their artistic merits. These writers became disillusioned with a place that was profit-driven and the people seemingly insincere. There is no better illustration of the broken promise of the Californian dream than "the cheated and betrayed" in The Day of The Locust (West 292). Unable to adjust to the seemingly artificial nature of the city and the transitory consumer promises of the region, these people can only watch the more well-adjusted masquerades with "eyes filled with hatred (West 180). These transplants are emblematic of the Midwestern middle-classes who moved to Los Angeles in the 1930s and '40s, and who find that "the sunshine is not enough" (West 291). Feeling "tricked" by the California booster myth, these people have turned into a violent mob at the end of the novel (West 291). West's apocalyptic forecast for Los Angeles is a projection of fear regarding the growing influence of mass culture.

In West's portrait of these Midwesterners, he draws parallels between mass culture and fascism. West associates their penchant for consumerism with

conformity. Susan Hegeman describes how during the 1930s it had become common amongst intellectuals to associate the Midwest with consumer culture, a view derived from anthropologists Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrel Lynd's influential study Middletown published in 1929, which described "the more prosperous Middletowners ... quick but also aberrant, adaptation to consumer culture," as illustrated through "a strong inclination to conspicuous consumption on the one hand, and by an equally strong propensity for social conformity on the other" (Hegeman 137). Most startling and yet most interestingly, the Lynds describe how these mid-westerners or Middletowners "[n]ot yet fully capable of expressing themselves through the use of consumer items ... instead become akin to the mass produced products they covet" (Hegeman 137). These Middletowners described in the Lynds' study, are portrayed in The Day of the Locust as those who have moved to Los Angeles for the sunshine but are unable to find happiness in the transitory fulfilments of its culture. Unlike the masquerades, these Midwest transplants or Middletowners, are ill at ease in the emerging consumer culture, consigned to merely stare at the masquerades who are better able to express themselves in terms of consumer culture. Homer Simpson is the archetypal Midwestern transplant who lusts after the seductive Faye Greener much like a consumer desires a commodity. The novel witnesses him shopping in the "SunGold Market" as well as falling victim to the sales-pitch of Harry Greener for "Miracle Solve." However, Homer is uncomfortable in this consumer society and compared to mechanically produced commodity: "a poorly made automaton" (West 201). He is described as being detached from his body and especially from his hands. Like Marx's description of the worker's alienation from the products he or she produces, Homer is alienated from his hands. Through this description of Homer's alienation, West provides further illustration of how consumer culture affects all areas of life including a person's relation to their own body. Furthermore, Jacobs describes how transplants like Homer are representative of

an older socio-economic order. Although these transplants partake blindly in consumerism, they are out of place in the image industry of Hollywood; nevertheless they are ultimately absorbed into this new order through its mechanisms of desire (245). West's novel contrasts the ill-adjusted transplants with the more well-adjusted masquerades who are consequently more at home in Los Angeles. The masquerade is represented by the seductive, glittering and vibrant Faye Greener, who lives her life through performance, illustrating her ease with the Hollywood culture of consumerism and the image.

In West's novel, the association is made between mass culture and the feminine as epitomised by Fay Greener, who exists as an object of desire and is synonymous with the consumerism of Hollywood industry. During the nineteenth century, the notion that mass culture was somehow associated with women gained ground, whilst real authentic culture remained the prerogative of men (Huysen 47). Women had always been excluded from the masculine domain of producing high art, leaving "low" mass art forms and culture to be considered feminine. And with the advent of the industrial revolution, the association of men with production and consequently women with consumption strengthened. As a result, the connection between women and mass culture intensified (Huysen 47).²⁹ Consequently, the modernist work of art represented a resistance to the seductive lure of mass culture and succumbing to its enticements meant "losing oneself in dreams and delusions, of consuming rather than producing," (Huysen 55). Both Homer and Tod are infatuated by Fay, revealing their vulnerability to mass culture. Faye is described as being "shiny as a new spoon," with "pale, glittering hair," which thus defines her as a commodity (West 212). As discussed in the previous chapter, Laura Mulvey describes how the

²⁹ Similarly, Huysen explores how the modernist aesthetic constitutes a fear of the other as is epitomised in a fear of the 'feminine' masses.

commodity takes on a distinctly feminine “seductive sheen” as it competes in the market-place (Fetishism and Curiosity 4). The nature of Faye as a *femme fatale* and her artificial, seductive surface can be likened to Los Angeles architecture. Craig Owens notes how “femininity is frequently associated with false representation, with simulation and seduction” (Owens 68). Thus femininity is conceived of as merely decorative much like the elaborate, decorative architectural facades of the houses in Los Angeles as described in West’s novel.

Fantasy and Façade in Nathanael West’s The Day of the Locust:

West’s novel depicts a Los Angeles where the line between illusion and reality has broken down and where to act a part is to be a person. Tod’s friend, the screenwriter Claude Estee, hosts a party and impersonates a Civil War colonel to fit the Southern architecture of his plantation-style house, which is “an exact reproduction of the old Dupey mansion near Biloxi, Mississippi” (West 188). Estee’s act involves declaring to his servant ““Here, you black rascal! A mint julep!”” when in reality his servant is Chinese and the drink is scotch and soda. Estee greets his visitors on the porch teetering back on forth on his heels, fooling observers into believing that “he had a large belly” (West 188). The illusion is altering reality and one is fooled into believing Estee actually has a large belly due to the persuasiveness of his performance. Elsewhere in the novel, the possibly cataclysmic results of the confusion between reality and illusion are demonstrated when the film set collapses under the collective weight of the many cast members, during the filming of *Waterloo*, as if the cast and crew had forgotten that the battle and the hill were not real. Similarly, writing in relation to Hollywood, Joan Didion declares decades later that “the dream has taught the dreamers

how to live” (*Slouching* 147).³⁰ West’s novel depicts a society where the dream is informing reality and dictating how people behave.

West’s novel illustrates the power of the film industry in forming not only people’s dreams but their behaviour and identity, and the architecture of Los Angeles plays a principal role in this formation. The link between Los Angeles’ architecture and its inhabitants is demonstrated when protagonist Tod Hackett is described walking along Vine Street in downtown Los Angeles and surveys the crowd:

A great many of the people wore sports clothes which were not really sports clothes. Their sweaters, knickers and slacks, blue flannel jackets with brass buttons were fancy dress. The fat lady in the yachting cap was going shopping not boating; the man in the Norfolk jacket and Tyrolean hat was returning not from a mountain but from an insurance office; and the girl in slacks and sneakers with a bandana around her head had just left a switchboard not a tennis court.

(West 180)

The glaring discrepancy between people’s dress and their daily activities can be associated with the trend toward façade in Los Angeles architecture. Tod’s walk continues into Pinyon Canyon, where he makes an unsympathetic assessment of its housing:

But not even the soft wash of dusk could help the houses. Only dynamite would be of any use against the Mexican ranch houses, Samoan huts, Mediterranean villas, Egyptian and Japanese temples, Swiss chalets, Tudor cottages, and very possible combination of these styles that lined the slopes of the canyon.

(West 181)

³⁰ Like the *noir* writers of the 1930s and ‘40s, Didion warns of the potential dangers in a society where movie-fantasies shape the people. In her essay “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream” Didion reflects on the media treatment of a court case involving the conviction of Lucille Miller, a wife who murdered her husband with the help of her lover, echoing the plot of both *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. She writes that “[t]his is the country in which a belief in the literal interpretation of Genesis has slipped imperceptibly into a belief in the literal interpretation of *Double Indemnity*” (*Slouching* 4). In California, religion had been replaced by a belief in the movies, which has an impact upon people’s behaviour.

The image created is surreal and abstract. The juxtaposition of different architectural styles causes a “Rhine castle” to reside next to a “coloured shack with domes and minarets out of the Arabian Nights,” and the result is jarring. West describes the architecture’s “desire to startle” as “eager and guileless” (West 181). They are artificial and insubstantial, being made of “plaster, lath and paper” (West 181). The outside aesthetic of the houses and the physical attire of the people are both façade.

The masquerades’ outfits bear no relation to their activities or occupations just as the houses are mere imitations of other architectural styles bearing no real relation to the tradition they mimic. The façade and eclecticism of Los Angeles architecture, as described in The Day of the Locust, had an influence upon postmodern theorists such as Frederic Jameson, particularly his definition of the postmodern practice of pastiche. Pastiche is like parody in its imitation of particular style but neutral and without parody’s satirical impulse or ulterior motive; pastiche represents a mimicry of other styles and the wearing of a stylistic mask (Jameson 16). Thus Los Angeles’ architecture, as described by West, can similarly be defined in terms of pastiche, having no genuine relation to the original style which it parodies. Such postmodern architecture and its relation to its surroundings, is epitomized by the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, designed by John Portman and completed in 1976, which “does not wish to be a part of the city but rather its equivalent and replacement or substitute” (Jameson 40). The Bonaventure Hotel functions in terms of a procession of a simulacra, whereby as imitation or parody of a city, it aims to replace the city itself. Furthermore, the highly elaborate yet artificial architectural façades seen in West’s fiction can be paralleled with the sheen of the commodity fetish and the *femme fatale*’s seductive surface. As explored, such conceptions of femininity point toward a notion of the self as performance. *Femme fatale* Faye Greener possesses such an elaborate façade,

with her “pale glittering hair” and “meaningless gestures,” which are a kind of blank parody or pastiche as they are detached from their original meaning (West 212). Los Angeles can be characterised in terms of its seductive surface and detachment from original meaning, an attribute shared with its people and architecture.

The flimsy and façade-like nature of the houses in Pinyon Canyon suggest their likeness to studio sets and the eclectic nature of the architectural styles recall the mix of different sets found on the film studio. To writers like West, the architecture of the city seemed indistinguishable from the movie lots that it surrounded. The architecture “became the raw materials for a fiction preoccupied with defining a place that conveyed a sense of insubstantiality and unreality” (Fine Imagining Los Angeles 18). Protagonist Tod comes across the old sets and props used by the studio which he calls “a dream dump,” and continues:

A Sargasso of the imagination! And the dump grew continually, for there wasn't a dream afloat somewhere which wouldn't sooner or later turn up on it, having first been made photographic by plaster, canvas, lath and paint. (West 248)

The words chosen to describe what the houses are made from are almost identical to those used for the dumped studio sets. The description suggests that the houses, like the sets, represent the failed dreams of those inhabiting them. Furthermore, this assessment is indicative of West's own contempt for the architecture of Los Angeles as well as his disappointment with regard to his screenwriting career. Alternatively, the “dream dump” can be seen as emblematic of a complex process of collective dream recycling that was part of Hollywood culture.

