BODIES OF WORK:
THE PRODUCTION OF WORK, CLASS AND GENDER IN FILM MUSICALS

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By

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The influence of community is always inextricable from class identity. I would like to thank the communities of strong women who have influenced my thinking and my work from my hometown in Guymon, Oklahoma to my academic home here at Georgetown University. Special thanks belong to Dr. Pamela Fox for her guidance and inspiration. By introducing me to working-class studies, she has given me the critical tools I have been seeking all along. A large part of this work however, is drawn from the ultimate community of women in my life—my mother, grandmothers, sisters, aunts and cousins. Their ceaseless work, their love of music, and their subtle feminism are all woven into my thoughts and my words.

To my mother and my Grammy Dee, thank you for showing me that a woman’s work can be as beautiful as her music.

Kathryn Jett
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Introduction

The stage musical is widely acknowledged as a purely American art form. Taking its roots from black minstrelsy, ethnically diverse Vaudeville, and New York’s Tin Pan Alley¹, musical theatre has always been rich with the class, race, and gender related themes that reflect a complex and often fractured American culture. The archetypal story of a hopeful hoofer making it big became the success story narrative of the genre itself as the musical made its transition onto film in the Twentieth century with the advent of sound technology. The Hollywood musical was born at the intersection between the American institution of musical theatre and the impending explosion of the American film industry. Both of these staples of popular culture represent the nation’s desire for entertainment and the massive industry that can grow from that need. While baseball may be the all-American pastime of sports, the film musical is definitely the all-American pastime of entertainment. In his overview of entertainment and its effects on American culture, Richard Dyer explains that

¹ Black minstrelsy and Vaudeville were both popular forms of entertainment at the turn of the Twentieth Century. Both operated off the objectification of lower classes, but they also served as a valuable source of income for African Americans and lower-class and immigrant families. Tin Pan Alley is the name given to the music district in New York City where sheet music was often sold through live demonstrations. Like Vaudeville and minstrel shows, it offered a source of employment to struggling creative artists and is credited with being the birthplace of the musical style that would become the classic Broadway musical. (Flinn and Broadway)
“entertainment is difficult to define because everyone knows what it is, because it is a common-sense idea . . . . it is resistant to the probings of those who want to ask what such-and-such means” (Dyer iv). Still, we must enter into the discussion of the meaning of these forms of entertainment because they are the roots of contemporary culture. Inspecting the systems of “common sense” at work within entertainment should shed light on the ways that a nation’s cultural history can be at once universal and altogether fragmented into subcultures. The American experience is stratified in terms of difference, and while those in the hegemonic majority often dictate what is commonly considered popular “culture,” members of the minority have often woven their voices into those same texts. Within the history that all Americans share—in the form of popular medias such as film, television, and literature—are multiple representations of uncommon culture. Within the mainstream there will always be subcurrents and undertows that defy the norm.

Working-class subculture within American society has gained increased academic attention in recent years. Like Dyer’s inability to define entertainment, class is a demographic category that resists definition. Some of the same reasons apply, for it is just as much an act of common sense to define one’s own class position as it is to define personal preference for entertainment. Class awareness grows over a lifetime of learning who works and how. Class is also difficult to define because it is closely related to religion, region, race and gender and a multitude of other social factors that play into individual identity and social power dynamics. According to the
Youngstown State University Center for Working-Class Studies, “Neither Working-Class Studies as a field, nor the Center for Working-Class Studies, advocates any single definition of what constitutes the working class. We recognize, instead, that the term has multiple meanings and associations” (“What is Working-Class Studies?”).

However, just as Dyer implies that there is a whole group of individuals (including himself) who seek to decode the meaning of entertainment, there is an equally active field of scholarship devoted to investigating class and its effect on individual and national identities. To that end, we must develop a working definition of class, and for the purposes of this study, a working definition of working-class representation in literature and art.

Working-class film theorist Peter Hitchcock claims, “while class is constantly being rethought vis-à-vis the social, it is generally undertheorized in terms of the literary” (20). His objective to “encourage an expanded lexicon” for the analysis of working-class representations dovetails with Janet Zandy’s call for innovations in what is commonly considered a working-class text (23). Working-class film, literature, art, or music can constitute either representations of working-class people and situations or representations by working-class people. This definition does not imply that they must be distinctly positive or negative in nature, but simply calls for identification and

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2 The Youngstown State University Center for Working-Class Studies has been a valuable resource in the forming of this project. I was first inspired to work with the class implications of musicals when I found *The Pajama Game* stuck in between dramas and documentaries on a list of working-class films on the Youngstown website.
recognition. According to Zandy, the field of working-class studies promotes identification and reclamation. In order to decode the history of the social effects class has had (and still has) in America, we must first reclaim the literary and visual artifacts of class as a social institution and identify them as working-class texts. Zandy identifies working-class texts as those which are “distinct from bourgeois literature . . . in [their] emphasis on the physicality of work . . . workers--so many hands--and physical labor are foregrounded” (Zandy 43). This definition applies directly to texts that represent labor visually, positioning the worker as the object in view. Zandy goes on to show that the worker is also the producer of the text in that working-class art “involves the stitching of beauty onto the ordinary, the joining of use and aesthetic value, and the enlargement of circumstances for creative expression” (65). In this way, almost anything that is “hand-made” or “home-spun” can become a site of reclamation for the working-class theorist—an artifact of a worker’s life, a diary of labor.

The texts I have chosen for my study hardly fit this definition. They are not explicit depictions of the harrowing struggle of men and women who have sacrificed their time, their energy and their bodies to produce the goods we all depend on. Nor are they produced in the fleeting spare hours between one shift and another. They are not the documentaries, diaries, or dramas so pivotal to the working-class film canon. I have chosen to work with musicals—a genre that is not commonly seen as working-class oriented—with the goal of reclamation and expansion. The value of reclaiming these
texts lies in their unique combination of labor through the use of song, dance, costuming, and humor. My study will focus on three film musicals: *The Pajama Game* (1957), *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (1967), and *Hairspray* (2007), which were produced in Hollywood studios by well-paid actors and directors. They rely on humor, dance, song and general excess to represent a world that is more fantastic than real, yet they are expressive of working-class subculture at distinct moments in the past half-century. The theatre history that precedes film musicals establishes a precedent for why this genre might lend itself to class-based representation or even to the expression of class-oriented resistance. I will use close readings of these three texts to show detailed instances of those representations and eventually discuss the ways that the film industry itself has been complicit in some of the same class subjugation and objectification that is revealed in the films. Film is a complex medium in that it is not “hand-made” in the singular, but produced by “so many hands.” No one author can be identified as responsible for every frame of the final product. For this reason, my analysis will generally implicate the film itself—not individual producers, directors, or performers—within the cultural or ideological effects it has on any given audience.

Reading films on multiple levels is not new to twenty-first century audiences. Critics with an eye to racial or sexual discrimination identify resistance to societal norms in film texts ranging the entire history of the genre. Since at least the 1960s and 70s, several films about labor unions and organization among workers have become key texts around which a working-class community articulates their ideas, feelings and
opinions. For example, Sally Field’s performance in the 1979 film, *Norma Rae*, has become symbolic of the plight of female factory workers and workers in textile mills in general. In particular, the image of Field standing on a table holding up a sign reading “UNION” is iconic in American popular culture at large and working-class culture specifically. Later films like 1983’s *Silkwood* and 2005’s *North Country* have made the depiction of female labor activists practically a film trope, but *The Pajama Game* is one film that predates all of these women-centered work pictures yet is rarely examined or utilized as a central text to the field.

Tom Zaniello’s catalogue of working-class oriented films, *Working Stiffs, Union Maids, Reds, and Riffraff: an Expanded Guide to Films about Labor*, is an expansive review of films that have everything and anything to do with issues of work and class. Unfortunately, Zaniello dismisses *The Pajama Game* as purely frivolous, claiming that it does not live up to director Stanley Donen’s other works, which include *On the Town* (1949) and *Singing in the Rain* (1952). However, Zaniello does not bother to mention that both of these musicals are also laden with labor-centered issues, particularly concerning their female characters.³ Zaniello may be failing to recognize the significant

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³ Of the three main female characters in *On the Town*, one is a taxi driver and another is a burlesque dancer. Their jobs and class positions play a large part in the evolution of their 24-hour romances with sailors on leave for the day in New York City. *Singing in the Rain* is an American film icon, but little critical attention is paid to the significant role of class difference in the film. In terms of entertainment as work, the film makes a clear statement about the separation between the worker and his/her
contributions of musicals to the labor conversation or, in fact, he may be disregarding comedies in general. Drama may, in many ways, more accurately depict the real living and working conditions of the working-class, but comedy has greater power of resistance. Mikhail Bakhtin demonstrates this power in his definition of the “carnival” as a kind of laughter that is “ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives” (Stallybrass 8). My hope is to claim The Pajama Game and other film musicals as valuable mines for working-class subcultural expression because they contain the essential resistance present in carnivalesque humor. Zandy asks for literary scholars and cultural critics to be more “attentive to working-class cultural formations, the multiple utterings, voicings . . . that attest to the presence of working-class cultural expression” (63). The voices that blend and the bodies that move to create film musicals are some of those “multiple utterings” that should join the growing body of working-class literature. Recognizing the folk value or the resistant voices within these mainstream texts is vital to the expansion of a working-class canon. My first and primary goal in highlighting these particular texts is to achieve part of that expansion.

My second goal in focusing on film musicals is to further expand not only the field of working-class studies but also the possibilities for reading film musicals. Musicals, even today, remain an undertheorized genre because they have long been

product. The film indicates that such a separation is a violation of the performer’s economic and creative rights.
considered “a commercial kind of theatre, justified only by a profit statement. The only good show was a hit show” (Gottfried 74). Unlike other forms of theatre, audiences could only be expected to enjoy a show, not analyze it or even be “culturally nourished” by it (Gottfried 75). Certain musicals resist this limitation by deviating from the musical comedy format. *Oklahoma!* (1955) And *Carousel* (1956) are two works that embrace dramatic content and refuse to rely on the commercial guarantee of comedy. They are also examples of dramatic film musicals that can easily be read through the lens of class dynamics. Despite this added complexity to the genre, few film critics devote much serious attention to film musicals, particularly musical comedies. Those who do rarely, if ever, focus on the class aspects of the texts. Perhaps this is due, in part, to the genre’s overt aestheticism, for as Hitchcock points out, “on the [political] left, there is a fear that any trace of the aesthetic is evidence of a bourgeois contagion” (25). This is why a critical practice that includes a specifically working-class aesthetic is so crucial to understanding film musicals.

