

Between 1951 and 1961, Elia Kazan (1909-2003) directed nine films, four of which are the subject of this thesis: *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *On the Waterfront* (1954), *East of Eden* (1955), and *Splendor In the Grass* (1961). Although the settings are diverse, each film's central character is an outsider, one who is relegated to the margins of society by some version of destitution, whether financial or moral. Often set in the domestic interior, each film follows the outsider character as he or she fights for inclusion into a family or general society. By analyzing the settings or interior spaces in each film, and the characters' interactions with objects therein, I will endeavor to understand how Kazan used material culture to communicate his own ambivalent relationship to American society in the post-war period. For Kazan and the general American public, home was especially significant for physical and emotional shelter, and objects therein were projections of individual identity and social relationships. The Turkish-born Kazan's sense of himself as an outsider in American society made him acutely aware of American culture and the zeitgeist of a period increasingly caught up with material goods.

The cultural backdrop against which these films were made is of particular importance. America in the 1950s was reaping the benefits of the post-World War II economic boom, and as affluence proliferated throughout social classes, goods and services became available at each level of the market, affirming "the good life" as available to all. But the notion of the good life was changing. It was shifting emphasis from *being* good to *having* what was good, and each film of this study acknowledges the disparity between these definitions by presenting a central character that confuses the two, and sates the desire for virtue with objects of value or status. The films, and their director, demonstrate the simple idea that living the good life means something different for everyone. Elia Kazan labored throughout his life and career to identify and locate the good life for himself, a search shared by the central character of each film discussed in this thesis.

The following chapters identify these struggles and situate the films within their contemporary framework to better understand the dialogue between current events and social

change as read by Elia Kazan. It is my contention that the theme of “The Good Life” versus “a good life” permeates each piece and that Kazan’s lifelong ambivalence to Capitalism and the American Dream is communicated by his use of sets and objects. While there is a great deal of literature analyzing Kazan’s films, there is less investigation of their mise-en-scène and the use of decorative objects or material culture to elucidate Kazan’s messages.

I will begin this introduction with an analysis of the good life as interpreted in the post-war era followed by a life history of Kazan based on his biographers and interviews. I will then treat each of the four films as a separate chapter to examine issues of class, politics, family, and consumption as they emerged in the post-war period. The first chapter chronicles *A Streetcar Named Desire* and shifting notions of domesticity, the home, and womanhood in the era. Objects in the set of *Streetcar* are analyzed to demonstrate an emerging class struggle between the established upper class and the new affluence of the working class. The following three chapters, *On the Waterfront*, *East of Eden*, and *Splendor In the Grass*, are more closely linked to Kazan’s own biography, and deal with themes such as the Cold War and his controversial testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, generational tensions and divides that echo Kazan’s struggle with his own father, and class-passing and rebellion against Puritanism as seen in his relationship with his first wife Molly. Analysis of material culture and decorative art objects is integral to the narrative of these films within the complex days of the post-war era.

Living a good life versus The Good Life

According to the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, the phrase “the good life” first appeared in 1942.¹ It grew in the popular culture vernacular until it was finally added to the dictionary in the 1966 Random House edition, where “good life” was first defined as a life “abounding in

¹ *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, s.v. “Good life,” accessed December 19, 2010, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/good%20life>.

material comforts and luxuries,” or secondly, one lived “according to the moral and religious laws of one’s culture.”²

An unscientific study of the phrase’s history in America reveals widespread trends in the phrase’s usage between members of the same era, while its meaning experiences more radical shifts between different generations and different periods. A search of Google Books for “the good life” in nineteenth-century literature finds millions of results, but these texts are generally limited to the subjects of religion and philosophy. In 1860, Rev. John Anderson asks in the *United Presbyterian Magazine*, “What is a good life?” To which he explains simply to first love God and thy neighbor, because “This is the whole duty of man, and this is the good life required of all men.”³

Thirty years later, in his 1895 discussion on professional ethics in education, Samuel Findley explains the issue with slightly more complexity, saying, “The greatest foe of the good life is the intense and irrational impulse each of us has to assert himself, even to the loss or injury of others, to take more than his due share of the good things, and less than his share of the work, the hardships, and the sufferings of human life.”⁴ His argument too focuses on the Golden Rule as a pillar of living the good life, but he specifically acknowledges financial and intrinsic gain as one of its key opponents, a point expounded on twenty-five years later in the 1920 *Philosophical Review*, edited by J.E. Creighton. Creighton posits that, “In itself, money is neither good nor bad...[In] so far as it is moderate in amount, and acquired by just and lawful means, and expended in a judicious and moderate manner, as an element in a kind of life which respects restraint, orderliness, and reasonableness, that money is a good.”⁵

² *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, Jess Stein, ed. (New York: Random House, 1966), 609, s.v. “Good life.”

³ John Anderson, “Address by the Rev. John Anderson, Kilsyth” *The United Presbyterian Magazine* IX (1860), 75, accessed December 21, 2010, <http://books.google.com/>.

⁴ Samuel Findley, “Professional Ethics,” *The Ohio Educational Monthly and the National Teacher: a Journal of Education*, Columbus, OH: Corson, publisher (1895), 395, accessed December 21, 2010, <http://books.google.com/>.

⁵ J.E. Creighton, ed., *The Philosophical Review* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1920), 361, accessed December 21, 2010, <http://books.google.com/>.

William Leach commented on the transitioning temperament of America in his 1994 book *Land of Desire*. While early settlers saw America as an opportunity for spiritual and social salvation, he says that “by the early 1900s this myth was being transformed, urbanized and commercialized, increasingly severed from its religious aims and focusing evermore on personal satisfaction and even on such new pleasure palaces as department stores, theaters, restaurants, hotels, dance halls, and amusement parks...This new era heralded the pursuit of goods as the means to all ‘good’ and to personal salvation.”⁶ By the post-war years, authors of *American Film and Society Since 1945* Leonard Quart and Albert Auster assert that American attitudes toward religion and salvation continued to shift. “The period did not remove religion from American life,” they say, “but [religion’s] growth became focused not on individual spiritual renewal, but social gains and conformity.”⁷

A 1940 issue of *LIFE Magazine* anticipated the post-war discussion of the good life by moving into the political arena and asking Republican presidential candidate Wendell L. Willkie to discuss “What Kind of America Do We the People Want?” Willkie’s position stated, “For all our people we hold the aims of basic security; the security of food, clothing, and shelter, or insurance against old age and want; of care for those who cannot help themselves. Beyond those basic securities lies the good life. We expect an ever widening share in that life for all our people.”⁸ Willkie’s comments were made before American participation in World War II and the end of the Great Depression, and they read as a remunerative campaign promise for future economic growth as versus a kind of cultural reflection. We know by his definition, however, that the good life was supplemental to helping and providing for thy neighbor, as his campaign promised to increase the number of Americans with the financial capacity to afford luxury items in addition to necessities—or to live The Good Life.

⁶ William Leach, *Land of Desire*, (New York, Pantheon Books, 1994), 4. Leach’s contention is that religion did not serve as a bulwark against a changing temper in the country.

⁷ Leonard Quart and Albert Auster, *American Film and Society Since 1945* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 41.

⁸ Willkie, Wendell L., “What Kind of America do We the People Want? Republican Candidate Sums Up His Thoughts,” *LIFE* 9: 19 (Nov. 4, 1940), 84, accessed December 21, 2010. <http://books.google.com/>.

A short ten years later in 1950 (the year preceding *A Streetcar Named Desire's* film release), however, the economic climate described in another *LIFE Magazine* article struck a very different tone. The article acknowledges the post-war boom, commenting that after at least four years of it, the “darned thing goes on and on and on...” Now, the *LIFE* editors declare in the title, “Living Better Than Ever, the U.S. Must Now Learn How to Live.”⁹ They opine that specific research on the improving and growing luxury markets has not yet been attempted, but, “If someone were to do this necessary statistical investigation, it just might prove that the U.S. citizen is learning what prosperity is for. He is at least beginning to learn that prosperity, once the primary needs of life are cared for, is only good as underpinning for the good life.” The writers reference the unbridled spending that led to the “suicidal stock market crash of 1929,” remarking that then, “the U.S. valued prosperity as an end and it disappeared. Are the American people really coming to value prosperity as a means to the larger good? We hope so, and we propose a toast: ‘Here’s to prosperity—and here’s to keeping it in its place!’”¹⁰ The editorial is optimistic, describing an older and wiser American citizenry ready to sidestep the mistakes of the preceding generations. *LIFE* was ready to enthusiastically accept prosperity, but hopeful that it would merely be a support, an “underpinning,” in the United States’ conception of the good life.

LIFE's embrace of prudence was short-lived. By the end of 1959 (as production on *Splendor In the Grass* was set to commence), the magazine devoted its end-of-year double issue to reflecting on America’s prosperity and its subsequent goods and services [fig. 1.1]. The introductory sentence begins, “The Good Life!” Even the grammar shows a radical shift in thinking. “Good” is no longer a separate adjective describing one kind of life; the phrase must be taken together, capitalized as a title, expressing a singular (in this case, luxurious) way to live.

⁹ “The Boom Goes On: Living Better Than Ever, the U.S. Must now Learn How to Live” in *LIFE* 28: 17 (April 24, 1950), 38, accessed December 21, 2010, <http://books.google.com/>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

“The Good Life: It’s two swimming pools in every back yard, and a jet weekend to Bali. Or is it? Opinions differ.”¹¹

The issue does describe a variety of contemporary notions of The Good Life, with one article focusing on the civic charity of an Alabama woman and another chronicling the recreation activities of contemporary celebrities. The overall theme of the issue, however, is how America’s growing leisure time allows for The Good Life. The issue argues that this growth in free time is attributable to automated production “which brings with it more and cheaper goods and better jobs.”¹² This is in contrast to the condition described in “The Gay Old Days” article in the same issue, depicting “memorable episodes—some rowdy and some classy like the yacht party of J.P. Morgan—of the old days when leisure was a luxury that belonged to a well-heeled few.”¹³

The victory of the preceding years was, as *LIFE* saw it, the spread of leisure (and with it, luxury) to a wider base of the American public. By 1959, 34 million American families, the majority, made more than \$4,000 a year after taxes, spreading control of the \$84 billion budget of “discretionary income’ (money left after necessary expenditures)” throughout the populace. “The most important thing about this market,” the *LIFE* editors claimed, “is not its size in dollars but its size in people...These new “leisure masses” have acquired not only the money and the time to spend it in, but also—and most significantly—an appetite for the good life.”¹⁴

The breadth of the public’s discretionary income is expressed in a helpful chart, entitled “How Do YOU Rate in the New Leisure?” (written by “witty observer” Russell Lynes). The chart allows readers to identify themselves as an Aristocrat, Upper Bourgeois, Lower Bourgeois, or Peasant, based on the leisure activities they pursue and objects they choose to buy. “Books and Art Works by Undiscovered Talents,” “Tasteful Art and Artifacts,” “Autographed Photographs,”

¹¹ *LIFE* 47: 26 (December 28, 1959), 70, accessed December 21, 2010, <http://books.google.com/>.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

and “Credit Cards” are listed as examples sought by each class, respectively.¹⁵ Each example, however, focuses on consumption as the principle means of spending leisure, and subsequently obtaining self-definition in the quest for The Good Life. This attitude toward consumption was termed “Populuxe,” by Thomas Hine in his 1986 book about this period, treating it as a materialistic “golden age” in which “America found a way of turning out fantasy on an assembly line,” and objects became “invested with greater meaning.”¹⁶

While the exploding finances of the middle class and the prevailing atmosphere of post-war leisure helped magnify this shift in American values, or “appetites,” “Populuxe” America had existed as a burgeoning force in American culture since the turn of the century, as noted by William Leach in *Land of Desire*. The six World’s Fairs that occurred during the Great Depression were symptomatic of this growing focus on material goods; they optimistically encouraged Americans “to modernize by consuming the products of American industry and the visions of future abundance that accompanied them.” World’s fair historian Robert W. Rydell discusses the desire on the part of fair promoters, designers, and financiers to demolish the old ways of “restraint and inhibition” and to destroy any remaining values of a “culture of production,” in lieu of utopian fantasies emphasizing scientific and cultural progress.¹⁷

The Depression-Era fairs in America (which welcomed over one hundred million people in Chicago, San Diego, Dallas, Cleveland, San Francisco, and New York between 1933-1940) were meant to revitalize the nation’s economy and collective spirit through modernization, pushing America out of the Great Depression and into “a consumer-centered, corporation-driven nation-

¹⁵ Ibid., 86.

¹⁶ Thomas Hine, *Populuxe* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 3-6. For further analysis of populuxe objects in film, see Christine Sprengler’s *Screening Nostalgia: Populuxe Props and Technicolor Aesthetics in Contemporary American Film* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

¹⁷ Robert W. Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 116. See Chapter Two of this thesis for further discussion on the cultural evolution from production to consumption. This dovetails with Leach’s description of a changing America in the early twentieth century.

state powered forward by science and technology.”¹⁸ The fairs were of course meant to promote consumption and “restore popular faith in the vitality of the nation’s economic and political system,”¹⁹ but on the eve of World War II, America had not yet developed the middle-class wealth and consumer confidence that would come to epitomize the post-war years. The 1939 New York World’s Fair promoters relied in part on the more educational virtues of the wonders of science, commending it as “a method of achieving success by straight thinking,”²⁰ and an integral part of “The World of Tomorrow.”

By the 1958 Brussels Universal and International Exposition (the first world’s fair of the post-war period), America focused less on the science of what was possible, and more on what its collective technologies were able to achieve on behalf of the American way of life. Over fifty nations participated in the Brussels exposition, using the opportunity to construct new national images in the wake of World War II. For its part, the American pavilion introduced visitors to “The Face of America,” a display that “bombarded visitors with images of American diversity... intended to present ‘a series of varied, largely unexpected and lasting impressions of Americana.’”²¹ The IBM RAMAC computer was on display, as well as Walt Disney’s Circarama exhibition, a fast-food restaurant, and live-performances, all displaying the American opportunities for “material abundance and more leisure for individual creative and recreational pursuits.”²²

The goods on display in Brussels demonstrated American’s post-war consumer prowess and emphasized the trade component integral to world’s fairs, but by the 1962 Seattle World’s Fair, the focus was back on space and the marvels of science. These themes were certainly represented in the 1964-65 New York World’s Fair, but because many countries, including the

¹⁸ Robert W. Rydell, “Making America (More) Modern: America’s Depression-Era World’s Fairs,” in *Designing Tomorrow: America’s World’s Fairs of the 1930s*, eds., Robert W. Rydell and Laura Burd Schiavo (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 113. Rydell quotes from the fair’s official guidebook.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 203-4.

²² *Ibid.*, 204. Rydell quotes descriptions provided for Eisenhower by Howard Cullman, the U.S. Commissioner General.

Soviets, opted out of this fair, “American-style Capitalism clearly stole the show.”²³ The New York Fair used a huge influx of corporate sponsors to handily surpass the commercialism of all previous expositions, a factor that the fair’s director, New York’s Robert Moses, declared as central to the event’s success, and which hinged on the participation of the “three most powerful organizations in the world: the U.S. government, the Vatican, and General Motors.”²⁴ At the height of the U.S.’s Good Life mentality, corporations including General Electric, IBM, Coca-Cola, and Kodak took advantage of the fair as an “unprecedented opportunity to build goodwill among tens of millions of consumers from all around the world,”²⁵ and circulate their brands among the “homemakers” and “breadwinners” at home.²⁶ Items on display such as the General Motors’ concept car—with a shopping cart fitted into the trunk [fig. 1.2]—reminded Americans visiting the fair that “the most tangible symbol of the [American] dream was the home—**the locale of the good life**, the evidence of democratic abundance.”²⁷

These symbols of the good life reached beyond the “crass commercialism”²⁸ of the fair grounds and occupied the interests of contemporary writers, described by Daniel Horowitz in *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939-1979*. In 1954 David M. Potter, for example, published *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character*, which Horowitz describes as an “analysis of abundance whose Cold War celebrations were tempered by an acknowledgement of the costs Americans paid for their headlong embrace

²³ Lawrence R. Samuel, *The End of Innocence: The 1964-1965 New York World's Fair* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007), xxii.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, xx.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Elaine Tyler May, “The Commodity Gap: Consumerism and the Modern Home,” in *Consumer Society in American History: a Reader*, ed. Lawrence B. Glickman (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 313. May states that while the post-war period served to (at least superficially) dispose of class differences, it reinforced the traditional roles of gender in American society. She says, “The men worked in a highly organized bureaucratized economy, the women focused their energies on the home, and together they sought personal fulfillment in their families, surrounded by children and consumer goods” (307).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 298. Emphasis mine.

²⁸ Ileen Sheppard, “Icons and Images: The cultural Legacy of the 1964/65 World’s Fair” in *Remembering the Future: The New York World’s Fair from 1939-1964*, ed. The Queens Museum (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1989), 168. Sheppard describes the frequent complaints that the 1964-65 world’s fair was overly commercial.

of prosperity.”²⁹ While Potter’s view of affluence depicts a dystopian era without traditional morals, virtues, or goodness, his contemporary, the Vienna-trained psychologist Ernest Dichter, celebrated the American “embrace” of consumption. He extolled the power it gave to the middle class and linked purchasing to democracy. To Dichter, Horowitz explains, the era’s consumable goods were “symbols of personal growth and creative self expression.”³⁰

Elia Kazan: A History

The idea of defining oneself and the path of one’s life based on how or what one consumed was a circumstance of American life that Elia Kazan felt very personally. His resentment at the foibles of Capitalism was relatively longstanding, evidenced by his association with Communism in the 1930s and much of his early work. For example, in 1949, Kazan directed Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, which culminated with the suicide of the very American salesman Willy. One of Kazan’s myriad biographers, Richard Schickel calls *Death of a Salesman* Kazan’s “Social indictment,” against the “pot of gold” of capitalism. Schickel quotes Kazan, saying “At the end, he [Willy] wins at all costs. He would and does sacrifice everything to his ideal. He really believes it as does all our middle class and he goes by it.”³¹ Arthur Miller described the theme in similarly deprecating tones, describing “the bullshit of Capitalism, this pseudo life that thought to touch the clouds by standing on top of the refrigerator, waving a paid-up mortgage at the moon, victorious at last.”³² The American conversation surrounding the consumption of the home continued to ferment over the decade, perhaps peaking in the rhetoric surrounding vice president Richard Nixon’s famous Kitchen debate with Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1959, to be discussed in Chapter Four.

As the 1950s’ relationship with “the good life” evolved, Kazan saw it as the era’s ultimate goal. “The economy of abundance,” says Quart and Auster in their book on post-war film and

²⁹ Daniel Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939-1979* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 79.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

³¹ Richard Schickel, *Elia Kazan: A Biography* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 194.

³² *Ibid.*, 195.

society, “helped create a powerful suburban and consumer culture where the pursuit of success and emphasis on social conformity became the dominant values of the era.”³³ For Kazan, the authors say, this concept manifested itself as an “ambivalence about the quest for middle class success” and a “personal disdain for bourgeois repression and respectability.”³⁴ Quart and Auster point to Kazan’s film *Viva Zapata!* (1962) as an early indication of his feelings, but Kazan’s frustration with the consumptive American climate grew and continued to play a role in his later work, as did his decades-long devotion to psychoanalysis.³⁵

Indeed, through his own psychoanalysis, Kazan noted that much of his work became autobiographical and descriptive of his relationships and aspects of his life that piqued him in some way. At the behest of Kazan’s wife, Molly, Elia Kazan first began undergoing psychoanalytic treatment in 1945,³⁶ but in 1959 he got a new, more rigorous, analyst, Dr. Harold Kelman. In his autobiography, Kazan remembers Dr. Kelman’s advice, saying “...My best and truest material was my own life: my parents, my childhood, my dreams, my intimate life, the desperation and panic I felt. ‘And your past,’ he [Dr. Kelman] said. ‘You’re not quite an American, are you? You’ve never spoken to me about that, of who you are. Why don’t you look at it?’”³⁷ The effect his analysis had on his work was huge. Kazan was “a great admirer of Freud. [He] analyzed the characters in his scripts and chose actors whose personalities mirrored them, based on his psychoanalysis of the actors.”³⁸ Analysis helped solidify the psychological backdrops he had long cultivated in his characters, and it allowed him to look inwards instead of always out at society. Kazan began to explore his familial roots, a study which came to fruition in 1962 in his first novel, *America America*, which he adapted into a film in 1963. Just before the

³³ Quart and Auster, 41.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁵ Suzanne Finstad, *Warren Beatty: A Private Man* (New York: Harmony Books, 2001), 201. Warren Beatty (who got his first “big break” from Kazan and remained close to the director throughout his life) stated that in the early 1960’s—the time of *Splendor In the Grass*—Kazan believed that “directing was eighty-percent casting.”

³⁶ Elia Kazan, *Elia Kazan: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 239.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁸ Finstad, 201.

film was released, however, his wife Molly died unexpectedly from a brain aneurysm, a tragedy that would further catalyze his growing interest in self-reflection.³⁹

Elia Kazan was born into the Greek family of George and Athena Kazanjioglou in 1909 in present day Istanbul, Turkey. Athena came from a prosperous and educated family of cotton merchants living in what was then Constantinople, while George's family lived a meaner existence in the outlying village of Kayseri.⁴⁰ His father's family was less "cultured" and had fewer educational opportunities, but it was the rug business of George's brother, Joseph, that brought the family to America in 1913 when Elia was just four years old.⁴¹ Although his early years in Turkey were short, they impacted Elia profoundly. He grew up speaking Greek at home and Turkish everywhere else. The cultural and political climate of the era was fraught with tension between the Greeks and Armenians living in the Turkish dominated region, and Elia learned early on that he was outside or apart from the society at large. His family, he recalls, "Survived by their wits, lived under constant threat. So when we came to America we brought with us the idea that we were still in a foreign country."⁴²

Once settled at Joseph's rug store, "The Persian Warehouse,"⁴³ George moved the family into a lower middle-class neighborhood on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, where the New York City contingent of Kazan's extended family also rented apartments. This allowed the clan to join together for group meals on Sundays and facilitate the maintenance of their traditions, languages, and ties to their homeland. One such tradition that carried through to America was the atmosphere of the patriarchal household led by George, a dominant male figure who cultivated a dynamic that would always hold Elia in isolation and fear of his father. George imposed on young Elia his ideas of how to succeed in America, which included the advice to "Say nothing, don't mix in, don't mix in other people's business, stay out of trouble." Just as they had

³⁹ Ibid., 162.

⁴⁰ Brian Neve, *Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 2.

⁴¹ Ciment, 11.

⁴² Ibid., 10.

⁴³ Neve, 2.

been in Asia Minor, the Kazans were outside the prevailing norms of America. Elia was taught that his people throughout their history “were constantly being demeaned, so the only way they could get along was by being sly, by never saying the wrong thing. The first thing I learned was to shut up.”⁴⁴

It was his mother that encouraged Elia to enter into mainstream American culture, first by enrolling him in the area’s Montessori schools and teaching him the pleasures of reading at length, and later, after the family had moved to suburban New Rochelle, New York, by going behind George’s back to encourage Elia to study and earn money enough to go to college instead of joining the family rug business.⁴⁵ Elia enthusiastically embraced his mother’s plans and began his studies at Williams College in 1926, clearly an outsider amongst the wealthy WASP Yankees populating the school.