Los Angeles is the place where dreams are made real through the construction of a hyperreality via the precession of the simulacra. West recognised “the importance of collective dreams and desires,” and portrayed the city's architecture as a

“catalogue of escapist daydreams” (Barnard 167). In this way, dreams are not necessarily made real but they are made photographic in the form of movies which are then reflected in architecture (Barnard 173). Thus Hollywood is the place where all dreams *are* realised, albeit in films sets and architectural styles as well as people’s dress and corresponding behaviour. Because dreams are made real in some physical form, we can conceive of Los Angeles as a kind of hyperreality. This process can be seen as an example of Jean Baudrillard’s precession of simulacra, whereby the copy replaces the original, thus “substituting the signs of the real for the real” (2). Just as the image of woman comes to eclipse the woman herself, in the case of Los Angeles, the dream has replaced reality. Baudrillard describes Los Angeles as “a city whose mystery is precisely that of no longer being anything but a network of incessant, unreal circulation ... no longer anything but an immense scenario and perpetual pan shot” (13). Los Angeles’ connection with the film industry, and by extension with people’s dreams, suggests that the city can only ever be conceived of as unreal and seen in terms of filmic devices such as scenario and pan shot.

The effect of the movies upon architecture was not purely one directional. Starr describes how movie sets themselves “reflected as well as influenced, architectural tastes in the building boom of the twenties and thirties” (Fine Imagining Los Angeles 19). This can be seen as further evidence of the breakdown between reality and illusion explored by writers like West, but it also suggests that the relationship between the two was a more complex dialectic. The reciprocity between film and architecture meant that “the more Hollywood created fantasy sets, the more expressively scenic became the surrounding architecture” (Starr Material Dreams 209). Principally, the Hollywood film industry helped facilitate the impulse toward storytelling in architecture and the greatest proponent of this was architect Wallace Neff. The “narrative eclecticism” seen in Los

Angeles architecture of this period could “in the hands of a master like Neff create fine architecture” (Starr Material Dreams 210). Neff was the architect of choice for the movie stars and was responsible for creating the Regency-inspired mansion Pickfair in Beverly Hills. Built in 1924, the home of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks set a new standard of aspiration. *See figure 5 appendix.* Another example of fantasy realised in architecture is the Greystone Mansion completed in 1928, designed by Gordon Kaufmann and described as “a dream materialized from Sir Walter Scott’s imaginings,” which itself has been used regularly since as a movie set (Starr Material Dreams 206). *See figure 6 appendix.*

The importance of fantasy and façade in Los Angeles’ architecture meant that the city literally came to represent “the apotheosis of American dream and desire – an urban milieu in which fantasy *is* the reality and where the culture’s desires erupt in their most extreme and compulsive form” (Clarke 125). The British architect Reyner Banham highlights how the tendency toward fantastical façade within Los Angeles architecture was particularly apparent in commercial buildings. These commercial buildings were constructed simply, they were box-shaped with attention being paid to what is seen, hence their highly elaborate and merely decorative facades. The main purpose of such facades is to symbolise Hollywood fantasy. According to Banham this is typified in Grauman’s Chinese Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard which has been the historic and traditional home of movie premieres since the 1920s. *See figure 7 appendix.* Banham describes Grauman’s Chinese Theatre as the “ultimate shrine of all fantasy that was Hollywood” (Banham 97). This was achieved by keeping “most of its fantastification as a garnish for the façade,” whilst the architecture beneath is “plain bread” (Banham 97). Similarly, the Aztec Hotel in Monrovia had its Mayan-style detailing stuck on a basic structure that is “liked piped icing on a pastry” (Banham 97).

See *figure 8 appendix*. Frank Lloyd Wright's Charles Ennis House, built in 1924, also has a highly decorative façade that catches the eye as it adorns the Hollywood Hills. See *figure 9 appendix*. In West's The Day of The Locust Tod's apartment building, the San Bernadino Arms, is described as a "nondescript affair" and fits Banham's account of commercial buildings in Los Angeles. West continues:

It was an oblong three storeys high, the back and sides of which were of plain, unpainted stucco, broken by even rows of unadorned windows. The façade was the colour of diluted mustard and its windows, all double, were framed by pink Moorish columns which supported turnip-shaped lintels. (West 181)

The unseen sides and back of Tod's apartment building are unadorned and unpainted plain stucco, whereas the front façade has been overly decorated in Moorish style, giving an impression that is almost saccharine. West's describes the building's colour as "diluted mustard" and the lintels as "turnip-shaped," and such a nauseous description further reveals West's dislike of the typically Los Angeles style of architecture.

Whilst acknowledging the "need for beauty and romance, no matter how tasteless," Tod Hackett comments in The Day of The Locust that "[f]ew things are sadder than the truly monstrous" (West 181). In the pursuit of their dreams, people sacrificed taste and aestheticism as evidenced in what West saw as the city's garish architectural styles. The Los Angeles of West's novel is "the nightmarish spectacle of the bourgeoisie's architectural fantasies" (Hegeman 154). The transplanted Midwesterners, uncomfortable in the culture of Los Angeles, were representative of a "vastly expanded middle class of 1930s consumer society," to whom "these new middlebrow monstrosities offer the flimsy illusion of cultural roots" (Hegeman 154). Lacking an authentic cultural identity of its own, Californian architecture imitated other cultural styles. Furthermore, "[i]n West's Los Angeles, what Horkheimer and Adorno would soon call the 'culture industry' is thus rather obviously pitted against Culture –

and, simultaneously, against *all* cultures” (Hegeman 155). Accordingly, West depicts a society whereby the architectural imitation of other cultures meant that the attainment of an original culture of its own was sacrificed.

The tendency toward fantasy in the construction of houses as well as in people’s outfits and role playing, demonstrates the impact that the Hollywood film industry had upon all areas of life. West is implying that “this celluloid-inspired culture is an aping of other times and places, a playing of roles by people who have neither individual nor collective identity” (Locklin 69). Without having yet achieved an identity of its own, during its early period Los Angeles’ architecture resorted to fantasy and an eclectic imitation of different styles from around the world. The most popular architecture of the 1930s and ’40s, “Spanish” and “English,” were not just imitating or parodying other styles but were “a romantic grafting of a largely imaginary past onto the physical fabric of the present” (Starr Material Dreams 202). Fine similarly describes how the architects of this period created a patchwork of conflicting styles in search of a usable past as well as constructing romantic evocations (Fine “Landscape of Fantasy” 51). The architects took advantage of the complete freedom in the use of materials in a period of architectural experimentation (Fine “Landscape of Fantasy” 54). Like the architecture, the clothing worn by the people is also a way of dealing not only with a lack of cultural identity but also the Hollywood myth of dream fulfilment. Their clothing, as depicted by West, is a sign of their “vulgar efforts to cope with newness and change,” and their preoccupation with fashion and fads a symptom of “the collapse of time and tradition” (Peters 27). The breakdown in temporality caused by Hollywood culture is evidenced in Jameson’s description of the schizophrenic experience, an effect of the postmodern age, whereby one is unable to unify the past, present or future, and instead forced to live in a kind of perpetual present (Jameson 27). One can interpret

Jameson's theory as a response to the cultural climate of Los Angeles as described by such writers as West and Chandler.

In Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies, Reyner Banham was writing in the 1970s when Los Angeles architecture was still popularly derided. He took a positive view of its fantasy and eclecticism which he calls "symbolic assemblage," whereby the building and the symbol are one and the same (Banham 94). This symbolism is most literally illustrated in commercial buildings such as the Brown Derby Restaurant, built in 1926. *See figure 11 appendix*. Similarly, the "Hollywood" sign itself, situated in Mount Lee on top of the Hollywood hills, although not a building has become perhaps the most charged symbol of the region and film industry. *See figure 12 appendix*. Like Los Angeles itself the sign was originally the result of land speculators who constructed the sign in 1923 as an advertisement for "Hollywoodland" real estate, but has taken on greater significance since. The sign is an advertisement for a place that does not exist and thus encapsulates the paradox of Los Angeles itself as a city without a centre. Constructions like the Hollywood sign and the Brown Derby restaurant can be seen as an extension of the neon-lighted buildings of Chandler's fiction, following a tradition in Los Angeles architecture whereby buildings are advertisements in themselves and "thus designed to express not a structural form but a graphic one" (Clarke 131). As seen with the use of façade, architecture in Los Angeles primary function is a visual one. It is easy to interpret such buildings as merely part of consumer culture. However, according to Banham such architecture is part of a wider tradition of taking a single idea and making it dominant over everything else and this is most triumphantly illustrated in the Wayfarers Chapel (Banham 94). The chapel was completed in 1951 by Lloyd Wright, son of Frank Lloyd Wright and its architecture consists of a geometric design of wooden beams and glass, incorporating the

surrounding landscape. *See appendix 13 and 14.* Perched on the edge of the Pacific, the chapel is a physical representation of California's geographic position. It epitomises the essence of the Californian psyche that having reached the end of the continent, Californians have nothing left to lose.

The region's architectural style can be attributed to its hasty geographical and demographic development. Banham describes how "Los Angeles is instant architecture in an instant townscape" (Banham 3). As explored, California grew quickly in a short time period and consequently the description of "instant" is appropriate. Carey McWilliams observes that the sudden population boom during the 1940s caused the creation of a new type of community, towns such as Westchester, near to Los Angeles municipal airport, which came into existence within the space of less than a decade. Such towns were "the modern day equivalent of the 'gold camp' of 1848" (McWilliams 14). Furthermore, Banham describes how in Los Angeles each plot of land was autonomous, whereby the owner could build whatever style of house he chose, thus accounting for the eclectic nature of housing seen in Pinyon Canyon:

Most of its buildings are the first and only structures on their particular parcels of land; they are couched in a dozen different styles, most of them imported, exploited and ruined within living memory. Yet the city has a comprehensible, even consistent, quality to its built form. (Banham 3)

Paradoxically, Banham argues there is a consistency to this disparity in architectural styles, because they all have in common the unifying theme of fantasy. The divergent architectural styles can also be seen, not a misuse of materials as writers such as West infer, but rather due to a sense of liberation that geography and historical period allowed for. Similarly, the Angelenos' role-playing displayed through their outfits is a response to the unmapped landscape of the city where no particular tradition or authority

governed. With no rules or dominant style to follow, the people of Los Angeles reverted to parodying other styles and living out their dreams.