Richard Dyer is one of the few serious critics of film musicals. He insists that the genre is expressive of serious subcultural content while, on another level, retaining

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4 *Oklahoma!* utilizes the isolated Oklahoma territory as a diorama of a society split into two classes—farmers and cattlemen. The class stratification is further accentuated by a third lower class represented by the farm hand, Judd. Lori’s rejection of Judd can be read as stemming from her fear of his lower-class position. *Carousel* is the metaphysical love story between factory worker Julie and her abusive unemployed husband, Billy. The second act depicts Billy’s death and their daughter’s subsequent struggle through life as a lower-class outcast.
its value as escapist entertainment. However, Dyer makes the following erroneous exception about the potential expression of class-consciousness in entertainment:

. . . the actual role of women, gay men and blacks in the creation of show business leaves its mark in such central oppositional icons as, respectively, the strong woman type, . . . camp humour and sensuous taste in dress and décor, and almost all aspects of dance and music. Class it will be noted, is still nowhere. (25)

Dyer claims that the capitalist project at work in film musicals is the denial of class difference or the implication that any difference can be made up through capitalistic consumerism. Though this may be a legitimate problem in the production of film musicals as part of the capitalistic system, the possibility of resistant expressions for other marginalized groups must surely open the possibility of subversive expressions of class as well. Dyer mentions camp humor as an “oppositional icon,” meaning the presence of camp humor throughout entertainment allows space for opposition to the norm. Laughter is not only the best medicine, it is also sometimes the best form of resistance.

Humor is one of the key elements that make resistant narratives possible in entertainment, but resistant humor is not unique to sexual politics. Female comics, African American comics and certainly working-class comics have often utilized forms of self-reflexive humor similar to homosexual camp culture. Clear examples of this method of subversive self-denigration are contemporary comedians like Kathy Griffin, Chris Rock or Jeff Foxworthy, each of whom base their mode of humor on making fun of their own inability to become part of dominant culture because of their class, gender
or racially marginalized positions. Feminist humor theorist Nancy Walker identifies the universality of resistant humor in Langston Hughes’ comments about “the underdog, the have nots of society who learn to cope with deprivation and discrimination in part by using humor” (Walker 101). Dyer’s exclusion of class dynamics from the realm of resistant humor clearly reflects the fact that gender, race and sexuality all play into the economic power structure that keeps those marginalized categories in the financial minority. If class is left out of the picture, it is only because the resistant icons Dyer identifies are all already in classed positions simply because of their marginality and lack of access to economic power.

Again, Zandy gives good cause for exploring old texts in hope of finding new angles of expression when she explains that “it is critically important to include working-class cultural study in any academic setting because such study expands and tests the assumptions about all kinds of knowledge and culture” (84). Zaniello’s assumption that film musicals are too frivolous to effectively express a working-class perspective and Dyer’s presumption that musicals express all kinds of subculture except class narratives are certainly among the many attitudes I aim to test. Zaniello’s standards for evaluating labor films are simply too narrow and do not account for the subversive nature of humor. Dyer too is guilty of a narrow definition. His list of oppositional icons does not include the American bildungsroman, who pulls him/herself up by the bootstraps to achieve the aggrandized American dream. Perhaps Dyer considers this standard feature of American film too uncomplicated to be the site
of any kind of resistance. I would argue that film, as a literary medium, has a great potential for subversive expression because of the unique collision between the cultural myth of the American dream, its association with Hollywood stardom, and the harsh reality that most of the working extras on any given set will never “make it” at all.

Each of the three films I will analyze is a female centered musical comedy that contains weighty social plots and subplots combined with the archetypical romantic story arc. Most importantly, they all depict the leading lady(s) as a worker who struggles to achieve her personal and professional goals despite certain disadvantages that she may experience as a working-class or lower-class woman. In *The Pajama Game*, Babe Williams (Doris Day) works in a pajama factory and serves as “the grievance committee;” basically another term for union organizer. Her love interest, Sid Sorokin (John Raitt), is the factory manager and thus her rival in the context of work. Babe’s emotional investment is torn between her commitment to the union and her romantic interest in Sid. The union’s strike for a wage raise leads to the romantic conflict between Babe and Sid as her political defiance forces his hand professionally. The film is ultimately resolved when Sid foils the owner’s double bookkeeping scheme and the workers are given their raise, excluding retroactive pay. Martin Gottfried, in his biography of choreographer Bob Fosse, describes this plot line as “a subject that was even more unsingable than death,” and it does seem rather unwieldy in terms of comedic effect. But the comedy is only a vehicle for the more important themes of work and the physical and emotional effects of labor. As the film unfolds, dancers’
bodies become workers’ bodies and vice versa through Fosse’s unique choreography. The complex relationship between the worker and his/her product is articulated in the staging and mise en scène. Finally, the dual relationship between Babe and Sid demonstrates that romantic love is yet another form of labor, complete with strikes, concessions, and wage compensations.

*Thoroughly Modern Millie* shares some of the same themes of romantic negotiation. Millie Dillmount (Julie Andrews) is on a quest for a husband, but instead of looking for one at parties or dances, she decides the best place to find a successful man is in an office, so she decides to look for a job with the intention of marrying her boss. This story-line might seem decidedly backward in terms of feminism, but its farcical attitude and Millie’s identification as a sap, rather than the romantic mercenary she would like to be, make the film a comedic riff on the growing culture of American feminism in the late 1960s. (In fact, the film was released only four years after Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique.*) Set in the roaring twenties, the musical makes ironic use of silent film intertitles to narrate much of Millie’s inner monologue. This use of anachronism allows the film to be a joke on its own moment of production with “the modern” woman standing in for the feminist woman. Millie’s declaration that “Women today are free. For the first time we’re man’s equal. We can go out into the world and make a life for ourselves,” becomes increasingly ironic as she fails to demonstrate her ability to follow through with that plan. Millie’s struggle to assimilate to a new value system is the same struggle that takes place on the national screen when
social critics like Friedan insist on a new value system for women at large. Friedan’s logic is inherently flawed because it is based on her own position as a middle-class married woman and does not extend to women in all class positions. Similarly, Millie’s plan of action seems more applicable to a woman in an upper-middle class role, as her rich counterpart, Miss Dorothy (Mary Tyler Moore), has a much easier time achieving all of Millie’s goals than Millie herself. Though Millie is often unable to reflect on her own class position, the film itself clearly acknowledges the important role that class plays in the formation of identity and “modernism.” Millie’s class position is played out in her polar opposition to Dorothy and Dorothy’s brother Jimmie. As it turns out, she is much more similar to their formerly working-class stepmother, Muzzy (Carol Channing). This film takes up American icons like jazz music and the flapper to articulate class difference in the landscape of American history. Using the dual lens of its setting and its moment of production, Thoroughly Modern Millie draws attention to the way class operates in two turbulent eras of post-war changes in social dynamics.

Hairspray, the third and final film in my analysis, is also a treatment of American history and social change. The stage musical and its film counterpart are both based on a non-musical film of the same title by cult director, John Waters. While the musical’s primary plot consists of the story of Tracy Turnblad (Nikki Blondsky) and her unlikely rise to fame on a local TV dance show, its major subplot revolves around the segregation of the show’s dancers, the impending cancellation of
“Negro Day,” and the broader social themes of integration and civil rights. As with *Millie*, this film also relies on a retrospective setting to provide critical distance from present-day political issues. This critical distance can be productive in that it allows space for re-envisioning oppressive histories, yet there is a fine line between subversive revision and a utopian blurring of the truth. For instance, *Hairspray* parallels Velma’s bigotry against African Americans with her hatred for Tracy as overweight and lower-class. This allows audiences to view multiple forms of discrimination as equally villainous. In addition, the coupling of Tracy with the black community gives her agency in the text as she joins the picket line for her own sake as well the sake of the black community. In terms of resistance, the film draws on the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement to reach and inspire modern audiences whose exposure to discrimination is fractured beyond the binary of black and white. In this way, the film operates in diverging temporalities simultaneously. Retrospective settings allow a look back for the audience, who experience a certain nostalgia that comes with its own entertainment value. For the working-class viewer, retrospective musicals may be a way to imagine a utopian alternative, to rewrite a history of utter oppression. According to Dyer, “the commonest procedure for doing this is the removal of the whole film in time and space . . . to places that is, where it can be believed . . . that song and dance are ‘in the air,’ built into the peasant/black culture” or in this case, the black and working-class cultures (Dyer 29).
On the other hand, the historical reality of discrimination in the United States is not a light matter. As Dyer implies, even though it “can be believed” that peace and harmony were easily available, that belief would be a fallacy. Little Inez’s (Taylor Parks) triumph in the Miss Hairspray pageant is one instance when the film’s utopian retelling crosses the line into obscuring historical reality. In both the non-musical and stage versions of the show, Tracy wins the crown, but in the film musical, Inez’s win seems like a hasty re-writing of the reality of white public opinion in the 1960s. In Velma’s (Michelle Pfeiffer) words, Negro Day’s “demographic is cleaning ladies and lawn jockeys.” Velma’s blatant racism does not dampen the fact that this audience hardly seems to constitute the kind of landslide majority needed to overtake the film’s heroine in a head to head contest. Thus to indicate that Inez has the majority vote seems to condense the entire civil rights movement into a single march lead by a white teenage girl. Not to mention that the scene also provides a clear conscience for audience members who still live in a country where minorities, including African Americans and lower-class voters, still struggle to achieve fair political representation.

*Hairspray*, like *Thoroughly Modern Millie* and *The Pajama Game*, is not an uncomplicated depiction of class in America. These musicals are fraught with the complexity of representing class, race and gender relations. Sometimes the resulting texts are successful and subversive and sometimes they fall in line with oppressive stereotypes. Suffice it to say, the films are not homogeneous in their treatment of the working-class. Theorists of marginality must reclaim these contradictory texts and the
socially resistant moments within them despite their inherent inconsistencies. My analysis will break down the modes of representation in each film, identifying both the hegemonic and the resistant representations of the working-class woman. Specifically, I want to focus on the depictions of work that are unique to film musicals, but fit squarely within a tradition of working-class cultural expression. My analysis must revolve around song, dance, and costume, as these are some of the key elements that separate a musical from a non-musical film.

The body of the worker is the physical site where song dance and costume are intrinsically tied to the representation of work. In particular, the female worker’s body bears great signification in these three texts.

