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Cukor and Collaboration: Subjective Displacement in America's Postwar Years

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I

Abstractions explain nothing, they themselves have to be explained: there are no such things as universals, there's nothing transcendent, no Unity, subject (or object), Reason; there are only processes, sometimes unifying, subjectifying, rationalizing, but just processes all the same.

Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*

The artist is the man without content, who has no other identity than a perpetual emerging out of the nothingness of expression and no other ground than this incomprehensible station on this side of himself.

Giorgio Agamben, *The Man without Content*

Please recall that wonderful night on the veranda / Amanda.

Cole Porter, "Farewell, Amanda" (Music and Lyrics from *Adam's Rib*)

IF THERE IS SOME SENSE OF A "COLLABORATIVE AUTEUR" in American director George Cukor's extensive filmography, pundits might agree that such collaboration arguably reached a kind of apogee when the director teamed up with the husband-and-wife screenwriting duo of Garson Kanin

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and Ruth Gordon after World War II. Starting in 1946, and for the next seven years, such memorable films as *A Double Life* (1947), *Adam's Rib* (1949), *Born Yesterday* (1950), and *Pat and Mike* (1952), to name only the high points, were the stellar results of this extraordinary artistic alliance. In the first part of this essay devoted to Cukor, I shall focus attention especially upon the second of these titles because another element of collaboration becomes further foregrounded in Cukor's middle period: the great acting duo of Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy. Already well-known from their first appearance together in director George Stevens's hit film *Woman of the Year* seven years earlier, the Hepburn/Tracy duo would appear only to heighten Cukor's participant "relationship with his actors" that, according to Robert Emmet Long, "was a creative collaboration, just as it was with the technical team he employed—designers and cameramen [and screenplay writers]—who were among the best in their field and gave his movies their romantic gloss, warmth, and excitement" (xii; further on 45, 56, 70). An entire directorial career spent working within "the Hollywood system" at the beck and call of various autocratic movie moguls could have felt considerably oppressive to Cukor. And yet in a late interview granted to Peter Bogdanovich in 1983, Cukor admits: "I've found I can function in this climate; technically, one is bedazzled here [because] [t]here is a *spirit* about making pictures in Hollywood—everybody really involved—that I like so much. I may be sentimental about this ... but I think [that vitality] still exists to some extent" (469–70, emphasis in original).

Later, in the second part of the essay, I shall turn to Hepburn and Tracy's very first pairing together in the aforementioned Stevens vehicle filmed during the war years (1942). There, my purpose shall be to contrast the rather more singular vision of Stevens's brand of Hollywood filmmaking when set beside Cukor's unique collaborative style to reveal just how controversial filmic collaboration might be in America's intrawar and postwar climate, for, according to Paul Cronin, Stevens "was vehement that the director retain absolute control of his work and be able to affect every element of a film's production." Observes Cronin further:

Always anxious to assert his rights as a director, something he did no matter whose feathers were ruffled in the process, Stevens never hesitated to ensure he had everything needed to construct precisely the film *he wanted* ... Stevens's friend, the director Joseph Mankiewicz, explains that "after the actors were gone, the technicians were gone, there was nothing left

but George and his film ... And that's why the making of films, I thought, for George was a very private, personal thing." (xi, emphasis added)¹

Clearly, the controversy surrounding collaboration makes a very clear separation between two quite disparate approaches to American filmmaking last century. And much of this controversy, as I shall also endeavour to show, is arguably attributable to two quite different approaches to the representation of gender and sexuality flagged, in part, by the somewhat ironic appearance of "women" in the titles of the two Hepburn/Tracy films elected for scrutiny—a representation that more accurately can be understood under the critical rubric of subjective displacement in postwar America.

But to begin with Cukor, although the director had moved over to the MGM studios in the postwar years, the notion of filmic collaboration was not entirely new to him. Back at RKO Pictures during the early 1930s where he would be hard at work on such pictures as *What Price Hollywood*, *A Bill of Divorcement*, and *Rockabye* (all from 1932), one of his biographers tells of Cukor's partiality for the teamwork approach to filmmaking. "He loved the slow, complicated, and sometimes torturous [*sic*] collaborative process that stymied so many others," Patrick McGilligan recounts. "He was *good* at the collaborative process. He enjoyed solving the problems, negotiating the egos. He enjoyed delegating ... so much [so] that sometimes it seemed he was doing nothing" (74). With the Kanins after the war, the teamwork approach to filmmaking was taken to unbelievably new heights. "Even when they were not in the same country," McGilligan observes, "the collaboration between them was exceedingly close in all areas of production."

1 In one interview in particular collected by Cronin (from 1963), Stevens himself candidly admits: "I personally like to see films that are the work of as singular a consciousness as possible. By that I mean of one individual, not a group around a table." Later in the interview, Stevens observes: "Those are the kinds of films I like to see—as singular as you can make the point of view. Only then does a film take on a definition for me. The 'auteur' concept is certainly the most desirable form of filmmaking, from my point of view" (25, 28). Individual creativity, then, was synonymous with such original auteurship, according to Stevens. Cukor, on the other hand, divulges (in an interview from 1972): "One does so many things instinctively while making a picture. That is why there is room for originality in film making, even though it is a collaborative effort" (Long 70). Hence for Cukor, "hector[ing] screen writers during script conferences" did not count for very much, he confesses (in an interview from 1982). "To that extent I am more of a critic than a collaborator where the script is concerned," he concluded (171).

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As is made clear from the cache of telegrams and letters in the Cukor archives, the Kanins had ideas about everything, from costumes to camera angles. Cukor dutifully sent them reports of every stage of production, still photographs of each scene, and regular assessments of the dailies. (207)

The question then becomes: Why did Cukor so intensely feel the need to expand his collaborative predilections² by resorting almost programmatically to teams of screenwriters and actors a couple of decades later in the early 1950s?

One very practical answer to this question might be sought in the historical temper of the times. Thanks to an arguably more phobic kind of filmmaking emanating from Hollywood during the war as we shall see later in the case of Stevens's *Woman of the Year*, the cultural predicament for a gay artist like Cukor in America's postwar years was never an easy one, as I have remarked extensively elsewhere (see *Going the Distance*, especially Chapter Four). The widely accepted linkage throughout the 1950s, for instance, between sexual and political deviance, as John D'Emilio points out, "made the scapegoating of gay men and women a simple matter": "the effete men of the eastern establishment lost China and Eastern Europe to the enemy" while "'mannish' women mocked the ideals of marriage and motherhood" (60). Louis B. Mayer, the head of MGM at this moment in Cukor's career, and notorious for his scandalous firing of the homosexual actor Bill Haines a decade previously, was perhaps typical of the era: "[A] flag-waving Republican and friend of the Roman Catholic prelate Fran-

2 McGilligan offers further insight into just how intense these predilections became for all concerned, citing Garson Kanin on the issue in particular: "We were all great pals, in addition to being coworkers," said Kanin. "He [Cukor] was certainly a great respecter of the text, once it had been set. And we used to have a lot of conferences and talk about the script ... It was all very ensemble in spirit. And things we didn't like, or which irritated one, or you didn't understand, you were able to state it, which one doesn't always get an opportunity to do in this business. It was not just friendship, but an artistic collaboration" (193–94). Likewise in Cukor's work with screenplay writer Moss Hart (on *A Star Is Born* [1954]) who succeeded the Kanins, "Both [Hart] and Cukor made career virtues out of collaboration" (221). However, an anonymous reader of this essay justifiably points out that "Collaboration ... does not stop with screen writers and performers," and proffers the argument that an oppressive "studio system" (alluded to earlier) quite conceivably may have prompted Cukor to expand his "collaborative venture," noting further that "four of the principal artists worked with Cukor before or after [the making of *Adam's Rib*]: George Boemler, editor; Cedric Gibbons, art director; Walter Plunkett, costume designer; and Edwin B. Willis, set decorator."

cis J. Spellman, [Mayer] had little grasp or tolerance of homosexuality” (McGilligan 156).