Homer's house in The Day of The Locust provides a detailed example of architecture imitating a particular style, as his home gives a very good impression of being a quaint country cottage:

The house was queer. It had an enormous and very crooked stone chimney, little dormer windows with big hoods and a thatched roof that came down very low on both sides of the front door. This door was of gumwood painted like fumed oak and it hung on enormous hinges. Although made by machine, the hinges had been carefully stamped to appear hand-forged. The same kind of care and skill had been used to make the roof thatching, which was not really straw but heavy fireproof paper coloured and ribbed to look like straw. (West 199)

The agent that sold Homer the house identifies the style as "Irish," but what is particularly notable about the cottage is the enormous attention to detail that was involved to achieve this imitation which even includes a chimney purposely made crooked. The time and skill that was required suggests that it would have been easier to have used the real thing - straw for the roof and oak instead of plastic for the door. The description of Homer's Cottage and the emphasis placed on the effort involved to create such an elaborate façade, is according to David Fine, indicative of West's use of architecture to "symbolise deception, masquerade and misappropriated skill" (Fine "Landscape of Fantasy" 55). West's attitude to the film industry can be paralleled with his description of the architecture. According to West both were a gross misuse of skills. However, the care taken in making the artificial look real implies that it is imitation for its own sake, a kind of architectural *trompe l'oeil*. The attention paid to creating this effect points to a postmodern realisation that there is no real and only imitation, and which can thus be associated with Baudrillard's concept of the precession of the simulacrum whereby the signs of the real have substituted the real (2).

Consequently, the architecture of Los Angeles and the Angelenos' outfits are more than just imitation, for if there is no longer any real to copy then there can only be imitation.

The Hollywood Novel: F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Last Tycoon & Budd Schulberg's What Makes Sammy Run?

By examining the novels of Fitzgerald and Schulberg in terms of their respective protagonists, I illustrate a progression toward a new concept of the subject that resulted from the development of the Hollywood film industry. Monroe Stahr, Fitzgerald's protagonist, is an example of an older model of subjectivity, whereas the protagonist from Schulberg's novel, Sammy Glick, is an example of a newer performative model of self. Sammy is thus aligned with the masquerades from West's novel, who actively construct their identity through performance. This performative subject is a product of the image culture of Hollywood, thus defined in terms of their surface nature, and can be compared with the architecture of Los Angeles in terms of their highly elaborate, pastiche-like facades.

The narrative structures of The Last Tycoon and What Makes Sammy Run? mirror one another and are indicative of the writers' respective relationship to the Hollywood film industry, which impacted upon their fiction and consequently the character of their protagonists. Fitzgerald was an outsider writing his novel from the perspective of an insider, whereas Schulberg was an insider using a narrator who is an outsider.³¹ Like many other writers at the time, Fitzgerald came to Hollywood to write screenplays but his narrator Cecelia Brady, who he casts as the daughter of a successful

³¹ The two authors knew each other and worked together on a screenplay for the film *Winter Carnival*, furthermore, Schulberg's novel The Disenchanted is based on Fitzgerald's time in Hollywood, as detailed in Henry Dan Piper's F.Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait (250). Likewise, Schulberg was a source of material for Fitzgerald and according to Schulberg, Fitzgerald modelled his narrator Cecelia in part on Schulberg, as described in his essay "Remembering Fitzgerald" as cited in F.Scott Fitzgerald: New Perspectives Bryer et al. ed.s

film producer, is an insider to the industry. At the beginning of the novel, Cecelia describes how Rudolph Valentino attended her fifth birthday, which she mentions to illustrate that “even before the age of reason I was in a position to watch the wheels go round” (Fitzgerald 269). Author Budd Schulberg’s relation to Hollywood was a similar one to that of Fitzgerald’s fictional narrator Cecelia. As the son of the production-head at Paramount studio, Schulberg was very much an insider growing up within the industry. However, Schulberg makes his narrator Manheim take a more conventional viewpoint of the Hollywood novel’s narrator. Manheim shares with F.Scott Fitzgerald his status as an outsider, originally from the East Coast and a screenwriter in the film industry.

The protagonist of Fitzgerald’s The Last Tycoon, Monroe Stahr was modelled on the legendary film producer Irving Thalberg, who Fitzgerald had met socially in 1927. Fitzgerald had initially disliked the studio head, possibly because Thalberg had originated the process of assigning more than one writer to work on a script, which was a process that Fitzgerald resented (Piper 262). However, Fitzgerald’s admiration soon grew when, after Thalberg’s death in 1936, Fitzgerald went to work for MGM and he began to appreciate Thalberg’s greatness within the film industry (Piper 262).³² Known as the “boy wonder” of Hollywood, Thalberg was one of the founding-fathers of the industry and the inspiration for Fitzgerald’s novel:

Where a lesser novelist, down on his luck in Hollywood, might easily have made his own plight the subject of his novel, Fitzgerald turned to the more heroic legend of Thalberg, the great organizing genius who, more than anyone else, was responsible for the transformation of a cheap form of entertainment into a billion-dollar, mass-production industry that for a time shaped the tastes and values of movie-goers throughout the world. (Piper 261)

³² Thalberg’s influence on Fitzgerald is evident in a letter to his editor Kenneth Littauer in which he outlines his novel and writes that “Thalberg has always fascinated me. His peculiar charm, his extraordinary good looks, his bountiful success, the tragic end of his great adventure” (as cited in The Correspondence of F. Scott Fitzgerald Brucoli and Duggan ed.s). Furthermore, Fitzgerald’s preparation for the novel includes extensive notes on Thalberg as documented in The Love of The Last Tycoon: A Western (Matthew J. Brucoli ed.).

With the MGM studio, Thalberg pioneered the process of manufacturing films on a production-line basis. Whilst being successful in turning movies into a lucrative business, Thalberg also “insisted on the same independence for his artists that he himself asserted” (Piper 262). Like Thalberg, Fitzgerald’s protagonist Monroe Stahr is a “booster” and his pioneering influence in developing pictures is often mentioned in the novel. Aboard a flight home, Cecelia’s thoughts are sparked by the sighting of Los Angeles and by the pilot wondering “how he ever got to be Mr Stahr” (Fitzgerald 284).

She reflects:

You could say this is where an accidental wind blew him, but I don’t think so. I would rather think that in a “long shot” he saw a new way of measuring our jerky hopes and graceful rogueries and awkward sorrows, and that he came here from choice to be with us to the end. (Fitzgerald 284)

Stahr’s life mission is to further the American picture industry and to put into film form the collective hopes and sorrows of the nation’s people. This passage is also illustrative of Fitzgerald’s sense of history. In California during the first half of the twentieth century, Fitzgerald sensed he was bearing witness to the end of the pioneer line and recognised that the film industry was the inheritor of the myths and dreams of a nation. Consequently, Fitzgerald charted the transformation of the American Dream into the dream factory in his novel.³³ Schulberg similarly describes how the power of Fitzgerald’s writing lies in his ability to show what happens when once accomplished, the dream turns to nightmare. In Hollywood and in the heroic figure of Thalberg, Fitzgerald had found material for what was arguably the greatest theme of his fiction – the pursuit and realisation of a dream.³⁴

³³ Bruccoli comments that “Fitzgerald was in fact writing a Western – a novel about the last American Frontier, where immigrants and sons of immigrants pursued the American Dream” (intro xvii).

³⁴ This theme is shared with Fitzgerald’s other novel *The Great Gatsby* as both novels feature protagonists are self-made men, actively trying to fulfil a dream of recapturing the past.

Stahr's reputation as a great leader and Fitzgerald's historical perspective, is further illustrated in the novel by the association between Stahr's first name and President James Monroe, as well as references throughout the novel to Presidents Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln.³⁵ Fitzgerald alluded to these great American leaders to indicate Stahr's embodiment of both the ruthlessness of Jackson and the compassion of Lincoln (Fitzgerald 268-9). In the novel, a direct parallel is made between Stahr's running of his studio and President Lincoln fighting on the battlefield:

Stahr like Lincoln was a leader carrying on a long war on many fronts; almost single-handed he had moved pictures sharply forward through a decade, to a point where the content of the "A productions" was wider and richer than that of the stage. Stahr was an artist only, as Mr Lincoln was a general, perforce and as a layman. (Fitzgerald 357)

Both Lincoln and Stahr were self-educated men and became accomplished leaders and pioneers in their respective fields. Stahr is described as "a marker in the industry" (Fitzgerald 291). Like Lincoln was, Stahr is described as an admired and popular figure, able to hold things together through the sheer force of his personality. After Stahr makes a judgement on a film, his word is not disputed: "[t]he oracle has spoken. There was nothing to question or argue. Stahr must be right always, not most of the time, but always – or the structure would melt down like gradual butter" (Fitzgerald 315). Furthermore, Stahr's leadership is benevolent; he is thus "representative of the old-fashioned paternalistic employer" (Fitzgerald 272). Stahr's artistic genius is often commented upon and he feels he has a duty to the public shown in his commitment to making a quality picture (Fitzgerald 307). Witnessing Stahr walk about the studio lot Cecelia describes him interacting with admiring people, greeting the cheering crowds,

³⁵ Cecelia makes visit to Hermitage, historic home of President Jackson, with Wyllie when their flight has to make an unscheduled stop and elsewhere in the novel, Lincoln comes to life when an actor playing the part for a film and is seen somewhat incongruously eating a sandwich on the back lot. These historical references are partly used to illustrate Hollywood's treatment of history as fragmentary and superficial; history like everything else has merely become material for films.

Stahr speaks and waves back, “looking, I suppose, a little like the Emperor and the Old Guard” (Fitzgerald 288). Stahr is also likened to royalty by his love interest Kathleen, who observes that he is more like a king than the royalty she had met in Europe (Fitzgerald 363). At the time of writing Fitzgerald was observing a shift in power from traditional old world monarch to a new aristocracy of Hollywood studio bosses like Stahr, who controlled mass entertainment.

The benevolent and artistic intentions that shape Stahr are not the same motivating forces that are described as driving Sammy Glick. Whereas Stahr strives for creative originality through films and his name does not appear on film credits, Sammy’s Hollywood career is driven solely by ambition and money putting his own name on other scriptwriters’ work to get ahead. Sammy and Stahr are both self-made men and from similar New York Jewish backgrounds. Fitzgerald gives the sense in his novel that Stahr is aware of where he comes from and what he has achieved:

He was a rationalist who did his own reasoning without benefit of books - and he had just managed to climb his way out of two thousand years of Jewry into the eighteenth century. He could not see it melt away – he cherished the parvenu’s loyalty to an imaginary past. (Fitzgerald 368)

Stahr is largely self-taught and considers himself to be a rational man of the Enlightenment as well as being a romantic. This is in contrast to Sammy, who, driven by self-interest, has no evident nostalgia for the past. Sammy instead rushes ever forward to forget where he came from:

There seem to be two-kinds of self-conscious self-made men, those who like to dwell on the patriotic details of their ascent from newsboy or shoe-shiner at two bucks and peanuts a week and those who take every level as if it were the only one they ever knew, rushing ahead so fast they were ashamed, afraid to look back and see where they’ve come from. One is a bore and the other is a heel. Sammy may have had other faults, but he had never been a bore. (Schulberg 35)

Both Sammy and Stahr are similarly running ahead of all others but on quite different paths. Fitzgerald writes that despite Stahr's sparse education he "had a long time ago run ahead through trackless wastes of perception into fields where very few men were able to follow him" (Fitzgerald 281-2).³⁶ Stahr is described as surpassing all other men as a visionary pioneer in the film-industry. Great care is taken by Fitzgerald in describing Stahr's artistic processes at work when he is in his personal projection room (Fitzgerald 311). Stahr is willing to risk a film losing money at the box office in order to make an original and quality artistic product (Fitzgerald 307). Unlike Stahr, Sammy is lacking in creative ability and his ascendancy from office boy to studio producer is done through bluffing and plagiarism. Where Stahr has artistic genius Sammy instead has a "genius for self-propulsion" (Schulberg 66). Both Stahr and Sammy are skilled Hollywood players but Sammy represents a transition to a new model or person who is concerned solely with making money and furthering his own career as opposed to testing the artistic capabilities of film-making.