Just as his father had ingrained in him the idea that the family “did not associate equally and freely with Americans,”⁴⁶ Elia found little comfort or direction at Williams College. When the stock market crashed in 1929, Kazan’s already reluctant father could no longer give him even meager financial help, and Elia was forced to wash dishes and serve food at the school’s fraternities, working for the people he saw as socially above himself. The inferiority he felt in his status at Williams further developed his childhood feelings of “antagonism to privilege, to good looks, to Americans, to Wasps.... I had nothing to make me feel confident or secure.”⁴⁷

Kazan graduated with no clear plans, but, desperate to avoid working for his father’s by now failing rug business, he followed his friend Alan Baxter into the Yale Drama School. At Yale, Kazan found his niche neither in the acting nor directorial classes; instead he worked in the scene shop where he honed his skills in carpentry and lighting, and general scenic creativity.⁴⁸ This experience, he says, “Was very useful for me because later I was never afraid of electricians,

⁴⁴ Ciment, 11.

⁴⁵ Schickel, 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁷ Ciment, 12.

⁴⁸ Schickel, 4.

or scenic and costume people. No one thought I could act but they thought I could be a good builder of scenery, costume designer, an able production man backstage.”⁴⁹ His energy and versatility cemented the nickname he would carry throughout his life, “Gadget”—usually shortened to “Gadg(e),”⁵⁰—and it provided a fundamental knowledge of the design aspects essential to film and stage *mise-en-scène*.

Also at Yale, Elia met Molly Day Thatcher. She was introduced to Kazan as Alan Baxter’s girlfriend, but Alan quickly bowed out when her kinship with Kazan became clear. She was thin, pretty, and “WASPy,” the opposite of Kazan’s shadowy foreign intensity—“The Yankee to Kazan’s immigrant.”⁵¹ Kazan left Yale after two years (by then committed to Molly) and followed a Yale teacher to the newly formed Group Theatre where he and Alan Baxter applied for apprenticeships. The company had grand plans to revolutionize the acting profession, and Kazan was given the opportunity to study with The Group that summer for a \$20 dollar a week tuition, a decision Schickel rationalizes, saying, “Even if you have to pay for the privilege it was still a job—in a year [1932] when twenty-five million Americans were without work.”⁵²

At the end of their summer apprenticeships, however, neither Kazan nor Baxter was made a member of The Group Theatre, a devastating blow for Kazan, who had been told, “You may have a talent for something, but it’s certainly not acting.” Elia found a job back in New York as an assistant stage-manager with the Theatre Guild, an opportunity that cemented his desire to direct instead of act.⁵³

It was also in the winter of 1932 that Kazan married Molly Day Thatcher. Molly and Elia had an extremely close relationship that spanned their personal lives, business, and politics until her untimely death in 1963.⁵⁴ Despite tensions caused by Elia’s frequent extra-marital philandering, Molly’s influence was reflected throughout his work, and she labored tirelessly in

⁴⁹ Ciment, 14.

⁵⁰ Neve, 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵² Schickel, 15.

⁵³ Ciment, 15.

⁵⁴ Schickel, 406.

her own more intellectual pursuits in the theater: criticism, editing, play reading, and later, writing for the stage. In fact, Molly is credited with discovering Tennessee Williams and introducing him to Kazan.⁵⁵ According to Kazan's mother: "Molly brought us into this country," meaning that Molly finally made them feel home, and less of the "other" in America. Together Molly and Elia had four children, two before World War II, Judy (1937) and Christopher (1938), and two after, Nick (1946) and Katherine (1948).⁵⁶

Throughout his early years with Molly in the late thirties and early forties, Kazan dabbled in a variety of work with varying degrees of success. The Group was ever ebbing and flowing (it finally folded in 1941);⁵⁷ he directed the short documentary *The People of Cumberland* in 1937, and went to Hollywood for a brief career as a type-cast gangster in two films,⁵⁸ after which he moved back to New York intent on leaving acting behind and focusing solely on directing. Beginning with 1943's staging of *Café Crown* to 1954's filmic production of *On the Waterfront*, Kazan directed fourteen plays and ten movies.⁵⁹ He also co-founded the Actor's Studio in 1947 with Cheryl Crawford and Robert Lewis, and in 1950 founded Newtown Production Company in New York, followed by Athena Productions in 1954, also in New York.⁶⁰

This concentrated period of production for Kazan was a sigh of relief. Kazan had intensely battled for a professional foothold for over twenty years, but his entire life had been spent in the manner of a sponge, absorbing characters and their environments until he reached a saturation point that begged a kind of release. His level of production is nearly incomprehensible, with overlapping schedules driven by perpetual verve and enthusiasm that would stay with him throughout his career. His tenacity was matched by his memory and an introspective ability to recall people and feelings in a way that permeated his professional work, drawing on his own contentious father-son relationship again and again to describe the

⁵⁵ Neve 3.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁷ Ciment, 180.

⁵⁸ Neve, 4-5.

⁵⁹ Schickel, 105.

⁶⁰ Ciment, 180.

intergenerational angst he saw around him. In addition, he looked to his own wife Molly to describe the WASP characters—the full-fledged Americans that stood apart from his own “otherness.”

Kazan’s “otherness” was felt as profound isolation, a sentiment acutely developed in him by generations of Kazanjioglous back in Turkey, but also brought to America where Kazan experienced himself as outsider to American culture. Even in his attempts at inclusion, Kazan was discouraged, first at Williams College when he was made to wash the dishes of the wealthy Anglo boys (and their girls) whom he so admired, and later at Yale when he was put behind the scenes as a general “grunt” carpenter. His work often references these early thematic influences: his father George appears repeatedly, for example, as Ace Stamper in *Splendor In the Grass* or *East of Eden*’s Adam Trask, and his characterization of Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* was modeled on the experience of Molly, a girl with a trust fund fallen from society and living far below her means after her marriage to Kazan.

Kazan’s status on the periphery provided a sort of objectivity available to someone on the outside looking in. He engaged in his relationships with people and with America as a sort of voyeur. His attitude is illustrated in his extensive 1971 interviews with French film critic Michael Ciment in which he reflected on the prevalence of water-related symbolism in *Splendor In the Grass*:

Purity. Sex. Again and again. Water is oblivion, water is death, water is threatening. It’s a positive image in the sense that Stavros says in *America America* [Kazan’s first novel]: ‘America will wash me clean.’ Let me tell you this: I’m an American, very American and all that, but way back I was born in Asia Minor; and I was raised in a place where there was no running water. Water was precious, water was a beautiful thing. To wash your hands in water was something nice; you did it with a pail, you did it in a basin. It was something we didn’t take for granted as Americans do. Americans take everything for granted.⁶¹

In a single breath, Kazan switches his tone from that of a direct inheritor of the American Dream to something far more derisive. His American citizenry allows him access to the culture, but his familial history enables a sort of self-imposed exile from the American experience.

⁶¹ Ciment, 141.

Kazan would later connect this lack of belonging to his burgeoning interest in the Communist Party, because, he says, “I got resentful of being excluded. I was an outsider...”⁶² His official affiliation with Communism did not last particularly long because he was essentially kicked out for taking direction poorly. Short-lived or not, however, Kazan’s stint in Communism would cast a shadow over the remainder of his life and career. In 1952 he was twice called to testify as a friendly witness before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and his testimony (described in the chapter discussing *On the Waterfront*), in which he named names of several former Communist colleagues, must have greatly increased his sense of himself as an outsider as he was reviled by many for acceding to the committee’s demands.⁶³

Kazan and Directing

Kazan was clearly invested in rooting the visual elements of his films in the American experience. His direction, both before and during production of a film, was stamped with his impressive visual literacy. Not only did he understand the construction of the physical components of mise-en-scène, but he also had an uncanny ability to see in his mind’s eye the setting appropriate for each character and each situation, describing objects and environs to his actors and crew as a way of explicating the motivations and existence of each character. His notes are specific on such matters. To Richard Day, for example, the art director on *A Streetcar Named Desire* (as well as *On the Waterfront*), Kazan wrote, “Have you thought of putting mosquito netting draped in some confused and careful way over the beds?”⁶⁴ Around the same time, he wrote a plea to Jack Warner for the funds to hire Lucinda Ballard as the costume designer for *Streetcar*, explaining, “I very much hope that you will see this my way, Jack. I am

⁶² Schickel, 3.

⁶³ Kazan’s testimony remains a sensitive issue and source of debate even today. In 1999, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (lead by one of its most esteemed members and a long-time friend of Kazan, Karl Malden) voted unanimously to present the Lifetime Achievement award to Kazan, a highly controversial gesture that renewed discussion about the House Committee on Un-American Activities and divided the film community over his participation in it (Schickel, xiii).

⁶⁴ Western Union telegram by Elia Kazan to Richard Day, 26 July 1950, Box 23, Jack L. Warner Collection, University of Southern California Archives of Performing Arts [hereafter cited as Jack Warner Collection].

most anxious that all these little details be right. A picture is made up of beautifully chosen details, and believe me Ballard is worth everything.”⁶⁵

The specificity of Kazan’s vision is also evident in the multiple notebooks of preparatory material for *Splendor In the Grass*. Kazan describes the premise of an early scene simply, saying Deanie goes “to bed with mother in the room.” He adds the directorial note, “Sees pillow, grabs it. Flirts with it.”⁶⁶ He took a simple scene (a girl going to bed) and a simple object (her pillow) and laid the groundwork for the sexual frustration that would plague Deanie throughout the film. On the following page, Kazan writes:

Stamper home

Picturize: sudden wealth

Exaggerate: contrast to Loomis home⁶⁷

He sets these early scenes in *Splendor In the Grass* with objects that are meant to develop the families and their identities in the absence of a thorough back-story or history. The sets serve as an important narrative device, essential to the picture’s development because, Kazan told Jack Warner, *Splendor* was the most “familiar” picture he had made since *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. “It is part of everybody’s life.”⁶⁸ In another letter written to Warner in the previous month, Kazan explained, “I feel very bullish about what we have. I think audiences everywhere in the world are going to find empathic connection with the subject matter and the events and emotion and the drama of this film.”⁶⁹

This emotional relationship with audiences was a priority for Kazan throughout his career, a consideration he emphasized through his use of “Method Acting,” or the Stanislavsky Method, named for Russian actor/director Constantin Stanislavsky. Interestingly, this system of performance places substantial importance on the ability of objects to tell stories and to express

⁶⁵ Letter from Kazan to Warner, June 1950, Box 23, Warner Collection.

⁶⁶ Note by Elia Kazan, 7 March 1960, Box 50, folder B50-F1, The Elia Kazan Collection, Wesleyan University Cinema Archives [hereafter cited as WUCA], 6.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁸ Elia Kazan to Jack Warner and Benjamin Kalmenson, January 4, 1961, Folder 2953, Warner Bros. Archives, University of Southern California [hereafter cited as Warner Bros].

⁶⁹ Elia Kazan to Jack Warner, 21 December 1960, folder 2953, Warner Bros.

the subtleties of mood; in fact “it stresses the use of objects both for their symbolic value and as emissaries from the solid, material world.”⁷⁰ According to a list of Method tenets provided by Princeton University sociologist Nina Bandelj, The Method stresses many of Kazan’s most recognized filmic qualities, including the use of objects, psychological underpinnings for a character’s behavior, genuine emotion, and what “The Method sees as the actor’s essential task the reproduction of recognizable reality—verisimilitude—on stage (or screen), based on an acute observation of the world.” In a 1971 interview with director and writer Jeff Young, Kazan explains his interpretation of directing for The Method, saying, “You’ve done the emotional direction by giving the actors physical actions. That’s the way I always try to work. I was brought up as an actor in the Stanislavsky Method. That has to do with objectives, with conscious emotions and **objects, objects, objects.**”⁷¹ The goal of Kazan’s prevalent use of objects and visual filmic techniques is perhaps best characterized by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, who ascribe to objects the ability to “express dynamic processes within people, among people, and between people and the total environment.”⁷²

Kazan’s use of objects and mise-en-scène was also integral to a dialogue with the public as to the nature of life in America in the post-war period. A 1950 book by Leo A. Handel, *Hollywood Looks at its Audience: A Report of Film Audience Research*, illustrates the era’s focus on audience reception. “Chapter 12: The Effect of the Movies,” for instance, is divided into four sections: Social Effects of Movies, Learning Through Motion Pictures, Reactions to Motion Pictures, and Effect Studies By the War Department. The study was intended not just for studios

⁷⁰ Nina Bandelj, “How Method Actors Create Character Roles,” *Sociological Forum* 18 (September 2003), 393, accessed January 28, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3648889>. The author has summarized method-acting conventions in a list of eight tenets derived from Robert Lewis’s *Method of Madness* (New York: French, 1958), a text with an original introduction by Harold Clurman, one of The Group Theater’s founders and a mentor to Kazan.

⁷¹ Jeff Young, *Kazan: The Master Director Discuss His Films* (New York: New Market Press, 1999), 143. Emphasis mine.

⁷² Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 43.

but for educational purposes, to examine the ways films and other “recently developed visual aids” could be used in education or training.⁷³

The report also endeavored to inform film producers of the ways movies of various genres affected different groups of people. Handel wrote, “Movies, or a type of movie, or a single film might be studied to discover the effect on some broad social matter such as crime and delinquency, or the general level of morality of the community, or other long-range changes in people’s attitudes.”⁷⁴

The effects of film on the public’s morality were already being heralded as one of the chief concerns of the Production Code Administration (commonly called the “Breen Office” after its leader Joe Breen), which would prove a constant headache for Kazan throughout his filmmaking career.⁷⁵ Leading the PCA, Breen was a Catholic layman who worked as the chief official in the office representing the moral interests of the church, or as a kind of go-between for the film studios and the Catholic Legion of Decency. Films had to abide by the production code or they were susceptible to a “C” rating (for condemned), a mark that branded a film unwatchable for American Catholics. The iteration of the code used in Kazan’s early days had been written by Martin Quigley, a Catholic publisher of motion picture trade journals who worked tirelessly to keep the American public from seeing what he believed to be depraved films and images.⁷⁶

Quigley fought vigilantly in his mission to safeguard viewers from amoral behavior. His reasoning is expressed in a transcript from his 1951 appearance on NBC’s *The Catholic Hour*, in which he noted that every two weeks the number of movie-goers was equivalent to the entire nation, and:

⁷³ Leo A. Handel, *Hollywood Looks at its Audience: A Report of Film Audience Research* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1950), 175.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁷⁵ Schickel, 248. The PCA was instituted by the studios as a self-policing measure meant to advise studios on how to get a picture approved by the Catholic League of Decency, a group of American Archbishops. As Fox’s Daryl Zanuck explained, “We pay those guys. They’re there to help us get pictures done, not prevent us.”

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

With the approach of autumn, the public in increasing numbers resumes its dependence upon the motion picture theatres of the nation as its chief source of entertainment. The present moment is therefore a timely one for an examination of those moral and social influences of motion picture entertainment which make it a force of deep and far-reaching significance in the modern world...[The movie industry is a] vital force—so potent in its influence upon society, especially youth in its formative years of character building—[it] must be so guided and so directed as to achieve its vast potentialities for good and, meanwhile, avoid the ever-present dangers of evil.⁷⁷

The Breen Office involved itself in moviemaking from the beginning of a film's production, weighing in on early scripts and withholding final approval until cuts or edits had been made in completed films. Kazan's first major fight with the Breen Office was over *A Streetcar Named Desire*, in which several cuts were made without his knowledge after he was done editing, a blow which Kazan felt acutely and retaliated against by contributing an article to the *New York Times* called "Pressure Problem: Director Discusses Cuts Compelled in *A Streetcar Named Desire*."⁷⁸ The column outlines the situation for the public, and stated that, "My picture had been cut to fit the specifications of a code which is not my code, is not the recognized code of the picture industry, and is not the code of the great majority of the audience." He continued to explain the efforts made to turn Stella into a "good" character. "Such a thought," Kazan said, "is directly opposed to Tennessee Williams' thought. All his characters are a mixture of the qualities we label "good" and "bad," and that is their humanity."⁷⁹

The article garnered a variety of opinions. For his part, Kazan received a great number of letters acknowledging and thanking him for his words in the article,⁸⁰ and the *New York Times* printed four response letters the following week. One letter of dissent against Kazan states that "Mr. Kazan shows a great concern for the public; at least, he seems to be concerned. The Legion

⁷⁷ "Christianity in Motion Pictures Today," *The Catholic Hour*, NBC Network, 2 September 1951, Box 23, B23-F5, WUCA.

⁷⁸ Schickel, 249. The lost four minutes of the film were found in a warehouse in 1993, at which point they were restored to the original film.

⁷⁹ Elia Kazan, "Pressure Problem: Director Discusses Cuts Compelled in 'A Streetcar Named Desire,'" *New York Times*, October 21, 1951, accessed December 9, 2010, <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F60A1EF9355D177A93C3AB178BD95F458585F9&scp=1&sq=kazan%2C+pressure+problem%2C+streetcar&st=p&emc=eta1>.

⁸⁰ Many of these letters and notes can be seen in the USC Archives collection.

of Decency also has great concern for the public.” The writer continues to state that while Kazan is afforded the right to “create and interpret for that public,” so too does the Legion of Decency have the right to criticize his work. The writer asks, “Does Kazan as an artist ask immunity from criticism?”⁸¹ Another letter expresses frustration not with Kazan or the League of Decency, but with Warner Brothers. “Their refusal to release the film without the approval of a minority screening board, shows a basic lack of faith in the maturity of the American majority which has seemingly characterized Hollywood’s attitude toward the moviegoer since the industry’s inception.” He goes on to note the “inescapable conclusion” that a movie “which offends nobody is not worth seeing, for it has nothing to say.”⁸² Another letter continues this point, noting succinctly that, “The Catholic movie fan only looks at the condemned list to see what new picture he has missed, for unwittingly, the Legion’s ‘C’ rating is the ‘must’ film.”⁸³

Such battles would follow Kazan throughout his moviemaking career, and these battles often had just as much to do with the placement of objects in his films as they did with more overt script dialogue or general content. In *East of Eden*, for instance, Kazan was encouraged to remove or edit brothel scenes, a note which Kazan refused on the grounds that he had already “aimed to make it dismal, unattractive and not at all glamorous...The house is dingy, the girls unattractive and the whole set-up on that is repellent.”⁸⁴ Four years later the Breen Office was sent a script of *Splendor In the Grass*, after which Kazan received a preemptive letter of warning from official Geoffrey M. Shurlock noting some objections. “On Page 5,” Shurlock said, “Any suggestion that Deanie is having an orgasm would be unacceptable. The same is to be said with

⁸¹ A.J. Palmerio, “Letter to the Screen Editor,” *New York Times*, October 28, 1951, accessed December 9, 2010, <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F60A13FF345D177A93CAAB178BD95F458585F9&scp=2&sq=A.J.+Palmerio&st=p>.

⁸² Robert A. Lundegaard, “Letter to the Screen Editor” in *New York Times*, October 28, 1951, accessed December 9, 2010, <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F60A13FF345D177A93CAAB178BD95F458585F9&scp=2&sq=Robert.+Lundegaard&st=p>.

⁸³ Ed Dudowicz, “Letter to the Screen Editor” in *New York Times*, October 28, 1951, accessed December 9, 2010, <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F60A13FF345D177A93CAAB178BD95F458585F9&scp=2&sq=Ed+Dudowicz&st=p>.

⁸⁴ Letter from Elia Kazan to Steve Trilling, 3 January 1954, Box 33, b33-f5, WUCA.

reference to Bud on Page 11. It has already been pointed out that using an oil well as a symbol in this context would be unacceptable.”⁸⁵

Kazan’s ongoing dialogue with the Breen Offices as well as his article in the *New York Times* highlight the importance and credit he affords the public as interpreters of his work. He guessed, perhaps correctly, that his popularity as a director of stage and screen was due in large part to the truthfulness of his work and the ability of the public to see themselves in the scenarios he created, even if it these were not the one-dimensional versions of a “good life” presented by Quigley and others in the Catholic Legion of Decency. The truthfulness of his work resided not simply in his film narratives but in his mise-en-scène, all of which consciously communicated the moral complexity of the post-war period and Kazan’s own ambivalence toward pursuit of *The Good Life*.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Letter from Geoffrey M. Shurlock to Elia Kazan, page 2, 15 September 1958, Jack Warner Collection.

⁸⁶ The capitalization of “The Good Life” is used to reference to financial gains or public success, whereas “a good life” connotes moral virtue and probity.

Chapter One: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

“Clothes, clothes, clothes... She is always taking care of her clothes, like a craftsman with his tools, always sharpening. Ironing, washing, dressing.”

“Blanche”—*from Elia Kazan’s preparatory notes*⁸⁷

Released in 1951, the film *A Streetcar Named Desire*, based on the play by Tennessee Williams, tells the story of the aging Blanche DuBois (Vivien Leigh) who travels to New Orleans to visit her sister, Stella (Kim Hunter), and brother-in-law, Stanley (Marlon Brandon), after losing the family’s plantation to creditors. Blanche is shocked by her sister’s life: the house is small and poorly furnished, and to Blanche, Stella’s husband Stanley is a primitive brute. It becomes apparent, however, that Blanche is more acutely affected by her own aging and faded gentility, the effects of which are exacerbated by the physical loss of the DuBois ancestral home Belle Reve. She arrives in town looking for comfort and connection, but Stanley’s incessant antagonism and eventual rape lead to her complete mental breakdown and subsequent institutionalization.

The setting of the film is more or less contemporary. The story is one of people in flux, their experiences mirroring the changes and ambiguities emerging in America in the years following World War II. Kazan remembered that he was attracted to Tennessee Williams’ story because of the pervading ambivalence in the characters’ interactions and the repeated cycle of embracing and then striking out against each other. “I saw this attraction/repulsion, fear/love thing all around me,”⁸⁸ and Williams, he says, had “a positive genius for dealing with subject matter that is on everyone’s mind and part of everyone’s experience...All his characters are felt for... All are wrong and right, magnificent and foolish, violent and weak. In other words Williams deals with real people.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Note by Elia Kazan, Box 24, WUCA.

⁸⁸ *Ciment*, 72.

⁸⁹ “A Quiz for Kazan,” *Theater Arts* (November, 1956) in *Elia Kazan: Interviews*, ed. William Baer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000) 15.

Streetcar was Kazan's seventh major film, and his reputation on stage and screen was already firmly established. He had won an Oscar for Best Director in 1947 for *A Gentleman's Agreement*, and his plays were considered among the best directed of the day.⁹⁰ Kazan had directed the stage version of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1949, with a cast that included Marlon Brando, Kim Hunter, Karl Madden (playing Mitch, Blanche's love interest), and Jessica Tandy as Blanche. He initially turned down the offer to direct the film adaptation, but was finally persuaded by Tennessee Williams to work on the Warner Brothers project.

Kazan employed nearly all of the same actors for the film as he had for the stage production. At this point Brando and the rest of the stage cast were relatively unknown, which is why Leigh, the well-known and highly regarded star of *Gone with the Wind*, replaced Tandy.⁹¹ In fact, after spending months on a script adaptation, Kazan scrapped the work and made the decision to reference William's script and the theatre production almost exactly. He noted that, "The strength of *Streetcar* is its compression. And I suddenly made a very radical decision—right or wrong, it was radical—I suddenly decided, I'm going to just shoot the play...I photographed my production of his masterpiece...almost precisely as he had written it for the stage"⁹²

This congruency between theatre and film extends to the setting, which focuses almost entirely on the Kowalski apartment. This forces the characters to navigate the story arc in extremely close proximity, and accelerates the sense of claustrophobia essential to the conflict of Stanley and Blanche; it also allows close observation of the different ways Americans viewed and used their homes in the era. The three inhabitants are trapped together in just two rooms as they struggle to pilot themselves through the emerging new world and their changing roles in it.

⁹⁰ William Baer, ed., *Elia Kazan: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), xiii.

⁹¹ Kazan, *A Life*, 385.

⁹² *Ciment*, 67.