Understandably, Cukor’s films were some of Mayer’s least favourite. Hence, Cukor might have attempted to displace much of the animosity directed at his own artistic ego by *negotiating* (as at RKO previously) a more disparate notion of “auteurship” by investing it in the high-powered writing and performing teams enlisted to carry it onward and upward around him. If the teamwork approach to filmmaking allowed Cukor the opportunity to “blend himself in” more to the phobic temper of the times as McGilligan further observes (196), it’s perhaps also important to be mindful of the fact that an element of “shame” was attached to Cukor’s homosexuality for most of his life. “That taboo,” McGilligan observes, “was a nagging obstacle in telling the story of his life, right through to the end of his days . . . [since] The director would not acknowledge for the record this central fact and compulsion of his life” (206, 298).³

A more nuanced explanation for Cukor’s artistic collaborations through these years, and one I think that is perhaps more in touch with the volatile gender issues presented in a film like *Adam’s Rib* as announced by its title, is offered by the critical theory of Gilles Deleuze, himself an avid fan of American films throughout his lifetime. Remarking on his own predisposition to collaboration, most notably with Félix Guattari in long philosophical treatises like *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze observes that they “didn’t collaborate like two different people. We were more like two streams coming together to make ‘a’ third stream,” thus making of his own sense of collaboration a concatenation of humanistic affects. “Affects aren’t feelings, they’re becomings that spill beyond whoever lives through them (thereby becoming someone else)” (*Negotiations*, 136, 137). Remarking further on their affective association, Deleuze additionally observes:

There’d be a problem if we were precisely two persons, each with his own life, his own views, setting out to collaborate with each other and discuss things. When I said Félix and I were rather like two streams, what I meant was that individuation

3 In the very last interview in the Long collection conducted by the gay journal *The Advocate* in 1982, Cukor maintains a discreet silence about his sexual orientation apparently to the very end (he died a year later). In response to the question, “Do you think that everybody’s private life—even a celebrity’s—is really their own business?” the director replies: “Mine is. Besides, it would embarrass me. Not that I’m cagey or anything like that. I’m just of a different generation” (183–84).

doesn't have to be personal. We're not at all sure we're persons ... [hence,] a nonpersonal individuality ... They express themselves in language, carving differences in it, but language gives each its own individual life and gets things passing between them ... our individuality is rather like that of events ... something passing through you [like] a current, which alone has a proper name. (141)

In a purely filmic context, for Deleuze, the great French "auteur" Jean Luc Godard would appear to be something of a lightning rod, and thus a model, for this collaborative current. "Godard constitutes a force in his own right," Deleuze remarks, "but also gets others to work as a team." Furthermore, "What counts with [Godard] isn't two or three or however many, it's AND, the conjunction AND":

AND is of course diversity, multiplicity, the destruction of identities ... which each time marks a new threshold, a new direction of the zigzagging line, a new course for the border. Godard's trying to "see borders," that is, to show the imperceptible ... belonging to neither but carrying both forward in their disparate development, in a flight or in a flow where we no longer know which is the guiding thread, nor where it's going ... on the border between images and sounds ... That's what Godard [has] done." (37, 44, 45)

When we inspect a film like *Adam's Rib* more closely, I would contend that as a master of collaborative force for the displacement (if not the destruction) of human identities, that is precisely what Cukor's direction has done as well.

Godard's project to dismantle the rigid demarcations of human identity just described in order to make it more porous like language ("on the border *between* images and sounds," etc.) has an interesting connection to the largely homosexual "New York" School of poetry emanating from the stultifying ethos of the 1950s, whose artistic credo, according to Michael Davidson, was to a significant degree "collaborative." "By looking at the collective milieu in which poetry is produced," observes Davidson, "we might see poetic composition as a collaborative [function] ... alienated from the then dominant versions of community in the United States. As a form of collaboration, poetry displays the porous borders between the work of art and the work that art performs in shoring up consensus" (18). The net effect of such collaboration, according to Davidson's compelling

study of masculinity in the Cold War era, was to make identity “free floating,” “multiple,” “constant[ly] shifting,” and “multifarious ... existence as a series of costumes, attitudes and positions” (27, 59, 105, 123). Katherine Hepburn’s observation, therefore, that Cukor was “Complicated to such an extent, [with] so many layers, that he did not really *know* himself” (cited in McGilligan 341, emphasis added) would appear to fit into this collaborative construction of postwar identity. As Davidson aptly characterizes the collaborative subject’s epistemological conundrum, “there is the countervailing knowledge [concerning masculine identity] that what is revealed is blank, a conceptual chasm for which language is inadequate.” What is more, observes Davidson, “It seems less important to ‘name’ it as homosexuality, as many critics have done, than to see it as an identity in formation, an identity in drag” (123). As Deleuze nicely sums up the case at this historical conjuncture, “What one says [or writes or perhaps even films] comes from the depths of one’s *ignorance*, the depths of one’s own underdevelopment. One becomes a set of liberated singularities, words, names ... little events, the reverse of a celebrity” (*Negotiations* 7).⁴

On first view, Cukor’s *Adam’s Rib* does not strike moviegoers as a vehicle for identity reversal or displacement (or even destruction) so much as it does a film text for its rigorous entrenchment. In sum, it tells the story of an abandoned housewife named Doris Attinger (Judy Holliday) who seeks redress by unloading an untrained pistol at her longtime abusive husband Warren Attinger (Tom Ewell) and his sometime home-wrecking mistress Beryl Caignn (Jean Hagen) discovered *in flagrante delicto*—“Caught in Love Tryst” as one sensational newspaper headlines it—at the end of a typical working day. The case lands reluctantly in the lap of New York Assistant District Attorney Adam Bonner (Spencer Tracy) whose prosecution is made even more reluctant when the case becomes taken up as a *cause célèbre* by his bluestocking wife Amanda Bonner (Katharine Hepburn), a graduate of Bryn Mawr and Yale Law School and now in a private law firm of her own.