In nature and culture, the female body is always at the center of production. Although she has often been excluded from “the workplace,” wherever a woman happens to be is usually a place of work and a place of production or reproduction. Even though her work is hidden within the home, the woman’s body is always already a worker’s body. A woman’s leisure and rest time is inundated by her work, because “workplace” and rest place are one in the same. In the first section of my study, I will

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5 The definition of a musical film is always evolving. In the specific niche of the genre I focus on, songs and dances are usually integrated into the show’s narrative, but remain unrealistic on most levels. Costuming and mise en scène are usually somewhat unrealistic as well. There are certainly musicals that break from this structure, using more realistic narratives to integrate music or dance into a believable setting. One recent example would be John Carney’s Once (2007), which depicts an Irish working-class guitarist and his romantic involvement with his musical partner who is an immigrant single mother. Clearly, implications of class, wealth and work are all important to this film, even though it does not necessarily fall into the mode of fantasy as such.
focus on the ways that the title of each of these films references this unavoidable connection between work and play or work and romance. My analysis of Theodore Adorno will show that the working-class body in general is subject to this conflation of labor and leisure, but my addition of the film musical texts should emphasis the female worker as particularly vulnerable to the insidious nature of work. My second chapter will be devoted to the concept of bricolage in the song, dance, and costuming of film musicals. Bricolage is the technique of making a prop or lyric or costume out of whatever happens to be at hand. This reference to the hand-made is a connection to traditional working-class cultural expression in literature and other arts. Like the connection between work and play, this theme of circumstantial improvisation is most visible in the characterizations of women in film musicals. Their movements can be molded from labor into choreography and their work uniforms become their costumes. The women in these films make the best use of their own circumstances to enhance their access to cultural expression.

In my third chapter, I will begin my close analysis of the female worker’s body and the way it is affected by industrialization. Hitchcock discourages readings of working-class representation that reduce the genre “to a laundry list or perceptions—the clothes, the hair, the voice, the hands—as if the nature of class were manifest purely in physical attributes” (24). However, the very nature of classic Hollywood cinema revolves around the fragmentation of the female body; corporeality is equally important to the expression of the physical toll of labor (Mulvey). Film as a genre is a
product of the industrial age, so it naturally follows that filmed bodies are industrialized on a certain level. That fact, compounded by the narratives of class and work within these particular texts, leads to clear depictions of the female worker’s body as a mechanized body. I will use Donna Haraway’s analysis of the post-industrial female cyborg to show that the mechanization of the body can be both a disabling episode and an opportunity to lay claim to super-human strength. In either case, the depiction of mechanized bodies makes film musicals a visual reproduction of the effects of work on the body. These effects are carried over into my fourth chapter, which deals with the way the feminine body, in particular, has not only been mechanized by industry, it has also been commodified. The worker’s body and the body of the female star are one in the same in these texts. As such, they are doubly subject to the influence of capitalism, first as the worker, commodified into units of time or units of production and secondly as the star, packaged into a unit of advertising in order to sell tickets. Narratives of commodification are present on several levels in each of these films.

My final chapter will look toward a productive resistance present in each of these texts. Again, the female body, though it has been subjugated, mechanized, and commodified, remains resistant to hegemonic forces. In this final section I will show that the bodies in these texts literally strain against the restrictions of “normal” “feminine” beauty. Even though the films themselves may not be consistently resistant, these female characters are a valuable addition to the scope of working-class
cultural expression. Their refusal to succumb to the pressures of marginalization through class, gender and race is emblematic of the working-class struggle to resist economic, political, and cultural marginalization. Finally, I will retrace some of the contradictions inherent to working-class texts and take a look forward to the future of the film musical and its power as a resistant medium.
Working Titles

In order to bridge the gap between the methods of reading required for more traditional texts and those demanded by texts layered with music, dance, visual and verbal representations, let us simply begin with an analysis of film titles. Each of these films offers a very clear invitation to the viewer, encompassed in the title, to read the film as a commentary on the nature of work. *The Pajama Game*, for instance, is based on a novel entitled *7 ½ Cents* by Richard Bissell. The novel’s title refers to the seven and a half cent raise that becomes the central point of contention in a union strike at the factory. However, this narrative of work and resistance is not the sole and central arc of the film. Rather, it is set in opposition to the romantic narrative. The musical adaptation of the book could have easily played under the original title, but *The Pajama Game* is actually a more sophisticated summary of the action within the text, for like the film, it expresses both work and play in the same breath. Theodor Adorno explains this phenomenon in his analysis of the constructed nature of “free time”. According to Adorno, “Free time is shackled to its opposite” and of course, in the title of the film, the “game” is inseparable from the “pajamas”—the play is interconnected with the product (Adorno 187). The dichotomy in the title is reflective of the dual narrative arcs in which the impending pajama strike runs parallel to the ongoing game of romance. In further close readings of individual scenes within this text, I will show
that there are continuous examples throughout the film of how work is tied to play and vice versa, but to juxtapose these supposedly mutually exclusive terms in marquee lights is the first and brightest indication that this film is meant to be read as an ironic statement about the way work and leisure are often too closely intertwined.

*Thoroughly Modern Millie* is also a title that provides a rubric for reading the film. While the title obviously serves to introduce the main character, we can further break it down into the same kind of instructional code as the one acting in *The Pajama Game*. The two alliterative terms, “modern” and “Millie,” contain the essential work/play juxtaposition. The word “modern” becomes a term in the film that denotes seriousness and militant strength, as Muzzy reminds Millie, “Moderns don’t cry.” According to Millie, a modern woman should be ready to enter the world as a worker and as a sexually liberated, autonomous being. “Millie” on the other hand, carries the connotation of frivolity and of course denotes Millie herself, who is a constant stream of mishaps and emotional outbreaks. With “Modern Millie,” the main character comes to stand metonymically for the entire film. The dual narratives are set up around her fierce determination and her clear naïveté. As such, her identity “speaks the language of fatigue and frivolity” that is indicative of a working-class body (Zandy 3). The first word of the title extends the work/play paradigm to another level on which the viewer is asked to question the thoroughness of each of the two poles. The question inherent in this title is, of course, exactly how “modern” is Millie? And as we delve into the text, exactly how silly and frivolous is this so-called “modern” sensibility? In some
ways, this is a repetition of the incredulity of *The Pajama Game*’s title, for how can work ever really be a game, and in Adorno’s inversion of terms, aren’t all games simply mechanisms that reinforce the structure of work?

Again, Adorno’s concept of play as a necessary opposite (made necessary by the system of capitalistic production) to work applies to the film text and to the title. Millie can only identify herself in her ability to work, and the position of being a “modern” requires Millie to be “thoroughly” committed to her identity as a worker. Yet, Millie’s work and leisure are not only intertwined, they are inverted, for Millie’s serious work is to find a husband, while she seems almost flippant about her ability to perform secretarial duties. However, Millie still struggles to keep clear boundaries between the personal and the professional when she insists that Jimmie stop calling and visiting at her workplace. Thus we see the film begin to play with the role of work in the life of the worker. Work is still depicted as play and play as work, as I will explain when I discuss the use of dance in the films, but while *The Pajama Game* insists that the factory and its mode of efficient production ultimately controls the worker in both work and leisure time, *Millie* begins to insert the irrepressible human spirit, the *jazz* spirit, that can subvert work into resistant play at any moment. This flexibility in interpretation is implied in the title through the double-edged term “thoroughly,” which is meant to say wholly and, at the same time, not at all. Millie is not at all thoroughly a worker, any more than she is thoroughly mercenary in her love life. Millie’s physical
body and mental spirit resist even her own efforts to be mechanical and to twist love into a business arrangement.

The final evolution in this expression of both work and play within the film title is *Hairspray*, which encompasses both worlds in one word. At last the terms are no longer juxtaposed, but actually blended into a single icon. The other two films have to do with the juxtaposition of work and romance, but *Hairspray* introduces the larger world of commerce and the idea of advertising. The word “hairspray” in one sense, is simply an ad for the product that drives the show-within-a-show in this film. On the other hand, “Hairspray” is essentially an advertisement both for the product in the text and for the text itself. The playful nature of the word lies in its association with the farcically big hair that is so much a staple of the musical and of the original John Waters film. The bouffant hairstyle is silly and playful in its nostalgic reference to 1960s pop culture, but it is also representative of drag queen culture. Drag encompasses the polar narratives of frivolity and serious resistance to gender norms. The over-the-top drag hair on all the characters in *Hairspray* demands a dual reading of humor and resistance. Tracy’s hair is an extension of her bubbly personality, but it is also her mode of resistance to her parents and to the general “norm” embodied by the other teenagers in the film. The title, *Hairspray*, connotes the joy of youth culture and the very serious burden of labor and resistance shouldered by those youth. *Hairspray* symbolizes the silly trendyness of teasing your hair, “just like our first lady Jackie Kennedy,” but it also implies the darker side of 60s popular culture as it is
necessarily accompanied by racial discrimination and for Tracy, the evils of a culture that prioritizes physical appearance. In the original non-musical film, Tracy’s hair is her trademark, but because she cannot wash it regularly, the rumor spreads that her hair is infested with roaches. The hair itself becomes representative of the way that kitschy pop culture can become a false front that disguises the dirt in our common national past. The title of this film is specific and brief, but it contains enough ambiguity to encompass much more than the simple topic of the film. It allows room for subtext and multiple interpretations of meaning.

Each of these titles serves as an entry point to the text. They are indicators of an overall tone of playful excess that typifies the genre accompanied by a subtext of irony and resistance. Entering the text through the simplest and briefest of expressions, the only moment of the film that is not layered with the multitude of elements that make up a single scene in a musical, is a way for us to start at the most basic level and expand the same concept to the ever widening spheres of representation in specific scenes, complete film narratives, the genre at large, and perhaps even the cultural ramifications of the industry as a whole. The search for working-class expression must start in the details of cultural utterance and expand to the level of a cultural lexicon.
One form of working-class cultural utterance that is not specific to musicals, but can easily be found in many film musical texts is bricolage, or the making of art from the materials at hand. Zandy’s definition of art created by the working-class certainly references bricologic modes of artistic production as she identifies the value of handmade art in its connection to the worker’s body and its appropriation of available materials (65). Not only is this a clear trend throughout the various mediums of working-class art such as quilting or found-art collage, in film musical texts, it is often another manifestation of Adorno’s work/leisure tie. The characters in a musical create their artistic expression (i.e. song and dance) from the materials at hand, which more often than not happen to be the tools of work. One example that seems to be ubiquitous in stage and screen musicals as well as music in general is making music with household tools. Banging on a pot, humming through a paper and comb, or even playing the saw, could all be considered musical applications of bricolage. In film musicals, bricolage is a way to positively reference folk art in the midst of a big-budget, Hollywood produced film, and as such, it allows space for the expression of a uniquely working-class aesthetic in an otherwise mainstream text. In terms of representing work, bricolage reveals the process of music making within the film narrative as opposed to the more formal method of the hidden orchestra. In this way,
film musicals that utilize this improvisational style place an emphasis on music and dance as the products of creative work and in so doing, become differentiated from mainstream film texts that focus on concealing the methods of production. This tendency in some film musicals goes back to their roots in vaudeville and the showcasing of physical talent as a human feat rather than the trope of “movie magic” where-in the performer is the subject of the action, not the creating force. On the other hand, Michael Wood intimates the very insidious nature of the kind of bricolage utilized in film musicals when he uses the term to describe choreography. He explains the imposition of the inanimate on the animate as he describes “a whole batch of domestic objects is rounded up and danced with . . . these are just the continuities [musicals] insist on; our speech can be nudged into music, our way of walking can be edged into dance,” and of course our way of working can be molded into entertainment (Wood 156). In dance, the tools of work can become extensions of the body. The movements of work are reinterpreted into dance in a resistant manner, but the dance itself also becomes a laborious effort. Bricolage is both the very epitome of working-class artistic expression that is beautified by its very limitations and a potent example of the way work finds its way into every part of the worker’s life, including his/her art.