For this reason, the domestic interior of *A Streetcar Named Desire* takes on a life of its own. Viewers witness the dichotomy of relationships between the two sisters and the space, revealing starkly opposite ideas of domesticity and the home. Blanche and Stella were raised as heiresses to a large southern plantation, an upbringing that seems to have included a certain level of money, sophistication, and class. Stella, the younger of the two, fled Belle Reve—and the traditional female role held for her in the patriarchal and more patrician household—and began a very separate life with Stanley in New Orleans. Blanche remained at the family homestead as its mistress until creditors seized it, a loss that instigated the sisters' reunion in the ramshackle two-room dwelling that contains most of the film.

The Stanley Kowalski residence is a two-family structure set in a working class area of New Orleans. Viewers follow Blanche's introduction to the space as she travels from the train station, recalling, "They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at—Elysian Fields." The address's symbolism is not lost on Blanche, who registers a look of regretful recognition of residing on Elysian Fields, the resting place for the righteous dead in Greek mythology.⁹³ The property she finds there is separated from the street by a solid wall, beyond which a stony courtyard leads to the house. The boundary between these interior and exterior spaces is virtually non-existent, and this open plan allows the filmic action to move amorphously between indoors and out. Upon her arrival, Blanche finds the windows and doors open, and we see that even the wrought iron staircase curls up the side of the building, further confusing her traditional notions of public and private space, which are particularly meaningful to Blanche given her upbringing [fig.2].

Blanche approaches the house, stopping short, wondering, "Can this—can this be her home?"⁹⁴ She is referring of course to the decrepit quality of the physical domicile, but for Blanche, the structure itself is critical to her notion of home. Blanche's recent homelessness has

⁹³ "Elysian fields" in *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th Edition* (July 1, 2010), accessed January 10, 2011, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

⁹⁴ Tennessee Williams, "A Streetcar Named Desire," in *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams* (New York: New Directions, 1971), 246.

exacerbated an intense need for spatial-attachment, a pursuit described by Meeka Walsh in her article, *Architectures of Domesticity*, in which she describes the feminine craving for a home, as expressed by the need for ownership of and belonging to a space.⁹⁵ “Home” is described as a desired concept. It implies the creation and inhabitation of a physical domicile, but it also connotes the desire for belonging and origin, and as such, it is more ephemeral than static, and, as with all things desired, it is anticipatory.

In this sense, “home” can be simplified into the expression of these two desires: ownership (concrete), and belonging (abstract). Once Belle Reve was lost, Blanche no longer had the requisite property ownership to complete the former requirement, but perhaps her more serious problem lay in the latter, or a lack of belonging to anything, whether a man, family, or history. Blanche’s young husband had killed himself, her ancestors are all dead, and her hometown of Laurel, Mississippi finally spurned her after several scandalous indiscretions. When she lost physical ownership of the house, she lost the family history and the domestic role it held for her. It is only then, owning little and belonging nowhere, that Blanche went to Stella or to Stella’s “home,” searching for a surrogate structure in which to contain her and make a home.

Blanche traveled to New Orleans under the assumption that, because she and Stella share an origin in Belle Reve, their paths will have progressed in tandem, allowing her to seamlessly enter Stella’s world in both the physical and emotional sense. However, while Blanche embraces the ownership of things as a means of self-identification, Stella’s world is unencumbered by objects. When we first meet her, Stella’s physical house is in shambles, which she makes little effort to improve. Likewise, Stanley does not attempt to domesticate Stella or mold her into a woman with traditional domestic proclivities. The house is his, and it is marked by signs of maleness. Stella seems content to reside here almost as a boarder. Through the course of the film, however, it becomes clear that Stella has found an instinctive, libidinal home

⁹⁵ Meeka Walsh, “Architectures of Domesticity,” *Border Crossings* 105 (2008), accessed March 12, 2009, HWWilsonRecords.html.

with Stanley, and her desire, at least for the present, is met by another's physical person, not a structure or house.

Stella's lack of domesticity allows for a male-dominated physical space as defined by Stanley's objects, memorabilia, pictures, and clothes. In this way, both Stanley and Blanche have something in common: each relies on objects to project or build a personal identity, and each recognizes objects as a text to read other people. Blanche enters Stanley's house before she actually encounters him. She actively peruses his space, thus forming opinions about him before they meet. This is Stanley's domain of bowling trophies and plain light bulbs with no shades to protect them. There is little boundary between the indoor world of the home (and women) and the outdoor sphere of work and society (for males). Throughout the film, people easily penetrate into the supposedly private sector of the Kowalski home: the newspaper boy, the red-hots vendor, and even the woman selling flowers for the dead gain access.

As the film progresses, however, so does the extent of Blanche's occupation of the house. She begins closing off spaces, essentially building walls around herself to form an individualized area.⁹⁶ This is done by constantly closing windows and shutters, hanging new curtains, and even by dimming lights in an attempt to obscure the outsider's view. Blanche's actions are highlighted when she asks Mitch, her potential suitor, to help her hang a paper lantern over an exposed bulb, placing Blanche in a shadowy environment that hides her image [fig. 3].⁹⁷ She repeats this time and time again, shrouding the table in a long floral cloth, adding shades to the chandelier lights, and even covering her own trunk with a blanket, essentially controlling visual access to her one possession.

In this way, Blanche slowly redecorates through the course of the film, always covering the objects of maleness, not removing them. The fireplace mantle shows the shift most clearly,

⁹⁶ French writer Raphaëlle Costa de Beauregard notes this shift in the home, calling it a change between an open cul-de-sac and a closed off dead end. Beauregard's thoughts are quoted by Christine Geraghty, in *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008) 178.

⁹⁷ At the end of the film, Stanley rips the paper lantern from the bulb directly before he rapes her.

initially containing Stanley's bowling trophies, military photograph, and bowling team picture. In fact, when Blanche arrives, Stanley's shirts are hanging from the mantle piece. By using the public space as personal storage, Stanley decrees his ownership over the domestic interior and literally marks the territory as his own [fig. 4]. The shirts soon disappear to his drawers, but the decorative objects of Stanley's are never removed. They are simply shrouded by Blanche's archetypically female lace and floral arrangements, forecasting her motivation: the quest for home and domestication by a man [fig. 5].

During her first major encounter with Stanley, Blanche places her perfume atomizer on the mantle piece. When he confronts her, she reaches for the bottle, this symbol of femininity, and sprays perfume all around, using the scent metaphorically to cover herself and place a barrier between her body and Stanley's. Later, when Stella is in the hospital giving birth, Stanley returns home and asks Blanche if she knows where the bottle opener is. Without waiting for reply, he deftly reaches into the foliage on the mantle piece and plucks out the opener, the mechanical extension of his maleness. Opening his beer bottle, he sprays the contents all over the apartment in a phallic celebration, saturating the objects Blanche has built into the simulacra of home. Blanche has fulfilled her version of proper feminine domesticity, something she sees as inextricably linked to the home, but Stanley maintains control of the structure by anticipating the location of his bottle opener in the midst of her attempt to domesticate him.

Just as Blanche fights to forge an identity and to wield power over Stanley, he has no qualms about using, moving, and changing her things to undermine her. This begins with her large, shabby trunk—filled, we learn, with all her earthly possessions. The trunk has become her house of sorts, sheltering her collected objects, at once significant and inconsequential. As he interrogates her about the loss of Belle Reve, Stanley asks, "Where's the papers? In the trunk?" To which Blanche retorts, "Everything I own is in that trunk."⁹⁸ Blanche has kept

⁹⁸ Williams, 282.

“thousands of papers, stretching back over hundreds of years”,⁹⁹ counting them among her few possessions worth retaining, hording them in the depths of her trunk. She keeps them, not as legal documents, but as emotional receipts—proof of her former existence as part of a home.

As Blanche extracts the Belle Reve documents for Stanley’s perusal, he inquires about additional papers stacked below. She explains that they “are love-letters, yellowing with antiquity.” A tug-of-war for the love letters ensues, ending with Blanche’s panic, saying, “Now that you’ve touched them I’ll burn them...Everyone has something he won’t let others touch because of their—intimate nature [figs. 6.1 and 6.2].”¹⁰⁰

Blanche has kept love letters from her long-dead husband, storing them alongside the Belle Reve legal documents. Though written under wildly different circumstances, they fulfill similar purposes and needs for Blanche. One acts as proof of a physical house, the others corroborate her former domestication and possession by a man. Together, they are a figurative version of home satisfying Blanche as she searches for the more elusive literal space. They represent the *domus* and domesticity, the domestication she needs for *home*, but lost along with Belle Reve and her suicidal husband, all stored inside her aged, beaten trunk, the one space to which Blanche may still lay claim.

In her article on domesticity, Meeka Walsh conjures a just image of Blanche, saying, “If you’re a woman, all you really want is a room of your own, on your own terms.”¹⁰¹ The trunk, while weathered, is well used, well traveled and a space that belongs solely to her; Blanche is the only one to own or define what goes into or out of the trunk. She defines the space. However, she did not acquire it of her own volition; most importantly it is not something she *desires*. The object itself stands instead for the loss of what she considered her home, and each object inside does not nurture or reveal her true core, but acts as a mask to obscure and hide her real desires.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 284.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 282.

¹⁰¹ Walsh, 16. Walsh perhaps expounds on the thesis of Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, which stipulates a woman must first have her own room and her own money in order to create (Harcourt Brace & Company, 1929) 2.

When the trunk is opened, we find it segmented, hiding and exposing parts at once, mirroring the efforts of Blanche's faux self-presentation.

Blanche is adept at using objects as a mask or decoration, projecting a self that is not true, and further removing her from any feeling of home. She uses external adornment as an advertisement for herself, a metaphor for her power and self-expression.¹⁰² This idea is discussed in Vanessa Chase's essay "Edith Wharton, The Decoration of Houses, and Gender in Turn-of-the-Century America." Writing over fifty years before Blanche's existence, according to Chase, Wharton situated the women in her novels in the home, manipulating the interior space as their own seat of power.¹⁰³

These feminized spaces, however, are seen as both containing and restricting women. Though the interiors were the product of their individual styles, and women could wield certain power in taste-making, the money used and the space itself still belonged to the social and economic realm of men. The Gilded Age of Wharton's heyday "asserted a more powerful social arbiter than women: money. And money was a realm reserved for men." Chase describes woman as a signifier of the man's wealth, and therefore any interior space she created was a mere indication of his financial success. "Thus, even though the house was seen as expressive of a woman, she only inhabited it as an inscribed figure: the real body displayed through the house, and woman, was the man's."¹⁰⁴

Blanche is the product of such expectations, but as time moves forward, her home has vanished along with the old-money class to which she belonged. She has become obsolete. Blanche longs for the security and power that came with her former social position, but the post-war era saw power shift into the hands of new consumers as wealth was redistributed downward. Andrew Hurley discusses the causes and ramifications of this financial upheaval in

¹⁰² Vanessa Chase, "Edith Wharton, *The Decoration of Houses*, and Gender in Turn-of-the-Century-America," in *Architecture and Feminism*, ed. Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, and Carole Henderson (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 132.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 134-5.

his book *Diners, Bowling Alleys and Trailer parks: Chasing the American Dream in the Post-war Consumer Culture*, in which he identifies social mobility as one of the key changes in post-war America. Working-class Americans saw their wages increase 65%, and by the late 1940s and early 1950s, consumer expenditures had doubled from pre-war levels.¹⁰⁵

The blue-collar worker's new wealth and ability to consume changed class dynamics in America, and closed the gap in power between themselves and the established upper class. This redistribution of wealth and influence was not without contention, as Hurley notes that, "If mass consumer culture was a source of liberation and a conduit for upward social mobility for some groups, for others, it constituted a threat to cherished social hierarchies and networks."¹⁰⁶ This dynamic perfectly expresses the tension between Stanley and Blanche. As Stanley grows richer in his job at the plant, his access to *The Good Life* grows. He has a portable radio and enough leisure time and disposable income to bowl several days a week.

Blanche, however, has experienced the opposite, a marked drop in power to the point of destitution. She is not only ostracized from this post-war consumer culture, but ousted from the ranks of the upper-class elite. Remembering Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, Meeka Walsh describes the female protagonist, Lily Bart, as "a beautiful but orphaned young woman without property of her own—no roots, no centre or ground on which to draw fortitude or support—finds herself without remedy and homeless, takes her life."¹⁰⁷ Blanche's predicament is remarkably similar. A product of female taste-making and the socially elite southern gentry, Blanche DuBois, like Lily Bart, craves a male-owned house and a man to domesticate her. Only then will she feel at home, with a space to decorate and project her mastery of style and taste, and display her membership in this upper class.

To this end, Blanche is eternally preoccupied with the appearance of things and is automatically concerned with the way others physically perceive her. After exchanging an initial

¹⁰⁵ Andrew Hurley, *Diners, Bowling Alleys, and Trailer Parks: Chasing the American Dream in the Post-War Consumer Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 5-7.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Walsh.

frantic greeting with Stella, for example, Blanche tells her, “You haven’t said a word about my appearance!”¹⁰⁸ She knows her physical beauty is necessary to attract a man (and a home), but she also wants her sister’s focus to rest on her exterior. She studiously works to refract any effort at emotional penetration, which is too painful for her. She frequently turns thoughts and gazes to her exterior, which is easier to construct and confront than her more disturbing mental and emotional desires.

Blanche studiously manages the relationship between her outer veneer and inner turmoil by consciously adjusting the frames through which others see her, and even through which she sees herself. The bedroom mirror is initially large and oval, providing the user a clear reflection of the body and the surrounding interior. Blanche changes this view by adding a ruffled liner to the inner perimeter, thus cutting the mirror’s size and reflective exposure in half. The visual scope has been constricted to the sitter alone amidst the generic ruffle that replaces the interior environment.

Blanche’s self-invention is magnified by her attire, best described in Elia Kazan’s preparatory notes where he writes that, “Clothes are a costume.”¹⁰⁹ When Stanley, for instance, initially opens Blanche’s trunk, he flings its contents about, scrutinizing Blanche’s possessions for evidence of her real self, believing he has found it in her tiara and “solid gold dress” [fig. 7].¹¹⁰ The objects, however, are merely obfuscations, used by Blanche to adorn her body and morph into someone who belongs to a fixed site or home. Her clothes are less articles for daily use than elaborate costumes in a play. In their reunion, one of the first things Blanche says to Stella is, “I brought some nice clothes to meet all your lovely friends in”¹¹¹—giving them notice and attention before her own self. Blanche frequently recalls her wardrobe categorically, describing her clothes with a scientific specificity, requesting that Stella retrieve:

¹⁰⁸ Williams, 254.

¹⁰⁹ Note by Elia Kazan, Box 24, WUCA.

¹¹⁰ Williams, 274.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 256.

That cool yellow silk—the bouclé. See if it's crushed. If it's not too crushed I'll wear it and on the lapel that silver and turquoise pin in the shape of a seahorse. You will find them in the heart-shaped box I keep my accessories in. And Stella...try and locate a bunch of artificial violets in that box too, to pin with the seahorse on the lapel of the jacket.¹¹²

Just as Blanche works to appear young and desirable, her accessories are ageless and permanent. She has captured the vitality of living things (seahorses and violets) and preserved them in her mawkishly romantic heart-shaped accessory box.

Stanley quickly identifies Blanche's charade as symptomatic of her fall from grace and the upper class. This fear was not limited to fictional characters, but was a widespread American concern after the war, which had stretched and distorted the traditional family unit. Fathers and sons left the family to fight, while women left the house and family to join the workforce. In *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, author Elaine Tyler Mae notes that post-war movies were quick to pick up on the contemporary fears of "woman turned bad" during the war, and highlights the film *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) as an example. When one soldier returns home from war, she says, he rejects a girl that "went bad" during the war in favor of "pure" woman.¹¹³

Blue Dahlia (1946) is another such example.¹¹⁴ In this film, a woman, Helen, is left to her own devices when her husband heads off to war. Her excessive drinking leads to the death of her son, and her affair with the Blue Dahlia nightclub owner contributes to her own mysterious death when her husband returns. Elaine Tyler May contends that in the early years after World War II, Americans were focused on the implicit safety and security of the home and domesticity, and the behavior of women was carefully scrutinized for evidence of amoral behaviors. "It was, she said, "the values of the white middle class that shaped the dominant political and economic

¹¹² Ibid., 405.

¹¹³ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 65-6.

¹¹⁴ Hurley, 58-9.

institutions that affected all Americans. Those who did not conform were likely to be marginalized, stigmatized, and disadvantaged as a result.”¹¹⁵

Anthropologist Mary Douglas corroborates this idea in her book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, noting that in most cultures, behavior that is seen as anomalous, ambiguous, or peripheral is often considered taboo, and subsequently looked down upon and the offending individual isolated. Blanche’s past behavior is seen as immoral, and it has placed her outside the normative post-war American society. Blanche, however, tries to compensate for her ostracized status by redecorating and cleansing the house of dirt. “In chasing dirt,” Douglas says, “[in] papering, decorating, tidying we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea,”¹¹⁶ and in Blanche’s case, gain re-acceptance into normative society.

Once Blanche has fallen from the upper class, however, she is unable to regain her foothold. “Class passing,” explains Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, a professor of film studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, “is impossible for the fallen woman.”¹¹⁷ Foster cites as an example the Bette Davis character in *A Marked Woman* (1937) who cannot salvage her status after her character has been judged as immoral. *A Streetcar Named Desire* positions Blanche as such a fallen woman, who is unable to restore her reputation after her wartime indiscretions finally catch up to her, and she is left homeless.

These films played on very real fears held by post-war Americans. During World War II, labor shortages occasioned a sharp increase in females in the work force. Brink Lindsey details the changing role of women in his 2002 book, *The Age of Abundance: How Prosperity Transformed America’s Politics and Culture*. He notes that from 1940 to 1944, the number of

¹¹⁵ May, 13.

¹¹⁶ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 2-5.

¹¹⁷ Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Class-Passing: Social Mobility in Film and Popular Culture* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 33. *A Marked Woman* features Bette Davis as a sort of call girl who must choose between loyalty to her corrupt mob bosses and informing to the District Attorney. The case’s detective, Humphrey Bogart, tries to help, even save Davis’s character, but she has fallen too low and refuses his help.

women in the work place rose to 19.4 million from just 14.2. After the war ended, only half of those 5.2 million new workers returned to their homes, and by 1953, the number of women in the professional workforce swelled to exceed its 1944 wartime peak.¹¹⁸

Perhaps most notable for this thesis is Lindsey's evidence that post-war Americans were very much aware of the shifting structure of contemporary gender roles. He lists several mid-century publications that wrote about the changing trends in daily female life and the ramifications for its participants. A 1956 issue of *LIFE*, for instance, chronicled what they called the "'Suburban syndrome' in which 'the wife, having worked before marriage or at least having been educated and socially conditioned toward the idea that work...carries prestige, falls prey to depression on account of being 'just a housewife.'" That same year *McCall's* ran an article aptly named "The Mother Who Ran Away." The editors said they received an "'avalanche of supportive letters...[and] we suddenly realized that all those women at home with their three and a half children were miserably unhappy.'"¹¹⁹

Blanche, while not a suburban mother, was an early product of shifting female expectations. She had neither home nor family, and although she was trained as an English teacher, she could not work because of past immoral transgressions. Her confusion over her role was only exacerbated by what the *New York Times* movie reviewer at the time, Bosley Crowther, called, "a comprehension of a whole society's slow decay and the pathos of vain escapism in a crude and dynamic world." He calls Blanche Dubois "lonely and decaying" as she fights to hold on to her "faded gentility against the heartless badgering of her roughneck brother-in law."¹²⁰

In this way, Stanley and Blanche clash over class—he is moving up, she is on her way down, and each begrudges the other for their past. Blanche resents Stanley for his lack of

¹¹⁸ Brink Lindsey, *The Age of Abundance: How Prosperity Transformed America's Politics and Culture* (New York: Collins, 2002), 110.

¹¹⁹ Lindsey, 111.

¹²⁰ Bosley Crowther, "A Streetcar Named Desire," *New York Times* (September 20, 1951), accessed December 17, 2010, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=EE05E7DF1730EF70BC4851DFBF66838A649EDE>.

breeding and for his dirty appearance, while Stanley embarks on a relentless quest to expose what lies beneath her ornamental surface. Their mutual animosity manifests itself in a series of assumptions and conjectures regarding one another's objects. In Stanley's world, a saxophone hangs from the bedpost, exotic souvenir figurines dot a shelf, and the viewer sees images of a young Stanley smiling in his military regalia. Each sign credits Stanley with some measure of worldliness; he appears to be aware of music, and the army most likely afforded him travel opportunities.

When Blanche enters the space, however, these objects are rendered meaningless. She cannot ascertain anything about Stanley beyond a superficial layer of dirt. He works laboriously with his hands and comes home wearing grease-stained clothes [fig. 8].¹²¹ In lieu of noting his hard work, however, Blanche commiserates that:

He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something—sub-human—something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something—ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I've seen in—anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is—Stanley Kowalski—survivor of the Stone Age!¹²²

This view of Stanley informs Blanche's opinion that he is beneath her, and, as a woman of breeding she must condescend to domesticate him. This takes many forms, most visibly in her redecoration of his house. The figurines of exotic origin once marked Stanley's knowledge and affinity for other cultures. Blanche removes them after her arrival, adding instead a framed picture of the Belle Reve plantation house, or her own history. She attempts to domesticate him by replacing his working class identity with her own, using an image of the DuBois house for self-definition and decoration. Relatively subtle changes like these work in Blanche's favor to establish the class disparity between them. By affirming her own position in the upper class, Blanche relegates Stanley to poorer, disenfranchised levels. In *The Age of Abundance*, Lindsey argues that this relationship is not uncommon. For the working class, he says, conditions had at least materially improved as had their financial ability to consume; however, they could not be

¹²¹ Williams, 322.

¹²² Ibid., 323.

considered part of the middle class because of their foundation.¹²³ It is such continued marginalization that inspires such vehement loathing in Stanley. He must destroy Blanche because he cannot fulfill the American Dream of social climbing and obtain the Good Life while she attempts to emasculate and demean him.

Stanley's motives are clear, but he takes a more analytical approach to dethrone Blanche. He sees her constant preening and efforts at presentation as an act, and he works throughout the film to expose her shabby center. Though he may be dirty, Stanley suspects Blanche of being truly dingy—always working to conceal her lost gentility, old age and lost love. This dinginess is tied to a stunted transition to adulthood, as seen through an old monthly calendar hanging from the bedroom wall. We know the duration of Blanche's stay to have been five months, but the page on the calendar never changes, always picturing a trapeze artist flying through the air in the hopes of catching her next rope. Like the trapeze artist, Blanche is suspended. She remains at age seventeen, a time before her homosexual husband killed himself, and she was wealthy, young, in love, and had a home.

Blanche is mentally unable to move past the tragic end of her youth, and she is physically inhibited as well. Her clothes are outdated and each piece is a relic of the past. Additionally, Blanche tells Stella that she has not "put on one ounce in ten years. I weigh what I weighed the summer you left Belle Reve. The summer Dad died and you left us..."¹²⁴ Blanche cannot lead a productive life in the present, so she assembles a false façade around her physical self, hoping to deflect any gazes into her interior and stave off the changes of age. All the while however, her presentation becomes less effective; it is, in fact, faded with age.

This type of self-preservation through faux representation could not go on forever, and Stanley's destruction of her façade facilitates her descent into madness. The degeneration began with his discovery of her true self. He made a sport of deciphering Blanche and sleuthing into her past. In fact, from their very first meeting, he did not trust the information she physically

¹²³ Lindsey, 91.