In classic battle-of-the-sexes style, the ensuing courtroom drama engages husband and wife, comedically at times, in an incendiary con-

4 Expanding on the thought here much later in *Negotiations* (“A Portrait of Foucault”), Deleuze importantly remarks: “There’s no subject, but only a production of subjectivity: subjectivity has to be produced when its time arrives, precisely because there is no subject ... Subjectivity is in no sense a knowledge formation or power function ... subjectification is an artistic activity distinct from, and lying outside knowledge and power ... [and therefore] mustn’t be seen as just a way of protecting oneself, taking shelter ... [but rather] becomes an art it takes a lifetime to learn” (113–14).

flict pitting the sacrosanct force of the law identified with the male, on the one hand, and the mitigating feeling for hearth and home identified with the female, on the other—a conflict, indeed, which puts the Bonners’ very own marriage on the line. “What blow you’ve struck for women’s rights I’m sure I don’t know,” Adam snarls at Amanda the evening before husband and wife make their final courtroom summations, and the jury renders its verdict, “but you sure have fouled us up beyond all recognition. You’ve split us right down the middle.” To which Amanda responds the next evening, alone with Kip Lurie (David Wayne), the Bonners’ bothersome next door neighbour (see figure 1), after she wins the verdict in favour of Doris Attinger that day: “No part of marriage is the exclusive province of any one sex. Why can’t [Adam] see that?” But after some fake gun-pulling to get Amanda to side with the law as a force for human rights, and some further fake tear-shedding on Adam’s part, husband and wife are at last reconciled, signaled by a curtain to their four-poster bed being circum-spectly drawn on their concluding lovemaking, but not before the male is made to sing a little of the female’s own tune courtesy of Cole Porter, to whose title song, “Farewell, Amanda,” I shall return later.

By the close of the film, then, gender roles would appear to have settled back into the ideological binaries constraining them at the outset whereby a certain element of public protest exercised by the female at the end of Doris Attinger’s wildly unsteady gun ultimately becomes disciplined as, in private, she is made to submit to the controlling force of the male’s higher Reason. “I’m old fashioned,” we recall Adam remarking to Amanda on the eve of their short-lived breakup, “I like two sexes,” and “I don’t like being married to a New Woman ... a competitor, a Com-pet-itor!”⁵ Hence, the expensive hat, initially purchased to placate his restive wife and transferred by Amanda herself to the visible cause of such restiveness in the public court of law, is snatched from Mrs Attinger’s wayward head as a climax

5 The dialogue at this point in the screenplay clearly registers what Elaine Tyler May observes as “the continuing anxiety surrounding women’s changing sexual and economic roles” during the Depression and World War Two in America—an anxiety that undoubtedly “helps to explain the unprecedented rush into family life and the baby boom of the postwar era” that we shall see more clearly in Stevens’s *Woman of the Year* in part two of this essay. But as already touched upon with Cukor’s *Adam’s Rib* almost a decade later, “Such concerns,” according to Tyler May, “were reinforced by the rise of a domestic cold war ideology and by the culture surrounding it as well.” Continues Tyler May: “Stable family life not only seemed necessary to national security, civil defense, and the struggle for supremacy over the Soviet Union; it also promised to connect the traditions of the past with the uncertainties of the present and the future” (“Explosive Issues” 167).

Figure 1

to her trial and becomes proudly sported by its true owner, once again, for the purpose of Amanda's wooing her Adam in the film's concluding scene. It's an old story, reaching as far back as the formation of the middle-class woman in the nineteenth century, as Carol Smith-Rosenberg writes: "Women's sexuality was controlled, men's uncontrolled and unbounded. To live beyond boundaries gave men power [but] it destroyed women. Outside family boundaries, woman had no legitimate sphere" (205). But with the reinstallation of both Doris and Amanda to their proper life within the domestic confines of the private sphere symbolized by that "tenderly trimmed bonnet" as Adam describes it (and which Amanda almost threatens to burn in the final scene, but pulls back), we wonder if women really do have any control *within* their family boundaries either, since man's identity would appear overbearingly to thrive "within and without the family" as Smith-Rosenberg historically observes (205).

If Cukor's collaborations, first with the Kanins in composing the screenplay to *Adam's Rib*, then with Hepburn and Tracy in bringing it to life, conduce viewers of the film to think of gender identity as a nonpersonal individuality on the model of Deleuze, that is, as an imperceptible state of becoming belonging to no one person in the team but carrying each and all toward some unknown and undecidable end described previously, then much of the asymmetrical dichotomizing of gender would appear to be worried by this overall sense of indetermination as well.⁶ Abstracting from male and female, therefore, explains nothing (to go with my opening epigraph) since there are no such things as transcendent universals or absolutes, but as Deleuze insists, only processes: "sometimes unifying, subjectifying, rationalizing, but just processes all the same" (*Negotiations* 145). Nudging such subjectifying toward displacement rather than determination precisely in this way, a collaborative Cukor worries other important aspects of classic Hollywood filmmaking as well—aspects perhaps underpinning more mainstream approaches to character presentation and development as we shall soon see in the less collaborative work of a director like George Stevens.

First among these is the dismantling of any hard and fast notion of realism in such representations. On this point, we recall the Bonners'

6 Concluding one of his several commentaries on *Adam's Rib*, a film which clearly has mesmerized American philosopher Stanley Cavell over a long career, Cavell similarly observes: "Perhaps it is the temptation to know and say more than we can know and safely say [about Cukor's film]. Perhaps it is the wish to deny that we know all there is to know in order to say what is to be said" (*Cities of Words* 81).

home movies shown in the first of five scenes that are flagged by a cue card throughout the larger film with the words “That Evening.” Ostensibly giving us some true insight into a more unbuttoned version of the couple’s intimate life together at their getaway farmhouse named “Bonner Hill” in Connecticut for which the mortgage has just been liquidated, the sequence of silent film vignettes is entitled “The Mortgage the Merrier: A Too Real Epic.” With its own interpolation of scene titles—“Congrats: You Own It Now,” “Censored,” “The End,” etc.—much like the film proper with which we are engaged, and with the Bonners’ own excessive mugging in several of the set-ups—“Tree-kissing: a famous old Connecticut custom,” quips Kip’s running commentary—nothing depicted in these reels could be less “real,” hence more further from the “truth.” As Judge Bonner, who watches the depiction of himself right along side his son Adam, remarks: “We acted this all out later, of course. I mean, it’s not actual.” And once again, Kip’s drawing our attention to the artifactual nature of the representation, some of which bears footage taken upside down, seems apt: “Who took all these pictures, your cow?”

Taking a step back from the presentation, then, we recognize “reality” for what it is: not so much a true “representation” of events but what Deleuze is pleased to call a “repetition.” “*Re*-petition opposes *re*-presentation,” Deleuze tells us (*Difference and Repetition* 57), a repetition accordingly whose “power of fantasy” lies not in something called “realism” but whose essence is entirely symbolic since “symbols or simulacra are the letter of repetition itself” (17). As such, the Bonners’ “Too Real Epic,” much like reality TV today, turns out to be a good deal more contrived than at first thought, perhaps even insidious, for “Repetition is truly that which disguises itself in constituting itself, [indeed] that which constitutes itself only by disguising itself. It is not underneath the masks, but is formed from one mask to another ... [since] The mask, the costume, the covered is everywhere the truth of the uncovered ... [thus,] the true subject of repetition” (17–18).⁷ The upshot, therefore, of repetition’s worrying the

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⁷ The important shift to the nonobjective and the nonrepresentational in various forms of artistic production following World War II and on into the Cold War 1950s in America is landmark, the most notable example perhaps occurring in painting with the transition from “Regionalism” to “Abstract Expressionism” as Erika Doss painstakingly explains. The Cukor/Kanin collaboration with the Bonners’ “Too Real Epic” may be registering this shift to a degree from the filmic point of view. Yet in a more professionally determined context, this somewhat alarming sense of a rather elastic hold on reality offered by repetition Amanda Bonner’s feminism does not view as insidious at all but, to the contrary, seems rather to be provoked by. In response to her own legal secretary who views

very tenuous line between fact and fiction in the Bonners' home movies has important implications for the film as a whole when we transfer our attention now to Cukor's first-time collaboration with the Hepburn and Tracy characters.