The major use of bricolage in The Pajama Game centers around the actual fabric used to construct the pajamas. This fabric takes on its own ubiquitous role in the film, appearing everywhere from the dance scenes to the costumes to the mise en
The opening dance sequence of the film, “Hurry Up,” is an elaborately choreographed use of pajama fabric. The brightly colored and textured fabric might be considered typical of a film musical scenic design since the waiving colors are large and exaggerated, but we cannot discount the industrialization of this scene. Not only does the fabric serve as the major prop for the dance, but the dance movements also mimic the movements of work. Using only exaggerated versions of normal work activity, such as sweeping the fabric into the air rather than moving it from a bin to a sewing machine, the workers move fabric bolts, construct garments, and iron finished pieces instead of participating in traditional dance. Rather than a chorus of kicking or tapping dancers, the chorus of women lean over their sewing machines in complex synchronization, making a dance out of the work. If we take Zandy’s goal of recognition and reclamation, this scene should be taken as a distinct representation of labor as a site for creative and resistant expression, particularly in the reprise of the song when the same bricologic choreography is simply slowed to an extreme pace as a protest against low wages. However, the very absence of improvisation or freedom of movement in the dance seems to indicate that it is more an expression of the physical toll of work than the creative resistance to that work.

The costuming throughout the film could also be considered a manifestation of bricolage as the women’s costumes often echo the colors and textures of pajama fabric in bright cotton stripes and polka dots, hardly representative of realistic outfits for textile workers. The ultimate erasure of the worker’s identity in terms of clothing is
usually the presence of a uniform. The costumes in *The Pajama Game* can hardly be considered uniform in that they are all different and all brightly colored. They even correspond to the personalities of each character to a certain extent, as some of the seamstresses wear more ruffles or less depending on how frivolous or serious they seem to be. Again, this could be viewed as simply symptomatic of the genre in that musicals often have larger than life coloring and costuming, but *The Pajama Game* takes it one step further to be sure that the message is clear. In the final scene of the film, the workers are no longer wearing clothes that are similar in color and texture to the pajamas, they are actually wearing the pajamas in a mock fashion show that touts the good nature of the Sleeptight pajama company. In this way, the bricolagic use of dance and costuming in the film is more along the lines of Wood and Adorno as the use of the available resources for cultural expression necessitates further adopting the accoutrement of work into the space of leisure.

The song “Once a Year Day” is also rich with implications of the way work can invade so-called “free time,” most obviously in the fact that the only free day of the year is also a company picnic. I will delve further into this scene when I discuss Bob Fosse’s choreography, but I would first like to point out the repetition of the fabric at the picnic as well. First the fabric was used as a dance prop, then as costuming, and in this scene it enters the *mise en scène* through the picnic flags. The long strings of colored pennants imply that even in an outdoor environment devoted to play, the fabric of work is still present. The theme is extended in the final scene of the film when the
picnic pennants, like the costumes, cease to be figurative and become literally the pajamas suspended from clotheslines to form work-themed party decorations. Thus the *mise en scène* in each of the scenes fully devoted to leisure is in fact, a bricologic use of pajama material.

Like the characters in *The Pajama Game*, performers in *Thoroughly Modern Millie* also rely on bricolage in choreography. The best use of the concept in this film is, of course, in the scene where Millie attempts to write a speedy memo for Trevor Grayden. Millie begins by actually typing, but in the course of her speed test, she also does quite a bit of dancing. She uses open file drawers, ringing telephones, and a stapler to modify her choreography into a complex (and certainly not efficient) letter writing routine. Millie almost makes a habit of this resourceful choreography as she dances on suitcases that imitate the steps of a stage. Jimmie certainly demonstrates the concept as he takes the opportunity of an unpaid bill at a restaurant to juggle dishes in the kitchen. He makes a game out of work, yet his real class position as a member of the elite class allows him to do so without really experiencing the trials of the working-class. Jimmie and Dorothy exoticize the working-class experience, so for them it is always already a game. They have only left the comforts of their upper-class lifestyle to find spouses with more down-to-earth working-class values. In some sense, they objectify Millie’s cultural values as much as Millie herself objectifies Trevor Grayden and his money. While Millie is in search of a certain lifestyle attainable through mercenary marriage, Jimmie and Dorothy are in search of cultural value through the
same means. In this way, they serve to highlight the inescapability of Millie’s class position. Jimmie may see bricolage on Zandy’s terms as unique opportunities for cultural expression, but Millie must certainly experience it through Adorno’s epistemology as her class position dictates her means of expression.

Tracy Turnblad’s use of bricolage is not quite as habitual as Millie’s, but she does employ the technique in the song “I Can Hear the Bells.” In terms of decoding the film as a working-class text, Tracy’s actual work environment can be ambiguous, as she does not hold a paying job. I would argue that both The Corney Collins Show and school, although more so the latter, serve as Tracy’s equivalent to work. In “I Can Hear the Bells,” Tracy makes free use of her workspace and the materials at hand—toilet paper as a bridal veil—to construct her fairytale dreams of romance. Tracy’s absent mindedness throughout the duration of the song shows her freedom of movement in contrast to the limitations observed in The Pajama Game or Thoroughly Modern Millie. Even the lyrics of the song reinforce the fact that Tracy is the “heavy-weight champion,” not the underdog of her own imagined scenario. Unlike the other two films, but highly indicative of John Waters’ sensibility, Tracy has a tendency to utilize objects that do not necessarily symbolize work, but are particularly laden with connotations of “trash.” For example, in the opening scenes of the film, Tracy sings her Cinderella song, “Good Morning Baltimore,” complete with rats for dance partners and a trash truck as a carriage. Tracy’s form of bricolage is more about exploiting the
materials at hand due to her class position than utilizing materials available through work.

Tracy’s mother Edna, on the other hand, utilizes the same modes of work-related creative expression as the other two films. Her work, laundry, brings us back to the ubiquitous textiles in *The Pajama Game*. One of the most blatant uses of bricolage in any of these three films is Edna and Wilbur’s dance to the song “Timeless to Me”: the two begin by dancing around the kitchen and laundry station and end up swirling through the laundry hanging on the line, mimicking Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in *Top Hat* (1935) in both their choreography and Edna’s silver marabou dress. Even though the costumes change to provide Edna and Wilbur with several fantasy versions of themselves, the surroundings remain working-class Baltimore and the romance of the choreography is grounded in the sheets that symbolize Edna’s position as a laundress. Once again, Adorno’s paradigm holds true, that free time and even fantasy are necessarily tied to work. Edna’s case is perhaps the most extreme because her work is in her home and her home is her work, thus rendering her a literal shut-in.

While Babe Williams and Millie deal with the balance of work and private lives as individuals, as a mother, Edna’s autonomy is limited by her primary jobs as wife and mother. In this way, Edna becomes representative of that hidden labor force that supports all of American capitalism—homemakers. Edna fears leaving her home in the exchange that precedes “Welcome to the Sixties” because, like most characters in working-class literature, her identity is inextricable from her work. Edna’s identity is
even more entangled with her work because it is not the compartmentalized nine to five job depicted in the other two texts. In fact, part of Edna’s work as a mother is raising her daughter, Tracy. Edna’s motherhood, her in-home laundry business, and even her weight are all signifiers of her class position. The moment that the film becomes progressive for the working-class narrative is when Edna finds that she can extract her identity from her physical labor. She discovers that she has the skills for negotiation and economic power. Capitalistically speaking, when Edna enters into a negotiation with Mr. Pinky over Tracy’s contract, she has gained the right to set the trade value of her own product (in this case, her daughter). Edna becomes further self-actualized when she speaks back to the policeman at the march. Like Tracy, Edna gains power from the momentum of the movement. From this moment on in the text, Edna capitalizes on an individuality and sexuality that she always had, but that was previously blocked by her dual positions as a worker and a mother.
Mechanized Bodies

The history of musical theatre certainly gives some president for reading film musical texts as expressions of a working-class aesthetic, but the history of film also plays an important part in connecting physical labor to the projected image. Far from the Hollywood sound stage, some of the earliest uses of film took place right on the factory floor. Frederick Winslow Taylor, known as “the father of scientific management,” was a leader in the management of workers’ bodies in that he utilized film to capture body movements in order to increase the efficiency of the motions used to do a particular job. He was certainly not the first to incorporate bodily discipline into the industrial system, but he was the first to film those bodies, thus rendering the work process visible and achieving an inseparable connection between that visual representation and the work itself. As Mark Selzter explains in his work, *Bodies and Machines*,

The real innovation of Taylorization becomes visible in the incorporation of the *representation* of the work process into the work process itself—or, better, the incorporation of the representation of the work process as the work process itself. (159)

Taylor’s method of filming work in order to study the working body and increase its efficiency would become known as the “time-study” method. This constant observation and policing of the worker’s body certainly brings to mind a Foucaultian
factory, in which the eyes of the manager are constantly watching. With the introduction of the filmed image, those eyes become the infallible lens of the camera. Seltzer goes on to express that the visual representation of the body as a machine for production that must constantly be monitored in the name of efficiency. He terms this concept “the American body-machine complex,” in which the identity of the nation is tied up in the shifts between the natural body and the technological body.

Seltzer’s interpretation of the effects of visual industry on the American psyche is complicated by Donna Haraway’s identification of the very specific effects industry has on the female psyche. In the use of bricolage there is the possibility for the expression of work as an infectious, invasive physical condition, yet there is also room for the creative use of circumstances to articulate the unique voice of the worker. Similarly, there are two sides to the argument of the effects of industrialization on the body. Haraway acknowledges that the industrial world has mechanized and even warped the body of the worker, and in particular the female worker. Yet, she sees the industrialized cyborg—part human, part machine—as a “myth... about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work” (Haraway 154). For Haraway, the mechanization of the female body pushes it beyond the corporeal bounds that limit women in pre-industrial patriarchy. Haraway’s cyborg takes the female worker from the level of sub-human to the plane of the super-human, capable of any feat and immune to human pain. Working-class theorists like Zandy would probably disagree
that the industrialized worker is beyond pain, but working-class theory does allow for
the subversion of pain and suffering into resistant modes of expression. In effect,
survival can be a new way to access power. Once again, we see a clear dichotomy in
working-class representations. Work and play are dialectical as are power and pain.