¹²⁴ Williams, 255.

and verbally presented, so he tracked down every lie she told. Stanley's emotional violation emerged when he presented her with a bus ticket home, but was compounded by another violation in which Mitch, informed of her past indiscretions and wartime follies, confronted her. He says, "I don't think I want to marry you any more...You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother."¹²⁵

This blow was devastating for Blanche, both in terms of the loss of a potential spouse and the condemnation of being dirty—the very thing for which she reproached Stanley. Once Mitch leaves, Blanche becomes desperate to stop anyone else from recognizing her dinginess. She wildly runs around the house, shutting off lights and slamming shut doors and shutters. She literally barricades her physical self in order to shroud her emotionally besmirched center. Williams' script sets the scene, describing Blanche as she retreats to her trunk, dragging it:

into the center of the bedroom. It hangs open with flowery dresses thrown across it. As the drinking and packing went on, a mood of hysterical exhilaration came into her and she has decked herself out in a somewhat soiled and crumpled white satin evening gown and a pair of scuffed silver slippers with brilliants set in the heels. Now she is in placing the rhinestone tiara on her head before the mirror of the dressing table and murmuring excitedly as if to a group of spectral admirers.¹²⁶

Blanche is literally playing dress up [fig. 9]. She has so completely lost sight of her self, body, and home that she adorns herself in a ridiculous costume of finery, using the dress and tiara to cover and obscure her own image, adding layers in an attempt to hide her true self. In the midst of this behavior, Stanley arrives home, and upon finding Blanche in this state, receives confirmation of his assertion that Blanche's exterior decoration was performative and meant to discourage viewers from looking too closely. At this point, Stanley rapes her. He has completely exposed her emotional and physical vulnerability, rendering her unable to reconcile reality with her distorted view.

Blanche's subsequent insanity is apparent, but even then she focuses on objects to conceal herself. As she prepares to go on vacation (Stella is really sending her to a sanitarium),

¹²⁵ Ibid., 390.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 391.

Blanche enlists Stella and the neighbor-woman Eunice to help her get dressed, ordering her clothes with extreme precision and even debating the women over the exact color of her “della robbia blue jacket. The blue of the robe in the old Madonna pictures.”¹²⁷ She then eats grapes provided by Eunice, repeatedly inquiring if they had been washed. Her delusions of cleanliness and purity emerge yet again, using the Madonna reference and the disparity between clean and dirty to publically establish her self-created high echelon of class. In the end, Blanche’s “faded gentility” could hold out no longer against Stanley and the pressures that surrounded her, and her quest to live the good life came to an ultimately unsuccessful conclusion.

Blanche’s struggle, though “heartbreaking” and pathetic by the end, resonated with viewers. In the *New York Times*, Bosley Crowther commented that, “Inner torments are seldom projected with such sensitivity and clarity on the screen.” He continued by praising William’s script for portraying an “essential human conflict,” and the actors, he said, “fill out the human pattern within a sleazy environment that is so fitly and graphically created that you can almost sense its sweatiness and smells.”¹²⁸ Crowther’s description of *Streetcar* indicates its sensory power over viewers and indicates the success of Kazan’s well developed visual cues. He was able to demonstrate the zeitgeist of post-war America by filmically representing the moral ambiguities between a good life and *The Good Life* through the context of Stanley’s “dirt” (attributable to hard work) as versus the aged, decayed “dirt” of Blanche’s immoral past.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 409. Blanche debates Stella and Eunice about the jacket color in a bizarre display of her misplaced priorities. The two women call it first lavender then lilac, but Blanche rejects these natural colors for the godly sounding “della robbia blue.”

¹²⁸ Crowther, “A Streetcar Named Desire.” All involved were praised at great length, particularly Vivien Leigh who in a “heartbreaking role” was “blessed with a beautifully molded and fluently expressive face, a pair of eyes that can flood with emotion,” and Marlon Brando who, on film, seems that much more highly charged, his despairs seem that much more pathetic, and his comic moments that much more slyly enjoyed.”

Chapter Two: *On the Waterfront*

“Every time someone ever smiles he thinks it’s about him.”

“Terry”—from *Elia Kazan’s preparatory notes*¹²⁹

Three years after *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *On the Waterfront* was released featuring Marlon Brando as Terry Malloy, an ex-boxer working on the loading docks of Hoboken, New Jersey. Malloy’s union, Longshoreman’s Local 374, is run by Johnny Friendly (Lee Cobb), a local mobster who controls who works what jobs or if they work at all. Terry is one of Friendly’s pets, and he basks in Friendly’s favor in exchange for his loyalty against angry dockworkers and the police who are investigating the mob’s “shady” business dealings. Terry only questions his allegiance to Johnny Friendly after he is made complicit in the death of a close friend; however, he is content to play “D & D” (deaf and dumb) when approached by police. The neighborhood’s well-intentioned priest, Father Berry (Karl Malden), and the murdered boy’s sister, Edie (played by Eva Marie Saint), however, will not rest until Terry is convinced to testify against Friendly, which he finally does after he falls in love with Edie, and his own brother Charley is killed by the mob. The film ends after Johnny Friendly’s trial when, back at the union’s dockside clubhouse, Friendly and his boys beat Terry almost to death. It appears to the workers looking on that things will go back to business as usual under Friendly, until Terry pulls himself off the ground and leads the men to work, thus accepting leadership and rendering Friendly and his men powerless.

Shot in 1954, *On the Waterfront* is often described as Elia Kazan’s masterpiece; it earned Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, and Best Supporting Actress,¹³⁰ but it is perhaps most noted for its similitude to the recent events of Kazan’s own life. In January 1952, Elia Kazan was called to testify as a friendly witness before the House Committee on Un-

¹²⁹ Note by Elia Kazan, Box 31-F4, WUCA.

¹³⁰ Baer, xiii.

American Activities (hereafter referred to by its common acronym HUAC). Kazan acknowledged his affiliation with the Communist party in the mid-thirties, but refused to name names of others in his cell. At the end of the year he was served a second subpoena, which he agonized over until he was called again to appear before HUAC on April 10, 1953.¹³¹ Kazan had spent the intervening months discussing the issue with his wife Molly, old colleagues and friends, and even visited some former Communist comrades whom he would have to name, seeking their authorization or consent. In the end, Elia Kazan named sixteen people with whom he was affiliated while a Communist, none of whom, Kazan says, were new to the commission.¹³²

The *New York Times* ran a brief article chronicling his testimony, however this was accompanied by a summary of a personal statement Kazan had paid to publish in the *Times* that same day. "This piece," claims Richard Schickel, "was a huge mistake, very possibly the largest of Kazan's public life, and it was largely the creation of his wife."¹³³ The idea was to create a clear narrative of his testimony and his current disgust with Communism before others had time to offer their own critique of his actions.¹³⁴ In the end he probably made himself a much larger target for critics of his actions, critics that remain loudly indignant today, nearly sixty years later.

In an interview with Michael Ciment, Kazan says of his testimony, "I don't think there is anything in my life towards which I have more ambivalence." He continues, "Since then, I've had two feelings: one feeling is that what I did was repulsive, and the opposite feeling."¹³⁵ While Kazan's actions were and are highly controversial, they reflect the confusion between right and wrong, good and evil that marked the era and the film *On the Waterfront*. Kazan neatly sums up the ambivalence of the movie plot and his own situation in a pre-production letter to Marlon Brando, describing *On the Waterfront* as, "a psychological story of a man between two

¹³¹ Schickel, 269.

¹³² Young, 331.

¹³³ Schickel, 269..

¹³⁴ Ibid., 271.

¹³⁵ Ciment, 3.

loyalties.”¹³⁶ Indeed, Kazan later said of the character Terry Malloy, “[He] felt as I did. He felt ashamed and proud of himself at the same time...He felt it was a necessary act.”¹³⁷

Americans were certainly gripped by the HUAC hearings, but they were growing accustomed to such government inquiries. The movie industry itself had undergone the very public U.S. vs. Paramount anti-trust trials in 1948, “studios to divest themselves of their control over theatres,” and they essentially lost their powerful structure of vertical integration.¹³⁸ In 1950, the United States Senate formed the Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce, lead by Senator Estes Kefauver, a Tennessee Democrat. The goal was to investigate and protect against the growing threat of organized crime in the United States.

The American public followed the Kefauver committee proceedings closely. At least 17 million viewers (Senator Kefauver estimated the number closer to 30 million) watched the New York trials alone, and in New York City, 70% of television sets were tuned to the hearings that introduced Americans to icons of organized crime such as Lucky Luciano, and essentially “created strong associative links with the mass popularity of sensational crime stories in U.S. popular culture.”¹³⁹ Like television programs, news and leisure publications were inundated by the exciting perils of organized crime, demonstrating the hybridity of the issue as it applied to “crime, ethnicity, television, and immigration policy.”¹⁴⁰

As a whole, the American people were able to easily target gangsters because they were clearly in the wrong. The public felt no ambivalence toward them, only condemnation. The issue was so ripe, that Kazan worked with not one but two playwrights on separate waterfront crime scripts based on the series of *New York Sun* articles by Malcolm Johnson. He began working in 1949 with his friend Arthur Miller to create *The Hook*, a crime drama centered

¹³⁶ Note by Elia Kazan, Box B31-F4, WUCA.

¹³⁷ Ciment, 110.

¹³⁸ Neve, 105.

¹³⁹ Lee Bernstein, *The Greatest Menace: Organized Crime in Cold War America* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Amherst Press, 2002), 62.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

around the Italian shipping community in Red Hook, Brooklyn,¹⁴¹ and by 1951, the two were deep in production talks with Columbia who was interested in financing the project. By then, however, McCarthy and HUAC's Communist fears had eclipsed gangsters on the public witch-hunt circuit, and Miller pulled out after several anti-Communist changes were suggested to the script.¹⁴²

Kazan fought for the production, but ultimately acquiesced to the mounting pressures surrounding his impending appearance before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.¹⁴³ Although the threat of Communism continued to grip the nation until well after his testimony, generations of movie-going Americans, and the actors and crewmembers of Hollywood, maintained anger toward Kazan about his actions (as seen in the vitriolic protests surrounding his 1999 Lifetime Achievement Award at the Oscars).

On the Waterfront is Kazan's contemporary rebuttal. It was, he said, "My own story; every day I worked on that film, I was telling the world where I stood and my critics to go and fuck themselves."¹⁴⁴ The story unfolds in such a way that evil is clearly identified and set in direct opposition to what is good. Viewers could quickly and comfortably mark the mobsters as unfair tyrants and self-identify with the longshoremen who wanted nothing other than the opportunity to work and provide for their families. Viewers agreed when Father Barry asked, "What does Christ think about the easy-money boys with 150 dollar suits and diamond rings—on your union dues and your kick-back money?"¹⁴⁵ And they rooted for Terry to be a hero for the dockworkers (and all of America) by selflessly talking to the police. As Peter Biskind eloquently explains in his book *How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties*,

¹⁴¹ Neve, 26.

¹⁴² Ibid., 76.

¹⁴³ Schickel, 232.

¹⁴⁴ Kazan, 529.

¹⁴⁵ *On the Waterfront*, directed by Elia Kazan (1954, Columbia Pictures Corporation; 2001, Columbia Tristar Home Entertainment), DVD.

Kazan “constructs a situation that makes informing the only reasonable course of action for the just man.”¹⁴⁶

This idea is explicated in a short preamble to the film displayed after the title cards:

It has always been in the American tradition not to hide our shortcomings, but on the contrary, to spotlight them and to correct them. The incidents portrayed in this picture were true of a particular area of the waterfront. They exemplify the way self-appointed tyrants can be fought and defeated by right-thinking men in a vital democracy.¹⁴⁷

The statement’s tone is more expository than apologetic for Kazan’s actions. It reads didactically to enlighten American viewers about their role in the democratic process, allowing “right-thinking men” everywhere to triumph over tyranny, whether in form of the gangsters or Communists.

In *On the Waterfront*, the gangster threat was housed in the union clubhouse, or outsourced to a nearby bar, where the real business took place in a back room [fig. 10]. The space is a highly gendered one with men as the principal occupants, and great care has been taken to reinforce the sense of masculinity in the space. Sporting photos of boxers and baseball players are framed on the wall, a giant stuffed marlin hangs over a mantle piece, and a large pool table acts as Johnny Friendly’s desk, across which kick-back cash is pushed as if it is a craps table [fig. 11].

Although the group that assembles is relatively like-minded, the space reads as dystopic. This is the anti-Good Life America, represented by what Biskind calls an “ethnic grab bag,” and a “throwback to an earlier time.”¹⁴⁸ By portraying Johnny Friendly’s crew as ethnically mixed, Kazan places them in direct opposition to white America’s sense of freedom and prosperity seen through its relative homogeneity. In his book, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*, Warren Susman notes that this attitude is one of the great “paradoxes” of U.S. history and culture. He questioned:

¹⁴⁶ Peter Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1983), 170.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 172. It is unclear who the author of this text was, and it is cut from later versions of the film.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 177-8.

how a nation of immigrants could be at the same time a nation that could so often be roused to fear and even hysteria over ideas, movements, and people labeled “foreign,” or how often other ideas, movements, and people could be defended and even enthusiastically supported if they could be thought of as “native”—or accepted if they could be proven to have been effectively ‘Americanized.’”¹⁴⁹

The sense of dystopia perpetuated by the union mob is further articulated by Johnny Friendly’s control over the longshoreman’s finances. He does not provide them a discernable service, but he obtains their “legitimate” union dues supplemented by an extra “few dollars a day to make sure they work steady,”¹⁵⁰ a policy that promotes rancor and resentment between the workers who are pitted against each other for the best jobs, or any jobs at all. A favorite method of instigation is to throw “chips” (little bits of metal that signify a longshoreman has been chosen for participation in that day’s work), into a crowd of hungry workers, forcing them to fight amongst themselves for the right to work.

Friendly not only exercises his control over the longshoremen’s livelihoods and finances, but he uses physical money to dominate his own gang. When he receives bundles of cash from bets or bribes, Johnny carefully chooses a worker to count it, treating the transfer and counting of cash as a benevolent act of favor within his court. After Joey Doyle’s death early in the film, Terry arrives at the bar, clearly agitated and disturbed. Johnny, who treats the former boxing champ like a show pony, gives him some bills to count, as if the project will soothe and pacify him by reminding him that his actions benefit the group. Johnny parades around the room, alternately rubbing Terry’s head, slapping Terry’s back and hips like brawny prized cattle, and finally stuffing money down the neck of his shirt as a final gift and act of approbation. Friendly’s actions in front of the group feminize Terry who is objectified, emasculated, and effectively marginalized by Friendly’s treatment [fig. 12].

Terry’s outsider status follows him throughout the film in his activities at the mob bar, at work, in the park, and at home. He lives in a small slum apartment building, the interior of

¹⁴⁹ Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 77.

¹⁵⁰ *On the Waterfront*, DVD.

which conspicuously goes unseen throughout most of the film. When it is finally revealed, the interior is predictably old and dingy. Cracks trace fissures in the wall, and the only adornment is the leftover remnants of his boxing days: a few pictures and his old boxing gear hang across the space, athletic shoes are tied together on the back of the front door, and a warm-up robe is strung over a nail with several pairs of boxing gloves. They hang there implying easy accessibility and frequent use, but they exist more ironically as a stagnant reminder of Terry's past [fig. 13].

Terry spends his time on the roof of this building where he keeps a fleet of racing pigeons [fig. 14]. He and the late Joey Doyle were charter members of the Golden Warriors, a club of young boys interested in breeding the birds. This was a popular activity in the post-war period, having emerged in the nineteenth century with the aristocratic interest in animal husbandry and fancy breeding, and continuing through the cultivation of homing pigeons in urban areas during the twentieth century.¹⁵¹

Pigeon breeding, in fact, dates back to the Roman Empire, but maintained its popularity into the American nineteenth century when birds were one of the most sought after pets, trailing only dogs and cats. By the middle of the century, wealthy adults and children dabbled in animal husbandry, in which specific aesthetic traits were emphasized and the resulting birds (and other animals) were shown competitively.¹⁵² This kind of fancy breeding (derived from the world "fantasy") was focused on artifice and intervention in nature, while the developed traits were meant to be "capricious and imaginative, yet pleasing."¹⁵³ By the 1880s, raising and racing homing pigeons became popular, and the activity, while still focused on breeding and harnessing specific genetic traits, prized athleticism over aesthetics. Whether for racing or show, however, fancying required "constant cultivation of the animal to an ideal physical form."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Katherine Grier, *Pets in America: A History* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2007), 208.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

These birds must be seen as objects and their owners as savvy collectors. Fanciers were charged with identifying desirable traits and implementing methods for their cultivation and development. Likewise, owners engaged in all aspects of general collecting from selecting and buying the birds to trading and selling them to grow their specific collections and aid their own self-expression. Especially in urban areas, homing pigeons maintained their popularity into the middle of the twentieth century due to their small size and fast life cycles (which aided owners in seeing results quickly).¹⁵⁵ Although the activity has lately been in steep decline, in the mid-1960s there were nearly 250 pigeon racers living in Manhattan and over 2,000 in the outlying boroughs.¹⁵⁶ In a 1995 interview with the *New York Times*, Sal Spera, a long time fancier and New York City resident, recalled that in the prime of their twentieth-century popularity, “Every house had them, if only because there wasn’t much else. People who couldn’t afford to go to the ball game could fly pigeons.”¹⁵⁷

This is the situation of Terry Malloy, who seems to spend all of his leisure time with his fleet of birds and as mentor to the young members of the Golden Warriors pigeon-racing team who look up to him. He accesses the roof and his pigeon coop by climbing through a small window in his kitchen, deftly maneuvering over ladders, ledges, pipes, chimneys, and radio antennae to reach his coop [fig. 15]. Throughout the film, his visitors—Edie and the police investigators—have trouble navigating this unwieldy terrain, but Terry prances around athletically, confirming this place as his seat of power and comfort, going so far as to lie down at night there instead of cramped inside his apartment. Terry’s presence on the roof allows for a sequence of wider shots, surrounding him with space and connoting a sense of freedom and escape. Writing about the theme of ambivalence in *On the Waterfront*, Kenneth Hey remarks that these roof shots are directly opposed to the cramped quarters of Terry’s apartment. Hey

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 207.

¹⁵⁶ Douglas Martin, “An Old Sport, Still Aloft,” *New York Times* (October 16, 1995), accessed October 28, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/16/nyregion/an-old-sport-still-aloft.html?scp=1&sq=douglas+martin%2C+an+old+sport+still+aloft&st=nyt>.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

notes that Terry alone in the apartment appears entrapped, while when Edie is present Kazan makes the small space feel intimate.¹⁵⁸

More than the openness of freedom and comfort, the roof houses his pigeon coop, which must be considered Terry's home. It is the one place in which he takes pride and from which he draws his own identity. More than with Johnny Friendly or his brother, Terry identified with his birds, and as Kazan explained in a preliminary letter to Brando, "He cannot consider Mickey [an early name for Johnny Friendly] really his friend. His best friends are the pigeons."¹⁵⁹ Terry withdraws from his apartment interior in favor of the roof, because his apartment seems to trap him in the past. The boxing equipment scattered inside served as constant reminders of an old identity that Friendly had given him, but had then taken away. The pigeons, however, are objects of Terry's own creation, and thus reflected Terry's real, self-developed persona and indeed his own athleticism.

The objects of daily use that Terry keeps in his pigeon coop reinforce the notion that it is his true home. While the pigeons are of paramount importance, viewers see that Terry also keeps his loading hook and jacket there. Terry must use the hook every day at the docks; in fact, it is the single most important tool of his trade and the means by which he earns his livelihood. Terry carries the tool throughout the film, often wearing it wrapped around his neck like an article of fashion, and by affording it pride of place in his pigeon coop instead of in the interior of his apartment, Terry gives it and the coop added significance [fig. 16].

According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, "The tools of one's trade, perhaps more than any other set of objects, help to define who we are as individuals."¹⁶⁰ Throughout history, people have acquired their identities from what it is they produce; historically, man has "defined and cultivated his individuality by using the things that enabled

¹⁵⁸ Kenneth R. Hey, "Ambivalence As a Theme in *On the Waterfront* (1954): An Interdisciplinary approach to Film Study" in *Hollywood as Historian: American Film in a Cultural Context*, ed. Peter C. Rollins (Lexington, KY: 1983) 177.

¹⁵⁹ Elia Kazan to Marlon Brando, 2 November 1953, B31-F4, WUCA.

¹⁶⁰ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, 92.

him to exist.”¹⁶¹ Writing in 1981, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton also note, however, that “We now define ourselves through objects of consumption rather than production.”¹⁶² We might see Terry at the center of this transition. His identity is based on labor (his loading work at the docks) and production (his pigeon breeding), and the objects he celebrates and with which he most closely surrounds himself corroborate this method of self-definition via production. His antagonists, Johnny Friendly and his inner-circle of gangsters, however, produce nothing. They take money to promote themselves as consumers, and rely on clothing to construct and illustrate their group identity.

In her book *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies*, Stella Bruzzi explains that for the filmic gangster character, “The social ascent is clearly signaled through the costume.”¹⁶³ The mob characters in *On the Waterfront* demonstrate this, as they take great pride in their clothing, and their ranks are outwardly displayed and easily distinguishable by their choice of coat. Terry, a dockworker, wears a lightweight flannel jacket marred by visible holes, while his brother Charley, the lawyer for the mob, wears a long beautiful coat. Coats and other clothes serve as social signifiers throughout the film and mark on which side of the “production—consumption” divide characters fall, a handy device for other characters (and viewers) to discern good and evil. Laura Beshears describes gangster clothing and its ability to expose morality in her article in the *Journal of American Culture*, “Honorable Style in Dishonorable Times: American Gangsters of the 1920s and 1930s.” She describes the general gangster appearance in terms of performance and the use of flashy clothing to demonstrate a rise in class ranks and to help “legitimize their status as business men.” The gangster’s clothing, she says, positioned him as “a model of the new American ideal for the urban working class.” But this ostentatious dress combined with the gangster’s overt materialist consumption “unveiled

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 74.

their illicit activities and exposed them as imposters and corrupters of the American dream.”¹⁶⁴ Susan Hayward expounds on this point in her *Cinema Studies: the Key Concepts*. She, too, says that American gangsters are driven by the American Dream, the success of which requires material wealth, and “implicit with that, the assertion of the individual.” As a member of the proletariat, however, the gangster character can only achieve this end of success (meaning wealth) and the American Dream by means of stealing it.¹⁶⁵

Edie’s father understands the false façade presented by the waterfront gangster’s clothing, and when he finds out that she has been seeing Terry Malloy, he discourages Edie by describing Charley, Terry’s brother, as a “butcher in a camel hair coat,” essentially describing and ascribing evil through a description of consumer habits. Likewise, the “150 dollar coats and the diamond rings”¹⁶⁶ described by Father Barry are all the evidence he needs to convince his listeners of the mob’s evil, which he sees demonstrated by their conspicuous consumption. Late in the film, Charley is killed for his inability to keep Terry quiet. The guilty mobsters, his former associates and friends, leave his body in an alleyway, strung up against a wall by loading hooks pierced through his coat. The garment—which was once his source of power and prestige, his personal symbol of The Good Life—became the vehicle by which his physical body is dispatched [fig. 17].

In this way, outerwear is referenced repeatedly as a stand in for one’s allegiances and true self. This is especially true of the late Joey Doyle’s jacket, which became a signifier of hard work and virtue for whoever wore it. Joey had been set to testify in the hearings against the mob when, with Terry’s assistance, Johnny Friendly has him pushed off the roof. After his death, Joey’s father gives his jacket to Kayo Dugan, a fellow longshoreman in the union. Eventually Kayo is convinced to speak out against the tyranny of the mob, and Friendly quickly

¹⁶⁴ Laura Beshears, “Honorable Style in Dishonorable Times: American Gangsters of the 1920s and 1930s” in *The Journal of American Culture* (Volume 33, No 3, September 2010), 197.

¹⁶⁵ Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts, Third Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 154.