If much of the real truth of the Bonners' country life seems up for grabs, so must the truth of their professional life back in the city be seen to be resistant to too ready comprehension or too facile compartmentalization or, to put a more positive Godard-like spin on it, a professional life "belonging to neither but carrying both forward ... in a flight or a flow where we *no longer know* which is the guiding thread, nor where it's going" (emphasis added). Precisely in this context, our collaborative Cukor aims to dismantle, in the second place therefore, all the neat dualisms formulaically associated with this particular husband-and-wife pairing: the female in private practice, on the one hand, who is able to go public in her defence of a much maligned mother and the male as public defender, on the other hand, who relishes a private moment at home preparing his wife lamb curry in the second "That Evening" sequence. Tears, in this dissolution of dualisms, would appear to be the sign of gender's most fluid imperceptibility: the "old juice" Adam calls Amanda's tears (see figure 2) that she uses as a feint to give her husband a swift kick ("Let's all be manly," she says in the third "That Evening" sequence), and the tears Adam himself is able to shed at will as a feint to dissuade Amanda from running against him for County Court Judge on the Democratic ticket ("There ain't any of us don't have our little tricks you know," he says in the concluding "And That Night" sequence). Referring to each other as Pinky/Pinkie throughout the film ("Y' for him, 'ie' for me," Amanda tells the court reporter at one point) barely arrests the gender bending. Nor does a name like "Amanda" from which "a man" like Adam can just barely be seen to protrude.

Indeed, Cukor's collaboration with actress Katherine Hepburn in particular exploits a longstanding history of gender ambiguity perhaps coordinate with his own (and Deleuze's) depersonalizing approach to identity that Hepburn's most searching biographer, Andrew Britton, dates back to an article entitled "The Screen's *Real* Mystery Woman" from a November 1937 issue of *Picturegoer Magazine*. There, Britton finds "beneath two

the scapegoating of adulterous women in modern society in contrast to their scapegrace male counterparts as a fatalistic fact of life—"I don't make the rules," the worker observes—Amanda cannot be quite so cynical: "Sure you [make the rules], we *all* do."

Figure 2

If the issue of male/female containment is thus made problematic by the displacement of their apparent dualisms, such collaborative decontainment casts a further important reflection on the smaller film contained within the larger.

stills, one in the 'lyrical' mode and one of Hepburn *en travestie*, a caption announc[ing]: 'Feminine Katie and her masculine self of *Sylvia Scarlett* contemplate each other—and don't seem much impressed.'" Like Deleuze, who views the collaborative subject as a lifetime process of construction and reconstruction, Britton is given to remark that "The conflicting images imply not simply that the character of Hepburn's sexuality is ambiguous, but that the ambiguities remain obstinately unreconciled and thus appear as contradictions" (91). So Cukor's best biographer reports that the director's "ambivalence about revealing himself became one of the obstacles to completing" an ongoing autobiography to the very end of his life (McGilligan 350).

If the issue of male/female containment is thus made problematic by the displacement of their apparent dualisms, such collaborative decontainment casts a further important reflection on the smaller film contained within the larger noted previously. Ruminating on the relationship between the two in his indispensable essay on *Adam's Rib* as part of a study of "The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage," Stanley Cavell is provoked to think that "The profound difference between the containing and the contained movie may be said to be that relation of containment itself." Writes Cavell, "The French title I have heard for what I have described as containment is *mise en abîme*, placement in abyss; I think of this as endless displacement, a good phrase for the endless mutual reflections these films create for one another" (206). I would go even further than Cavell, however, and suggest that the abyss of endless displacement moves considerably beyond film reflecting upon film in *Adam's Rib* and perhaps casts both as a profound reflection on the status of gender itself in its repetitive state of endless performativity signaled by all those cue card signages throughout the film's diagenesis. Here, Giorgio Agamben is helpful in commenting upon a "radical tearing or split" in modern art—we recall Adam Bonner's remark about being split "right down the middle"—when a modern art form like film sets aside "the inert world of contents in their indifferent, prosaic objectivity," and thereby allows a "free subjectivity" to soar "above the contents as over an immense repository of materials that it can evoke or reject at will."⁸ Concludes Agamben: "Art is now the absolute freedom that seeks its end and its foundation only in itself, and does not need, substantially,

8 Similarly, in Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, "a fissure or crack in the pure Self of the 'I think' ... [means] the subject can henceforth represent its own spontaneity only as that of an Other, and in so doing invoke a mysterious coherence in the last instance ... [coterminous with] a dissolved self" (58).

any content, because it can only measure itself against the vertigo caused by its own abyss” (35, emphasis added).

For Agamben, then, the artist is the man (or woman) without content and has no other identity than (as in my second epigraph) “a perpetual emerging out of the nothingness of expression” (55). In Cukor’s collaboration with Hepburn and Tracy, I would argue, the artist’s place is taken over by the performer or actor but more especially the actor in close-up. In *Adam’s Rib*, one thinks especially of the camera studying in close-up the worried faces of Amanda and Adam just before the jury announces its verdict. In such close-ups, as Deleuze usefully observes in his cinema studies, the actor is brought up fully before his or her “relationship in fear to the void or absence,” that is, “the fear of the face confronted with its nothingness” in its need “to go beyond the states of things, to trace lines of flight just enough to open up in space a dimension of another order favourable to [its own] composition” (*Movement-Image* 100, 101).⁹

The close-up in Deleuze, of course, is his favourite instance of the affection- or becoming-image—an image in-between action and perception which opens up a gap or hole or interval in various states of affairs “without filling it in or filling it up” (65). Adam Bonner’s persistent stammer throughout the film —“Ladies and Juttlemen of the Jerry,” he stumblingly begins his final summation—is perhaps an anticipation of this affective in-betweenness, a stammering we should note “not in order to get back to a prelinguistic pseudo-reality,” but an attempt to make his character, like language, “flow between [the] dualisms” within which it is socially and sexually bound (Deleuze *Dialogues* 34; compare also “He Stuttered”). Or, following Agamben previously, make his character soar above a whole repository of ideological entrapments coterminous with a far too moralizing/molarizing court of law. Hence, the inspiration behind Amanda’s third and final character witness in her defence of Doris Attinger when she calls Olympia La Pere (Hope Emerson), a sometime carnival acrobat, to the stand. In this hilarious scene, after performing a number of amazing backflips across the courtroom floor, the spectacular Miss La Pere, true to her mannish name, then proceeds to hoist Adam Bonner high into the air, much to the irate disgruntlement of the presiding judge who seems powerless to quell the deafening uproar that this sensational display of womanly strength consequently unleashes. Viewers especially attentive to the production values of this droll scene, however, are likely

9 Elsewhere, Deleuze remarks that “The face digs the hole that subjectification needs in order to break through; it constitutes the black hole of subjectivity as consciousness or passion, the camera, the third eye” (*Thousand Plateaus* 168).

to be less impressed when they notice the guy wires that director Cukor employs to have his leading man *appear* to be effortlessly thrust upward to the courtroom ceiling by means of the olympian musculature of this carnivalesque female athlete.