The pajama game brings the audience into this space of mechanized resistance
in the opening scene as Hinsey, the foreman, alludes to F.W. Taylor when he exclaims,
“I’m a time-study man!” Through Hinsey’s position as the comic relief and the
technical fast-forwarding the film reel, this scene becomes a parody of the very real
time-motion study. The speeding up and slowing down of the film frames draws
attention to the use of film in recording and manipulating the working body
reminiscent of Taylorization. This is obviously an element that is unique to the film
version of the musical, as it could not be accomplished on stage. It is also unique to
the genre of the musical, as it requires a suspension of disbelief that would not be
necessary for the audience of a more realistic representation of work. The typical
notion of what qualifies as a “labor film” as it is set out by Zaniello or acknowledged
by popular opinion does not account for the resistant possibilities of spoof. This scene
itself is a recognition and reclamation in that the visual representations of workers in
time-motion studies are reclaimed and reinterpreted with humorous effect. In this way,
the musical comedy exposes the ideological effects of work on the laborer, instead of
the realistic effects captured by Taylor’s films.
Although less explicit than *The Pajama Game*, other film musicals take up the same theme of the body as inevitably mechanized by the industrial age. Choreography, in particular, is one of the reasons the theme of mechanization is apparent in film musicals specifically. I have already discussed some of the ways that dance, through bricolage, incorporates work into the narrative of play and leisure. Now I would like to further discuss dance in general as a mode of work in and of itself. Dance is not only a mode of work in that it takes physical activity and has a certain physical toll on the body. It is also related to the kind of ideal work epitomized by Taylorization in that it requires a specific synchronization of movement. The dancer must use the body as efficiently as possible so as to maintain the consistency of the product from one dancer to another. This mechanization and synchronization are particularly apparent in the type of dance that is utilized in musical theatre. In a way, Broadway dance styles draw more attention to the physical movements that construct the dance than more classical forms like ballet. Fluidity is not as highly valued, but rhythm syncopation and muscle isolations are major points of focus, similar to Taylor’s emphasis on the isolation of individual movements required to perform a single task. While classical forms of dance may appear effortless, jazz dance draws attention to the effort and the feat to be accomplished in each step. No choreographer has been more influential to Broadway dance styles and the use of Jazz rhythms in dance than Bob Fosse, whose first big
break as a stage choreographer\footnote{Fosse began his show business career as a child performer in various local venues in and around Chicago and had some success as a tap dancer and “an overlooked contract player at MGM” (Gottfried 74).} came when he was hired to design the stage version of *The Pajama Game*.

Fosse’s signature style, which pervades the screen version of the musical, is part personal bricolage and part industrialization of movement. Fosse utilizes bricologe in the sense that he uses the materials on hand, i.e. his own body, to form his unique expression. Fosse based the angular awkward body positioning that defines his shows on his own personal inadequacies. Because he could not “turn out” as well as most classical dancers, the feet became turned in. Because his posture was not perfect, the shoulders were designed to be humped-up. Fosse’s highlighting of bodily imperfections is a visual application of Zandy’s description of working-class culture. For both Zandy and Haraway, imperfections are both the tragedy and the beauty of the working-class body. They mark the body as both a site of economic struggle and a place for creative reinterpretation of that struggle. In Fosse’s case, his own body was not considered good enough to work as a dancer, but his art would propel him to Broadway infamy. (Gottfried and *Broadway*)

Fosse’s style is epitomized in *The Pajama Game* in the dance that takes place at the union rally. “Steam Heat” is a perfect distillation of everything associated with Fosse’s style—from the bowler hats and stovepipe pant legs, to the inverted knees and elbows. The dance makes a significant contribution to the overall industrialization of

\[\text{\footnote{Fosse began his show business career as a child performer in various local venues in and around Chicago and had some success as a tap dancer and “an overlooked contract player at MGM” (Gottfried 74).}}\]
the film through its rhythm, which is both independent of and intertwined with the song itself. The rhythmic movements of the dancers “became a little machine, clacketing to the sounds of clucking tongues and knocking mouths, with hissing and finger snapping and counter-rhythms of hand clapping and foot stamping. It is like a cuckoo clock gone silly . . .” (Gottfried 78). The undeniable connection between these mechanical noises and the work performed by the union members during regular work hours is further strengthened by the reference to steam. No doubt a close analysis of the lyrics would reveal that the song is actually about the steam in a radiator, but within the diagesis of the film, it also references the steam forms that are so ubiquitous in the factory floor scenes. In this sense, the song reiterates the work/leisure connection as it ties the work narrative, “I got steam heat,” to the love story, “but I need your love to keep away the cold.” The strict uniformity of the dancers’ bodies and costumes, obliterating even their gender differences, reinforces the mechanical choreography. This song, however, also stands as a perfect example of the reclamation of the mechanized body as the instrumental music falls away and the song morphs into a chant culminating in “Come on union, get hot!” Resistance is literally born out of the ticking rhythms of industry.

Another scene in the film that captures the Fosse dance style is the song “Once a Year Day”. Again, this scene references the tie between work and play along several levels but in particular in the mode of dance. At first the dancing is entirely juvenile, as the chorus members seem to be playing games and showing off their own abilities to
“be a goof”. The scene is an example of Bakhtin’s definition of “carnival” as a “world of topsy-turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess” (Stallybrass 8). Dyer also provides a designation for this phenomenon as “unruly delight” and further problematizes the term by implicating the concept of “abandon” itself as a social construction that “derives its force from coexistence with orderliness” (Dyer 6). As the song escalates, it becomes clear that both Baktin’s sense of subversive carnival and Dyer’s understanding of the repressive nature of play are at work in this scene. There is a feeling that the dancers are undoing some of the strictures that guide their normal lives. On the other hand, their pure mania and speed obviously alludes to the previous speed driven scenes in the factory.

Fosse was excited to re-choreograph this scene outdoors since this was a rare occurrence in film musicals. He structured the choreography to take full advantage of the sloping landscape in LA’s Griffith Park (Gottfried 102). The escalation of speed as the dancers careen down the hill and perform trick after trick echoes the speeding up of the workers on the factory floor. Their physical feats are perhaps manifestations of Haraway’s super-human cyborg, but it would seem that the film articulates the perilousness of operating beyond natural human ability. The dancers’ bodies are now industrialized sites of performance, speeding up past the point of enjoyment to the level of utter exhaustion when they fall down on the ground in mock death. In terms of filmic phrasing, this ending provides the period for the sentence that was never finished in “Hurry Up”. The hyper-speed seamstresses in that opening scene fade into
black with an infinite possibility for their speed of production. The ending of “Once a Year Day” articulates the fact that production is not infinite, but rather, that increased efficiency in production comes at the cost of workers’ lives (and/or sanity). As with any musical comedy, all of this is delivered in a brightly wrapped package of humor and excess just like Bakhtin’s carnivalesque laughter. At the end of “Once a Year Day” the dancers give a final twitch, which seems to undercut the desperation of their collapse, but it is only a humorous deflection of the serious message that underlies their play. The dancer’s industrialized body is in danger of wearing out not because the body is more vulnerable than the machine, but because of the simple physical toll of work on both the human and the mechanic body. The Pajama Game does not disprove Haraway’s cyborgian myth by demonstrating human weakness as compared to the alien body of the machine. Rather, the film repeatedly demonstrates the fallibility of machines when they break down or are purposefully broken down in order to disrupt production. In this way, the endlessly working body, whether it is that of the worker or of the machine, can become a site of resistance simply by stopping the work, as Babe demonstrates when she jams her machine in order to voice her protest. Babe’s resistance through the disruption of the work rhythm is a precursor to the scene of work stoppage in Norma Rae that has become so iconic in working-class film theory.

The consequences of the industrialized body are also depicted in Thoroughly Modern Millie. While the style of dance in this film is not particularly related to Fosse’s style, some of the same themes appear in the choreography. Millie relies on
tap dance through a large portion of the film to help reinforce the 1920s setting and the mode of the flapper. Dyer identifies tap dance, and its roots in vaudeville as “mechanical skill, tap dance as a feat, were stressed as part of vaudeville’s celebration of the machine and the brilliant performer” (Dyer 22). The regulation and enforcement of that rhythm is what really brings the sense of the body as a tool of work into this otherwise pink-collar depiction of the female worker. “The Tapioca” is certainly one scene that plays on the same themes as Fosse. Jimmie, ever the king of bricolage, decides to make a dance out of whatever Millie happens to have had for dinner, but when the phonograph get stuck, the dancers continue to tap the same rhythm over and over with the same kind of mechanical mania that manifests itself in *The Pajama Game*, until Mrs. Mears knocks the needle off its track. While Adorno may emphasize the insidious nature of work, it would seem that this scene and the film as a whole implicate dance and music as a kind of opiate for the working masses. They seem almost unconscious of the hypnotic effect of the record player. This is not the only instance where machinery controls or dictates the dance movements in this film.

The industrial nature of tap dance is apparent throughout the film but the theme centers on the elevator. From the very beginning of the film we are confronted with machinery as Mrs. Mears attempts to make the elevator work. When it fails to operate correctly, she substitutes her own body as the means to make the elevator move. The elevator practically becomes a character in the film in its own right. It contributes not only to the plot, but also to the score of the musical with its moaning and groaning
reminiscent of, if more literal than, the mechanical noises in “Steam Heat”. Millie explains the real connection between the bodies of the working girls and the elevator when she tells Miss Dorothy that the elevator no longer works because “Some show girls used to practice their routines in here. I think it did something to the machinery.” To which Miss Dorothy responds, “Oh, I love it! In the Ritz elevator all you do is go up and down.” The work/play connection here is apparent in that a home for working girls is inevitably damaged by the nature of their work. Conversely, since the elevator is broken, the girls must continue to work just in order to make it up to the correct floor. Dorothy contrasts this hardship with the experience of the upper-class who do not have to labor for their transportation but also do not have access to creative cultural expression in the form of dance. Later, when Millie is angry with Miss Dorothy, she abandons the playful choreography displayed in earlier elevator scenes for simple machine-gun taps. The name for this dance move is fairly self-explanatory in that any rapid-fire toe tap with a limited range of motion can be referred to as a machine-gun tap. This step is the epitome of efficient choreography and a prime example of industrialized dance specific to musical theatre. Here, Millie makes use of her body and her dance as products of industrialization to more clearly express her frustration with the injustice of her situation.