¹⁶⁶ *On the Waterfront*, DVD.

has him eliminated as well, via a tumbling load of Irish whiskey. With two well-loved members of the working-class community killed for their virtue (while wearing the jacket), it is returned to Edie. She takes the jacket to the tenement building where she finds Terry lying on his pigeon coop.

Edie wants to believe in the goodness of Terry Malloy. He is part of her community defined by work and production (she is studying to become a teacher), and Edie gives Terry the jacket in a show of faith, hoping to inspire him to cooperate with the police like Joey and Kayo. They share a passionate kiss, which, along with the gifted coat, is enough to convince Terry to participate in the following day's hearings. He arrives in court wearing an old suit, the left arm of which is ripped behind the shoulder. As Terry sits in the witness pen with Johnny and the other "union delegates," the class disparity between them is made evident through their outerwear. Terry, who used to have access to prosperity and *The Good Life* by means of his boxing career, is now relegated to wearing an old torn jacket over mismatched pants. The high level mobsters in attendance, however, look clean and immaculately dressed, an overt implication of their desire for opulence and the ability to live *The Good Life*, now unavailable to Terry.

Terry takes the stand and explains his role in Joey Doyle's murder, implicating Johnny Friendly as the crime's mastermind. Friendly is called as the next witness, and, though he has been wearing them the whole time, ferociously tears off his overcoat and scarf, effectively stripping himself of a layer of consumerist armor in his legal defeat. As Friendly heads toward the stand, the two meet in the middle, pausing for a close-up. Friendly, who is facing the camera in his garish pinstripe suit and boldly patterned tie, begins to verbally and physically abuse Terry, whose back is nearest the viewer, exposing the ripped back of his suit, once again explicating the film's inverse correlation of dress and moral virtue [fig. 18].

After the trial, Terry returns to the tenement and goes directly to the pigeon coop (despite Edie waiting for him with coffee inside his apartment). As he climbs a ladder from one

roof to the next, Tommy, one of the Gold Warriors, throws a dead pigeon at him, exclaiming, “A pigeon for a pigeon!” Tommy is so distraught over Terry’s testimony that he has killed each of Terry’s birds, his prized possessions and best friends, and the scene is easily read as a parallel to Kazan’s own HUAC testimony and the subsequent pain and anger expressed by his former associates and fans.

Edie follows Terry to the roof and finds him sitting inside the coop with the bird carcasses. She encourages him to leave the neighborhood saying “There’s no place that’s safe for you now on the waterfront;”¹⁶⁷ she suggests he go west, to a farm. She implies that if Terry cannot be at peace in his pigeon coop, the emotional seat of his home and identity, he must move on. Terry is incredulous. With the water and docks in sight, Terry grabs his loading hook, of course stored next to him in the coop, and uses it to pull himself off the ground. He grabs Joey’s jacket (also stored in the pigeon coop), and takes off for the docks, determined, he says, “To get what’s mine.”¹⁶⁸

When he arrives, Friendly is there, wearing neither his ubiquitous overcoat nor a suit jacket, standing simply in his slacks and button down shirt and tie. He seems truly vulnerable, and Terry unleashes his long dormant boxing skills, landing several effective punches on Friendly. The rest of the mob converges on the melee, pushing Terry down a narrow pier to the floating union clubhouse. Out of sight of the other dockworkers, the gangsters continue their assault, leaving Terry’s limp body half in the water to be discovered by Father Barry and Edie. Father Barry convinces Terry (who is still wearing Joey Doyle’s jacket) that Friendly will lose the remainder of his credibility if Terry assumes leadership and leads the men in to work [fig. 19]. This is the only way to defeat Friendly—by giving the workers someone else to follow.

The men are assembled, waiting to see if Terry is alive and can emerge as their new leader. Friendly screams at them to go to work, but he seems naked and somehow disenfranchised without a coat, his source of visual supremacy and professional control. The

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

workers are just about to give up hope and follow the doctrine of Friendly when Terry finally gathers enough strength to lead the men on to the waiting ship.

Although the story is told using Johnny Friendly and the waterfront gangsters as the enemy, it is not difficult to substitute the contemporary threat of Communism for Friendly's gang. Just as Soviet citizens were not encouraged to assert their individuality through purchasing competing consumer products, the longshoremen in *On the Waterfront* were forced to work as anonymous cogs in Friendly's wheel, unable to experience the virtues of individuality or freedom of thought inherent to American life in a democracy, a notion that was in the forefront of Kazan's mind in the aftermath of his HUAC testimony.

While most Americans were not subpoenaed to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, they were nonetheless encouraged to experience their dominance over tyranny (and totalitarianism) through active participation in Capitalism. "Consumer choice was one of the key ways in which the United States sought to distinguish itself from the Soviet Union, and associate itself with pluralism," argues Mark Jancovich in his article "The Politics of *Playboy*: Lifestyle, sexuality and Non-Conformity in American Cold War Culture." The emerging consumer culture, he says, "provided individuals with the freedom not only to choose between consumer items but, in so doing, to reject conformity and choose their identities."¹⁶⁹

The corollary between spurning conformity in favor of personal identity is a major theme in *On the Waterfront*. When viewers first encounter Terry Malloy, he is one of many components integral to Johnny Friendly's daily operation. We learn that he was a talented boxer, encouraged financially and emotionally by Johnny since he was a child. It seemed that he was unstoppable, but after Johnny made him throw a fight to a lesser opponent, Terry slipped into obscurity, settling near the bottom rung of Friendly's thugs. He operates with complete

¹⁶⁹ Mark Jancovich, "The Politics of *Playboy*: Lifestyle, sexuality and Non-Conformity in American Cold War Culture," in *Historicizing Lifestyle: Mediating Taste, Consumption and Identity from the 1900s to 1970s*, ed. by David Bell and Joanne Hollows (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 71.

subservience to the mob's regime, even setting up his good friend Joey Doyle at their behest, and playing "D&D" when he has a chance to turn on this underworld.

Terry chooses the vague sense of connection he gets from this membership versus asserting himself and his individuality. Before filming began, Kazan thoroughly analyzed Terry's behavior in a long letter to Marlon Brando. He explained, "Terry is terribly and fundamentally lonely. Consider he lives alone in one small room with one small window. There is something of the ascetic about him."¹⁷⁰ By portraying Terry's space monastically, Kazan strips away any identity or positive feelings of the self that Terry might be harboring, just as Friendly uses Terry's position within the mob collective to keep him anonymous and subservient. Terry's resentment finally explodes near the end of the film. He has not yet decided to leave the mob and testify against them, but (in a famous and oft-quoted line) he exclaims to his brother Charley, "You don't understand! I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I coulda been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am" [fig. 20].¹⁷¹ Terry does not have the flashy possessions of fame and fortune that he feels he deserves. His opportunity for fame was taken from him, and the audience is able to recognize his dearth of objects, and subsequent unhappiness, as directly related to this.

Once Terry decides to testify, he is able to step away from his membership with the mob and finally assert himself and his individuality. Kazan foreshadows this transition in his letter to Brando, emphasizing that, "Shame and guilt are replaced by self reliance and dignity. He's not a mind or a brain ever. But he does become himself."¹⁷² In its review of the film at the time, the *New York Times* describes Terry's evolution, as a "shatteringly poignant portrait of an amoral, confused, illiterate citizen of the lower depths who is goaded into decency by love, hate and

¹⁷⁰ Elia Kazan to Marlon Brando, 2 November 1953, B31-F4, WUCA.

¹⁷¹ *On the Waterfront*, DVD.

¹⁷² Elia Kazan to Marlon Brando, 2 November 1953, B31-F4, WUCA.

murder.”¹⁷³ Terry’s good life and newfound identity are defined by the morality of his actions, but Kazan’s staging allows these virtues to be seen through his objects and interior spaces. Terry’s clothing and objects are invested with what is right, while the gangsters’ rich coats and fine suits, although they stand for *The Good Life*, are manifestations of evil wrongdoing. The visual differences between the two camps remind viewers with whom they identify, and the potential for moral strength within the everyday working-class man.

¹⁷³ A.H. Weiler, “On the Waterfront,” *New York Times* (July 29, 1954), accessed December 16, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/1954/07/29/movies/19540729waterfront.html?scp=2&sq=on%20the%20waterfront,%201954&st=cse>

Chapter Three: *East of Eden*

“Comic view: Cal is a genius. Cal is a young kid. Cal is a genius who is comically viewed.”

“Cal”—from *Elia Kazan’s preparatory notes*¹⁷⁴

Released in 1955, the film *East of Eden* is set in 1917 in coastal California. The story centers on brothers Aaron (Dick Davalos) and Cal (James Dean) who live with their father, Adam Trask (Raymond Massey), a farmer, draft board member, protestant, and amateur inventor, in the inland town of Salinas. Across the Santa Lucia Mountains lies the waterfront town of Monterey, home to Kate’s Place, a bar and brothel operated by Kate (Jo Van Fleet), Adam’s long estranged wife and Aaron and Cal’s presumed dead mother. The story follows life in the months leading up to the American involvement in the Great War, focusing on the antagonism between Cal and Aaron brought on by Adam’s clear preference for Aaron, and eventually Cal’s badly hidden love for Abra, Aaron’s girlfriend (Julie Harris).

Cal learns that his mother is not only alive, but living in Monterey, and undertakes to meet her. He is acutely aware of the similarities between Aaron and Adam, and is desperate to know whether he shares his “bad” nature with his mother. Eventually, Cal takes a large financial loan from Kate to invest in bean futures (essentially war profiteering), in order to cover Adam’s substantial losses accrued in a failed refrigerated railroad car invention. But when Adam refuses to accept Cal’s misbegotten fortune as a birthday gift, Cal rebels by dragging the unsuspecting Aaron to Monterey to meet their Madame-mother. Aaron’s shock and dismay are so severe that he hysterically joins the war-bound army, causing Adam to suffer an incapacitating stroke. On his deathbed, Adam is convinced by Abra to forgive and rely on Cal, in what is his final (and probably first) real expression of love to his son.

Written by Kazan’s friend, the novelist John Steinbeck (who had previously worked with Kazan on the script for *Viva Zapata!* in 1952), the script is adapted from the last section of his

¹⁷⁴ Note by Kazan, Box 33, Notebook 1, 3 April 1953, WUCA.

1952 five-part novel of the same name. The plot is a thinly veiled variant of the biblical story of Cain and Abel, which Steinbeck calls “the best known story in the world because it’s everyone’s story.”¹⁷⁵ Kazan was drawn to the universality of this story and was intrigued by the characters’ ambivalence toward one another, particularly between generations as seen in the father/son battle waged between Adam and Cal. On the first page of the first of several preparatory notebooks used for analyzing *East of Eden*, Kazan announces his intentions:

First big decision
This is a love story
It is a love story between Adam & Cal¹⁷⁶

“Cal,” he says, “is the character in this book that the audience has got to get to know and understand. He is the face of the audience’s emotion.”¹⁷⁷

Cal was the bad boy in town, who “has gotten to expect rejection, he anticipates it...He feels full of revenge... His load of hate and vengeance makes him feel guilty. He seems evasive...he is concealing hatred.”¹⁷⁸ Cal was the outsider both in his community, and worse, in his family unit where he was pushed away by Adam’s strict Puritanism and Aaron’s goodness. Kazan felt that the viewing audience would identify with Cal’s alienation from his family, and condemn Adam, a man of strictly Christian and conservative values, but lacking in the capacity for unconditional love and forgiveness. It was, Kazan thought, this older, parental generation of puritans that allowed the angst of World War II to wax on, manifesting itself in the contemporary era’s constant anxiety over the Cold War and the war in Korea. The American youth, Kazan thought, had a:

Very understandable and correct disgust felt... for the generation that had caused the war [World War II]. There was a genuine feeling that the moral standards of the old generation were hollow, that they no longer meant anything and weren’t valid for us anymore. So there was a genuine questioning of the values of their parents by the young people.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Note by Kazan, Box 33, Notebook 1, 15 May 1953, WUCA.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, April 3, 1953.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Robin Bean, “Elia Kazan on “The Young Agony,”” *Films and Filming* (March 1962), in *Elia Kazan: Interviews*, ed. by William Baer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 46.

For Kazan, *Eden* was an opportunity to directly attack the severity of the pervading cultural Puritanism. This was not necessarily an attack on the specific faith, but on an exaggerated and distorted absolutism and religiosity emphasizing the idea that “this is right and this is wrong.”¹⁸⁰

Teens and adolescents, an emerging market in the era,¹⁸¹ responded to Kazan’s rejection of moral absolutism, and embraced the rebel figures played by actors such as James Dean and Marlon Brando—characters who felt misunderstood or marginalized because they were different, not because they were wrong or really bad; they “embodied the alienation, anguish, and sensitivity of 1950s teenagers.”¹⁸² The actions of these characters were easily identifiable because they represented a kind of purity and rebellion against the inhuman environment supplied by preceding generations.¹⁸³ Brink Lindsey discusses the increasing prevalence of teen angst in *The Age of Abundance*, a phenomenon caused by the “generation gap” between baby boomers and their parents. This generation born of World War II was coming of age in the period of this study (1951-1961). They were the first, “Born into” what Lindsey calls, “The realm of freedom,” the material wealth of which placed distance between themselves, adulthood, and their parents. This distance fostered a sense of incompatibility between generations and supported teenage feelings of isolation and misunderstanding.¹⁸⁴

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, with the Great Depression and World War II behind them, Americans were anxious about the economy and how it would perform during peace. But, as Harvey A. Levenstein notes in *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, “The expected post-war depression failed to arrive.”¹⁸⁵ There were no longer enemies in

¹⁸⁰ Ciment, 121.

¹⁸¹ Lindsey, 128. Lindsey quotes David Halberstam’s *The Fifties* (New York: Fawcett Books, 1993), saying, “The average teenager’s income of \$10.55 a week now matched the disposable income of the typical American *family* in the early 1940s.”

¹⁸² John Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture*, second edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2005) 116.

¹⁸³ Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., inc., 1977), 334.

¹⁸⁴ Lindsey, 129.

¹⁸⁵ Harvey A. Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: a Social History of Eating in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 102.

Western Europe or the Pacific against which the American people could unite against tyranny and oppression, but instead of lapsing into a time of peace, the Soviets were introduced as a rapidly re-growing force. They were, says historian Howard Zinn, presented by the Truman administration, “not just as a rival but an immediate threat,” thus prolonging the anxiety and agitation of the war years. “In a series of moves abroad and at home,” he says, “it established a climate of fear—a hysteria about Communism—which would steeply escalate the military budget and stimulate the economy with war-related orders.”¹⁸⁶

In the wake of his recent HUAC testimony, Kazan, experienced—perhaps more sharply than others—the red anxiety pervading American culture in the 1950s. In a review of the movie *East of Eden* published in the *New York Herald Tribune*, critic William K. Zinsser correctly identified this aspect of Kazan’s work, writing that, “Kazan has recaptured the jumpy temper of the times, with its war hysteria and star-spangled recruiting parades.”¹⁸⁷ The zealous patriotism characterizing the pre-Great War days was, Kazan felt, ringing true in the present day. He used the World War I story and setting of *East of Eden* to explain the discord felt between generations in contemporary America, perhaps even identifying the “hysteria and star-spangled recruiting” as a recurring mania, constructed to encourage support of the United States’ wars and to keep the economy rolling.

Kazan had long held the belief that, “Most bad was done in the name of good.”¹⁸⁸ In the case of *East of Eden*, he says that he was, “trying to show that right and wrong get mixed up, and that there are values that have to be looked at more deeply than in that absolute approval-or-disapproval syndrome of my Left friends.”¹⁸⁹ The ambivalence Kazan felt for contemporary events like his HUAC testimony and the Soviet threat reverberated into *East of Eden*, using the anachronistic setting to express the emotions of modern Americans.

¹⁸⁶ Howard Zinn, *The Twentieth Century: A People’s History* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), 160.

¹⁸⁷ William K. Zinsser, “Slowness Is a Virtue in Elia Kazan’s ‘Eden,’” *New York Herald Tribune* (13 March 1955), Box 3 of 4, Folder 651, Warner Bros. Archives.

¹⁸⁸ Ciment, 72.

¹⁸⁹ Ciment, 121.

Kazan explained that, “the whole sense of writing about contemporary issues, whether or not the story is contemporary, is my own temperament. I see things around me or feel things in my life which I think would make a wonderful subject for a film.”¹⁹⁰ This was not uncommon in films of the period. In *The Fifties: the Way We Really Were*, Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak ventured that most films unrealistically portrayed the United States as a “bland middle-class paradise,” with few films set in the present-day “to avoid claims of politicism or radicalism” which might alienate viewers.¹⁹¹ The public had, however, already begun a steady decline in their movie-going.

In 1946, 82 million people attended the movies, the studios garnered over 181 million in profits,¹⁹² and Americans spent a full twenty-five percent of their disposable income on movie tickets.¹⁹³ By 1950, however, attendance had dropped to 36 million, and the industry reported 16 million dollars in losses.¹⁹⁴ Myriad factors contributed to this weakening, including the public’s exposure to the negative circumstances surrounding the Hollywood-centric HUAC hearings and the Paramount Anti-Trust case. More than anything else, though, the ever-expanding material comforts and leisure time afforded to Americans contributed to keeping them away. In *American Cinema/American Culture* John Belton supports this, saying, “The decline of the movies was tied, in many ways, to the increasing affluence of the average American, whose newfound wealth enabled him or her to buy into a radically new lifestyle.”¹⁹⁵

This new lifestyle included migration to the suburbs (where there were fewer movie theaters) and increased wages for a workweek that dropped from six days to five, a circumstance that not only increased general affluence, but also increased the market for new recreational outlets to accommodate this wealth and compete with movies.¹⁹⁶ Television lead

¹⁹⁰ Bean, 46.

¹⁹¹ Miller and Nowak, 319.

¹⁹² Ibid., 319.

¹⁹³ Belton, 306.

¹⁹⁴ Miller and Nowak, 319.

¹⁹⁵ Belton, 307.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.,

the charge of competing leisure industries, and by 1960, President Eisenhower reported to Congress that over 90% of homes equipped with electricity had television, counting this among the most impressive pieces of evidence indicating America's prolonged prosperity.¹⁹⁷

These elements turned "habitual movie goers" into infrequent patrons, but Hollywood was adept at reaching new audiences in order to expand. Originally targeting the working class and immigrant cultures in the 1910s, early movies combined a "Marxist critique along with escapist fare," explains film historian Steven J. Ross in his book *Working-Class Hollywood*. By the 1920s and 1930s, however, studios shifted their focus to the "respectable" middle class's rapidly growing ranks.¹⁹⁸ By the 1950s, as the middle class began applying their considerable disposable income to pay for ever improving television sets and the electricity to run them, forcing the film industry to once again shift its focus to reach new viewers. They looked to the new technology emerging after the war, using 3D, new and improved cameras and lenses, larger screens and better sound, and especially color film technology to appeal to thrill-seeking consumers.

East of Eden was Kazan's first foray into these new media. He used CinemaScope, a new, wider, film shape that prevented close-ups, but forced a new attention to overall design and the spatial relationships of the set and characters. "I tried to make frames within the frame," Kazan explained, focusing on larger sets for characterization versus the characterizations usually wrought from close-ups on specific characters.¹⁹⁹

Kazan also used color for the first time in *Eden*. In fact, Kazan considered this his best use of color in film,²⁰⁰ but his initial apprehension was apparent when the studio required him to use the Technicolor Company (called WarnerColor in the titles) to print the film. Kazan had very specific ideas about the tone and mood he wanted to derive from his color design,

¹⁹⁷ Hurley, 273.

¹⁹⁸ Steven J. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class In America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 9.

¹⁹⁹ Ciment, 122.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

explaining his position in a letter to Steve Trilling, Warner Brothers executive assistant to Jack Warner, “They want pretty colors. They want gorgeous prints. I don’t. I’ll throw up in the projection room if I see GORGEOUS TECHNICOLOR on *East of Eden* after all these months of avoiding it [sic].”²⁰¹

For the same reason, he disliked an early version of the title cards, apparently printed in a bright orange, stating in a memo to Fred Gage (his point man for the color production) that, “the mood of this picture starts with the titles and this swings into the first action of the picture. I feel that too brilliant coloring mars the opening mood.” Kazan requested “stone color (tan, beige, sandstone).”²⁰² The final production uses lettering splashed in a yellow/brown/green combination that is accented by vibrant blue shadows [fig. 21]. The effect is demonstrative of the brilliance and variety of colors available, while somewhat in keeping with Kazan’s desired ambiance. A review in *Newsweek* praised this aspect of Kazan’s work with the new media, saying, “Working in CinemaScope and WarnerColor, director Kazan is less concerned with narrative than he is with achieving a mood so pervasive that his actors are almost secondary. It may be a fault that his technique, as brilliant and successful as it is, impinges on his characterizations.”²⁰³

Achieving “pervasive” milieu was among Kazan’s chief concerns throughout the production process. In another letter to Fred Gage, he warned:

Be certain to keep the over-all mood and value of color as it is presented here. By no means let any brilliant or “pretty” color creep into the entire film. On the other hand, see that the color values are kept natural, and by no chance should go to grey and get into dirty tones. Keep the Monterey sequence cold and the Salinas sequence warmer.”²⁰⁴

As is clear from this quote, Kazan worked from the very beginning to differentiate between the two towns in the film. Where cold tones were used to describe Monterey—the town of Kate’s

²⁰¹ Interoffice memo from Kazan to Steve Trilling, 9 December 1954, Box 23, Jack Warner Collection.

²⁰² Interoffice Communication from John Hambleton to Fred Gage, 13 December 1954, Box 23, Jack Warner Collection.

²⁰³ “New Films,” *Newsweek*, 7 March 1955, pp. 90-91, folder 651, Warner Bros. Collection.

²⁰⁴ Interoffice Communication from Elia Kazan to Fred Gage, 13 December 1954, folder 651, Warner Bros. Collection

brothel, the fishing community, and a more generally “rough and tumble” atmosphere, warmer tones were reserved for Salinas—Adam’s peaceful agricultural village.

A sense of binaries and opposition are thus cultivated throughout in terms of both style and content. The “good” Aaron counters the “evil” Cal, while the “good” Adam is opposite the “evil” Kate. Salinas is home to the virtuous, while there is a market and opportunity for Kate’s brothel business to flourish in Monterey. This is established from the earliest scenes, when a title card flashed over the panning regional farms and seascapes (shot in glorious wide screen CinemaScope), explains, “In northern California, the Santa Lucia Mountains, dark and brooding, stand like a wall between the peaceful agricultural town of Salinas and the rough and tumble fishing port of Monterey, fifteen miles away.”

The film then introduces Cal, sitting on a street curb in Monterey. Viewers understand that he is not a town resident, but there on his own business. He is following a blonde woman whose face is covered by black netting, and she is kept hidden and obscured from our view until she reaches her home, Kate’s Place, where she peeks through the curtains to see if the, as yet unknown, boy is still following her. Cal has learned that this is his mother, who did not die in his early childhood, but was living in Salinas as “the town Madame, or whatever you call her.”²⁰⁵

Cal throws several rocks at the brothel, professes his hatred for Kate to her henchman, and storms off, stowing away atop a freight train back to Salinas. Later, fraught with the desire to know his mother, he returns to Monterey. Cal seeks his own identity and is desperate to know if he is like her: if being bad is part of his nature. He sneaks into the bar and ambushes her in her personal quarters, a combination bedroom and office down a long dark hall in the brothel. When he finds her, she is napping in a plush chair, her long, white-blonde hair is down, cascading over the shoulder of her flowing, light pink robe. She is the picture of femininity, albeit a tawdry one (an assessment emphasized by the rowdy backdrop of the brothel), but she is mother Cal always desired [fig. 22].