Fitzgerald's novel charts a shift in the American frontier from geographic westward expansion to Hollywood and the film industry. Schulberg's novel sees that frontier shift still further, becoming one of mere capital where film-making has become solely a means to fulfil one's own ambition. Whilst trying to retain his studio's artistic merits, Stahr is aware of the monster he has created, "[t]he system was a shame, he admitted – gross, commercial, to be deplored. He had originated it" (Fitzgerald 316). Stahr is destroyed by the very same Hollywood film industry that he played such a crucial role in founding, and like all tragic heroes, Stahr's downfall is caused by the very strengths that made him great:

³⁶ A parallel can be made between this passage where Stahr is described as "running" ahead of all other men and the title of Schulberg's novel: "What Makes Sammy Run?"

Fitzgerald conceived of Monroe Stahr as a doomed and heroic figure whose heroism and doom were both the consequences of his success as a man of business. Stahr, is in short, the self-made man whose destruction is brought about by the business organization that his talents and imagination have created.

(Piper 271)

Stahr's story echoes that of Thalberg's, whose "death marked the ultimate triumph of the commercialism that for so many years he had kept at bay" (Piper 264). Stahr's demise can be seen as evidence that a creative, benevolent force cannot survive in the emerging Hollywood environment of ruthless capitalism which sacrifices art in pursuit of profit. This capitalist world where everyone and everything are objects becomes fully realised in Schulberg's novel and embodied in his protagonist Sammy Glick. As in The Last Tycoon when the pilot asks how someone like Stahr comes into being, the question of "what makes Sammy run?" is a recurring motif in Schulberg's novel and much of Manheim's narrative is spent pondering the question. Sammy constitutes a puzzle because it is almost incomprehensible how purely selfish his motives are. Fellow screenwriter Kit remarks to Manheim "I wonder if the thing that makes Sammy so fascinating for us is that he is the *id* of our society" (Schulberg 195). Sammy is uninhibited and his personality consists of his basic libidinal instinct to succeed at the expense of others. These characteristics, as well as Sammy's ceaseless performing, are in direct contrast with Stahr.

Manheim describes Sammy as "the smartest and stupidest human being I had ever met" (Schulberg 7). Sammy is an enigma, a puzzle to those around him and just like the *femme fatale*, his survival is predicated on this indecipherability. Sammy looks out for himself: "[h]e had quick intelligence, which he was able to use exclusively for the good-welfare of Sammy Glick" (Schulberg 7). Sammy has a particular kind of intelligence associated with quickness and agility, which is used only to benefit himself. Manheim witnesses how Sammy's abilities only become more acute as he grows older.

With Sammy there was “[n]o mellowing, no deepening of understanding. Maturity to Sammy meant a quickening and a strengthening of the rhythm of behaviour that was beginning to disconcert everybody who came into contact with him” (Schulberg 13). Sammy’s personality is intensified as he matures and he becomes more adept at running; Sammy’s frenetic energy can be paralleled with Jameson’s account of the schizophrenic experience that consists of a “heightened intensity” of the present (Jameson 27). Success for Sammy comes about due to his supreme self-confidence or sheer *chutzpah*. Intelligence and talent for Sammy lie in his ability to perform and entertain. Manheim describes how Sammy “was as uninhibited as a performing seal,” and how he “never questioned his right to monopolize the conversation or his ability to do it entertainingly” (Schulberg 79). Sammy is an example of a postmodern, performative identity. As illustrated in the masquerades of West’s The Day of the Locust, and explored with relation to the *femme fatale*, the new subject is at home in the consumer culture of Hollywood and able to actively construct his or her identity through constant performance. Sammy is similarly self-invented. Just as Los Angeles has been constructed, Sammy has constructed his career and personality. Not long after Manheim and Sammys’ arrival in Los Angeles, Manheim notes how “Hollywood was the perfect track” for Sammy (Schulberg 47). The pace at which Sammy achieves success causes Manheim to conclude that “the history of Hollywood was nothing but twenty years of feverish preparation for the arrival of Sammy Glick” (Schulberg 165). Sammy’s performative and self-invented personality is synonymous with Los Angeles. He is at home in Hollywood because he is able to survive in the environment of the image-industry where everyone is reduced to a commodity and where identity consists of performance.

Sammy and Stahr can be further compared in terms of their romantic entanglements, which illustrate their respective personalities and motivations. Sammy declares he is incapable of love yet convinces himself he is in love with Laurette Harrington, who by virtue of her father's position within the film industry, is able to further his career. As Manheim describes, Sammy "had fallen in love with position, with the name and the power of Harrington, and it came to him not as something sordid and cold but as love, as deep respect for Laurette's upbringing and attraction to her personality and desire for her body" (Schulberg 275). Sammy is unable to disassociate his ambition from genuine romantic love because his personality consists solely of his own career and self-ambition. Furthermore, Sammy's abandonment of his sweetheart back home in New York is further illustration of his callousness. In contrast, Fitzgerald's protagonist is largely defined by the death of his wife and the enduring love and grief he feels for her. Parallels can be made between Stahr and Fitzgerald's other great protagonist Jay Gatsby, as they both dream of recapturing a lost love. Like Gatsby, Stahr "cherished the parvenu's passionate loyalty to an imaginary past" (Fitzgerald 368). Stahr falls in love with Kathleen because of her likeness to his deceased wife, but there is also evidence in the novel that Stahr's love for Kathleen grows into something more than just this resemblance. Stahr's affair with Kathleen and his knowledge that he may be dying, causes him to be willing to neglect his studio obligations: "he wanted to stop being Stahr for a while and hunt for love like men who had no gifts to give" (Fitzgerald 344). However, Stahr's affair with Kathleen ends in heartbreak when she marries another man. Stahr receives news of Kathleen's marriage via telegram, at a time when he is struggling to hold on to power at the studio. Like a great dramatic hero, "Stahr's strength and his weakness is that he cares too much ... [h]erein lies his nobility and his pathos, his triumph and his doom" (Piper 273). It is his propensity for love which weakens Stahr's power. Stahr's failed liaison with Kathleen distracts him from

his business and clouds his judgement. Furthermore, it is Stahr's desire to protect his employees and maintain his creative vision for the studio which precipitates Stahr's downfall.³⁷

Of particular importance in Fitzgerald's novel is Cecelia's narrative perspective with regard to the Hollywood film industry. Cecelia is "as much a production of Hollywood as one of its films" (Piper 273). At the beginning of the novel, Cecelia describes how "[m]y father was in the picture business as another man might be in cotton or steel, and I took it tranquilly" (Fitzgerald 269). However, Cecelia is aware that in order to understand herself she must understand the culture that produced her (Piper 274). Cecelia's self-knowledge is illustrated when she describes how "[i]t's more than possible that some of the pictures which Stahr himself conceived had shaped me into what I was" (Fitzgerald 282). Cecelia's awareness demonstrates how close she is to the film industry, so much so that even her conception of love and her infatuation with Stahr is most likely influenced by the films he himself made.³⁸ Although she admits she has taken Hollywood for granted, it is Cecelia's willingness to understand Hollywood by examining Stahr which provides the *raison d'être* for her narrative:

³⁷ In his attempt to hold onto power over the studio, Stahr increasingly battles divisive forces such as rival Pat Brady, the studio financiers in New York and the growing influence of the unions. For example, the last completed episode of Fitzgerald's novel sees Stahr's unsuccessful negotiations with the representative of the Writers Guild, Brimmer, despite assurances that Stahr wants to do right by the writers and not treat them as commodities (Fitzgerald 370).

Although unfinished at the time of Fitzgerald's death, scholars have been able to piece together the ending of the novel using Fitzgerald's notes and correspondence. Crucial to this forecast is a letter dated 29th September 1939 that Fitzgerald sent to Kenneth Littauer, the fiction editor at *Colliers* and Max Perkins, Fitzgerald's editor. In this letter, Fitzgerald sets forward a plan for his novel and describes how Stahr fights for control over his company with Brady, who is interested only in profit; Fitzgerald describes Stahr as being a "paternalistic employer" and having "certain idealisms" (Brucoli and Duggan ed.s 547). Fitzgerald outlines Stahr's death in a plane crash on his way back from a trip New York where he has been dealing with studio financiers in order to regain control of the studio from his rival Brady (Brucoli and Duggan ed.s 548).

³⁸ Similarly, Cecelia love for Stahr takes the form of an image; she says "[w]hat I was looking at wasn't Stahr but a picture of him I had cut out over and over" (Fitzgerald 327). Furthermore, Cecelia is aware that she is not in love with the real Stahr but her pictorial representation of him: "[h]e was my picture, as sure as if he had been pasted on the inside of my old locker in school" (Fitzgerald 327). This illustrates an inversion of the usual subject-objects relations whereby Cecelia is the subject and Stahr the object. Cecelia turns Stahr into an image and thus into an object of fetish.

You can take Hollywood for granted like I did, or you can dismiss it with the contempt we reserve for what we don't understand. It can be understood too, but dimly and in flashes. Not half a dozen men have ever been able to keep the whole equation of pictures in their heads. And perhaps the closest a woman can come to the set-up is to try and understand one of those men. (Fitzgerald 269)

Cecelia's assessment of Hollywood is that it is enigmatic and eludes comprehension, especially when taken to be a whole coherent entity, and instead it is best understood in fragments, "dimly and in flashes." Cecelia evokes the medium of film itself in its basic form, which consists of flashing images projected onto a screen in a dimly-lit room. Consequently, the description suggests that the physical nature of celluloid film had an effect upon Hollywood culture as well as how it can be best understood. Furthermore, the description of "dimly and in flashes," suggests fragmentation and the dispersed geographic make up of Los Angeles. The city's fragmentary nature is also inferred from Cecelia's description of the studio backlot as like fragments of a children's story book:

Under the moon the back-lot was thirty acres of fairyland – not because the locations really looked like African jungles and French chateaux and schooners at anchor and Broadway at night, but because they looked like the torn picture books of childhood, like fragments of stories dancing on an open fire. I never lived in a house with an attic, but a back lot must be something like that, and at night of course in an enchanted distorted sort of way, it all comes true.