Another representation of mechanized bodies in Thoroughly Modern Millie is apparent through the use of costuming. Throughout the film, each scene has a specific monotone color scheme. We begin the film with green, transition to yellow at the
friendship dance, and see hints of red in the office space. No one deviates from the color scheme, except Muzzy whose eccentricity should prove that she is well beyond uniformity at any level. The constant uniformity of color in the film speaks to the nature of the female worker (in this case, the chorus girl and the office temp or stenographer) in the capitalistic society, in that they are replaceable, disposable duplicates of one another. Seltzer picks up on this theme, though in a different medium, as he analyzes Henry James’ novel *The American*. Seltzer focuses on a scene in the novel when the protagonist, Newman, is looking out a plate-glass window at a stream of girls all dressed alike. The girls serve as “a metonym of the traffic of, and in, women that the novel represents,” which is certainly one reading for the interchangeability of the women in *Millie* as Mrs. Mears literally carts the girls off to be trafficked in a mysterious underground slave market (52). However, Seltzer offers another more complex reading of the novel that calls into question an industrial system that depends on these women to perpetuate capitalism by working in and consuming it as he argues that the women are

... not merely the mass-reproduction of copies—of fashionable imitations—that make possible this flowing line of pretty girls... [they] function at once as the object and the objectification of a general consumerist vision, a consumerism that here pivots on the ‘neat figure’ of the pretty girl. (Seltzer 52)

*Millie* is making a similar move by relating the industrial cityscape to the world of white slavery. Both markets are dependent on an ever changing, ever interchangeable, ever anonymous stream of female bodies. The marketing of female bodies is not
unique to *Millie* or Henry James. In fact, it is practically a trope in early film musicals by directors like Busby Berkeley. These films place little emphasis on narrative structure and instead, feature grand visual displays of chorus girls in geometric arrangements. The women are often identically dressed down to the smallest detail. The compositions may be full body shots, or they may be isolated body parts like a line of so many legs or “so many hands.” Many feminist film critics view Birkeley’s visual commodification of the female body as the ultimate fetishism of the robotic female body (Mulvey 841). Because *Millie*’s use of uniformity is more subtle than Berkeley’s films in that the costumes only coordinate rather than match right down to the hair and makeup, the statement in the more modern film becomes a critique of the previous modes rather than an uncomplicated display of matching mannequins. Nevertheless, Millie’s apartment house does seem to serve as an assembly line producing one “modern” after another. The film implicates the city and the notion of modernity in the inevitable mechanization of the female body. Even Muzzy, who at times appears to have the ultimate answer for all of Millie’s struggles, has been physically effected by the jazz age as she declares herself a “Jazz Baby,” “rock[ed] to sleep while the cradle went to and fro, to and fro to the tune of the tickle-toe.” The mechanical rhythm of jazz music, like the music and dance found in *The Pajama Game*, has rendered her a subject of modernity and of mechanization.
Commodified Bodies

The discussion of the mass production of bodies, apart from their industrial mechanization, brings us to the notion of the female star as an object of commodification. Each of these films obviously centers on a white single female protagonist(s) who represents both the character within the film and the actress as she exists extradiagnostically in the minds of the audience. That is to say, according to filmic star theory, the female protagonist holds meaning on two levels, the first of which is within the film narrative, but that level can never be effectively separated from the second level of signification, which is the female star as a public icon. Obviously, Doris Day in *The Pajama Game* carries all the implications of being America’s favorite good girl. Due to her position within the studio system, her public persona was a carefully crafted narrative that had to be made and remade in order to fit different film texts depending upon the role (Jeffers 50). Similarly, Julie Andrews brings a heavy load of meaning to any film. Notably her association with the film musical gives added legitimacy to *Thoroughly Modern Millie* in that it was a screenplay before it was adapted to the more widely accepted stage musical format. Before *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, Andrews had already headlined in *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music*, and though later works such as *Victor/Victoria* would vastly

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complicate her image, at the time of Millie, Andrews still connoted hard work, wholesomeness and pluck.

*Hairspray*’s star power is multiplied times four in its use of four distinctly iconic actresses whose roles are influenced by a standing tradition from the previous versions of the show. Queen Latifa as Motormouth Maybelle and Michelle Pfeiffer as Velma Von Tussle both partially allude to their own filmographies. Queen Latifa’s role in the screen version of *Chicago* (2002) was a part of the recent rebirth of the blockbuster live action film musical lead by producers Craig Zadan and Neil Meron, who also produced *Hairspray*. Michelle Pfeiffer’s most notable musical film role (though hardly her most recognizable role in general) was as Stephanie Zinone in *Grease 2* (1982). Stephanie and Velma are both domineering women whose class origins do not exactly include blueblood, despite their attitudes of superiority. Nikki Blonsky, though she does not necessarily hold any star signification in her own right, fills the place of the two women who played Tracy in the other versions of the show, both of whom were unknowns when they first played the role and thus connoted a sense of freshness and enthusiasm. Admittedly, the web of connections here is complex, but part of reading the film actress as a “star” is recognizing that she can never be observed purely within

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7 The Meron/Zadan production team was also responsible for TV adaptations of *Gypsy* (1993), *Cinderella* (1997), and *Annie* (1999), all of which contain class-oriented narratives of a young girl who rises from her lower-class beginnings to become the triumphant (and financially solvent) heroine of the film.

8 Ricky Lake played Tracy in John Waters’ original film and Marissa Jaret Winokur originated the role on Broadway. Lake makes a cameo in the film musical version as the talent agent in the final Miss Hairspray competition scene.
the diagesis of the film and is always already connected intratextually with other films and other narratives. She becomes not only part of the product of the film at large, she is herself a product packaged up in the film and ready for consumption. Mary Ann Doane explains in her reading of Charles Eckert’s study of commodities in cinema, “the film frame functions . . . not as a ‘window on the world’ . . . but as a quite specific kind of window—a shop window . . . ‘windows that were occupied by marvelous mannequins and swathed in a fetish-inducing ambiance of music and emotion’” (24). Thus the actress who stars in a given film becomes a commodity in and of herself the moment she enters the plate glass that is the movie screen. Her value as a commodity is determined not solely by her appearance on the screen at the moment but also by the texture of her identity at large.

The fourth and final “female” star of Hairspray is probably the most loaded in terms of class and gender significations for obvious reasons. John Travolta’s role as Edna Turnblad brings together a similar history of tradition as the role of Tracy in that Edna is always played by a man in drag. I have already discussed the ways that drag queen hair (even when displayed on female characters) can reference the humor and resistance inherent in drag performance, and the same notion certainly holds true for

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9 The role was originated by John Waters’ muse, Divine (aka Harris Glen Milstead). Waters claims that the extras on set, local Baltimore housewives, did not know Divine was a man. Harvey Fierstein created the Broadway version of the role, making the drag all the more obvious by his distinctively low voice. John Travolta was particularly concerned with not appearing to be a man in drag, but rather, to disappear into the body of a woman. His version of Edna is much more along the lines of purely feminine beauty than the other two men. (“You Can’t”)
Travolta’s role. In this film, a man in drag must necessarily be an icon of resistance to hegemonic gender norms. Thus Travolta, even though he is not a female star and does not fit squarely within “star theory,” carries special signification purely because of his gender. He combines this with his own history as the leading man in several musical films, the most obvious of which is *Grease* (1978), but given some flexibility in the term “musical,” one might also consider his role in *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) part of his history as a dancer/singer. The fact that these films are musicals or heavily influenced by music and dance is less significant than the fact that Travolta’s role in both films is a young working-class male. As a star commodity, John Travolta codes working-class even when he is hidden under layers of makeup and prosthetics.

The scene that solidifies this connection is Edna’s chrysalis moment in “Welcome to the 60s”. Shy, unassuming Edna makes her debut in the world when Tracy needs an agent to arrange her contract as the celebrity representative for a plus size dress shop. Clearly the narrative in this particular section supports the reading of the star as a commodity in that Tracy herself is experiencing the same process of commodification within the diagesis of the film. When Edna undergoes her transformation and emerges from the dressing room fully coiffed and dressed in pink sequins, the scene clearly references *Grease* and the makeover of the car, “Grease Lightning”. The dancers in Mr. Pinky’s shop wave scarves in a direct correlation to the dancers waving plastic wrap in the mechanic’s garage. Travolta’s signature use of vocal falsetto is mirrored in these two films as well. Just as his voice gives an octave
break when he declares, “Why it’s Grease Lightning!” almost thirty years and one
body suit later, his voice gives the same break on “your mamma, your mamma, your
mamma!” There is no coincidence in these two lines directly relating Edna to the car,
for sometime later in the film, during the song “Timeless to Me,” Edna’s husband
Wilbur refers to her as “a broken down Chevy” to which she replies, “All I need is a
fresh coat of paint.” Clearly there is a strong tie between the two films, but the real
question at stake is how Travolta’s star identity affects the film. With the support of
his role in Grease, Travolta’s portrayal of Edna solidifies her position in the working-
class while simultaneously positioning her as a commodity once she is made over. The
analogy reaffirms the mechanization of the woman’s body as she is related to (among
other things) the ultimate machine. Reflecting the cultural trope of the feminized car or
the boat, the reverse is true of Grease Lighting as the car is distinctly feminized by the
lyrics, “she’s a real pussy wagon”. Thus Travolta’s identity as one of the most notable
male film musical stars of his time plays a significant role in the formation of Edna’s
characterization.

The scene at Mr. Pinky’s certainly places Edna in Eckert’s shop window as an
item to be consumed, but the other two films do not take place in that commercial
space. The scene in The Pajama Game that seems to accomplish a similar end with
Doris Day as both the extra diastic Hollywood icon and the narrative woman-as-
product, takes place during the song “I’m Not at All in Love.” The other seamstresses
at the factory begin by teasing Babe about her romantic interest in Sid but ultimately
end up implying that she should marry him. Or as Babe says, “If there’s a guy you merely have a beer with, they’ve got you setting the wedding date.” The choreography to the song consists of the women pushing Babe back and forth across the loading dock on a dolly as if she is about to be loaded onto a truck and sold along with the pajamas. The pajamas are bound for a store and Babe is bound for love and marriage. Thus the studio packages Day according to the sexual demands of each role she takes and similarly, Babe’s own community packages her according to her role as a woman and thus subject to the automatic desire for home and husband. This scene exemplifies the collapse of distance between the worker and his/her product articulated in Karl Marx’s *Grundrisse*. Marx indicates that capitalism demands that the worker take on a value that correlates with his or her product. Once the potential for production in a single worker is estimated, that is the worker’s sole value, not his or her skill or artisanship. Thus the worker is elided with the product itself and not the skill required to produce it. These women are workers and producers, but due to the demands of industrial capitalism, they have transcended production to actually become the product as we see in their visual relation to the pajamas.