²⁰⁵ *East of Eden*, directed by Elia Kazan (1955, Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

Later in the film, a revenge-seeking Cal forces Aaron to Monterey to meet his mother. When they were kids, Cal reminds Aaron, "You said she must have looked like heaven's youngest angel." Now he is intent on damaging Aaron's sense of goodness by informing him of their mother's moral corruption. When they arrive at Kate's Place, they find her again in her chambers, but now she is sitting behind her business desk counting stacks of money (a sordid symbol of her trade), dressed in an elaborate, almost provocative, black costume of fur, feathers, and sheer black fabrics [fig. 23]. She appears drunk and in disarray, and the meeting does not go well, ending with Cal violently pushing Aaron onto his mother, and a frenzied and drunk Aaron tearing back to Monterey, bent on self injury and joining the army.

The disparity between the boys' first meetings with Kate is vast. Cal, who went looking for Kate out of a desperate need to know himself, was introduced to her as a feminine and domestic figure. The sight of Kate in her ethereal robe punctuated the fulfillment of harmony for Cal, and he immediately knelt sweetly before her, asking to talk (upon waking she immediately kicks him out). Aaron, on the other hand, was always certain of his mother's goodness, so his shock over witnessing her so extravagantly dressed in black and in the throes of her corrupt business was intensified.

Such binaries continue to dominate the relationships throughout the film. Cal, who has never felt "home" in Adam's house, has cultivated an interior space that reflects his outsider status. In his room (which he shares with Aaron) a piece of beached driftwood sits next to a model boat over his bed, while a large starfish hangs on an adjacent wall. These items clearly reflect the sea culture of Monterey and stand at opposition to the agrarian setting of Salinas and Adam Trask's house. Cal even has a small set of antlers mounted on the wall, echoing the large antler chandeliers dominating the bar at Kate's Place, which ties his room and his current identity to Monterey and Kate. Cal has little additional furniture in the room, only a small bookshelf and a steamer trunk sitting beneath the window. The trunk anticipates Cal's desire to flee the oppression he feels in Adam's house and Salinas at large [fig. 24].

If Cal's room implies a sense of transiency, Adam's room displays the opposite. The space is extremely masculine, showcasing high ceilings, high-relief moldings and a large, architectonic bed. Everything has a built-in quality of permanence, reflecting Adam's status as a household and community stalwart. Bedridden after his stroke, Adam's room is only revealed to viewers at the end of the film, showing a space that is relatively alive and vital. The room, large and solid in its appointments, is painted a deep, lush green. This is what Kazan declared, "I think the best color I ever had," explaining:

That room is so green and so dark, where he dies, that you feel something poetic about that scene, that you wouldn't have if it had been in black and white, or in ordinary colors...I worked that color out with extreme care...and I thought, it's verdant, it's a valley—and Steinbeck's description of Salinas: green, green, green. The old man dies in green: a death's version of his valley, that was the idea.²⁰⁶

The space that Adam cultivated for himself was his sanctuary, reflecting a lush Eden in the midst of an otherwise cool domestic interior [fig. 25].

The space most often seen in the Trask house is the dull and gray dining room. A large table rests in the center of the space, and a large, heavily carved sideboard helms the room with a bowl of bright red apples. These showcase the vivid color attainable by WarnerColor, and in the biblical context of the movie, perhaps reference the illicit desires guiding the characters. In one scene, Adam asks Cal to read a passage out of the bible. A hesitant Cal speed-reads his assigned chapters (and recites each verse number aloud, much to Adam's chagrin), before pushing the bible back over the table to Adam. The two embark on a reverse tug-of-war, pushing the bible violently back and forth across the table [fig. 26].

The characters are frequently seen in similar scenarios at the table, and mealtime is frequently referenced, such as when Aaron reminds Cal that their father has been talking about his business dream every night over dinner. "In my pictures," Kazan says, "I constantly have

²⁰⁶ Ciment, 123.

people in an entirely antagonistic relationship eating a meal together. People in conflict are forced by social convention or family custom to eat together.”²⁰⁷

Such is the case with the Trask men. Their main interaction in the home is at the dining room table, and although their exchanges are generally unsatisfying, they return to the space time after time. Despite the World War I setting, by situating the family’s communication around in the dining room, Kazan is able to evoke a sense of familiarity for post-World War II audiences. For families of this era, the dining ritual was sacred, explains Andrew Hurley. It presented an opportunity to strengthen the sacred family unit, which was, “stretched” after World War II, breaking down the familial dynamic that represented “all that was good and wholesome about America.”²⁰⁸ In the post-war years, the parents of the baby boom generation reemphasized these family units, and, thanks to growing incomes and veterans’ assistance programs, the middle class (families earning between \$4,000—7,500 a year in 1953 dollars) grew by 5.5 million families between 1947 and 1953. As consumer need and spending rose, Harvey Levenstein remarked that the “Food and appliance producers hardly missed a beat in switching from patriotic wartime themes to extolling the virtues of the middle-class American home and family, the new core of the mass market.”²⁰⁹

Virtues of domesticity, particularly in dining and providing food for the family, was to be the female homemaker’s first priority and central to securing familial bonds. Creator of Betty Crocker, Marjorie Husted extolled this idea, saying that for women, “a homemaking heart gives her more appeal than cosmetics, [and] that good things baked in the kitchen will keep romance far longer than bright lipstick.” This system of values quickly penetrated the era’s popular culture in advertising, television, radio, and film. Levenstein cites radio show “Ma Perkins” and television sitcom “Father Knows Best,” which unfolds in the kitchen and dining room, as two key

²⁰⁷ Ciment, 73.

²⁰⁸ Hurley, 58-59.

²⁰⁹ Levenstein, 102.

signifiers of the era's focus on female domesticity and the importance of the dining ritual.²¹⁰

This ubiquitous treatment of dining as central to the family in popular culture makes the discord of *East of Eden's* dining room scenes more disconcerting, and the lack of a central female presence more apparent.²¹¹

Only during the birthday party for Adam does the dining ritual hold any joy or expectation of familial and domestic felicity, a feeling wrought from the presence of Abra who is actively asserting herself as leader and coordinator of the meal and dining experience. Cal and Abra, who decked the dining room with "paper decorations from the Five and Ten!" orchestrated the event as an opportunity for Cal to give Adam his gift: a huge stack of bills produced from Cal's earlier investment in bean futures. As noted earlier, Adam had recently lost all of his money in a failed vegetable refrigeration business, and Cal wanted to recoup Adam's financial loss to show his support and love. Before Adam arrives home for his surprise party, Cal and Abra run around frantically. Abra unnecessarily helps Cal fix his suit, excusing several brief moments of exciting physical contact. Her ambivalent interactions with him display an intense physical attraction, made all the more powerful by her repeated declarations that she is afraid of him. His magnetism over her was highlighted in a preceding scene at the fair, when she and Cal similarly used objects to exchange superfluous touches. Cal repeatedly grabs the watch that is tethered to her waist (even though he has his own similar time piece), and when he swipes some merchandise off of a vendor's stand and sticks it into her hands, she responds by wildly raking her hands across his chest, pushing the object into his pocket [fig. 27].

In the midst of their party preparations, Cal surveys the scene worriedly, wondering, "Does it look festive?" His consternation over how the space appears extends to his gift. A bow adorns the tissue-wrapped stack of bills he shows to Abra, and he asks, "Does it look pretty?"²¹² They have transformed the space with streamers and paper lanterns, which quite delights Adam

²¹⁰ Ibid., 103.

²¹¹ Adam Trask does have a female employee who seems involved in cooking and general domestic caretaking, but she is outside any narrative action and peripheral to the family unit itself.

²¹² *East of Eden*, DVD.

upon his entrance. The evening is essentially ruined, however, when Aaron unexpectedly announces his engagement to Abra, to which Adam responds, "It's the best gift you could have given me," effectively trumping Cal's gift, which Adam has forgotten about in his hands. Abra reminds Adam about Cal's present, but Adam's excitement quickly turns to bitterness when he opens it and Cal explains how he invested money in beans, which exploded in price after the war began. Adam adamantly refuses the war profit money, which he sees as a symbol of professional and moral conflict of interest with his work on the draft board. "If you want to get me a present, give me **a good life!**" says Adam. "That's something I could value" [fig. 28].²¹³

Cal is devastated and runs tearfully out the back door where he stands beneath a poignantly chosen weeping willow tree, which provides visual cover for Abra as she follows him outside to supply physical and emotional comfort, expressions of love which push an observing Aaron to extreme jealousy and hatred. It is during this scene, however, that the audience sees the backyard for the first time. It is overgrown and littered with found objects. A wooden side chair sits in the mid-ground, and a plank and rope swing is still suspended from a tree as if it were a relic from Cal and Aaron's childhood [fig. 29]. The outdoor space exemplifies the vague sobriety of the house's interior. Both seem faded, dingy, and eerily solemn. It appears that nothing has been moved or changed since Kate abandoned the domestic space, leaving Adam suspended in an unending state of readiness for her return. "After she left him," the sheriff tells Cal, "he died. He walked around, but...he died." Kazan explained this sense of loss and desire in his preliminary character sketch of Adam, saying, "[Cal's] father still yearns for Kate and doesn't know it. It left him frozen in a perpetual sadness."²¹⁴

Kazan's characterization of Adam is also described in a section of notes entitled "FULFILLMENT." He says that Adam wants to do "something for mankind before he dies. Actually he still longs for Kate the one true love lost forever and doesn't know it."²¹⁵ Throughout

²¹³ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

²¹⁴ Note by Elia Kazan, Box 33, Notebook 1, WUCA.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

the film Adam's desire for Kate manifests itself in his need for achievement, which is expressed by his entrepreneurial work with the Salinas Valley Lettuce Company. Adam buys an icehouse in an attempt to freeze his farm's vegetables and send them by train to New York City, thus revolutionizing the produce industry and leaving a lasting legacy.

In this way, Adam's character embodies the post-war popular notion of success and the American Dream. Perhaps only after buying a house or a car, business ownership was the greatest indicator of success and personal achievement. Hurley describes the perceived benefits of proprietorship in his book on the 1950s consumer culture by focusing on diners, bowling alleys, and trailer parks. Each of these institutions, Hurley posits, was active before World War II, but a unique set of variables after the war encouraged their growth: a widespread quest for achievement, easy availability of credit, technological innovations from the war, and the need for new businesses in the expanding suburban markets. Lizabeth Cohen supports this idea in *A Consumer's Republic: the Politics of Mass Consumption in Post-War America*, detailing the diverse government methods and incentives' for job and business creation and the subsequent consumer reactions. Not least among the motivations to start a business, she says, were the "vast consumer appetites" that made suburbia "ripe for the conquer."²¹⁶

Easily transferable to these suburban markets, the diner industry was particularly persuasive in their advertisements for restaurant ownership. P.J. Tierney and Sons (a popular purveyor of dining cars and all the necessary accoutrements) declared that owning a dining car would allow a man "a comfortable home—a good car—education for the children—the good things in life for his family." In short, Hurley says, "Dining car companies sold the American Dream."²¹⁷ Adam Trask's business promised the same material advantages. His optimism about the lettuce venture even informed his decision to buy a car, an important symbol of status and

²¹⁶ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Post-War America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 303. See Cohen's chapter 3 (beginning on page 138) for discussion on the various political interests influencing U.S. economic decisions.

²¹⁷ Hurley, 38-39.

achievement in this early period of the twentieth century, but a purchase that resonated with the consumer desires of the post-war period as well.

Adam was motivated, however, not by the status or wealth that was possible through business expansion, but by the virtue of doing something good for mankind. He says to an associate, "I feel that if I could only do something, some little thing before I die, some little thing for progress, or people." Cal looks on as Adam speaks, and finally interjects with his opinion on the superior profitability of planting beans before the impending American involvement in WWI. Adam addresses him scornfully, saying, "But I'm not particularly interested in making a profit, Cal."²¹⁸ Cal misinterpreted his father's business interests as motivated by profit as versus virtue, illustrating the essential difference between the two men. After this reprimand, Cal still does not understand his father's motivations for participating in the frozen-vegetable business, and when Adam loses his investment, Cal misreads his sadness as inspired by financial loss instead of the lost opportunity to make an improvement to the human or American experience. It is only after Adam tells him, "If you want to give me a present, give me a good life," that Cal understands what "good" means—that it is not economic or financial but productive and moral.

²¹⁸ Cal says that he has read the information about bean futures in a Monterey Newspaper, thus aligning war profiteering (his project) with the morally corrupt town of his mother's brothel.

Chapter Four: *Splendor In the Grass*

“[She] sees a pillow, grabs it. Flirts with it.”

“Deanie”—from *Elia Kazan’s preparatory notes*²¹⁹

Written by playwright William Inge, *Splendor In the Grass* is the second film of this study set in a bygone era, unfolding, as it does, in pre-Depression rural Kansas. The story centers on the high school coupling of the star athlete Bud Stamper (Warren Beatty) and the beautiful Deanie Loomis (Natalie Wood). Bud’s family is extremely wealthy due to patriarch Ace Stamper’s involvement in the oil business, while Mr. and Mrs. Loomis run a modest general store. Bud and Deanie fight constant sexual urges for one another, but are determined to put off their gratification until after they are married. Mrs. Loomis leads the charge in favor of Deanie’s abstinence, explaining that a woman’s only sexual duties are performed within the frame of marriage, and then strictly for procreation. Ace Stamper also acts to keep the couple apart, insisting that his son attend Yale after high school in lieu of an early marriage.

Their subsequent break-up pushes Bud into a sexual relationship with the promiscuous Juanita, and Deanie, after several reticent attempts at promiscuity, has a mental breakdown that lands her in a Wichita mental health institution. While Deanie is hospitalized, Bud follows his father’s wish for him to attend Yale, where he does little and essentially fails in an act of spite. Ace, meanwhile, loses his fortune in the 1929 stock market crash and jumps out of a New York City hotel room window. The story ends when Deanie returns home after two years in the asylum engaged to marry a fellow patient, a doctor from Cincinnati. She asks to see Bud, and two friends reluctantly take her to the Stamper Ranch, where Deanie finds Bud laboring on the farm, living with a pregnant wife and baby. The two part ways amicably, and viewers feel hope for their respective futures.

²¹⁹ Note by Kazan, 17 March 1960, B50-F1, WUCA.

The characters of Bud and Deanie continue Elia Kazan's focus on outsiders fighting for inclusion. In this case, however, the characters in question are surrounded by traditional support systems of family, friends, and lovers, but the expectations of each group push Bud and Deanie into isolation. Deanie is constantly dissuaded from pursuing Bud sexually by her mother, while Bud is repeatedly reminded that there are two kinds of girls, one you marry, the other you don't. Attitudes differ among their friends in school, but Bud and Deanie are essentially pulled apart by these conflicting viewpoints and their inability to reconcile these opinions with their desires.

Kazan recognized that these were not unique emotions or confusions. "This is the most 'familiar' picture I have made since *Tree Grows in Brooklyn* [sic]," he stated. "It is a part of everybody's life."²²⁰ The movie trailer serves to alert viewers to this fact, saying "if you're an adult, you lived this story...If you're young, it's happening now...So much of us is in it."²²¹ Just as the conflict between desire and restraint was identifiable by all age groups, Kazan and Inge intended to demonstrate the similarities between the current social, economic, and moral systems and the dominant social norms of the years leading up to the Great Depression. In a 1962 article in *Films and Filming* entitled "Elia Kazan on 'The Young Agony,'" author Robin Bean looks at the recently released *Splendor In the Grass* as a social critique and a warning that the social and economic collapse of 1929 could reoccur. Kazan replied that "there is a parallel in *Splendor in the Grass* between collapse of old moral order of absolute Puritanism (ie sex equals sin) [sic] and the collapse of an economic order which is also contained in the film. The two are felt by William Inge to be related phenomena."²²²

Kazan's methodology in *Splendor In the Grass* once again reflected the feeling of generational conflict found in *East of Eden*. Kazan felt that the contemporary mores dictated by

²²⁰ Letter from Elia Kazan to Jack Warner and Benjamin Kalmenson, 4 January 1961, FOLDER 2953, Warner Bros. Archives.

²²¹ "Splendor In the Grass, Original Trailer," *Turner Classic Movies*, accessed November 12, 2010, "<http://www.tcm.com/mediaroom/index.jsp?cid=9989>."

²²² Letter from Elia Kazan to Jack Warner and Benjamin Kalmenson, 4 January 1961, FOLDER 2953, Warner Bros. Archives.

the so-called older generation were obsolete and duplicitous, just as depicted in his portrayals of pre-Great War or pre-Depression era life. By setting *Splendor in the Grass* in the late 1920's, a time of well-documented social and economical upheaval, Kazan was able to make his points about the true effects of Puritanism without directly attacking contemporary institutions. Just as in *East of Eden*, the central characters of Bud and Deanie must assert their individuality by rebelling against oppressive conventions.

The promotional material surrounding the movie's release identified the generations as separate. One poster read, "Whether you live in a small town the way they do, or in a city, maybe this is happening to you right now... maybe (if you're older) you remember...when suddenly kissing isn't a kid's game anymore, suddenly it's wide eyed scary and dangerous" [fig. 30].²²³ The statement reminds the older generation that they shared the collective experiences of desire, and their current condemnations were part of the "collapse of the old moral order of absolute Puritanism."²²⁴

If the film focused superficially on the moral chasm separating the two generations, the companion message dealt with the economic future of the country. The prosperity of the 1920s and the 1950s seemed to progress on parallel tracks. In each case, a European war precipitated an American boom, and as 1929 introduced the Great Depression, there was certainly widespread consumer worry about what the post-war period would bring. Could profits continue to skyrocket as markets became saturated with goods, and larger numbers of businesses emerged in the market place? In 1954, the economy began growing more slowly, and by 1957 it experienced a recession, perpetuating the congruencies between the post-war era and the pre-Depression era.²²⁵ Kazan's own memory of the Great Depression facilitated his understanding of the American people's fear of a recurrence, saying:

²²³ Publicity announcement for *Splendor In the Grass*, folder 2274, Warner Bros. Archives.

²²⁴ Robin Bean, 43.

²²⁵ Cohen, 293. Cohen cites advertising trade journal *Printer's Ink*, saying that between 1945 and 1960, the number of businesses in operation doubled, a figure that did not include growing foreign competition.

I had a lot of intimate experience with the crash. I saw many people get killed by it, and my own father had, in effect, his spirit killed by it and so had Arthur Miller's. His father was eviscerated, he was just wandering around. I saw people who committed suicide and they *were* jumping out of the windows. I saw a man's body between two buildings just as I showed Stamper in a long shot. I think the crash still haunts this country. When they talk about inflation, what they all remember is that moment when the banks were closed, when you couldn't get money, when you couldn't buy anything with a dollar.²²⁶

These economic concerns were exacerbated by a national fear of Communism and the growing power of the Soviet Union. Since the Haymarket Affair of the 1880s and the Red Scare of 1919-1921, an anti-radical, anti-Communist sentiment had pervaded American culture;²²⁷ by the late 1950s and early 1960s, Soviets became recognized as the official red "Other" in America—a distinction intensified by the HUAC hearings and the more than fifty anti-Communist films of the post-war era.²²⁸ The fear exposed by McCarthy and HUAC in the early fifties had, by this time, been supplanted by a different approach to bolstering democracy and Capitalism: mass consumption on the part of the American citizenry. In his famous "Kitchen Debate" with Nikita Khrushchev in 1959, Vice-President Richard Nixon cited items such as the built-in dishwasher and a kitchen filled with amenities to demonstrate that "the United States, the world's largest Capitalist country, has from the standpoint of distribution of wealth come closest to the ideal of prosperity for all in a classless society."²²⁹ Such items meant to "make more easy the life of our housewives,"²³⁰ releasing them from much of the drudgery of traditional work in the home and allowing for the cultivation of individual identities through options and choice. What is more, Nixon pointed out that this model house was available to

²²⁶ Ciment, 139.

²²⁷ Howard Abramowitz, "The Press and the Red Scare, 1919-1921," in *Popular Culture and Political Change in Modern America*, ed. by Ronald Edsforth and Larry Bennett (Albany, NY: The State University of New York, 1991) 61.

²²⁸ Biskind, 168.

²²⁹ Lindsey, 17.

²³⁰ Harrison E. Salisbury, "Nixon and Khrushchev Argue in Public as U.S. Exhibit Opens; Accuse Each Other of Threats," *The New York Times* (July 24, 1959), accessed November 22, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0724.html#article>.

everyone—even coal miners making three dollars an hour could afford one of the \$14,000 houses mass produced and available with a variety of add-ons and choices [fig. 31].²³¹

Consumers were encouraged to buy as a way of proving America’s might over Soviet totalitarianism, because, as Nixon showed at the model American kitchen, a central difference between the two countries was the American right and patriotic duty to “choose the kind of house, the kind of soup, the kind of ideas that they want,”²³² implying that economic freedom or the freedom to purchase was indicative or equivalent to freedom of thought.

As the fifties progressed, consumers continued to buy the expanding array of goods available to them, and as they developed into more sophisticated consumers, so did producers and their growing marketing teams. By 1956, an article was published by Wendell Smith in the *Journal of Marketing*, called “Product Differentiation and Market Segmentation as Alternative Marketing Strategies.” The article introduced the idea that marketing should not be based on the assumption that consumers comprised a single-minded collection of spending dollars susceptible to a single mass-market approach to goods and services. Rather, consumers were separated by an array of differences that required diverse approaches to selling, and often, different objects all together.²³³ In 1958 a similar article by Pierre Martineau continued this line of thought, embracing the idea that money was just one divisive factor between classes, and thus, what they buy “will differ not only by economics but in symbolic value.”²³⁴ In *A Consumer’s Republic*, Lizabeth Cohen explains this notion using a sort of advertising mantra, “homogeneity of buyers within a segmented market, heterogeneity between segmented markets,” and each of these markets, she continues, has “distinctive needs, wants, and product preferences.”²³⁵

Most of these niche markets were likely unaware that they were being specifically courted as consumers; however, the notion of choice and preference allowed them to feel a

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Cohen, 295.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid., 295; 298.

certain amount of prestige in their taste and individuality. The ability and opportunity to buy was available to a wide array of Americans who quickly discovered that their chosen purchases could create a specific identity for themselves and for their families. Objects could manufacture nearly any image because of their inherent dollar value, and thus were used as a “class-passing” vehicle. Sociologist Gwendolyn Audrey Foster expounds on this idea in her 2005 book *Class Passing: Social Mobility in Film and Popular Culture*, in which she describes the enticing opportunities to change classes based on performative gestures and supplemented by objects.²³⁶

Class-passing, Foster explains, became an expected, normative expression of the American Dream, and as such was integrated into film and popular culture. Actors and models, explains Foster, “act as a mirror to our own class passing...[while] films offer the chance to experience class passing vicariously.”²³⁷ This sense of truth and general human understanding appealed to Kazan, and this element of class, its constant evolution, and the ability for Americans to use objects to pass in other hierarchal levels is apparent in most of his films. Of *Man on a Tight Rope*, for example, Kazan said, “one of the points we wanted to make with the picture was the fantastic upward mobility in the country, the speed with which a man goes up and down.”²³⁸

The rapid rise and fall of characters in *Splendor in the Grass* reflects Kazan’s experience, as seen through the financial fortunes of the two central families. Ace Stamper grew up with Mr. Loomis as financial and class peers, but while Mr. Loomis’s general store allowed his family to merely live comfortably in the back of the store, Ace’s oil fortune catapulted his family into an ostentatious mansion house just outside of town. After the stock market crash their fortunes were reversed, and their consumption habits revealed their changed financial statuses as each attempted to pass for a higher level of class.

²³⁶ The theme of class-passing has long been a favorite Hollywood motif, especially popularized by Fred Astaire/Ginger Roberts films of the late 1930s and 40s. See *Fred Astaire* by Joseph Epstein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) 134.

²³⁷ Foster, 24-5.