If there ever was an affective-image in *Adam's Rib* for Cukor's collaborations soaring off into the imperceptible nothingness of depersonalized identity along Deleuzian lines of flight, this surely must be it. Kip Lurie's "mild show-biz homosexual tinge" (Cavell, *Pursuits* 214) clearly prepares the way for this projected misordering of subjectivity with his earlier line to Amanda cheering on her feminist activism in the courtroom: "You've got me so convinced, I may go out and become a woman." And Adam's rejoinder—"And he wouldn't have far to go either."—thus becomes especially ironic given his own present state of aerial animation.¹⁰ But perhaps even more inspired than this moment is the "revealing experiment" Amanda would have the jurors undergo by inviting them to imagine how each of the contestants involved in the court proceeding might look—Doris, Warren, and Beryl—if he or she were suddenly to take on the appearance and thus the identity of the opposite sex, as in fact they do thanks to some morphing trick photography on Cukor's part. These rather surreal transformations that result perhaps give viewers the clearest sense of how the filmmaker's art under the impress of collaboration "loosens itself from itself" as an unworldly surrealism takes the place of camera-ready realism "and moves in pure nothingness, suspended in a kind of diaphanous limbo between no-longer-being and not-yet-being" (Agamben 53).¹¹

10 Cavell's gay characterization of Kip Lurie was one to which Cukor himself was somewhat resistant, according to the director's other substantial biographer, Emanuel Levy, who records the director as saying: "There should not be even the slightest indication that Kip is a pansy" (178). Levy attributes the remark possibly to an overly censorious Production Code at the time, but the definitional displacements of collaboration as I am arguing might also indicate why Cukor was "uncomfortable" about talking about Kip's character in this way, and therefore chose to "remain[] silent" about him (178). I shall return to this issue in part two of the essay.

11 If as Stanley Cavell argues, so-called "comedies of remarriage" open up a "distance between 'the facade of reality' and 'a real existence of ethical forces behind or beyond,'" [that] we are then imaginatively required to span (*Contesting Tears* 41), one strategy for taking the measure of this lacuna, as I have been arguing, lies in the very ethic of artistic collaboration itself. As a key to subjective displacement in one of Hollywood's great screwball comedies from the 1950s, *Adam's Rib* thus foregrounds the real genius behind Cukor's collaborative auteurship that perhaps so offended Mayer when he caught an early glimpse of it in one of the director's best friends, Bill Haines, mentioned earlier, and "his ability to re-create himself, as if by magic, yet again" (Mann 290).

This final manifestation of the “nothingness” toward which I am arguing Cukor’s collaboration appears to be nudging us is impacted with a terrific sense of irony given some of Adam and Amanda’s own gender reversals throughout the film outlined previously. So that if Cukor’s very title to the film now strikes us as considerably ironic, it’s a sense of irony coordinate with the evolution of modernist art according to Agamben: “*Irony* meant that art had to become its own object, and, no longer finding real seriousness in any content, could from now only represent the negative potentiality of the poetic I, which denying, continues to elevate itself beyond itself in an infinite doubling” (55). Which returns us, as promised, to the title song of the film and the curious doubling it is afforded in Adam’s rendition of Cole Porter’s lyrics at the film’s close: No longer a woman “stepping on the stars” in Kip’s death-dealing version of the “Farewell Amanda” lyric rendered at the piano earlier in the film but one fully transformed now into a lover “gazing [up] at the stars” in an life-affirming image of an “Hello Amanda”—a version filled with infinite potentiality and hope. And lest we feel that “veranda” is perhaps a bit too cornball a rhyme for “Amanda,” we would do well to remember that the house for Deleuze (“Bonner Hill,” in this instance) is an invitation to think about identity formation in terms of life’s infinite potentiality just noted—“an entire becoming,” Deleuze calls it—to which verandas, both literal and figurative, may give us access, since it is precisely through such means, “through a window or a mirror [that] the most shut-up house opens onto a universe” (*What Is Philosophy* 180). Having feared earlier that their lives threatened to outdo the parody of a Punch and Judy show,¹² how appropriate, therefore, that Adam should ring the curtain down on *Adam’s Rib*

12 Cukor, picking up collaboratively on the allusion to Punch-and-Judy in the Kanins’ screenplay, set himself a quite strenuous challenge by interleaving each of the scenes of the film’s diagesis with those vaudeville type cue cards noted previously. Yet such a formal constraint tugging at the corners of his film’s realism nonetheless uncannily plays into the very character displacement that I am arguing the act of collaboration invites—a point which Charles Simic makes recently in relation to the poetry of Donald Justice. Observes Simic: “His interest in intricate forms, [Justice] explained, was connected to a wish to displace the self from the poem, not to obliterate it entirely, but not to have it stand center stage. ‘I want to treat the personal stuff as impersonally as if I were making it all up,’ [Justice] said” (40). Later in his essay on Justice, Simic relates that impersonal “personal stuff” in Justice’s poetry to some “indefinable, ineffable something [Justice] cannot quite name,” and observes further: “The sadness without a cause of a solitary child and the continuing memory of it are the riddle [Justice] is trying to solve. The secret child of his identity and his identity as a poet, he suspects, are to be found there” (41).

with a French invocation: “*Vive le difference!*” If in his quick translation, the expression “means hurray for that little difference” that both Adam and Amanda have at last agreed to acknowledge at the conclusion, it’s an important difference that, like Cukor’s own collaborations, we are not quite given to see but have only to imagine.

II

The intellectual woman looks and analyzes, and in usurping the gaze she poses a threat to an entire system of representation. It is as if the woman had forcefully moved to the other side of the specular . . . [and become] constructed as the site of an excessive and dangerous desire. This desire mobilizes extreme efforts of containment, and unveils the sadistic aspect of narrative.

Mary Ann Doane, “Film and the Masquerade”

AS A MEANS OF TEASING OUT FURTHER the implications of Cukor’s collaborative approach to filmmaking, and the rather complex treatment of character that it entails, I turn now to director George Stevens’s *Woman of the Year* wherein Hepburn and Tracy made their first screen appearance together seven years prior to their partnership with Cukor. As a way into employing Stevens’s less collaborative brand of filmmaking noted earlier as a distinct foil to Cukor’s own, let me begin with an early scene in Stevens’s film where *New York Chronicle* sports columnist Sam Craig (Spencer Tracy) is seen listening in with his barroom cronies to a radio quiz show featuring Tess Harding (Katherine Hepburn), an op-ed columnist for the same newspaper and, as we learn, a frequent verbal sparring partner for Sam. When asked to identify the most frequently run distance in American sport on the show, the uncomprehending Tess is speechless for a rare moment and the usually disgruntled Sam is only too happy to bark the correct answer to his buddies: ninety feet, the distance between home plate and first base. But Tess would go much further to enlarge the metaphorical distance between herself and baseball’s home base. By half-mockingly suggesting that the game of baseball be dispensed with entirely from American life, in Amanda Bonner style, she sets herself even more at odds with her sportswriter colleague, who, one year after the U.S. entry into World War II, can only perceive such an outrageous suggestion as but another “threat,” as he says, “to what we call our American way of life.”

Sam's championing the importance of home life in wartime America opens Stevens's film to a level of subtext vis-à-vis Cukor's later 1949 film that would only continue to bulk larger and larger in the Cold War years to follow in other Stevens's postwar Hollywood hits including *I Remember Mama* (1948), *A Place in the Sun* (1951), *Shane* (1953), and *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), to mention only a few. Here, I refer to the subtext of gender history alluded to in the first section of this essay and the purported distance (to go with the baseball metaphor once again) that would now *appear* to open up once again between Stevens's own filmmaking in 1942 and the representation of middle-class men and women that achieves something of the nature of a status quo in the century preceding. Alluding to the 1 March 1942, *Life* magazine cover featuring two women in white shirts, tailored jackets, and bow ties, Michael Renov offers a citation from the cover story that ostensibly reveals where Stevens's wartime filmmaking that same year might be headed: "[T]his year, not only the smart dressers but all busy women seem to have discovered the comfort, style-value and well-groomed look of a suit tailored like a man's" (18).