(Fitzgerald 288)

The backlot's magical nature is not due to the representative accuracy of the sets but rather because they are reminiscent of childhood stories and are a sort of enchanted simulacrum. Like the varying architectural styles described by West in The Day of the Locust, the backlot is a fragmentary pastiche of dreams which together create a kind of illusory fairy-tale land. Thus "Fitzgerald's movie studio with its shifting and illusory props suggests a dream-like space that has no stability" (Peters 23). In this way, the backlot is a symbol of the spatial paradox that is Los Angeles; a fragmentary city with no centre that can only provide the illusion of coherence through such means as its

freeways and film industry. Furthermore, Cecelia is not only able to perceive the fragmented and illusory nature of Los Angeles but is also aware that she is a part of it.

Despite the self-deprecation implied when Cecelia says that the closest a woman can come to understanding the industry is to understand one of the men of the industry, being a woman allows Cecelia a unique perspective on Hollywood. As the daughter of a studio head, Cecelia's proximity to the industry means she is able to observe and access the men of power without herself being observed. In contrast to the *femme fatale*, Cecelia is positioned in a more active visual role, as she is in a position of looking opposed to being looked at. Joan Didion recognises Cecelia's potential and goes so far as to say that she is the real subject of the novel:

To the extent that *The Last Tycoon* is about "Hollywood" it is about not Monroe Stahr but Cecelia Brady, as anyone who understand the equation of pictures even dimly or in flashes would apprehend immediately: the Monroe Stahrs come and go, but the Cecelia Bradys are the second generation, the survivors, the inheritors of a community as intricate, rigid, and deceptive in its mores as any devised on this continent. (White Album 153)

Like Cecelia, the protagonist of Didion's novel Play It As It Lays Maria Wyeth is representative of the next generation of Angelenos attune to the true nature of Hollywood and Los Angeles. Both Cecelia and Mariah are survivors. Didion's novel is one of a new genre of "survivor tales," which provide a "reaffirmation of self and the capacity to endure" (Fine Imagining Los Angeles 237). Similarly, Faye Greener in Nathanael West's The Day of The Locust is an earlier example of a survivor. The "resourceful and apparently indestructible" Faye, constitutes the "lone success story of the novel" (Jacobs 245). Furthermore, Faye's survival is predicated on her association with the strategic allures of Hollywood culture. Faye displays a performative identity that is able to cope in the image-centred environment of Hollywood and attune to the transitory fulfilments of the consumer culture. Like Faye, the new generation

epitomised by Cecelia and Mariah, are able to manipulate their appearance and identity, thus able to survive in the consumerist image-industry of Hollywood. However, in contrast to the *femme fatale* figure, survivors like Cecelia take a more active visual stance, representing a shift in visual relations that represents their ability to better cope with their image-centred environment.

Tales of Survival: Joan Didion's Play It As It Lays and Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 –

Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 was published in 1966 and Didion's Play It As It Lays in 1970. Consequently at the time of writing, the novels are contemporaneous with a time of social unrest and political protest. Pynchon and Didion's novels reflect both the hope and disillusionment of that era. The immediate post-war period saw a continuation of the population and economic growth that California had already witnessed during the war years, with many veterans deciding to settle in the area with their families during the 1940s and 50s (McWilliams 15). However, as Starr notes, these seemingly idyllic years in fact represented "a stable landscape resting atop tectonic plates that would soon result in the earthquakes and fissures of the mid and late 1960s" (Starr Golden Dreams ix). However, the cracks were apparent long before. California's abundance had created a culture of consumerism and conformity that had many notable critics. Among which were the *noir* writers, as well as the authors of The Dialectic of the Enlightenment: Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. The phenomena associated with the development of Los Angeles, such as a growing dominance of mass culture as well as social and geographical fragmentation, only amplified post war. There was a growing sense of dissent and frustration among

those marginalized, such as California's African American community as illustrated by the Watts riots of 1965, as well as among the state's Hispanic and Asian populations.³⁹

The Watts Riots of 1965 were emblematic of the failure of the California dream; the burning of buildings provided a profound visual metaphor for the social fragmentation and discontent that began to infiltrate Los Angeles in the 1960s. As described by Frederic Jameson in his essay "On Raymond Chandler," the city had always been geographically divided in terms of class and ethnicity. However this segregation became more pronounced post war with the continued expansion of Los Angeles. The African-American population increased dramatically due to the demand for manufacturing workers during the Second World War.⁴⁰ Just like other migrants, African-Americans were attracted to California in the hope of a better life. However, the post-war era saw uneven economic gains as a *de facto* segregation took hold in the city.⁴¹ In addition to real and perceived police harassment, the growing social disparity caused young African-Americans in the city to become particularly frustrated. Marquette Frye, whose arrest sparked the riots, had moved to Los Angeles just a few years earlier with his mother and can be seen as the "epitome of the failed promise of California" (Sides 174). Perhaps even more than for other migrants, California represented the "Promised Land" for African-Americans. Consequently, the

³⁹ The Zoot-suit riots of 1943 highlighted unhappiness within the Hispanic community caused partly by the Sleepy Lagoon murder and the wrongful arrest of 17 Hispanic young men in 1942. Furthermore, the internment of Japanese Americans during the war created resentment among this population (as described by Kevin Starr in Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace, 1940-1950).

⁴⁰ Known as "the Great Migration," between 1940 and the 1960s the black population of Los Angeles increased by approximately eight times: from 63, 4744 in 1940 to 763,000 in 1970. An important event in precipitating this migration was President Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802, which gave African-Americans the same rights to war production jobs as their white counterparts (as described by Josh Sides L.A. City Limits African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present 2-3).

⁴¹ Although the geographical area in which blacks could rent and buy property expanded beyond pre-war borders this didn't keep pace with the continuing influx of migrants (Sides 97). This influx, in addition to other factors such as the hostility of white home-owner associations, meant that the suburbs remained largely off-limits to African-Americans and consequently the creation of "ghettos" such as Watts (Sides 108). Post-war, such neighbourhoods were subject to overcrowding, deterioration, and during the 1960s were hit hardest by the decline in blue-collar manufacturing jobs as well as public transport (Sides 113).

disappointment felt in response to the failure of that dream was perhaps greatest amongst African-Americans and this sadness and frustration was illustrated in the ferocity of the Watts Riots.

Didion and Pynchon are inheritors of *noir* tradition, writing at a time when West's apocalyptic vision of Los Angeles as a city of rioting and burning had been realised. Pynchon's novel was published a year after the Watts riots, a subject he covered in his article "A Journey into the Mind of Watts" (published in *The New York Times* on the 9th of June 1966) in which Pynchon explored how Watts constituted a separate world to that of the rest of "white" Los Angeles. Furthermore, two years before the publication of The Crying of Lot 49 the Free Speech Movement had erupted on the campus of the University of California Berkeley, in the Fall of 1964.⁴² Similarly, Didion's novel depicts a protagonist navigating the turbulence and moral uncertainty of the era, thus capturing the atmosphere of Los Angeles in the aftermath of such events as the Manson murders that took place in 1969. In her essay "On the Morning After the Sixties," Didion describes how "the narrative on which many of us grew up with no longer applies" (Didion The White Album 205). Perhaps more than any other writer, Didion was haunted by West's dystopian vision. Her Los Angeles is the place of moral apocalypse: "a helter-skelter of demeaned ambition and random violence" (Davis 45). However, whilst haunted by the apocalyptic visions of the city, Didion's Play It As It Lays also offers the possibility of survival in the form of protagonist Mariah Wyeth.

As with Cecelia in The Last Tycoon, the protagonist of Didion's novel Mariah, offers a unique narrative perspective. Mariah is writing from a psychiatric hospital where "they suggested I put down the facts" (Didion Play It As It Lays 4). Mariah resists other peoples' desire to delve deeper into her psyche, and says that "I am

⁴² In Pynchon's novel, Oedipa visits the Berkeley campus in her quest to solve the Tristero.

what I am. To look for ‘reasons’ is beside the point” (Didion Play It As It Lays 3). The theme of “nothingness” and the quest to achieve a state of being without deeper thought is central to Mariah’s narrative. Once more, Mariah’s characteristic detachment is echoed by Didion’s own journalistic voice, whose essays reveal a “disengagement from the impulse to understand, in favour of a willed acceptance of the existential irreducibility of things” (Cohen 26).⁴³ Mariah’s introduction to herself includes specifying how her name is pronounced: “Mar-eye-ah” (Didion Play It As It Lays 4). The emphasis on the *eye* sound in her name foregrounds the importance of visual relations in the novel, asserting that “the eye is at the centre of her identity” (Cohen 127). Vision is of paramount importance to the identity of Mariah and she is highly observant of the world around her as well as her position within it. Furthermore, Mariah has the capacity to see even herself with an objective viewpoint. Even though Mariah repeatedly views herself performing on film, she is unable to identify with this person: “neither time did she have any sense that the girl on screen was herself” (Didion Play It As It Lays 29). Within the culture of Hollywood, Mariah is aware that everyone bears the objective stamp of the commodity-image. The impulse toward detachment and being able to see oneself as an object, for Mariah constitutes an act of survival. A parallel can be made with woman’s relation to her image and the process whereby images of women can take on an objective power of their own.

The objectivity present in Mariah’s narrative is caused by events in her life. Consequently there is a decisive change in her narrative viewpoint from subject to object after the event of an abortion and meeting the man who is to carry it out:

⁴³ Mariah’s desire to achieve nothingness is a postmodern stance. In his essay “Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism,” Terry Eagleton describes how postmodernism conceives of the world “just as the way it is and not some other way.’ He continues: ‘[p]ostmodernism, confidently post-metaphysical, has outlived all that fantasy of interiority, that pathological itch to scratch the surfaces for concealed depths” (*New Left Review* 1/52 Jul-Aug 1985, 70).

In the past few minutes he has significantly altered her perception of reality: she saw now that she was not a woman on her way to have an abortion. She was a woman parking a Corvette outside a tract house while a man wearing white pants talked about buying a Camarro. There was no more to it than that.

(Didion Play It As It Lays 79)

Mariah's resistance to examining the events in her life and her decision to instead accept things as they are stems from this episode. The only way that Mariah can come to terms with such events is to see herself objectively. Mariah sees herself simply as a woman talking to a man about cars and nothing more than that. This shift in Mariah's narrative "signifies a willed reversal of her perspectival relation to the world, in which she disavows her status as subject of her own experience and embraces the position of object" (Cohen 129). Mariah accepts the status of object which has been pressed upon her by others and by events in her life, and as a result she responds to the clinical detachment of the abortionist and her husband by becoming detached herself.