Tracy Turnblad is much more literally commodified after her rise to fame. While her mother’s commodification takes place in the dress store, Tracy’s transformation into commercial goods happens in her father’s joke shop. During the montage that accompanies the song “New Girl in Town,” Tracy’s rise to fame is intercut with shots from the joke shop as Wilbur sells various Tracy products to a line
of waiting customers. Tracy’s signature hair is for sale in the form of wigs and her face plastered on paper fans. Once again, the theme of commodification as it concerns the female star is inseparable from the theme of industrialization. Once the Tracy products go on sale, Tracy becomes a mass-produced item. The twins, Doreen and Noreen, copy Tracy’s hairstyle, indicating not only that she is no longer unique, but that she can be duplicated. In this way, Tracy loses her “aura,” if we are to rely on Walter Benjamin’s understanding of the effects of mass production on originality. Tracy’s commodification and mass production culminates in the Miss Hairspray scene in which the police are confused by Tracy fans masquerading as Tracy herself. Even Wilbur dresses up as his own daughter, but Tracy regains her originality and her aura when she arrives at the show bereft of her bouffant. Her hair is straightened and she has traded her good girl skirt and blouse for a short sequined dress and boots a la Nancy Sinatra. Tracy seems to be one of the few female characters in these films whose stardom does not dominate her characterization and perhaps this is because of Nikki Blonsky’s lack of star signification.

Tracy’s reclamation of her originality and unique identity is a high note in the film compared to the treatment of some of the other female characters. The low notes of the film contributing to the commodification of the female star are the film

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10 According to Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” the “aura” of any original work of art is sacrificed in the process of mass reproduction. However, mass reproduction of art is the only way to achieve a democratic distribution of art and beauty even if it lacks “aura.” In this sense, part of Tracy’s mass reproduction is clearly for the benefit of the masses.
techniques employed to capture her image, in particular the pan up the body that is so much a point of contention in feminist film theory. Mulvey takes issue with this staple of classic Hollywood cinema as it fragments, objectifies, and fetishizes the female body. In the classic body pan, the film frame and its relationship to the female body is again similar to the relationship between shop window and mannequin. The frame puts the body, beginning with the legs and proceeding upwards, behind the metaphorical glass of the screen. *Hairspray* is guilty of employing this technique to introduce both Edna and Velma. In both Travolta’s case and Pfeiffer’s, the pan seems to be intended to provoke suspense in the audience as to who will be playing the role. This effort to reveal the identity of each character slowly may be felt more intensely because of the film’s tradition of careful and sensational casting, as if part of the experience of viewing the movie is contingent on who is starring in each role. That revelation must be carefully withheld from the viewer until the perfect moment. *Hairspray*’s director Adam Shankman may have intended these shots to give his big name stars their due introduction, but the result fails to take into consideration the denigrated position of women in the glamour that is associated with these classic Hollywood pans. By “honoring” Pfeiffer and Travolta with a trope used in antifeminist films that objectify and over-sexualize the women on screen, Shankman has taken the resistant voice of John Waters and his renegade version of cinema out of *Hairspray* and replaced it with an uncritical imitation of classic Hollywood patriarchy. Certainly Waters never relied on the constructs of classic Hollywood cinema to define
what kinds of shots to use. Shankman would create a more ideologically resistant film if he relied on less conventional and less critically fraught film techniques.

Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” was not published until 1975, almost ten years after the film version of “Thoroughly Modern Millie,” so the same expectations of gender sensitivity cannot be held for Millie as for Hairspary. However, the same pans of women’s feet and legs are abundant in the opening scene of the film. This scene is the most demonstrative of the concept of commodification of the female body, both in Millie’s gaze that is directed at the female bodies around her in the street and in her attempts to imitate, through consumption, their appearances. In this sequence, we see Millie all but purchase her identity. She witnesses the changing hairstyles and conveniently finds hairdresser’s shop right in front of her. She notices the difference between her clothes and everyone else’s and, accordingly, ducks into the nearest dress shop. In this way, the film is slightly before its time in that it demonstrates the female viewer and her necessary identification with the subject on the screen. If Millie were sitting in a theatre instead of standing on a sidewalk, her inner dialogue and unmediated gaze at other women would be a clear demonstration of Doane’s understanding of female spectatorship. She relates the film frame in general to the shop window and to the Lacanian mirror that reflects a more perfect self. In this opening scene, the film frame serves both purposes for Millie. She sees the other women as perfected versions of herself, but she also sees them as commodified. Thus
Millie can be seen as a progressive film in that it represents the female position as a spectator and consumer, but Doane reminds us that Insofar as the woman is constructed culturally as the perfect spectator—outside the realm of events and actions—it is important to note that spectating is not the same as seeing. And consuming is certainly not synonymous with controlling the means of production. (13)

Millie is a spectator throughout the film as we can see from her wide-eyed asides to the camera that demonstrate shock at what she has seen, but she repeatedly fails to see the truth about various situations. Similarly, she can consume the accoutrement of modernity in her hairstyle and clothes, but ultimately it is Jimmie and Trevor Graydon who sanction the women’s appearances and thus control production.
Millie’s fascination with commodities for sale in the industrialized cityscape leads to a close examination of her own body. She notices that in comparison with other women, her own breasts keep her newly purchased beads from hanging straight. She later observes that nasty Judith Trumain, the villainess who shows up at Muzzy’s party, also has perfectly straight beads and associates this phenomenon with wealth when she wonders, “Why are rich girls always flat chested?” However, when Millie attempts to purchase a minimizer to flatten out her own class-based imperfections, her body simply resists. The corset pops off in a humorous moment that is no less so because of its significance as an instance of the working-class body’s resistance to conformity. Though Millie’s mind is subject to patriarchal notions of female beauty and identity, her body resists all but a working-class identity.

Each of these three films contains repeated instances of the working-class body balking at the demands of the dominant culture that surrounds it. The female bodies in these films are too curvy and out of control to meet the standards of hegemonic society. In this way, they are similar to the “grotesque satiric body” as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White define it. They are sites of excess that satirize themselves, but also poke fun at the world around them. Millie’s “fronts” are representative of her inability to truly become “a modern” because the modern values of cold calculation
and excessive leisure are not in line with her working-class values of frankness, hard work, and real emotions. Another example of Millie’s body as resistant to hegemony and to Millie’s own will is her beauty spot, which refuses to stay put or even to stay on her own face. Millie can attempt to conform cosmetically, but she cannot change herself corporeally.

Tracy’s body also refuses to conform to hegemonic notions of polite fashionable girlhood. Like Millie, she does not necessarily choose her weight as a political statement against thinner standards of beauty, but unlike Millie, she does seem to embrace her size as a tool of her individuality. Her parents instill part of her understanding of her size as a productive site of difference. Her father reaffirms her desire to audition for the Corney Collins Show by exclaiming, “This is America babe! You gotta think big to be big!” Her mother retorts that “Big ain’t the problem in this family, Wilbur.” Her mother demonstrates a clear understanding of her own weight as both a disability in terms of her class status and a source of strength and sexuality.

Both of Tracy’s parents freely acknowledge their own class positions in their discussions with Tracy and their conversations together. Edna does so through her warning to Tracy that her dreams may not always work out, as Edna has experienced through the death of her coin-operated laundromat dream. Wilbur, on the other hand, seems to believe whole-heartedly in the American dream but understands its limitations as he sarcastically compares his small joke shop to the Taj Mahal. Thus Tracy can comfortably acknowledge her cultural class position as determined by her
parents’ employment and her social class position (in terms of popularity) as determined by her weight. Tracy’s big body, hair, and personality, place her in the perfect position for outsider resistance. Her very appearance refuses to conform to class coded standards of beauty and even decorum. Her hair and body are seen as disruptive to the classroom and to the Corney Collins Show. This physical disruption is reflected throughout the film in as Tracy attempts to disorder the dominant ideology of racial discrimination.

Tracy’s dancing in particular is another level on which her body refuses to conform. Tracy embraces the more provocative dance styles she learns in detention over the conservative dances the other white characters utilize. Tracy’s oversized body becomes a tool that enables her to access a cultural richness contained within the black community. In particular, the turning point in Tracy’s dancing career seems to be the moment that Link notices her through the detention window. The frame of the window focuses in on her ample rear end as she dances. Tracy’s body is literally pushing the limits of the film frame just as narratively she pushes the limits of her racist and classist culture. By accessing Seaweed and Maybelle’s power of marginality through her stint as a detainee, Tracy utilizes her status as an outsider to accomplish her goal of being center-stage. In other words, Tracy has to become further marginalized in order to gain possession of the full size of her resistance. In a seemingly insignificant moment between Velma and several of the dancers on the Corney Collins Show, Velma forces the students to remove stuffing that would have enhanced the size of the
girl’s bust line or the boy’s crotch. Even though this exchange is meant for comic effect, it would seem to support the inversion of contemporary beauty norms in this film. Bigger is consistently better in a mode of defiance to American film history and the American class/weight complex. Of course, the manifesto for bigness in the film is Maybelle’s triumphant “Big Blonde and Beautiful.”

“Big Blond and Beautiful” serves several purposes in the film. First of all, it affirms size as the location of Maybelle’s sexuality and by extension implies hidden sexual potential for Edna and Tracy. The lyrics to the song are subtly erotic as in, “we need a man who brings a man-sized appetite!” but they are further sexualized in Edna’s reprise of the song as she sings, “That food! Well, there ain’t nothing like a spread to get ya in the mood.” The reprise of the song pits Edna against Velma in terms of weight as Velma references the fact that Wilbur may be “tired of heavy lifting,” but the face-off is also about class as Velma refers to the fact that she is “selling something you can’t buy in a ten cent store.” Maybelle’s words of advice let Edna into a community of resistant bodies that are too big and too black to fit into the norms of white patriarchal culture or into the demands of a classist sexual hierarchy. One generation is echoed in the next when Seaweed makes a similar declaration that his blackness is his source of power and sexuality in the song “Run and Tell That.”

The final conclusion to Edna’s corporeal resistance shows up in her costuming in the final scene. Just as Tracy reestablishes her originality in her surprise revelation at the Miss Hairspray pageant, Edna literally reveals herself in defiance of Velma when
she takes off her tear-away skirt and dominates the dance floor. Her red and gold spangled hip-shaking dance, intended to reference Tina Turner, makes her body the central focus for cameras and audience members on the diademic and the filmic levels. Despite the fact that Edna’s costuming and hair change dramatically after her “coming out,” she still retains her class identity through her size, shape and heavy Baltimore accent. Her costuming only serves to demand greater screen presence, similar to the way Maybelle’s platinum hair demands attention on the Corney Collins Show. Both women embody Mulvey’s concept of “to-be-looked-at-ness,” but in a defiant way in that they are not objectified, but rather insist on inhabiting the camera’s gaze.