Yet it is precisely Renov's view (and Elaine Tyler May's referenced earlier) that "Aggressive females were an aberrant species-women in men's clothing." Accordingly, "The vigor of the new woman was most easily contained by its exnomination," and "[t]he threat of sexual difference created by the increasingly visible female reduced by unsexing the offending party" (18). Explains Renov further:

[Female] selfhood is neutralized by romantic alliance or marriage, or [female] selfhood is annihilated by death. With the first resolution ... strong professional women choose to moderate their careerist tendencies in deference to romantic alliances ... [since] All realize that love and marriage are reason enough to compromise their ambitions and become domesticated ... [With the second resolution,] women die that their men may be inspired to greater heroics. Their destruction is yet another instance of the disavowal of sexual difference, the negation of the threat to patriarchy so characteristic of the wartime women's film ... [where] women are either coupled and thus defused of their threatening energy, or offered up in ritual sacrifice to the renewal of male strength and the impossibility of self-affirming female potency. (22)

By foregrounding the female potency of his "Woman of the Year" in the title, as we shall see, Stevens's wartime women's film would thus ostensibly

appear to fly in the face of the amelioration of sexual difference in either of the plot resolutions outlined above.

In point of fact, however, the argument in this section of the essay aims to bolster Renov's view (although *Woman of the Year* is nowhere mentioned in his article) that "particularly strong women attempting to make their marks in a world in which their gender, their otherness, poses a threat, must be contained" and so (following resolution one) "neutralized" by marriage. Accordingly, "woman is placed within the constraints of Law, renamed and domesticated by motherhood and wifely duties" in order to "serve the further exploits of men" (22).¹³ I should point out, however, that in enlarging Renov's argument throughout this section with the exemplification of *Woman of the Year*, my purpose is not, via Stevens's filmmaking now, to mount an anti-collaborationist brief against auteur filmmaking *tout court*. True it is, as Andrew Britton observes, that there is an "extraordinary virulence and unpleasantness" in Stevens's film that, pursued in its "rigorous consistency and its blithe indifference to the liberal proprieties" of female representation (203, 204), leaves no doubt that Cukor and Stevens stand on opposite sides with respect to the treatment of gender. But as another anonymous reader of this essay cogently observes, great auteur workmanship like Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* could prove to be as subversive of gendered (and other) binaries as even some of the best work of Cukor just dealt with.

My intention, therefore, in contrasting an earlier Hepburn/Tracy vehicle to a later one in this half of the essay is merely to explore further the whole notion of filmic collaboration as one possible critical optic for both assembling and coming to a better understanding of one type of filmmaking powerfully set to work in American culture, particularly through the postwar years. Or, to reverse the terms, my intention is to reveal how the exnomination, the amelioration, if not the neutralization of sexual difference in postwar America (following Renov) helps to set more boldly

13 Thematically, then, my argument comes very close to the reading of the film recently proffered by Marilyn Ann Moss who contends that *Woman of the Year* reveals "a lapse in Stevens's generally fond regard for the female character." "Instead," continues Moss, "his camera takes a persistent pot shot at her, insisting that she ultimately acquiesce to the demands of her partner, Sam. If [Tess] refuses, she is humiliated, scorned and made to suffer the consequences" (80). On the more globally political level, Stevens, about to join the American war effort overseas the following year as a documentary filmmaker, aims "to level all that Tess ... and her body signify, that is the threat to America by anything European, anything related to foreign governments or citizens, anything having to do with 'otherness' at a time when war seemed imminent and traditional American values needed to be shored up, protected and secured" (81).

in relief Cukor's collaborationist treatment of gender identity dealt with in the first part of the essay—a collaborationist approach that, in the very first instance as Deleuze once again reminds us, is *not* about “knowledge formation” at all (nothing here, that is, to exnominate or ameliorate or even neutralize) but about that which lies quite *outside* knowledge: “not what we are,” says Deleuze, “but, rather, what we become, what we are in the process of becoming” (*What Is Philosophy* 112). Now, as a gay director Cukor may arguably be more predisposed to this insight than most filmmakers of the time, for, according to Deleuze's own best collaborator Félix Guattari, like woman, the homosexual as a singular “departure from binary power relations, from phallic relations” stands as a model for that very process of becoming itself—a “becoming homosexual”:

[I]t's a direction. Toward what? Quite simply toward another logic ... that is no longer a reading of a pure representation, but a composition of the world, the production of a body without organs in the sense that the organs there are no longer in a relationship of surface-depth positionality, do not postulate a totality referenced on other totalities, on other systems of signification that are in the end, forms of power. Rather, these are forms of intensity ... that construct alternative coordinates of existence at the same time that they live them. (218)

In this concluding section of my argument, therefore, Stevens's wartime filmmaking stands in distinct contraposition to Cukor's postwar filmmaking, despite the Hepburn/Tracy linkage, to the degree that Stevens's formulaic representations of gender in every way serve to distance themselves from Cukor's repetitions of sexual process lived by and through their collaborative difference.

Like Adam and Amanda previously, in Stevens's film *Sam and Tess* only *appear* to provide us with the reversal of the “system of family organization” undergirding the sexual regimen of men and women a hundred or so years previously. According to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, once again, “The double standard enforced by British common-law rulings respecting divorce, required women to confine their sexuality within the narrow boundaries of their reproductive family” and, at the same time, “permitted men to escape those restrictions [so that] [m]an's sexuality could thrive within and without the family” (205). Hence, in *Woman of the Year*, Tess Harding would seem precisely to be dismantling such a double standard. In one of her several notorious speeches declaimed before an eager audience of bluestocking intelligentsia gathered at Riverside Hall, her stand is

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unequivocal: “Our place is not in the home ... [but rather] in the first line of battle ... a battle to preserve and extend democracy [as] the freedom of one to defend the freedom of all.” Such worldliness, indeed, is only in keeping with the cosmopolitan outlook Tess acquires as the daughter of a world-traveled diplomat reared motherless in South America and China—“*Uncle Tom* in the Argentine, *Huck Finn* down the Yangtze”—schooled fatherless in Europe (Switzerland, Leipzig, the Sorbonne), and hired as a globe-trotting foreign correspondent with apparently limitless access to any number of national movers and shakers: Roosevelt, Churchill, even Cuba’s soon-to-be-deposed President Batista. Playing Uncle Sam to a Tess of a more Hardy-esque lineage, the poor sports columnist once interested in this decidedly homeless woman of the year can only mug behind the potted palms from the Riverside Hall stage just noted and, once seated, ineptly drop all of his cigarettes at the feet of the ladies who, like Tess on not a few vampish occasions throughout the film, will actually dare to smoke those cigarettes. Tess’s further daring to harbour in her apartment the Yugoslavian statesman Dr Martin Lubeck newly escaped from a Nazi concentration camp (with whom she converses in perfect German) is further discomfiting to a homebody like Sam. Tess cannot seem to sit still it seems—her New York dwelling a kind of mini League of Nations whose denizens (French, Russian, Slavic, and Mexican in one memorable scene) she graciously moves among, with several other foreign languages fluently at her disposal. Thus, when she finally comes around to contemplating marriage with Sam, Tess’s first thought, not unexpectedly, is “The frightening idea of getting tied down.”