Mariah's impassivity to the world around her should not be interpreted as an act of defeat. Rather her ability to embrace the position of object is the means by which Mariah can survive the events in life by becoming merely a role she is playing. As illustrated by Mariah's attitude to her performance on film, she is as detached from her own life as she is from the woman she views on screen. After the abortion, Mariah's "life becomes a series of impenetrable gestures, whether sexual, professional or emotional" (Cohen 129). Mariah can be paralleled with Faye Greener in West's The Day of the Locust, whose elaborate gestures are similarly described as meaningless and also possesses an impenetrable surface. Devoid of deeper meaning and without their original signifying function, Faye and Mariah's meaningless gestures are a type of postmodern pastiche. Such gestures are further example of their performative selves, and can be paralleled with the expressions of identity that in fact constitute one's identity. Both Mariah and Faye perform roles, displaying surface animation and highly

conscious of their own existence as objects. Both Mariah and Faye's identities point toward a postmodern conception of the subject as performative and are conducive to the Hollywood image-industry they are surrounded by.

Mariah's compulsion to drive the Los Angeles' freeways is an attempt to escape her past as well as achieve a sense of control over the world around her. If one day Mariah did not drive the freeway, "she lost the day's rhythm, its precariously imposed momentum" (Didion Play It As It Lays 15). This ritual represents a means by which Mariah can exist and survive each day, and without this ritual Mariah loses her already unstable footing. Furthermore, the freeways become a site of perpetual present for Mariah and a place where she can escape all thought:

Again and again she returned to an intricate stretch just south of the interchange where successful passage from the Hollywood onto the Harbor required a diagonal move across four lanes of traffic. On the afternoon she finally did it without once breaking or once losing the beat of the radio she was exhilarated, and that night slept dreamlessly. (Didion Play It As It Lays 16)

Mariah's ability to sleep without dreaming is proof that performing this ritual allows her to achieve a state devoid of thought and to exist on the surface without deeper meaning. This state of mind constitutes a means of survival for Mariah.

Mariah's compulsion to drive the freeways creates a false sense of a perpetual present that is completely cut off from the past. Consequently, "[t]he freeway produces a gaze that fixates on the spectacle of the present, and closes off memory from the past" (Cohen 127). Driving the freeways causes the city to become a spectacle of immediate present and the landscape is one viewed from a speeding car, a series of images or a "spectacular object world" (Cohen 126). This objectified visual plain that is created by driving, reinforces Mariah's detached visual perspective which is much like an Emersonian "transparent eyeball." Didion's Los Angeles becomes a hallucinatory

spectacle which constitutes “a cinematic rendering of the landscape” (Cohen 126). The city is a world of objectified images that is seemingly impenetrable. Consequently, Mariah strives “to melt into the undifferentiated object world of signs that characterises her experience of Los Angeles” (Cohen 130). Mariah’s position is that of the *femme fatale*, who assumes the impenetrable seductive surface of the commodity in order to resist the objectifying, male gaze and to survive in a world of spectacle.

Didion’s novel illustrates that for Mariah, as for the rest of the Los Angeles’ population, driving the freeways has become a mode of being.⁴⁴ The freeways represent a “state of mind” where a “heightened awareness” can be achieved (Banham 196-7). Mariah’s experience of the freeways indicates that “[t]o negotiate these areas of movement is to partake in an art form, a kinetic process in which the self is immersed” (Clarke 129). Consequently, the freeways are crucial to Los Angeles’ identity. Didion is herself aware of the importance of the road within the American psyche, she describes how “absolute personal freedom, mobility, privacy” more than anything else is the driving force behind America’s westward expansion (Slouching 71). In Didion’s novel, the freeways function as a means of escape and freedom, which can be paralleled with the significance of the road in the fiction of James M. Cain. As seen in The Postman Always Rings Twice, with the car crash that puts an end to Frank and Cora’s dreams, the freedom offered by the road similarly proves illusory for Mariah. The freeways cease to provide a means of escape when she makes an unintended trip beyond the freeways to Nevada where her husband Carter is filming. This trip reminds Mariah that the freeways are not just a place in themselves but provide a link to other destinations. Consequently their function as site of perpetual present is transitory, proving that her

⁴⁴ Graham Clarke describes how in Los Angeles driving is an end in itself, he says that “the freeways *are* an environment,” and could even be considered “the most *obvious* public architecture” (129).

past and her thoughts are not escapable. After this episode Mariah no longer drives the freeways.

Mariah's detached and objective perspective is a means of survival and a way of dealing with the indecipherability of the world around her. The enigmatic environment which Mariah inhabits is further illustrated in the concept of game playing which reoccurs in the novel. Mariah says "maybe I was holding all the aces, but what was the game?" (Didion Play It As It Lays 10).⁴⁵ Los Angeles represents a surfeit of signs which Mariah suspects are meaningless, however, Mariah is aware that she has no alternative but to carry on with the game. She says "I know what nothing means, and keep on playing" (Didion Play It As It Lays 214). These final words from Mariah indicate her confrontation with a world without meaning, as well as her ability to survive in it despite this realisation. In Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49, the protagonist Oedipa Maas, like Mariah, is a survivor, but unlike Mariah spends much of the novel trying in vain to navigate and decipher the deceptive signs of San Narciso, a pseudonym for Los Angeles. Oedipa has been assigned the executor of an estate belonging to her deceased, former-lover Pierce Inverarity who made his fortune due to land speculation. The narrative is driven by Oedipa's determination to create order:

[W]hat you might have to call [a] growing obsession, with "bringing something of herself – even if that something was just her presence – to the scatter of business interests that had survived Inverarity. She would give them order, she would create constellations. (Pynchon 62)

By attempting to order Inverarity's estate, Oedipa is offered the possibility of giving her own existence meaning. Consequently, Oedipa's quest to decipher Inverarity's estate

⁴⁵ The concept of playing in Didion's novel can be paralleled with the playing of chess and card games in Chandler's fiction which is symptomatic of the deceptive city that Marlowe inhabits.

and find the meaning of the Tristero, is really a search to find the meaning of San Narciso.

Pynchon's novel concerns the enigma of Los Angeles itself. The Crying of Lot 49 is "the story of a woman seeking to know a city that is cryptic, encoded and ultimately unknowable" (Fine Imagining Los Angeles 241). Looking at the sprawling houses of San Narciso, Oedipa is reminded of the circuit card of a transistor radio: "there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate" (Pynchon 15). The hieroglyphic nature of the city can be paralleled with the mysterious character of the commodity, whereby the attribution of exchange-value "converts every product into a social hieroglyphic" (Marx 45). Similarly, woman is associated with the hieroglyphic language and a parallel can be made between woman and Los Angeles in terms of their seemingly indecipherable nature.⁴⁶ Oedipa believes that there is a meaning or at least an intent to communicate that underlies the hieroglyphic pattern of the city. However, the meaning is seemingly unobtainable, "a revelation that trembled just past the threshold of her understanding" (Pynchon 15). Similarly, Oedipa senses that being in San Narciso meant she was "at the centre of an odd religious instant" (Pynchon 15). Oedipa feels that her geographical location should offer some kind of epiphany but like the meaning of the city this realisation is elusive. San Narciso and Oedipa's quest to solve the puzzle of the Tristero both constitute an endless deferral of meaning whereby the answers always lie just out of reach. The deferred meaning of the city can be linked to the deferral of gratification associated with the culture industry as described by Adorno and Horkheimer, whereby fulfilment of the consumer's desires is endlessly postponed. In this way, San Narciso is

⁴⁶ As explored in the previous chapter, woman and her image shares with the commodity its seemingly indecipherable character, "woman, the enigma, the hieroglyphic" (Doane 18).

associated with the commodity and the meaning of San Narciso, like the promise of the commodity, always lies just beyond reach.

San Narciso is a fragmentary and undefinable city. To Oedipa Maas, the freeway system provides a sense of order in a disordered world, just as Mariah Wyeth's driving ritual in Play It As It Lays represents a means by which to retain a precarious sense of control. In Pynchon's novel, San Narciso is described as "less an identifiable city than a group of concepts – census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts, shopping nuclei, all over-laid with access roads to its own freeway" (Pynchon 14). Just like the centre-less Los Angeles, San Narciso has no unifying concept or coherent meaning, and the only order or coherence to be found is in the freeway system. Much of Pynchon's novel involves Oedipa travelling by road, but unlike Mariah, to whom the freeways offer the promise of control, Oedipa is not fooled by "this illusion of speed, freedom, wind in your hair, unreeling landscape – it wasn't" (Pynchon 16). The novel satirises this most charged symbol of the Californian fiction, which in American psyche is synonymous with freedom. Pynchon describes the illusory promise of the road as a "hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of the freeway, a vein nourishing the mainliner LA, keeping it happy, coherent, protected from pain" (Pynchon 16). The road functions as a type of drug giving LA the illusion of order and coherence by anaesthetising its inhabitants.

According to Pynchon, the only redemption possible for California is the ocean, because "no matter what you did to its edges, the true Pacific stayed inviolate and integrated or assumed the ugliness at any edge into some more general truth" (Pynchon 37). Pynchon uses the symbol of the Pacific Ocean in the same way as Cain in The Postman Always Rings Twice, in which Frank and Cora cleanse themselves in the

ocean after the murder of Cora's husband.⁴⁷ Similarly, Christopher Isherwood's A Single Man depicts protagonist George, finding a way to continue after the sudden death of his lover, helped by the sense of renewal and purification found in the baptismal surf. In the sea, George "washes away thought, speech, mood, desire, whole selves, entire lifetimes; again and again he returns, becoming always cleaner, freer, less" (Isherwood 132). George's baptism also represents a diffusion of his being into the world around him. In Cain's The Postman Always Rings Twice, the ocean turns into the site of Frank and Cora's demise; whereas Didion, Pynchon and Isherwood show that a place of endings can become a place of beginning.

The puzzle of Tristero and San Narciso continues to elude Oedipa as the novel ends. Just as Mariah finds a way to continue by accepting things as they are and not to penetrate beneath the surface, Oedipa considers the possibility that there is no deeper meaning beyond the obvious, and that she has been caught in a circle of paranoia. Either there was "[a]nother mode of meaning behind the obvious or none."

Thus Pynchon continues:

Either Oedipa [was] in the orbiting ecstasy of a true paranoia, or a real Tristero. For there either was some Tristero beyond the appearance of the legacy of America, or there was just America and if there was just America then it seemed the only way she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia. (Pynchon 126)

As in Isherwood's novel, with George's immersion into the water and thus the world around him, Oedipa and Mariah become a part of enigmatic city that surrounds them, accepting the way things are and finding a way to exist in a seemingly meaningless world. The survivor novels of Pynchon, Didion and Isherwood thus depict "people who

⁴⁷ Further reference is made to Cain's novel in the name of the motel where Oedipa stays "Echo Court" recalling the echoing or repeating of events in novel as well as the actual echoing of Cora's husband's voice after he is murdered.

find as they come to the end of the line and continent reasons for going on, mandates to affirm the demands of self” (Fine Imagining Los Angeles 237). The protagonists of these novels find a way to exist in an indecipherable environment where meaning and gratification is illusory.