Babe Williams’ physical body does not break rules in the same ways as the women in the other two films, but she is physically different through her clothing. In costuming, Babe begins the film as a sort of cheerleader, but when she is fired from her job for her rebellious behavior, there is a perceptible change in her wardrobe. Her most rebellious act takes place when she purposefully jams her sewing machine, thus shutting down the entire line. Day’s legs and feet and the smoke from her machine fill the frame. Her red patent leather pumps are symbolic both for her rebellion from work and for her sexual rebellion in the act of privileging her union over her lover. From this point on, red will become her signature color--symbolic for her wildness and for her communist bent. Babe’s sexual rebellion is depicted in a second layer of costuming, which is the construction rather than the color of her garments. The film is divided
scene by scene as she fluctuates between a soft feminized appearance and a sharper, masculinized wardrobe. At Babe’s first entrance, she is dressed in her blue smock, blue skirt and white blouse that characterize her leadership role in the factory. Before she enters, Sid assumes that she must be a man, both from her position and from her name. When she comes in the room he is simultaneously corrected and confirmed in his assumption. She is certainly a woman, but her haircut and her stiffened collar are constructed to give her a “tough” look that is much more masculine than the way audiences so often see Doris Day—hyper-feminized and in hazy focus.

Tamar McDonald Jeffers’ reading of costuming in Doris Day films focuses specifically on the construction of garments. She identifies the more full skirted outfits as reserved for virgins and wives, as the abundance of fabric may form a protective zone around their chastity. She reads women in tighter fitting garments as more sexually available. I do not disagree that “dress codes . . were made to serve the function of dichotomising women,” but where Jeffers sees only the dichotomy of “virgin/post-virgin,” I see multiple dichotomies including the gender dichotomy of feminine and masculine (McDonald 52). The fullness of the circle-skirted dresses and petticoats is not a protective barrier but softness that harkens back to hoop skirts and other lavish female costumes. The tighter fitting garments are not solely meant to highlight the sexual elements of the female anatomy but also to mimic men’s clothing.
with collared shirts and trousers. There is a constant tension in this film as Babe tries to establish her equality with Sid and resist the cultural norms that would require her to be submissive to him. This gender dichotomy in costuming is one of the tools she uses to do so. Her clothing is repeatedly indicative of either her defiance of him or her passivity to his wishes and to love in general. Contrast the scenes in which she appears in buttoned blouses, with her collar always standing up, to those scenes where she appears in solid color dresses, always with a lower neckline and usually with a delicate scarf. Even when the color scheme is the same, she is in dresses when she needs to appear more feminine and in agreement (or in love) with Sid, but she immediately returns to separates when she needs to regain power. Babe’s costuming is a part of the overall tension between love and politics in the film. Just as the union must negotiate terms with the company, Babe and the other women in the film must negotiate the terms within their love relationships.

The scene that takes place between Babe and Sid in the kitchen exemplifies this back and forth negotiation over which of Babe’s priorities should come first, the union or Sid. When Sid begins to seduce Babe, she tries to subvert his attempts by talking about politics and inflation, among other things. Sid terms these subjects “Small Talk” and proceeds to sing a song of the same title in which he tells Babe, “Why don't you stop all this small talk? I've got something better for your lips to do. And that takes
no talk at all.” Although Babe ultimately surrenders to Sid’s sexual advances and his attempts to silence her, her reluctance to do so is significant. Further, when the song ends in an embrace between the two, she immediately breaks the hold to warn Sid that the union and her responsibilities there are her first priority and she is afraid that the strike may come between them. Raymond Friedman, in his analysis of labor negotiations, states that a dramaturgical approach is the best way to discuss the roles that various actors take when trying to negotiate between union and company. This film seems to be taking on the same project as it narrates the negotiation between the union and Sleeptite through the sexual give and take between Babe and Sid. Although the film is not consistent in its approach to sexism and even misogyny, this scene is a very clear statement of the film’s priorities in conjunction with Babe’s. As long as Babe’s commitment to her fellow union members remains in tact, so does the film’s presence as a representation of labor relations and not just a romantic musical.

Physical resistance goes hand in hand with political resistance for each of these characters. Their curves refuse to conform to hegemonic beauty norms; their costuming refuses to be quiet or demur. At the same time, their narratives stand in opposition to repressive cultural norms like racism, sexism, capitalism and perhaps even romantic love. The body of the female worker is consistently mechanized and commodified in an effort to bring her under control, but the fact remains that women’s bodies are already outside the patriarchal norm, so resistance is as easy—even as natural—as
simply existing outside that restrictive frame. The films take on a similar pattern of denying mechanization and commodification as the characters become metonymic for the film narratives. Each of these films is a product and a depiction of mechanization. They only exist as part of a commercial film industry and actively participate in the commodification of the female star. Still, they are also expressive of a working-class denunciation of patriarchal control and the filmic male gaze.
Of these three films, *The Pajama Game* is certainly the clearest choice for a study of the representation of working-class culture. There is no denying that it is a literal depiction of work and labor, even if it contains inherent contradictions through its illustration of both repression and resistance. The film exposes the insidious connection of work to leisure time. On the other hand, the workers foregrounded in the film exploit that tie to further their cultural expression by incorporating the objects of work into their art. *The Pajama Game* demonstrates the effect of labor on the body in several ways as the workers are physically drawn into the mechanical process of production. They are then commodified by a capitalistic system that values the profit over the producer. These factors are all progressive to a degree, simply because they are visual manifestations of the real ideological position of the worker in the capitalistic system.

The ending is the most problematic moment in reading the film as a resistant working-class text. The terms of the settlement between Sleeptite and the workers’ union seem to allow for a tied finish between crooked capitalism and idealistic socialism. That is, the illegal double-bookkeeping that has kept the workers from fair compensation is seemingly forgiven; yet, it is not forgotten. This ending is exactly what it claims to be—a compromise. It is a concession to the bottom line of selling
movie tickets, to the genre of the happy-ending romance, and to a film culture steeped in the Red Scare. Just as with any negotiation, the film must sacrifice its full power of resistance in order to gain some political ground, for despite its ending, *The Pajama Game* has jammed up the Hollywood machine, at least for a moment, simply by depicting work at all and particularly by allowing the worker’s body and voice to dominate the film frame.

Ten years later, *Thoroughly Modern Millie* takes up that torch of resistance with a decidedly feminist bent. It, too, has its own inconsistent moments. Given the fact that racial marginalization is a significant theme in the representation of class difference, it is certainly difficult to justify the film’s unapologetic negative stereotyping of Chinese Americans. However, it still embodies many of the class-oriented articulations unique to film musicals in its choreography and costuming. Like *The Pajama Game, Millie* demonstrates the parasitic relationship between work and leisure, where work has become playful and romance has become a full-time job. Millie’s characterization is dependent on the working-class attitude of making the best of difficult circumstances, so the element of bricolage abounds in much of the choreography. The most dynamic way that this film serves as a resistant working-class and feminist text is in its narrative of the “stenog” and the chorus girl. The mechanization and interchangeability of these characters symbolize the industrialization of the female worker and her position as a disposable, exchangeable commodity within the world of work and slavery. Millie stands in opposition to these
systems of repression purely through her awkwardness and naiveté. She refuses commodification and conformity because her body and her ideology simply do not fit the molds. In this way, Millie herself and the film as a whole are a productive representation of the working-class female body as resistant through its difference.

_Hairspray_, while hardly a “labor” film, explores the intersections of class, work, race and gender more comprehensively than the other two films. It is the most ensemble-driven of the three, so the other women in the text support a working-class reading despite Tracy’s status as a non-worker in the literal sense. In fact, the very playful nature of Tracy’s own narrative is the epitome of the invasion of work into leisure. Tracy may not be employed, but she is a worker nonetheless. Edna is the only homemaker in these three films and as such, she represents an important manifestation of female labor. The unpaid and underrepresented labor of cooking, cleaning and childrearing that supports all economic systems is often ignored in even the best working-class films. Edna’s work as a wife and mother is not supplanted but only intensified by her in-home laundry business. Ultimately, the characters in this film make it a working-class text even though the setting is not the typical factory or office.

Unlike the previous two films, the overall narrative of _Hairspray_ rarely conflicts with a working-class reading. Several song and dance sequences demonstrate the use of work/class related objects and circumstances for creative expression. It also clearly depicts Tracy as a commercialized and commodified body. Bodies that resist conformity abound in the film, from those that are too big or too black to hairstyles that
are too blonde, clothes that are too bright, and attitudes that are too bold. The truly problematic elements of the film lie outside the narrative level on the plane of filmic intention, as with the use of classic patriarchal filming techniques like the full body pan. The film takes the element of nostalgia one step too far as it recognizes the possibilities for discrimination within its diacetic film moment of the 1960s, but refuses to acknowledge that a different kind of ideological discrimination was historically existent in the very film practices it attempts to mimic. In this way, *Hairspray* is the most productive of the three films in terms of a positive representation of working-class resistance to racism, sexism and economic oppression, but it is the least successful in that it only deals with these issues on the narrative and not the filmic level.

Within the bounds of this project, it is necessary for me to articulate both the successes and the shortcomings of these texts, if my work is to have any forward motion and possibility for application. Not only is the field of working-class studies in need of new texts that represent and articulate a working-class viewpoint, but the genre of the film musical is also growing in new directions. In the previous sections, I have treated film and musical theatre as a historical background for a study that stretches the traditional limits into working-class theory, but the film musical is not an archaic or static genre. In fact, some would say that *Hairspray* is just one of many films made in the past ten years that constitute a re-birth of the feature-length film musical. In particular, the ABC/Disney conglomerate has embraced the genre as a vehicle to reach
the family-oriented television audience. Their most notable success in converting the classic Hollywood film musical to the small screen (and back again) is the Disney Channel’s 2006 hit *High School Musical*. The youth phenomenon was quickly followed by a sequel, *High School Musical 2* (2007) and is set to conclude in a third film, *High School Musical 3: Senior Year*, slated for theatrical release in October, 2008 (“HSM 3”). These films and Disney’s previous attempts at TV musicals (*The Cheetah Girls*, 2004) employ some of the stereotypical narratives of teenage movies like popularity, clicks, sports competitions and talent shows.

A closer look at the texts reveal that some of these same clichés are expressive of larger social concerns like racial diversity, wealth and class difference, and the need for creative expression. *High School Musical 2*, for example, does not feature the typical adolescent social structure of the popular versus unpopular. Instead, the film categorizes characters on the basis of wealth and depicts the hero and heroine as working-class students who are employed at the villainess’s country club for the summer. In short, teen musicals may be frivolous in appearance, but they represent a young new voice of social resistance. As cultural critics and theorists, we must recognize these texts not only for the value of their representations but also for the influence those images will have on the formation of future generations. Young audiences will understand their surroundings and themselves based on the visual media that pervades their lives. We now live in a demographically complex society; so future critical study will have to expand beyond binary definitions of difference. Yet, we
cannot give in to an uncritical multiculturalism that “gives every margin centrality for a nanosecond” (Hitchcock 21). We must create a critical space that allows for sustained attention on the spectrum of difference in literary representations. Working-class theory is inherently difficult to define because it stretches across established fields of study like race, gender, and queer theories, but that very ambiguity makes it one of the best critical lenses through which to view contemporary cultural production.
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