Tess’s initial resistance to marriage in order to legitimate a life for herself outside the family sphere thus anticipates the gender restiveness of women in Cukor’s later film but also registers a certain restiveness in Stevens’s earlier project from the point of view of America’s entry into World War II one year prior to *Woman of the Year*’s release. As women’s historian Elaine Tyler May once again observes, “The dislocation of wartime might have led to the postponement of marriage and child rearing, continuing the demographic trends of the [Depression] thirties toward later marriage, a lower marriage rate, and fewer children” (*Homeward Bound* 50). But as Tyler May further explains, “In spite of the tremendous changes brought about by the war, the emergency situation ultimately encouraged women to keep their sights on the home, and men to reclaim their status as the primary breadwinners and the heads of households” (50). Somewhat in line with Renov’s arguments previously, she goes on to remark how following the war, “the short-lived affirmation of women’s independence gave

way to a pervasive endorsement of female subordination and domesticity” and to a certain “suspicion surrounding autonomous women that had not been present during the depression” (77; compare Michie 37, 38).

In Stevens’s film in particular, much of that suspicion perhaps manifests itself in the infamous baseball sequence wherein Sam scandalously invites Tess into the press box—“No women allowed!” his fellow sportscasters rudely shout at them—in order to tutor her in some of the game’s fundamentals. With a stylish hat large enough to obscure much of the playing field for several of the men seated behind her (see figure 3), Tess really does intimate in this scene that “The nightmare side of the postwar dream included ‘domineering’ women ...waiting to overwhelm the returning veterans” (Tyler May 78). And only when she stops asking Sam all of her tedious questions and learns to be silent and dutifully attentive to the players moving about on the field does Tess appear finally to become acceptable to the boys. But by that point, her unwieldy hat has curiously disappeared.

“[A]ll of this is for Tess’s own good,” Marilyn Moss surmises in a related context. “She needs to come home to America,” and “Sam’s dominance must be established before Stevens and American soldiers go to war” the year following the picture’s general release (86). A similar kind of parody visited upon the activist American woman by the haplessly sidelined breadwinner greets us even more uproariously in the closing sequence of the film where Tess, as we shall see in a moment, makes a shambles of a coffee-and-waffles breakfast for Sam who, much earlier in the film, is himself revealed to be terrifically adept at whipping up a dinner of fried eggs on very short notice. Before turning to that final scene, however, let me dwell a moment further on the gender reversals in Stevens’s wartime film sketched thus far and their import within the context of the so-called Cold War years that might be thought to be inaugural with the release of Cukor’s battle-of-the-sexes vehicle seven years later (though, in Cukor, handled with much different results, as Stevens’s concluding breakfast scene will reveal).

As a backdrop to my commentary on these gender reversals, Michael Renov reminds us that the Cold War, after all, was “the era in which the blame was put on Mame; the feminine mystique operated with the force of law. The prescription for prosperity no longer required a female workforce, but rather an implacable enemy across an Iron Curtain” (26). Hence, Virginia Carmichael in her admirable *Framing History: The Rosenberg Story and the Cold War* (1993) alludes to the containing ideology of certain “perfecting myths as attempts to transcend irrational, impalatable,

Figure 3

or unbearable social and historical realities” as a “process of making the (sublime) world cognitively apprehensible in bearable terms” (229, n. 8). In such terms, the unpalatable and unbearable Tess must therefore be called to account as America weighs anchor—Stevens’s appropriate fade-to-credits theme song being “Anchors Aweigh” as we shall hear—and the country sets about to do real men’s work in a real man’s world represented by her tough-talking, no-nonsense, and soon-to-be husband Sam. Hence, the egg yolks slopping all over Tess’s stylish pumps in the closing scene of *Woman of the Year* just alluded to would, in striking contrast to Amanda Bonner’s courtroom victory in *Adam’s Rib*, cleverly suggest the manner in which the unpalatable might be reduced to something more cognitively bearable. Accordingly, the anchoring of domestic partnerships like that of Sam and Tess within the later Cold War context of what Kaja Silverman refers to as an ideological “dominant fiction”—sovereign fathers, receptive mothers, procreative family units, etc.—is perhaps, following World War II, America’s perfecting myth par excellence through the 1950s and early 60s (39). And it surely comes as no accident that a belief in the “realism” of Hollywood cinema through this period, so Silverman argues at length, would become the very means to solidify that dominant fiction (404, n. 70) as Stevens’s hugely successful mainstream film career through the 1950s and early 60s noted earlier would only help to corroborate. No home movies or supra-diagetic cue cards, in other words, to worry the very tenuous line between fact and fiction that we had seen earlier in Cukor’s collaborative project. In Stevens’s monochromatic wartime vision of gender representation—“I made [films] in *my own way*,” he adamantly declares in a 1964 interview (Cronin 35, emphasis added)—Hollywood realism, like the essentializing of male/female identity, is fairly much a cinematic *donnée*.

Two scenes in particular from *Woman of the Year* help to cement that dominant fiction’s realistic portrayal in place in the years to follow. In the first, what might be thought to be the crisis of the film since it succeeds in driving Sam and Tess apart, we find Tess warming Sam up with a meal in bed (prepared by her maid, of course) and then presenting him with a “son.” As it turns out, little Christian is a child refugee from war-torn Greece whom Tess has taken on as the president of an international refugee organization, and it matters little to her if “having a child” equates either to birthing or adopting one’s progeny. For Sam, on the other hand, the status of the offspring within the procreative nuclear family matters enormously: “We can’t keep that child,” he roars in exasperation at Tess. “As a substitution, he simply won’t do.” Later, as Tess prepares herself to

attend the banquet for her election as “Outstanding Woman of the Year” (see figure 4), Sam becomes even more outraged at the suggestion that the refugee child be left in the care of a doorman for three or four hours while he and Tess attend the award ceremony. Incensed in her turn that Sam’s sudden change of heart toward the adopted boy is nothing more than a “paternal act,” Tess brutally rounds on Sam and orders him to stay home with the little Greek boy himself. Lambasting him in a moment of pique for his sports-writing vocation, Tess brings the hapless breadwinner to his knees with the stinging line: “Who would believe that you had anything better to do?” If the dominant fiction essentially resides in the realistic depiction of the proverbial place of women in the home, Tess’s callous rebuke to Sam here only doubly corroborates the homely adage in his own mind, thus prompting the cowed and subdued substitute father to respond, somewhat impotently, with a stinging rebuke of his own: “The outstanding woman of the year isn’t a woman after all.”