²³⁸ Ciment, 114.

Like the new niche marketing and consumer preference studies of the era suggested, however, class was contingent on more than money. Beyond the mere ability to buy, purchases were indicative of upbringing, taste, and overall values and connoisseurship, as explained by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. In Chapter Five “The Sense of Distinction,” Bourdieu’s study analyzes tastes according to class, hypothesizing that the dominant class is autonomous, defining itself by the “distribution of economic and cultural capital among its members.”²³⁹ Amongst other things, participants were asked to describe a variety of things, including the qualities of an interior, qualities of a friend, the style of meals served to friends, furniture purchases, preferred signers, preferred works of classical music, visits to museums, opinions on art, and knowledge of composers. The resulting data represents an individual’s “cultural capital,”²⁴⁰ or preferences and practices as determined by one’s volume and structure of power.²⁴¹

As the working class became more affluent, their collective desire to rise in social status manifested itself in widespread consumption. The idea of “cultural capital” as it applies to this era’s consumer preferences indicates that all classes would make purchases based on their available resources, but *what* one may buy is based more on class history. This newly affluent working-class group, Hurley explains, “could afford things, but still technically wore a blue collar and were not really part of the middle class because they were still workers...They felt the greatest pressure to demonstrate their status through the accumulation of things.”²⁴² Brink Lindsey also discusses this idea in *Age of Abundance*, saying:

The large urban working classes remained outside the golden circle of middle-class trust. In purely material terms, of course, conditions had improved dramatically. But culturally, the working classes still lacked the ability to work effectively with strangers in furtherance of common abstract loyalties.²⁴³

²³⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 260.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 263.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 267.

²⁴² Hurley, 288.

²⁴³ Lindsey, 91.

This post-war mentality is exhibited through the fictional 1920s home of Ace Stamper. His working class background did not include the social training to match his newfound affluence, but he fought to distinguish himself through his lavish interiors. When viewers first see the Stamper home, it is clearly designed to be Ace's seat of power, covered with hunting memorabilia and exotic objet. In Kazan's conceptual notes for the movie, he describes the Stamper home in a list of objects:

MALE DOMINATED HOME

Deer heads

Moose heads

Bear rugs on grand piano

Model of oil rig

Stuffed bird

Big phonograph

Primitive radio set on grand piano

WWI Kaiser films, WWI shells, WWI photos²⁴⁴

The film reflects this list almost exactly, betraying Ace's rabid ostentation, and morphing into a display of what the 1950's established middle class (as described by Lindsey and Hurley) would have actually considered "crass" [fig. 32].²⁴⁵

The décor is extremely heavy and absolutely every surface is covered and accounted for with draped rugs, curtains, or hides, and even the source of his wealth, the oil rig, is represented in the form of a sculptural model. He has cultivated a space that not only demonstrates his wealth but also his power to his visitors. Furniture is heavy and carved in deep relief, and bits of animal remnants from hunting expeditions are placed around the room, showing his hunting prowess and his well-traveled history. The living room is almost like a Renaissance studiolo in the exotic collection of objects and pastimes it presents, but Ace is clearly no scholar. His speech

²⁴⁴ Note by Kazan, 7 March 1960, B50-f1, WUCA. From the early stages of his planning, Kazan used war memorabilia to anticipate a war history for Ace Stamper. (Deanie also has medals hanging in her room, but these are likely from her father, certainly not her own). Nicholas J. Saunders discusses the importance of such objects in his article "Memory and Conflict" in *The Material Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2002). He points out that "the material culture of war—particularly small and portable souvenirs, trophies, jewelry, and equipment" are particularly meaningful to fighters and their families. "Due to their personalized nature," he continues, "such objects are often attached...to bodies and body parts, and, sometimes exclusively, are able to identify human remains and permit official and familial closure when reburied" (178).

²⁴⁵ Hurley, 288.

and attitude show that he is a working-class man with new affluence, which he uses to buy self-identifying objects and power.

When Mrs. Stamper is revealed, she is incredibly weak and quiet, and just as she plays a subordinate role in her marriage, her identity cannot be seen in the home or décor. The home magnifies Ace's taste, power, and wealth, while Mrs. Stamper is not reflected at all. Even the kitchen, the traditional realm of authority for pre- and post-war women, is gendered male when Ace and his oil-covered friends barge in, brandishing cooking utensils and taking over the cooking duties. Ace even wears a checked towel in his belt like a lady's apron—usurping the feminine [fig. 33].

Bud's room, however, lacks the conspicuous consumption that marks his father's style. It is sparse in furniture, and the objects are useful or commemorative souvenirs rather than purchased items selected for aesthetic or identification purposes. On top of a chest of drawers sits a stack of schoolbooks, a basketball, a trophy, and a small-scale oil rig, all items that have been earned through work or valor, and have more sentimental than intrinsic value [fig. 34]. His bed is small and contains no luxurious trimmings or personal opulence. The only real adornment in the space is a small framed coat of arms hanging above the headboard, a sign of family and tradition connoting a sense of belonging to a group. Taken in context, however, the coat of arms and the rest of the objects (particularly the oil rig) create an identity that does not belong to Bud; they are an assemblage of Ace's desires for his son, and therefore, a false identity that connects Bud to his dad.

Ace works throughout the film to meld Bud's priorities into his own. "You've got to do the running for both of us now,"²⁴⁶ Ace reminds him, attempting to cultivate Bud's interest in school (by attending Yale) and sports (by eating right on game days—again usurping the domestic role by controlling his family's food). Bud shows little interest in athletics or talent for academics, however, and instead articulates a desire to pursue a future as a cattle rancher. Ace

²⁴⁶ *Splendor In the Grass*, directed by Elia Kazan (1961, Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2000), DVD. Ace fell from the top of an oil rig and walks with a pronounced limp.

does not approve of Bud's choice because such a career will provide neither the wealth nor education necessary to move up the ranks and establish the Stamper family above the working class.

Ace's motivation throughout the film is to achieve *The Good Life*, both for his own self-appraisal and for the benefit of his family. He pushes Bud away from cattle ranching not because he is working against the boy's happiness, but because it would move the family back into the working class. Ace has laid a foundation for his family to experience the leisure and financial security available to the upper middle classes, but Bud is reluctant to embrace this version of *The Good Life*. Ginny, Bud's sister, however, is much more inclined to promote the family through money and the clothes and objects it provides.

Ginny's behavior directly opposes Bud's sense of integrity and ethic of hard work. Her first appearance in the film is after her arrival home from Chicago, where she was living until she had to have "one of those operations," and throughout the picture she behaves in a generally unpleasant way to her family. Ace clearly has no idea what to do with her, but she wants for nothing as evidenced by her extremely fancy clothing and the décor of her room.

Ginny's massive closet provides a variety of extremely fashionable outfits—even a pants suit accented by a cosmopolitan cigarette holder for the Stamper family Christmas photo. Ginny uses clothing to construct an identity for herself within the rural community, attempting to set herself apart through glamour and (her father's) ability to spend on the latest fashions and finest materials. The Christmas photo itself is meant to capture this affluence, as each family member is placed in front of a tinsel-laden tree and a gift-bearing maid. Mrs. Stamper is actually holding an open jewelry box to show the expensive gifts given in the Stamper celebration, and Ace is enthroned in the foreground, occupying a large chair covered with a leopard pelt—a symbol of his imperialist conquest. Ginny leans away from the rest of the family against a table of more Christmas cards and gifts scattered around the model oil rig, a reminder of what provided the Stamper's bounty [fig. 35].

This visual affluence extends into Ginny's bedroom at large. It is bedecked in pale satin fabric ruched into elaborate twist designs, and there are chrome art deco sconces and elaborate wall paintings affecting cosmopolitan designs by the likes of Charles Rennie Mackintosh or the later floral deco of *Suë et Mare*. Her bed sits recessed into the wall, but it is raised on a low platform to provide a stage-like setting of ruffled satin sheets in the center of the room. A large silver platter of food rests at the foot of the bed, punctuating the disarray of Ginny's space that, while marked with various reminders of femininity, is not neat or orderly. Clothes are draped over nearly every surface, the result of her dressing routine which involves prancing about in silky undergarments, flinging about outfits, tissue paper, and boxes with little regard for their care. When she finally does choose an outfit, the others are left behind, discarded as props of her material wealth and symbols of her true indifference toward it [fig. 36].

Ginny's environment discloses her prowess as a consumer and her interest in obtaining the newest fashions, versus any interest or talent for production, a common predilection in America by the end of the Second World War. James C. Williams discusses this trend in his book *The Evolution of Mass Culture in America—1877 to the Present*, describing a 1944 study by Leo Lowenthal that detailed a shift in popular magazines stories from 1901 to 1941 in which "'idols of production' gave way to 'idols of consumption.'" As idols shifted from the diligent and hardworking to the lucky, beautiful, or strong, "No way," he says, "was left for readers to identify themselves with the great or to emulate their success, except by identifying with them as fellow consumers."²⁴⁷ By the late 1950s and early 1960s, television and film reflected this reality, and Ginny Stamper is able to replicate the status of the wealthy elite by replicating their consumer habits.

She studiously affects a sense of urbane glamour and disposable wealth, a version of class passing, meant to propel her above the more homely ladies and fashions that dominate the rest of the film. To the women in town, however, Ginny's worldly design and clothing choices do

²⁴⁷ James C. Williams, "Television—Reflection of Modern America" in *The Evolution of Mass Culture in America—1877 to the Present*, ed. Gerald R. Baydo (St. Louis: Forum Press, 1982), 161.

not reflect *The Good Life* of financial and class success as much as they provide evidence of her promiscuity. She does not shy away from this role; in fact, she embraces it and uses a variety of archetypal men as disposable objects. In quick succession she dates an artist, a gas station attendant, and a bootlegger, all men below her supposed social class, but effective instruments in her “slumming” or class-passing down. In effect, her acquisition of men socially below her acts to raise her own status by direct comparison with the lower classes, and provides what Foster calls an exciting “point of contact between classes,” the “hybridity” of which “is a desire Capitalist America produces and maintains.”²⁴⁸

The bootlegger comes to pick up Ginny on Christmas morning, and she runs upstairs to change after her haughty participation in the family photograph. She begins to peel off her shirt en route to her room, and Bud reprovably follows her, beseeching her to just stay home, away from that smarmy man who is beneath her and the family. Ginny, who for her part is now wearing nothing but her ubiquitous silk lingerie, stockings, and high heels, responds by finally choosing a dress, a chocolate brown number with a luxurious white fur collar, and asking Bud to fasten her outfit, using the buttons to force him to physically care for her. The following week on New Years Eve, Bud again uses her clothing to care for her, only this time he must follow a trail of her shredded party dress to a parked car where she has repeatedly been used sexually, further charging Bud’s opinions about the dangers of sex and forming his resolve to get away from Deanie, the story’s antithesis to Ginny.

Deanie’s space, like her attitude and clothing, is starkly different from Ginny’s. Viewers experience the Loomis interior in an early sequence in which Bud drops off Deanie at home after a long night of kissing in his car parked near the area’s picturesque dam. Deanie lives in a bedroom over her parent’s general store and has curated a space similar to the anti-consumerist air of Bud’s room. Everything in her space is nostalgic, including the dolls and other small baubles, war medals hanging on the wall, pictures of celebrities pasted above her chest of

²⁴⁸ Foster, 6.

drawers, and a seemingly infinite number of pictures of Bud. Deanie has created a shrine to Bud in her most intimate personal space, framing his photos next to her bed, over her vanity, and on her desk [fig. 37]. Her setting was carefully cultivated by Kazan, who noted in his preparatory work that, “Deanie has a little shrine of Bud’s pictures and stuff. She has some little ritual each night. She kisses his picture...etc.”²⁴⁹ The film reveals her ritual, as she kisses her hand before touching three of his pictures, finally picking up a fourth and pecking his image with her mouth.

“Above all,” Kazan says, “[Deanie] wants to please him. She regards him as her master and can suffer anything except for his disapproval & coolness.”²⁵⁰ Deanie proves this by incorporating her Bud ritual into her evening prayers, which directly follow the picture-kissing sequence. Later, Bud reinforces her behavior in the Loomis dining room, when he forces Deanie to kneel before him and call him her god, which she does as an act of supreme obedience.

The Loomis living space shares Deanie’s sense of eclecticism and emphasis on found objects and memorabilia. Hand-made doilies cover cushions, framed black-and-white pictures hang on the wall, and surfaces are littered with small vases and other incidental items. When Deanie returns from a date with Bud, she avoids her mother’s interrogation by taking a conch shell from the mantle piece and putting it to her ear, ignoring her mother who follows her through the house turning on and off Tiffany & Co.-style glass lights that hang in each room. The whole space has a slightly outmoded sense of the homemade, corroborated by the sewing table placed in the living room and the densely packed fabrics that make up the space [fig. 38].

As such the Loomis’s home is a production-based interior. The house adjoins Mr. Loomis’s store, the source of their livelihood, and the interior reflects the industrious virtues of occupation and production. The Stamper residence, first seen directly after the Loomis house, is based on the contrasting ideology of consumption. Ace’s miniature oil rigs are the only reference to work, and even these are sculptural replicas not to be used, but meant to inspire

²⁴⁹ Note by Kazan, 17 March 1960, B50-F1, WUCA.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

awe in visitors. Everything else, from the animal pelts to fine furniture and silver, are items acquired for their social value.

In the initial scene at the Loomis house, Deanie again attempts to flee her mother's examination by going upstairs to bed, pulling her dress over her head as she goes, essentially using her lack of clothing as a barrier. This technique is later copied by Ginny who uses her overexposed body to invite or reproach the advances of others. Deanie's undergarments are revealed to be basic white cotton, a stark contrast to Ginny's silk finery. Deanie's clothing matches the simple, homemade feeling of the family décor. She begins the film in simple and conservative attire, seemingly dressed by her mother [fig. 39]. After Bud leaves her, however, Deanie fights to find a new method of self expression and identity, and drastically changes her appearance, emulating the flapper dress and style of Ginny and Juanita, the two openly promiscuous characters in town. Seated at her vanity, ensconced by images of Bud, Deanie cuts her own hair into a bob, and in preparation for a school dance, dons a bright red dress.

To this point, Deanie has exclusively worn virginal whites and pastels, and the shift to the red flapper dress is a conscious effort to shed her former identity and create a new, transformed life for herself. She gets into her date's car, rolling down her stockings below her knee as she has seen Ginny do, and from there attempts to emulate Ginny's various lascivious mannerisms [figs. 40.1 and 40.2]. The red dress seems too large for her small frame, however, and Deanie spends the entire scene pulling it up and adjusting herself in a visual indication that this new identity does not quite fit. Deanie tries to seduce Bud, but ends up at the dam with her original date, attempting to shed her virginal reputation with him. She eventually flees his car, running across the concrete dam and throwing herself into the water. Her suicide attempt having failed, Deanie is committed to an asylum for care.

When viewers return to the Loomis house after Deanie's two-year stay in the mental hospital, it is clear that the family's fortunes have improved. To afford Deanie's treatment they had been forced to prematurely sell their stock in Stamper's oil business, thus they got out of the

stock market just before it crashed. Mr. and Mrs. Loomis now appear in finer clothing, in contrast to their own home that has not yet caught up to their new found affluence and “class.”

Upon her homecoming, Deanie finds her room, however, quite changed. It contains the same ruffled white curtains and painted furniture, but the collage of Bud memorabilia has been removed. Only a few small vases of flowers dot the surfaces, but the vestiges of her former décor can still be seen. Dirt smudges surround clean rectangles, clearly delineating the spaces where Bud’s pictures once hung but have presumably been removed by Mrs. Loomis. Seeing the site of her former idolatrous rituals, Deanie gasps, touching her hand to her face, as if the absence of Bud’s shrine has finally and irrefutably taken him away from her, replaced by a heavy bible now sitting on her dresser.

After her two friends from high school, Hazel and June, arrive, Deanie changes into a flowing white dress, white gloves, and white broad brimmed hat and announces that she would like to see Bud. Her mother and friends feign ignorance, but Mr. Loomis pipes in that Bud is living at the old Stamper ranch. When they arrive, Bud is wearing grease-stained overalls and a denim shirt, working in the dirt underneath an old truck. Deanie, meanwhile, appears clean and pure in her all-white ensemble, a contrast that makes it impossible for them to have any physical contact. One of Kazan’s most common directorial devices (as noted in the chapter in *East of Eden*) is using objects to promote or allow what might be construed as somewhat inappropriate physical contact between people, generally as an illustration of the magnetic side of their ambivalence. In *Splendor in the Grass*, however, propriety is forcibly honored when Deanie’s extreme whiteness, her remaining purity, will not allow her to pass the physical threshold of Bud’s extreme dirtiness [fig. 41].

Bud introduces Deanie to his pregnant wife, Angelina (an Italian girl he met in New Haven during his brief time at Yale). She is also dirty and greasy from cooking in the kitchen, and she and Deanie grasp forearms instead of hands in greeting, once again to protect Deanie’s clean white gloves. When they part ways, Deanie looks down incredulously at her dress,

apparently rethinking the decision to wear it. When she returns to the car, she immediately takes off her hat, signaling that her clothing was, in fact, a costume meant to portray her youthful purity to Bud. She realizes, though (through a voiceover recitation of William Wordsworth's "Splendor in the Grass" poem), that like her pure white outfits, their love is in the past.

Through this ending, viewers are made to feel hopeful for Deanie's life and happiness, while Bud's embrace of his home, career, wife, and family promote the view that he is content to live a poor, but production-driven life on the ranch, away from the Stamper mansion, his childhood home of extreme material excess. Bud's family, we learn from Mrs. Loomis, has been unable to exorcise themselves from the burden of their materialistic lifestyles. Ginny died in a car accident, and Mrs. Stamper is living with her family in Oklahoma, "poor as a church mouse."²⁵¹ In her description of the Stamper's lost fortune, Mrs. Loomis once again enunciates her fixation with wealth and the objects and status it could buy, seemingly gloating over the material losses experienced by the Stampers. By immediately visiting Bud instead of shunning him for his comparative poverty, however, Deanie displays her attraction to work and morality over wealth and objects. Bud is also undeterred by the loss of the family's fortune or The Good Life it provided. He seems confident in his work, describing the extra cattle they were able to keep this year, and he invites Hazel and June (Deanie's old friends and chaperones for the trip) to a beer party. The simplicity of his wishes are in direct opposition to the lavish home, lifestyle, and parties of his father and project a clear dichotomy between the era's good life and the corruption of the Stamper's former Good Life. Indeed, the Stampers' mansion has now significantly been turned into a funeral parlor.

²⁵¹ *Splendor In the Grass*, DVD.

Conclusion

In each of these films Elia Kazan's directorial approach focused on objects as a means to drive narrative and create characters. He articulates this attitude in notes and interviews, explaining that:

One of the basic things in the technique of the Method is to use objects a lot. All objects are symbols of one thing or another. It's something you can see move from one hand to another, you can see it break, or you can see it captured, you can see it sold, you can see it bought, you can see it transferred, you can see it embraced, you can see it thrown away. That's like making an act out of a feeling, through the object.²⁵²

In turn, Kazan's use of objects can be related to a notion of the good life that waivers between morality and excess, a dichotomy expressed in his own American experience, that is his attitudes toward consumption and Capitalism and his feelings of otherness. Kazan applied these themes to his work and relied on *mise-en-scène* to enhance their meaning.

His work over this ten-year period emphasizes three distinct approaches to his handling of objects: as a means to describe specific relationships and create identity, to demonstrate class hierarchies and passing, and to comment on American post-war consumerism. In this conclusion, I will draw together these devices in the context of specific filmic examples, connecting them to his autobiography and other primary source interviews to understand his attitudes and motivations.

Relationships and Personal Identity

The use of objects to create identity or to describe specific relationships between characters is among Kazan's most obvious filmic devices and an important part of The Method technique. There are instances of this in each film, beginning with *A Streetcar Named Desire* when Blanche asks Stanley to fasten the back of her dress. The request is meant to annoy Stanley and shift their dialogue away from the lost Belle Reve plantation, but it is also evidence of both sexual repression and desire. The action allows them to touch for the first time (their

²⁵² Ciment, 45.

initial greeting contained no warm handshake or familial hug), and it gives the characters' ambivalence a visual form or outlet, in a sense foreshadowing Stanley's later rape of Blanche.

Kazan uses this technique again in *On the Waterfront* after Father Berry holds a meeting at the church to discuss the importance of cooperating with the police against the mob. Johnny Friendly's gang intervenes and physically breaks up the meeting by banging on windows, blocking doors, and threatening those in attendance with wooden clubs and chains. Terry helps Edie escape, and the two walk home together. According to Kazan, the alliance is "rather against her will; and she...wishes that he'd leave her alone because there's a social stigma attached to him, so she'd rather lose him, and at the same time she's attracted to him and would rather keep him."²⁵³ Kazan continues:

And he, too, is attracted to her, but he's also shy, and tense about connecting with her because he was responsible for the death of her brother. But mainly Brando wants to keep her, despite her desire to get rid of him. As they were walking along, she accidentally dropped her glove; and Brando picked the glove up; and by holding it, she couldn't get away—the glove was his way of holding her. Furthermore, whereas he couldn't, because of this tension about her brother being killed, demonstrate any sexual or loving feeling towards her, he could towards the glove. And he put his hand inside the glove, you remember, so that the glove was both his way of holding on to her against her will, and at the same time he was able to express, through the glove, something he couldn't express to her directly. So the object, in that sense, did it all [fig. 42].²⁵⁴

Similar ambivalence is manifested in the physical displays between Cal and Abra in *East of Eden*. These are detailed in the third chapter, but it bears repeating within the frame of Kazan's larger body of work. In the early parts of the film, Abra demonstrates no qualms about displaying her affection for Aaron and Adam physically, often touching and hugging them both. With no regard for propriety, Abra gleefully jumps on Aaron in the icehouse and often hugs Adam Trask when they meet. With Cal, on the other hand, her behavior is demonstrably different. She does not instigate physical contact directly with his person as she does with the others who are "good." Instead she holds, touches, and maneuvers the objects and clothing

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 46. Kenneth Hey discusses the meaning of gloves for Terry Malloy. He was given a boxing glove by Johnny Friendly, but in this scene with Edie, Terry wears the "white glove of virtue" (Hey, 178).

between them to demonstrate her feelings and glean small amounts of his affection. Cal returns her physical advances in equally vague terms, and the two push and pull objects from each other at the fair and again while preparing for Adam Trask's birthday party as a way to express their mounting desire for each other.

Discussed in the fourth chapter, Kazan employs this technique in reverse in *Splendor In the Grass*. Instead of using clothing or accessories to invite physical contact, Deanie uses the vivid whiteness of her clothing to stand in contrast to Bud and Angelina. When they were teenagers, wanton physical tension between herself and Bud drove Deanie mad, but now she protects herself against her old feelings by using her clean dress, hat, and gloves to ward off desire and the possibility of physical affection.²⁵⁵ Just as Deanie's white clothing serves as a barrier to physicality, in each of these cases objects are used to elucidate relationships.

Another chief technique employed in each film is the ennobling of worthless or ephemeral objects, or giving importance and status to things without intrinsic value. Objects are thereby imbued with significance as markers of personal identity. Of all the "fine" clothes, trinkets and baubles Blanche keeps in her trunk, for example, she values most a stack of letters "yellowing with antiquity"²⁵⁶ because they were written by her dead husband. Viewers are first treated to a display of her impending madness when Stanley touches them, and Blanche, completely beside herself, threatens to burn them because they have been so contaminated by Stanley.