Influenced by the social and political unrest of the 1960s, Pynchon and Didion depict a postmodern city that is increasingly fragmented both socially and geographically. It is a society dominated by mass culture where everyone is reduced to a commodity as part of a spectacular objectified landscape. However, despite their hostile environment, the protagonists of Didion and Pynchons’ respective novels are survivors. In her essay “On the Morning After the Sixties” Didion describes her membership of the “silent generation,” which came of age during 1950s and who are “the survivors of a peculiar and inward time” (The White Album 208). This generation of survivors, witnessed the social tumult of the 1960s but often abstained from political action, refusing to adhere to a particular ideology. Like Mariah and Oedipa, this silent generation realised “the meaninglessness that was man’s fate,” and yet found a way to survive regardless (Didion White Album 206-7). Furthermore, within the post-war era the term “survivors” undoubtedly has connotations with the Holocaust and the horrors of fascism in Europe during World War II. Adorno and Horkheimer paralleled fascism with mass culture, warning of the possible dehumanising effects of what they called the culture industry. Mariah and Oedipa find a way to survive not only the social upheavals of the 1960s but also the dehumanising effects of mass culture. They learn to exist in this post-capitalist city by resisting the impulse to search for deeper meaning. As survivors, they assume a performative identity aligned with the *femme fatale* and adapted to the Hollywood image-industry. This identity is that of the successful migrant

or masquerade, adjusted to the culture created by Hollywood, energetic and infinitely capable.

The survivor tales of Pynchon and Didion offer narratives attesting to the ability of the individual to endure in a seemingly hostile landscape. Although they assert a kind of optimism associated with the original myth of California, they do not represent a return to the booster myth. They represent an “anti-anti-myth” proving that the myth and anti-myth are mutually dependent. If the anti-myth literature of Cain, Chandler and West is one of disillusionment, it requires that the original illusions remain at least an imaginable memory (Winchell 183). We can understand this dialectic with relation to the concept of myth and its ability to change meaning and be appropriated. Thus we can see how the symbols of the California dream, such as the ocean and the road have been appropriated by Cain and re-appropriated by Pynchon and Didion. Furthermore, the original booster myth of California dictates a view of Los Angeles as centred. The booster myth constitutes a coherent narrative of dreams realised and associated with traditional models of the subject. Whereas the anti-myth views the city as a fragmented, lacking a coherence and where gratification is illusory. The anti-myth can be aligned with a postmodern conception of the subject as equally fragmented, fluid, adapting to its environment and the transitory fulfilments of a consumerist environment.

Conclusion: the Survival of the California Dream.

This chapter has illustrated how symbols crucial to the California psyche such as the ocean, the road and architecture have been used by various writers to explore the idea of the Californian dream as well as its shaky realisation. In James M. Cain’s fiction, the ocean and the road represent the promise of freedom and a better life, as well as the fragility of such dreams. The ocean, more than any other symbol,

represents the dream realised. The ocean's proximity enables the startling epiphany that as Californians, they are representative of the American Dream, for California is the place where the American continent quite literally runs out. The power of the ocean and the road as symbols lies in their ability to change meaning and to be appropriated by later writers such as Pynchon and Didion, to whom such symbols come to represent the transitory and illusory nature of California dream. The relationship between dream and reality in California fiction is played out within the architecture of Los Angeles. In The Day of The Locust, Nathanael West's critique of Hollywood culture, houses are an essential part of living the dream. Once more, the importance of façade and fantasy in Los Angeles architecture can be attributed to the acting out of dreams. This chapter has shown how the formation of a performative identity occurred alongside the development of the Hollywood film industry, which was illustrated in the comparison between Monroe Stahr and Sammy Glick. The performative model of self is conducive to the image-industry of Hollywood and best illustrated in the seductive yet impenetrable *femme fatale* Faye Greener. Faye's ability to "come out alright," which is fundamental to her performative self is further evidenced in survivors Maria Wyeth and Oedipa Maas. The protagonists of Pynchon's and Didion's novels find a way to continue existing in a seemingly hostile and meaningless landscape by accepting the fragmentary nature of Los Angeles. Consequently, one can conclude from these novels that by assuming a performative identity one can better cope with the postmodern environment of Los Angeles, and thus these survivor tales offer the potential for the continuation of the Californian dream.

Conclusion.

By examining the depiction of women and the city of Los Angeles in selected twentieth-century American fiction, this project has demonstrated how Hollywood culture was pivotal in the development of a performative identity. Within the context of the Hollywood film industry, the female image came to exist as a marketable commodity, and California itself came into existence by being promoted as “the land of sunshine and oranges.” By exploring the image of woman on screen and the city of Los Angeles in terms of the “seductive sheen” of the commodity fetish, I illustrated how both take on new resonance with relation to the postmodern concept of surface. In the first chapter, I looked at the existence of woman’s image as spectacle and how this impacted upon visual relations between the genders as well as woman’s relationship to her own image. The second chapter examined how Los Angeles architecture, with its elaborate facades, can also be interpreted in terms of the “seductive surface” of the commodity fetish. Furthermore, I used the figure of the *femme fatale* as a starting point for charting a progression toward a postmodern subject based upon theories of identity as performance. This progression was further examined by exploring the depiction of the Californian landscape and the city of Los Angeles in terms of its architecture and inhabitants. Nathanael West’s The Day of The Locust best illustrates how the Hollywood film industry helped create a type of person known as the masquerade, who is synonymous with the image culture of Hollywood, and whose ostentatious outfits match the garish, eclectic facades of Los Angeles architecture.

The Hollywood film industry and the culture that surrounded it, helped form a new model of subject based upon the notion of identity as performance. For example, in Chandler’s The Little Sister, a studio boss named Ballou describes people in show business as living “intense and rather disordered lives,” and says that “if their emotions

didn't ride them too hard – well, they wouldn't be able to catch those emotions in flight and imprint them on a few feet of celluloid" (Chandler LLON 482). According to this assessment, actors and actresses live with their emotions on the surface so that they can be more easily captured on screen. Consequently, one can infer that there is something intrinsic to the material nature of celluloid film and the process of film-making that requires human beings to act in a particular way. Similarly, the *femme fatale* and masquerade, Faye Greener, from The Day of the Locust, is defined in terms of her surface animation. Such a conception can be paralleled with Frederic Jameson's definition of the schizophrenic who experiences the present in terms of a heightened intensity, as well as Judith Butler's notion of gender identity as performance. The postmodern subject described by Jameson and Butler, is further demonstrated by the frenetic personality of Sammy Glick in Budd Schulberg's What Makes Sammy Run? In contrast to The Last Tycoon's Monroe Stahr, Sammy Glick represents a new generation of performers and survivors, better able to cope with the society of spectacle in which a person is merely a set of surface gestures and images. In Hollywood, to have an identity is to play a role. In contrast to the transplants, the performing masquerades are better able to express themselves in terms of the image culture of Hollywood. Thus one can conclude that such a performative identity is intrinsic to the development of the film industry, and is best illustrated in the perennial performer, Faye Greener, who emerges as the lone survivor of West's apocalyptic novel.

Seductive Surface: Identity as Performance in the Photography of Cindy Sherman

See figures 15 and 16 in appendix.

In Untitled Film Stills (1980), the artist/model Cindy Sherman depicts herself in a range of attires and poses as though in a scene from a 1940s or '50s movie.

Through these photographs, Sherman foregrounds the artificial nature of femininity and suggests that identity is performed. As a result, we can further understand how the Hollywood film industry contributed to the formation of a performative subject. The photographs question what it means to be a woman and the nature of femininity. Through a process of myth, Sherman exploits conventional image representations of women as objects of male desire. Since “the best weapon against myth is to mythify it in its turn, to produce an artificial myth,” Sherman similarly appropriates these representations by foregrounding their artificial and constructed nature (Barthes 161). In this way, Sherman creates a sense of unease and disturbance, thus undermining the function of the female image in terms of processes of desire. Sherman illustrates how such images of women hover in oscillation with respectability, thus questioning the acceptability of conventional cinematic image-representations of women and suggests that they are no different from unrespectable pornographic images that also involve the objectification of woman.

Sherman highlights the discrepancy between a woman and the feminine façade that she is forced to put on within society. As both the model and artist, Sherman takes on a different persona in each picture, causing a feeling of disjunction and strangeness. The uncomfortable juxtaposition between model and artist, as well as variety of poses, scenes and styles that Sherman utilizes, accentuates the “surfacedness” of the pictures, as a sense of nostalgia begins to dissolve instead into unease (Mulvey Fetishism 68). The “put-on” nature of the roles Sherman plays in each picture, and the use of cosmetics “literally as a mask,” creates an awareness of the false and superficial nature of femininity (Mulvey Fetishism 68). The heavy use of cosmetics by Sherman emphasizes the surface nature of these representations, as well as suggesting that femininity consists of performance. Using cosmetics in this manner causes the viewer to

feel uneasy and to question the veracity of what they are looking at. Consequently, by causing the viewer to re-examine concepts of femininity, Sherman hints at the slippery nature of gender roles, and even suggests that the very nature of identity should be reconsidered.

In the same way that the *femme fatale* is a representation of masculine desire and fear, Sherman's work examines the societal expectations that are projected onto cinematic images of women. According to Craig Owens, Sherman's photographs "function as mirror-masks that reflect back at the viewer his own desire (and the spectator posited by this work is invariably male) – specifically, the masculine desire to fix the woman as a stable and stabilizing identity" (86). By taking on a different pose in each picture, Sherman denies the masculine impulse to contain and control woman. The resistance present in Sherman's work, has implications for male-female visual relations, in addition to causing the destabilization of the female subject. Sherman's main aim is to cause the viewer to question the conventional representations of women in society, as well as to unsettle received conceptions of female identity. Sherman reveals that within society, a woman is largely defined by how she looks. But if a woman can so easily change her appearance, as demonstrated by Sherman in her photographs, what implications does this have when considering female identity? As a result, the most unsettling aspect of Sherman's work is the undermining of the whole concept of a stable identity. Because Sherman is both "artist and model, voyeur and looked at, active and passive, subject and object, the photographs set up a comparable variety of positions and responses for the viewer" (Mulvey Fetishism 68-9). Consequently, "[t]here is no stable subject position in her work, no resting point that does not quickly shift into something else" (Mulvey Fetishism 69). Within her photographs, Sherman's own identity is ever-changing and this gives the viewer the same opportunity to take on role in relation to the figure represented. Consequently, she proposes a postmodern concept

of self, one that is unfixable. A fluidity of subject positions can be seen as particularly female and evident in the multiple roles women often play within society. Furthermore, the “construction of the category of woman as a coherent and stable subject,” is merely “a regulation and reification of gender relations” (Butler 7). Woman is neither a stable subject nor a coherent category, but is only made into one in relation to man. Thus Sherman’s work demonstrates how gender identity is fixed only in relation to the opposite gender. As a result, the concept of a stable identity is called into question and one can see how Sherman’s work illuminates the possibility of a changing, performative identity.