Terry's pigeons in *On the Waterfront* continue this method. The birds were commodities to be bought, sold, and traded, but to Terry, their intrinsic worth was far less than their emotional value. Terry thinks of them as friends and confidants, and each bird has a role to play

²⁵⁵ It is interesting to note that Kazan's friend Tennessee Williams employed a similar technique in his play *Mister Paradise*, published post-humously in 2001. In it, a woman asks for a kiss upon taking her leave, but is declined by Mr. Paradise, who replies "No.—For the same reason that I wouldn't touch a clean white table cloth with —mud all over my fingers." (*Mister Paradise and Other One Act Plays by Tennessee Williams*, ed. Nicholas Moschovakis and David Roessel. New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2005) 25.

²⁵⁶ *A Streetcar Named Desire*, directed by Elia Kazan (1951, Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

in his menagerie. His lead bird, Swifty, is his most valuable in terms of racing, but Swifty also operates as a psychological double for how Terry sees himself. Terry explains to Edie that Swifty would fight the other birds for top position in the coop, to which she remarks sadly that, “Pigeons aren’t peaceful.” “One thing about them though,” Terry answers, “they’re very faithful—they get married just like people.”²⁵⁷ The exchange is a first look into Terry’s sensitive nature and allows the audience and Edie to hope for the character’s redemption.

Also in *On the Waterfront*, Kazan uses physical money as a symbol greater than its actual value. As an act of benevolence, Johnny Friendly gives stacks or rolls of money to his henchmen to count. The amount is not important, but being chosen for the task is paramount. Later in *East of Eden*, Cal gives his father a gift of physical money. The stack of bills is decorated with paper wrapping and a bow, presented as a birthday present, but by rejecting the physical gift, Adam rejects Cal, explaining, “If you want to get me a present, give me **a good life**—that’s something I could value.”²⁵⁸ By declining Cal’s offer, Adam demonstrates the chasm between his notion of a good life (achieved through virtue) and The Good Life (accrued with wealth). The confusion between these clashing ideologies separates Cal from his father and solidifies the tensions coursing through each film in this study. In addition, this dichotomy mirrors Kazan’s own life and the post-war era at large, while the visual cues underscore the precision with which Kazan was able to create character identity through objects.

In *Streetcar*, Blanche’s loss of the family’s wealth was directly related to her loss of moral virtue, a deficiency for which she compensates with objects of feigned value. Terry’s conflict in *On the Waterfront* is similarly internal, as he must choose between his livelihood and the potential for prosperity in the mob world and the blacklisted poverty he will certainly face if he cooperates with Edie and Father Berry to become an informer. In *East of Eden* and *Splendor in the Grass*, however, Cal, Deanie, and Bud face opposition from the outside source of their parents. Deanie’s mother pushes her to maintain her virginal purity, but only to ensure a

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ *East of Eden*, DVD. Emphasis Mine.

financially advantageous marriage. Bud's father, on the other hand, discounts Bud's desire for a simple life by forcing upon him the gluttony of food, objects, and women.

Class Hierarchies and Class Passing

Similar to the intergenerational strife in the latter films, a central conflict in Kazan's own life was between himself and his father. Their disagreements are well documented by Kazan's biographers, and in his 1988 memoir, Kazan flatly states that by the end of George Kazan's life, "I was left with a persisting regret that I had never come to know my father."²⁵⁹ Their problems were exposed early on by the contrasting ways Kazan and his father envisioned life and work. "In our tradition," he wrote, "Children were, up to a point, a mother's concern. That point came when the son was expected to begin 'learning the business.'"²⁶⁰ The business in Kazan's case, was taking over George Kazan, Inc., Oriental Rugs & Carpets, a pursuit that Elia made every effort to avoid throughout his childhood and early adult years.²⁶¹ He instead studied humanities at William's College, a further blow to George Kazan who asked "Why you not learning something useful?" which probably meant attending business college.²⁶²

George and Elia, it seems, had very different motives and methods for achieving their "American Dreams." While Elia worked with a psychoanalyst to understand his identity and come to his own definition of the good life, George brought his family to America in search of great prosperity, and after starting his own business in the mid-twenties, moved to suburban Long Island—as if anticipating the coming post-war rush to suburbia and the Capitalist American Dream. For George, identity was derived by the status and possessions his wealth afforded him and by observing longstanding cultural traditions. These traditions dictated that George ask Athena's brother—as her head of household—for her hand in marriage,²⁶³ name Elia

²⁵⁹ Kazan, 12.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 25.

²⁶¹ Ibid. George Kazan started his own rug business in the 1920's, after a fight with his brother.

²⁶² Ibid., 40.

²⁶³ Ibid., 19.

for the boy's paternal grandfather,²⁶⁴ and provide his eldest son with direct inheritance to the family living, which Elia rejected.

Throughout his life, George moved carefully between honoring these traditions yet also "passing" among upper middle-class Americans. Elia Kazan writes about this idea of "passing" in his autobiography, and how it came from the old country to America. In Turkey, he says, the men:

Wore a mask of deference. They survived by 'passing.' The tactic persisted when some of these people came to America...My father's brother, the man who brought us to America, was known in New York not as Avraam Elia Kazanjioglou but as A.E. Kazan. His nickname was Joe. What could be more American?²⁶⁵

From an early age, Elia was exposed to and cognizant of the concept of passing and of the many ways in which he and his family did not quite fit in. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster explains that for Americans, especially immigrants, the emphasis placed on financial class and upward class mobility "exemplified the capitalist American Dream."²⁶⁶ Her discussion focuses on this notion as it applies to American life and cinema, and she notes the importance of details to successful passing. "Class," she says, "is not only about wealth, status, and birth but also about everyday performed behavior...about performance and performativity."²⁶⁷ Foster counts language and speech among the most significant and revealing signifiers. For males especially, class passing up hinges on the ability to speak well. She paraphrases Emily Post who wrote in 1945 that, "Speech is a marker of good 'breeding' and education."²⁶⁸

Foster pinpoints this phenomenon in *A Face in the Crowd*, Kazan's 1957 film starring Andy Griffith as a backwater hillbilly-made-good. "Meant as a scathing critique of the wages of the sins of Capitalism," she says, "*A Face In the Crowd* warns the classed against taking in the unclassed... Ultimately unable to class-pass, the poor, white-trash figure is a dangerous, beastly

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 21.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 14.

²⁶⁶ Foster, 8.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 50.

arrogant hillbilly who cannot be tamed.”²⁶⁹ Throughout his career Kazan used speech as a tool for viewers to distinguish between social classes. Like the Andy Griffith character, Marlon Brando is famously inaudible as both Stanley Kowalski and Terry Malloy, and his lowbrow characters are placed in direct opposition to the well-heeled speech of his female counterparts. Likewise, James Dean mutters his lines as Cal Trask, a manner of speech that isolates him from Abra, Aaron, and Adam who all enunciate clearly. In *Splendor In the Grass*, Ace Stamper is not only physically crippled, but he speaks with rural affectations in contrast to Bud’s (comparatively) clear, articulate speech.²⁷⁰

Throughout his life, Kazan was affected by the look of things and the class differences between objects and people. For him, these disparities were deeply informative and shaped his work. When his parents dropped him off at Williams College in 1926, for instance, Kazan remembered that, “My mother looked particularly Old World by contrast with the Yankees of New England...My Father...looked what he was, a small cosmopolitan importer, uncomfortable out of his environment.”²⁷¹ Similarly, when he brought Molly home that first time, “My childhood home embarrassed me; I’d just seen Molly’s rich aunt’s place. Our parlor furniture was bourgeois junk, joints glued, not mortised.”²⁷² Writing about these events so many years later, Kazan recalls the clothing of his parents and the furniture of their sitting room specifically, using these descriptions to describe his felt inadequacies. His language also demonstrates an understanding of the power and subtleties of speech, costume, and furnishings as inherent to class hierarchies, and the power of objects and *mise-en-scène* to create these same distinctions in film. Susan Hayward confirms this reading of film in *Key Concepts*, saying, “Class [in film] is

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 51.

²⁷⁰ Ace’s speech and mannerisms are so inarticulate that they stand in contrast to even this description of Bud from the *New York Times* review by Bosley Crowther. He calls Warren Beatty “a surprising newcomer, [who] shapes an amiable, decent, sturdy lad whose emotional exhaustion and defeat are the deep pathos in the film. Except that he talks like Marlon Brando and has some small mannerisms of James Dean, Mr. Beatty is a striking individual. He can purge himself, if he will” (October 11, 1961).

²⁷¹ Ibid., 40.

²⁷² Ibid., 91.

iconographically denoted, signified by certain referents (clothes, language-register, environment, and so on.)²⁷³

Howard Zinn postulated in 1998 in his book *The Twentieth Century: A People's History* that the post-war era was fraught with this kind of class appraisal and calibration. He states that during the war, the army was especially susceptible to class struggles between officers and enlisted men, a culture captured in such post-war literature as *Catch 22*, *From Here to Eternity*, and *The Naked and the Dead*.²⁷⁴ Writing ten years before Zinn in 1988, Walter Shear also commented on post-war literature's recurrent focus on the struggles of class and power after World War II, a thesis that can aptly be applied to Kazan's filmmaking of the same period. In Shear's "The Sense of Fate in Mid-Century American Literature" he says of the post-war period that, "There seems little question that, as the immediate heir of the economic chaos of the 1930s and the global annihilations of World War II, the era almost instinctively acknowledged the powers of fate and circumstance."²⁷⁵

Kazan's work articulated the 1950s' human desire to face "fate and circumstance" by filmicly representing the desire for home, identity, and expression in the face of circumstantial obstacles—a view shared by the era's authors, fighting, Shear says, to prove existence through self-destruction.²⁷⁶ The correlation between these two—self-destruction as means of identifying oneself or passing in society—is one of the central themes of Kazan's work and life. He said in his interview with Michel Ciment that, "One has to turn against oneself, experience death to have rebirth."²⁷⁷ This feeling is essential to the ambivalence that resides in his plots and characters, but extends to Kazan's personal life and relationships as well. Kazan said that:

²⁷³ Hayward, 63.

²⁷⁴ Zinn, 151.

²⁷⁵ Shear, Walter, "The Sense of Fate in Mid-Century American Literature," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 21, no. 1 (Spring, 1988), 38-40. Shear references James Jones's *From Here to Eternity*, citing thoughts by fictional Sergeant Milt Warden who says he understands, "Why a man who has lived his whole life working for a corporation might commit suicide simply to express himself, would forcibly destroy himself because it was the only way to prove his own existence.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁷⁷ Ciment, 73.

The difficulty in life is not when you love somebody but when both feelings [love and hate] exist at the same time. And this is my relationship with America. I really love it and have a great resentment against it. At the bottom there is a great affection for the country; I like it better than any other country I have been in...There are also constant fires in my pictures. It is a way of expressing what I would like to do with certain aspects of American life. So I played that out in fantasies.²⁷⁸

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, for instance, Stanley essentially destroys Blanche as a representative of the upper class so that he may prosper and move forward with Stella. Blanche, meanwhile, faces the internal conflicts wrought by her changing position in American society. As the two attempt to navigate their respective social status, their ambivalence comes to exemplify the conflicting definitions of contemporary class. Essentially, Stanley cannot achieve the American Dream of social mobility while Blanche occupies his physical space, which she curates in such a way as to establish her class standing as above his. Blanche tries to deny Stanley the opportunity to turn the fruits of his working-class labor into the rewards of the middle-class Good Life.

Terry Malloy, on the other hand, faces an internal upheaval in *On the Waterfront*. In order to gain Edie's approval, social respectability, and his own self-esteem, he must rid himself of his history, destroying the part of himself that worked for Johnny Friendly's mob. This theme of destruction is continued in *East of Eden*, of which Kazan said, "The story of a son trying to please his father who disapproved of him was one part of it. Another part of it was an opportunity for me to attack Puritanism; the absolute Puritanism of 'this is right and this is wrong.'"²⁷⁹ The film's antihero Cal triumphs over the goodness of his father and brother, and in the end, Adam must rely on Cal, the son in whom he placed no trust, love, or good will. By "setting fire" to the Trask's father-son relationship, Kazan perhaps sets fire to his own relationship with George. By dramatizing the stories of Blanche DuBois, Terry Malloy, Cal Trask, Deanie Loomis, and Bud Stamper, through the "fantasy" of his work, Kazan was effectively able

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 72.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 121.

to raze aspects of his own life as well as aspects of the American experience of which he disapproved.

American Post-War Consumption

Kazan's work in this post-war era commented not only on issues in his own life, but also on what he perceived as a radical shift in American values. He seemed to both reject and embrace the rampant consumerism manifest in the post-war prosperity, and he used his work to address the dangers of unbridled enthusiasm attendant to the object-filled Good Life, or what Russell Belk and Richard Pollay in their essay on the post-war period called consumerist "hedonism."²⁸⁰ The article, "Images of Ourselves: The Good Life in Twentieth-Century Advertising," describes their study of trends in twentieth-century advertising, focusing on the idea that, "Advertising can potentially emphasize and support as a goal the second definition of the good life—a life abounding in material comforts and luxuries—through the settings in which it promotes its offering and through the values to which it attaches its appeals."²⁸¹ Through their quantitative content analysis of advertising, Belk and Pollay describe an overall shift in values apparent in the post-war period in which discretionary income led to increased consumerism, and consumption became tied to the idea of The Good Life. The concept of materialism itself, they state, is neither good nor bad, but the consumer's goals and meanings attached to the objects are telling.²⁸²

The article describes three types of owner-object relationships and the perceived benefits an object can hold for its owner: the benefit of having, doing, or being. Pleasure in

²⁸⁰ Russell W. Belk and Richard W. Pollay, "Images of Ourselves: The Good Life in Twentieth Century Advertising" *Journal of Consumer Research* 11 (March 1985), 887.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 889. Although written over twenty years ago, these points are valid within the frame of Kazan's work and his interest in psychoanalysis. The paper's language is focused on Sartre and the notion of "existential promises."

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 895. The study analyzed advertisements in popular magazines in the middle year of each decade (1905, 1915, 1925, etc.). From 1945 to 1955, ads emphasizing luxury or pleasure rose from 17% to 26%, while ads stressing "Having" or Terminal Materialism rose from 28% to 50%. Between 1955 and 1965, the percentages dipped slightly. Ads emphasizing luxury dropped from 26% to 24%, and ads stressing Terminal Materialism took a larger drop from 50% to roughly 32%.

simply *having* an object is called Terminal Materialism, meaning having the thing is its own reward. Obtaining an object that allows one to *do* rewarding things is Instrumental Materialism, and thirdly, a relationship in which certain objects allow one to *be* or *become* a better person is Non-Materialism.²⁸³ The authors claim that, “Using material consumption to derive direct satisfaction by having the good life (Terminal Materialism) is ultimately disappointing, while using material consumption to facilitate living the good life (Instrumental Materialism) can be rewarding.”²⁸⁴

These relationships with objects can be applied to Kazan’s characters and their varying degrees of success in negotiating diverse interpersonal conflicts, post-war consumerist hedonism, and the era’s evolving definition of a/the good life. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, for example, Blanche reacts to shifting notions of home, domesticity, and class traditions by embracing Terminal Materialism. She opposes conflicts by zealously performing her traditional gender role in the domestic interior and hoarding objects of perceived value, simultaneously holding onto and destroying her past. By placing all of her self-worth in objects, Blanche superficially confuses a good life with The Good Life, and by the film’s end she is on her way to an insane asylum.

In *On the Waterfront*, Terry Malloy must choose between belonging to a group (with its attendant material advantages) as versus doing what is good, or informing on the mob’s illegal and violent crimes. Terry’s decision and subsequent actions allow him to assert his identity by doing rather than consuming, and he is able to achieve his individuality and selfhood apart from acquiring disposable income and material possessions and can be considered to be leading a good or moral life. Terry’s object relationships are focused on Instrumental Materialism or having objects that allow him to *do*. His pigeons allow him to express his nurturing capabilities and his loyalty, while his hook is a work tool that symbolizes hard work and the ability to be self-sufficient as versus his reliance on Johnny Friendly. Joey Doyle’s jacket (given to him at

²⁸³ Ibid. 889.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

film's end by Edie) is a symbol of responsibility, or non-materialism. In *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films*, Leo Braudy claims that this coat has meaning for Terry and all of the other characters simply because "everyone in the film has explicitly decided that it has meaning: the kids consider it to be the mantle of a new hero; the dockers see it as the emblem of the fate that will come to Terry Malloy; and Terry himself puts it on for the last sequence to indicate how he has taken on its cloak of responsibility."²⁸⁵ In the end, Kazan demonstrates the era's own ambivalent relationship with material wealth. Terry's Instrumental Materialism allows him a hero status which trumps Johnny Friendly's quest for money and power.

Similarly, in *East of Eden* Cal's initial focus is on obtaining The Good Life, but he only finds success, happiness, and personal identity when he focuses on love and his father as versus the one-dimensional acquisition of worldly goods. Again, the theme is clearly self-referential for Kazan given his discordant relationship with his own father and their divergent ideas pertaining to materialism and the American Dream

Splendor in the Grass portrays like aspects of generational conflict and demonstrates different views or relationships with money and objects. Throughout the film, Deanie emphasizes her ownership of objects to symbolize her possession of people, particularly Bud. Her confusion about the value of objects is compounded by her mother's relationship with wealth and class. For Mrs. Loomis, Kazan says, "Wealth is a substitute for sex...[She] doesn't get sexed by Mr. Loomis [because she preaches the ultra-conservative views of sex for procreation only], so she takes over for him in the stocks, takes over for him as a man."²⁸⁶ Deanie observes her mother's convoluted messages about wealth, class, and sex, and eventually her focus on *having* instead of *doing* or *being* leads her to a mental breakdown. Deanie is able to achieve her self-identity and truly live a good life only after she fails in her attempt for The Good Life. Her preoccupation with objects, particularly in her performative use of clothing as costume, remains

²⁸⁵ Leo Braudy, *The World In a Frame: What We See In Films* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 86.

²⁸⁶ Ciment, 141.

evident in the final scene, however, when she goes to see Bud in her all-white outfit. Deanie is only able to separate from their past when she finally removes her hat, giving up on Terminal Materialism.

Bud's understanding of material wealth undergoes similar shifts throughout the film, as he achieves a good life only after he has lost material wealth. As a high school student in the early part of the film, Bud did not possess a true identity. Instead, Deanie and Ace used objects to define him. For Ace, this focus on *having* was his downfall. Significantly, he slept through the sermon on the book of Matthew in which the minister reminds parishioners: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."²⁸⁷ It was Ace's overbearing predilection for material goods that illustrated to Bud the kind of Non-Materialism or *being* that he wanted in his own life. By the end of the film, Bud's wife, Angelina, demonstrates this attitude by absent-mindedly wiping her cooking fork across her hip to clean it, paying no attention to the value of her clothing.

The Good Life: A Pervasive Message

Given Kazan's own background, he well understood the era's conflicted relationship with material wealth and objects, and he used film narrative and mise-en-scène to demonstrate inherent problems with identity, class, and generational divides within post-war American society. Kazan's experience with method acting and psychoanalysis no doubt brought particular focus to his use of objects in his films in this regard. Kazan's messages were both deeply personal and socially meaningful. His work was part of a dialogue with the public, a dialogue that, for his part, Kazan took seriously as his struggles with the Breen Office evidence. Kazan clearly expected viewers to understand and interpret his filmic messages as they related to their own lives. He said, "My work would be to turn the inner events of the psyche into a

²⁸⁷ *Splendor in the Grass*, DVD. This quote from Matthew 6:21 was also referenced as the epigraph of this thesis. It is meaningful that this passage was used, as it exemplifies Ace's misplaced priorities, and demonstrates the ambiguity of the word "treasure" as both material and abstract.

choreography of external life,” and he does this through a sensitive use of interior space and objects. “Even a deaf man,” he said, “Should be able to tell from what he **sees** before him...the human event in all its complexities and subtleties”.²⁸⁸

In 1986, philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan wrote, “Everyone wants the good life. How it is conceived varies greatly from culture to culture, and in a complex modern society even from individual to individual.”²⁸⁹ A good life is thus both an individual and social construction. Societies have distinct values that dictate their essential goals and worthwhile pursuits, while the same holds true for individuals within those societies. Americans in the 1950s had greater material wealth, more disposable income, and newer technologies, all of which lead to higher rates of consumption, and Kazan’s films demonstrate the different ways that post-war Americans used the marketplace to express relationships and desires within a Capitalist society.

As the 1959 *LIFE Magazine* issue referenced in the introduction made clear, this theme of financial prosperity overwhelmed the era.²⁹⁰ In fact the American notion of The Good Life so pervaded popular culture that the song “The Good Life” became a signature hit for the singer Tony Bennett. (Indeed, Bennett’s 1998 autobiography is titled *The Good Life*).²⁹¹ In 1963, Bennett sang;

It's the good life, full of fun, seems to be the ideal,
Yes, the good life, lest you hide all the sadness you feel,
You won't really fall in love 'cause you can't take the chance,
So be honest with yourself, don't try to fake romance.
Yes, the good life, to be free and explore the unknown,
Like the heartache when you learn you must face them alone,

²⁸⁸ Kazan, 90. Emphasis mine.

²⁸⁹ Yi-fu Tuan, *The Good Life* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 3.

²⁹⁰ Economists Michael Alan Bernstein and David E. Adler stipulate in their book, *Understanding American Decline*, that the financial boom of the post-war period lasted from 1948 through 1966. They explain that this era of American prosperity was unmatched by any previous periods of success, as the post-war years experienced “productivity growth roughly 30 percent more rapid...than during the 1901-1929 period.” The post-war era frequently compared itself to the pre-Great Depression era, as seen in the *LIFE Magazine* articles of the period. Michael Alan Bernstein and David E. Adler, *Understanding American Decline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 40.

²⁹¹ Tony Bennett, *The Good Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 174. The song “The Good Life” was written by French composer Sacha Distel.

Please remember I still want you and in case you wonder why,
Well, just wake up, kiss that good life goodbye.²⁹²

The song itself reflects the ambivalent discourse around the notion of having it all, a sentiment so rampant that others, including Frank Sinatra (1964)²⁹³ and The Drifters (1965),²⁹⁴ quickly recorded and popularized their own versions. The notion spread throughout popular American media, infiltrating music, magazines, films, and even the 1964 New York World's Fair that proclaimed: "Peace Through Understanding: Man's Achievement On a Shrinking Globe In an Expanding Universe."²⁹⁵ The slogan describes the complicated dualism of *The Good Life*, which requires that the "goodness" of peace be attached to technologies fostered by a corporate world.

Elia Kazan wrestled with these same issues in his own life and work. It is interesting that he titled his autobiography *Elia Kazan: A Life*, using no adjectives to connote what *kind* of life it was. But the objects in his filmed interiors are less ambiguous. He used fine things to represent the badness in people, be it the decay of Blanche's stately things in *Streetcar*, the expensive coats of Johnny Friendly and the gangsters in *On the Waterfront*, the finery afforded to Kate by her brothel in *East of Eden*, and the crass superfluity of Ace and Ginny Stamper's home in *Splendor In the Grass*. Kazan explored the duplicity between nice things and goodness through inverse relationships that marked the post-war era's complex relationship with consumption, leisure, and *The Good Life*.

²⁹² Tony Bennett, "The Good Life," *The Ultimate Tony Bennett* (1963 Sony BMG Music Entertainment, 2001), iTunes digital recording.

²⁹³ "Recent Stereo Releases for Music Operators," *Billboard* 76, no. 43 (October 24, 1964), 66, <http://books.google.com/>.

²⁹⁴ The Drifters, "'The Good Life' with the Drifters," magazine advertisement, *Billboard* 77, no. 3, (January 16, 1965) 1, <http://books.google.com/>.

²⁹⁵ Paola Antonelli and Udo Kultermann, *Exit to Tomorrow: World's Fair Architecture, Design, Fashion, 1933-2007*, ed. Andrew Garn (New York: Universe Publications, 2007), 6.

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