This project has examined how the Hollywood film industry produced a culture of commodity that impacted upon notions of the subject as explored through the depiction of women and Los Angeles. The transformation of woman and her image into a commodity fetish takes place through image culture of Hollywood. However, inscribed within woman’s existence as a commodity is the possibility of resistance. In the same way that a commodity’s value as an exchange is detached from its labour value, a woman is detached from her fetishized image form. The way in which the female image takes on a power of its own is illustrated in Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita separate from her image. Within the narrator Humbert’s mind, Lolita exists as a perfect copy or simulacra; she is described as a “cinematic still” and a “photographic image rippling upon a screen” (Nabokov 44 and 62). Like the *femme fatale*, Lolita has a chameleon-like identity; she appears within Humbert’s mind in “shift after shift” taking on “strange and ludicrous guises” (Nabokov 254). Humbert’s detachment from the real Lolita, but also Lolita’s own separation from the existence of herself in Humbert’s mind, offers her the possibility of resistance. Similarly, such resistance is epitomized by *femme fatale* Faye Greener who is defined in terms of “her completeness, her egg-like self-sufficiency” (West 224). Faye is also likened to “a very pretty cork,” and just like a

cork, Faye will always “come out alright” (West 287-8). As demonstrated by Lolita and Faye, it is the *femme fatale*’s seductive surface that ensures her survival.

The narrator of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Last Tycoon, Cecelia Brady is the daughter of a film producer, and thus indifferent to the glamour of Hollywood that surrounds her. Cecelia is emblematic of the new generation of “survivors,” suitably adjusted to life on the edge of the continent. They are “the inheritors of a community as intricate, rigid, and deceptive in its mores as any devised on this continent” (Didion The White Album 153). Didion’s female protagonist in Play It As It Lays, Mariah Wyeth, endures the turbulence of the sixties as well as tragic events in her own life. Mariah’s story is epitomised by her realisation that “I know what nothing means, and keep on playing,” which is the mantra of the survivor (Didion Play It As It Lays 214). In the same way, Oedipa Maas in Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49, sets out to decipher the enigmatic San Narciso, but is confounded by the meaningless void that is this postmodern city. These survivor tales feature female protagonists whose identity consists of performance and resilience, and who learn to inhabit the seemingly hostile environment of Los Angeles where ultimate meaning is denied. Just as the seductive surface of the *femme fatale* allows her to resist the male gaze, the compulsive performing of the postmodern subject can be viewed as a coping mechanism. Such a mechanism developed in response to the Los Angeles culture of the 1930s and ‘40s that grew so quickly in such a short space of time and that was dominated by a growing consumerism and the Hollywood film industry. A peculiar image-centred consumer culture emerged where ultimate fulfilment is illusory, and where to assume an identity is play a role. As a consequence, we can see how a performative identity offers a means by which the individual can survive within a postmodern world.

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Films:

Double Indemnity, Paramount, 1944, dir. Billy Wilder.

Gilda, Columbia, 1946, dir. Charles Vidor.

The Big Sleep, Warner Bros, 1946, dir. Howard Hawks.

The Postman Always Rings Twice, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1946, dir. Tay Garnett.

Appendix.



Figure 1. Film still from *Double Indemnity* (1944)

Femme fatales Phyllis Dietrichson (above) and Cora Smith (below left) portrayed as mercenary and heartless, they are cinematically static and can be contrasted with *femme fatale* Gilda (below right) a sympathetic portrayal of a woman and defined cinematically instead in terms of movement and vitality.

Figure 2. (Below left) Film still from *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946) and **Figure 3.** (Below right) Film Still from *Gilda* (1946).





Figure 4. Reclining in dull invitation: pin-up photo of Lauren Bacall, which appeared in the November 24/26 issue of *Yank, the Army Weekly*, 1944. Bacall played Vivian Sternwood in Howard Hawks's *The Big Sleep* (1946).

Figure 5. 'Pickfair'(Below) Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks at their Regency-style mansion, finished in 1924.

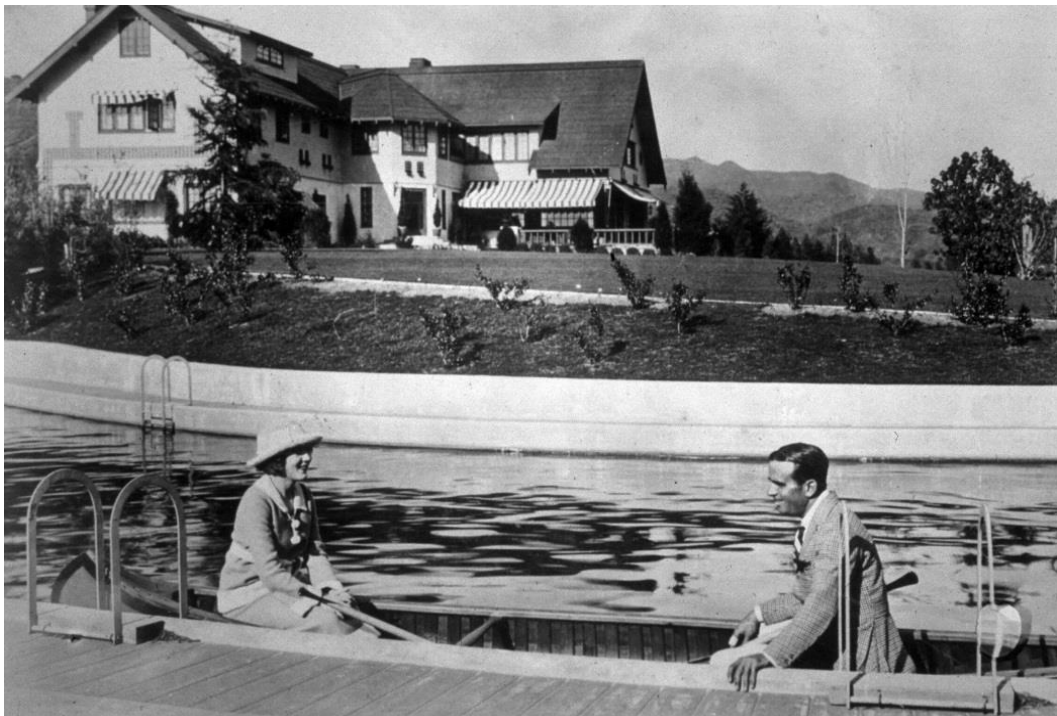




Figure 6. (Above) Greystone Mansion (finished in 1928) built for Irish millionaire Edward L. Doheny.



Figure 7. Grauman's Chinese Theatre (1927)



Figure 8 and 9. (Above) Elaborate façade then and now: Aztec Hotel, Monrovia (built 1925)

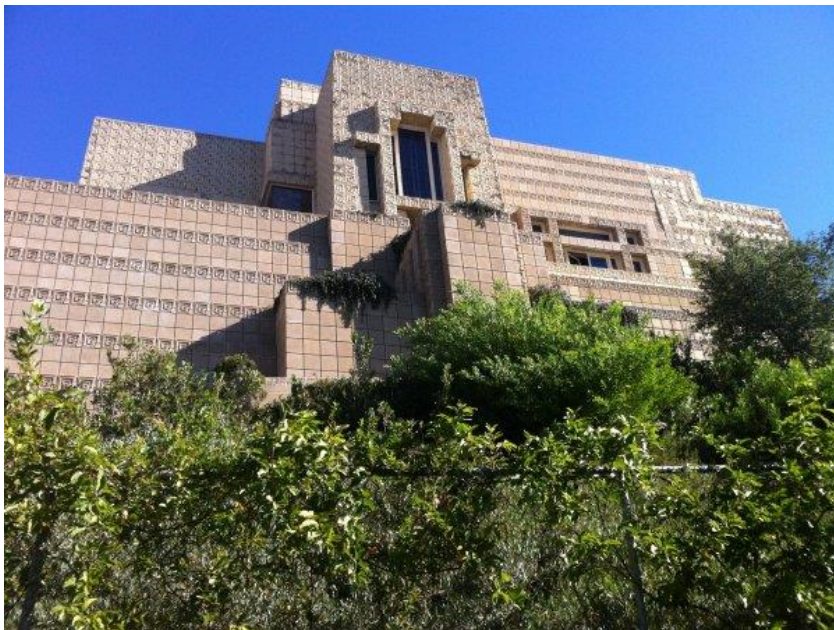


Figure 10. (Above) Decorating the Beverley Hills: Charles Ennis House by Frank Lloyd Wright (1924)



Figure 11. The Brown Derby (1926) according to Reyner Banham such commercial buildings take a single idea and make it dominant and are designed to be symbolic.

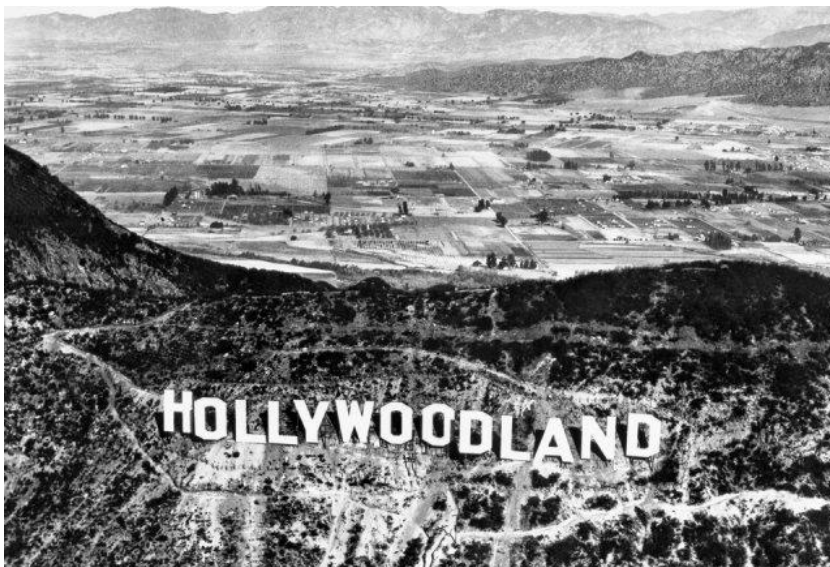


Figure 12. ‘Hollywoodland’ sign as it was first constructed in 1923 as an advertisement for a housing development of the same name, losing the ‘land’ in the 1940s when the sign was restored after deterioration. Seen by many as an advertisement for a place that does not exist.



Figure 13 and 14. The Wayfarer's Chapel (1951) by Lloyd Wright (son of Frank). Perched precariously on the edge of the continent, the surrounding landscape is incorporated into the design of the building which is fully experienced when seated inside the chapel, see below.





Figure 15

Untitled Film Still 17

Cindy Sherman.



Figure 16

Untitled Film Still 21

Cindy Sherman.