But a second scene helps to resuscitate even more the dominant fiction for Sam and Tess by the end of the film, and for America in many years to come as “[s]ocial tensions related to the notion of sexual difference were displaced by the immediacy of Cold War priorities” (Renov 26). This scene occurs shortly afterward when Tess is called upon by her aunt Ellen to act as a witness in Aunt Ellen’s marriage to William Harding, Tess’s diplomat father who follows Sam’s lead and thinks it better now to work at home in the States. Still stung by their previous altercation, Sam declines to accompany Tess to the wedding, pleading naturally enough a previous sports engagement: “a fight, a championship. It’s quite important in a not so important way.” And so alone, and before the marriage altar a second time, Tess finds the moment to be the turning point in her relationship with Sam, succeeding as it does in ultimately driving her back into the arms of her estranged husband by the end of the film. Key to this penultimate scene in the film are the words of the wedding ceremony itself that are dinned into Tess, “an honorable estate not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly,” as the order of service declares, “but entered into reverently, discretely, soberly, and in the fear of God.” And as the ceremony proceeds, Stevens shoots a very long close-up of the radiant Katharine Hepburn weeping as its words resound in her ear—words underscoring the “traditional gender roles as the best means for Americans to achieve the happiness and security they desired” (Tyler May, *Homeward Bound* 78). “As for her most sacred husband,” the ceremony concludes, “let the bride inspire and sustain him in great moments and small.” Nor is the bride to be “moved in her devotion, but believe in the ideal [of holy matrimony]. It still exists. It is

Figure 4

But while the
laughter is
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at the expense
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Tracy character
in Cukor, in
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the brunt of
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character played
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Hepburn.

the final truth”—an asseveration thus reinforcing yet again the “traditional arrangements in the home” as Americans themselves “head[ed] homeward toward gender-specific domestic roles” (Tyler May, *Homeward Bound* 78) during and after the war. At this point, it would seem appropriate now to turn to the final scene of Tess’s own homecoming rounding out Stevens’s text, and perhaps the most important one in the entire film.

Here, we find Tess at dawn creeping into the kitchen of Sam’s new bachelor apartment to prepare him his daily breakfast as all dutiful female homemakers ought. The uproarious comedy that ensues as Sam secretly watches Tess’s waffles spew like lava from the waffle iron, her coffee gush in frothy torrents from the coffee percolator, and her burnt toast fly like bullets through the air from a pop-up toaster—all of these comedic high jinx are the rival of the uproarious laughter elicited by Olympia La Pere in Cukor’s later film. But while the laughter is provoked mostly at the expense of the Spencer Tracy character in Cukor, in Stevens’s comedic climax the brunt of the humour is directed mostly at the hapless character played by Katharine Hepburn as previously remarked upon by Moss. And if subjective displacement arguably appears to be the upshot of Cukor’s collaborative relationship with this great acting duo, in Stevens’s film control and containment would appear to be the point of the directorial relationship—a disciplining of gender performance that would seek to *unify* the rôle playing as a singular tour de force. His film, in a word, his way.

The most blatant instance of the disciplining rather than the displacing of gender performance occurs immediately after this uproarious scene in *Woman of the Year*. It occurs almost incidentally in the very last minute of the film and is rendered by that concluding line of Sam as he proceeds, off-screen, to smash a bottle of champagne over the head of Tess’s personal secretary who, significantly, just happens to be a man: “I’ve just launched Gerald.” Gerald (Dan Tobin), of course, will perhaps remind viewers not a little of that “mild show-biz homosexual tinge” associated with the Kip Lurie character by Stanley Cavell in *Adam’s Rib*, particularly with the camp line recollected earlier: “You’ve got me so convinced [by your gender performance, Amanda], I may go out and become a woman.” Andrew Britton also sees the gay link between Gerald and Kip, similarly picking up on the disciplinary import that I am attempting to set out here when he writes, “Significantly, both Gerald and Kip get beaten up by Spencer Tracy at the end of their respective films, so as to assure us that the tentative accommodation of the Hepburn figure which Tracy is about to make doesn’t entail a loss of virility” (187). The comment may be overstating the case somewhat with respect to Cukor’s film as I endeavoured to show with Tracy’s “*Vive*

le difference!” in concluding the last section, although Cukor’s own silence about the Kip portrayal also noted earlier should keep us wondering. Nor do I agree with Britton that “The reconciliation at the end [of *Adam’s Rib*] is signalled by Adam’s appropriation of the [Cole Porter] song, whose lyric he amends to suggest the finality of the reunion and of the clarification of the blurred gender lines” (187). In my view, Cukor’s postwar collaborations (even with Cole Porter) are not about clarification at all—the point of much of the disciplining of gender in wartime Stevens in this section—but as in Deleuze, “walking across a narrow overpass above a dark abyss ... to meet a blind Double approaching from the other side” (*Thousand Plateaus* 202). For this reason, Patrick McGilligan has chosen the title for his biography of the director’s life, *A Double Life*, wisely I think.

In *Woman of the Year*, the horror elicited by that tinge of gay innuendo attaching itself to Gerald (and perhaps Kip) enlarges exponentially in prospect of a parallel reversal of gender rôles—a reversal that is anticipated, ironically enough, in Stevens’s film in the previous wedding ceremony when Aunt Ellen remarks that she had so counted on Sam being the “bridesmaid” at her nuptials in the way that she had been the “best man” at Sam’s. What is perhaps even more ironic about this reversal of gender rôles is the fact that, upon closer scrutiny, it would appear to corroborate what in fact *did* happen at the time when America went off to war abroad. In the intensely masculinist theater of war, as Allen Bérubé scrupulously documents, “[e]ven heterosexual men could find themselves abandoning the norms of civilian life as they had to rely on each other for companionship and affection” (189). If Gerald as “Queer of the Year” thus becomes, in Sam’s phobic 1940s mindset, the face that launched a thousand fags (and then some) from the retrospective vantage of the gay-liberated 1960s, with even more renewed scrutiny Sam’s astonishingly cruel act of violence speaks to something calculatingly sinister in the Cold War years lying in between.

For here, once again, we are reminded of the widely accepted linkage, from this time, between sexual and political deviance that, remarked upon previously by John D’Emilio, “made the scapegoating of gay men and women a simple matter” (60). If Tess in Stevens’s *Woman of the Year* is precisely that mannish woman mocking the ideals of marriage and motherhood at one of the most imperiled moments in modern American culture, it’s only because George Stevens’s brand of Hollywood filmmaking gives voice so clearly to “the central binarism of cold war ideology” as Steven Cohan conceives it: “the opposition of American and alien” (124). With Cukor’s collaborative approach to American filmmaking a few years

later, the alien (as witnessed in some of the director's morphing trick photography noted earlier) becomes displaced from that too exclusionary rigid binarism. Embracing rather than pathologizing identity, alien subjectivity in Cukor thus fulfills a more ameliorative function, nudging as it does (in the punningly "lurid" personage of Kip Lurie) the great American acting duo of Tracy and Hepburn toward that very gendered "pure nothingness" so eloquently characterized by Agamben, once again, as "a kind of diaphanous limbo between no-longer-being and not-yet-being" (Agamben 53).

In the hands of director George Stevens, however, the intractable opposition between American and alien (Cohan) or American and other (Moss), whether that alien otherness be a masculated woman or a feminized man—precisely this opposition, it would appear, takes us to the very heart of the realism that, in a final moment of retrospection, becomes perhaps the most significant context within which to situate Stevens's cinematic project in clear contrast to Cukor's through the Cold War's decidedly uncollaborative years. In this context, Slavoj Žižek reminds us that "'cinematic space' is never a simple repetition or imitation of external, 'effective' reality, but an effect of montage." "What is usually overlooked," Žižek goes on to explain, "is the way this transformation of fragments of the real into cinematic reality produces, through a kind of structural necessity, a certain leftover, a surplus reality that is radically heterogeneous to the cinematic reality but nonetheless implied by it, part of it" (530). In *Woman of the Year*, I take this surplus reality to be emblemized by the diagenetic references to eggs—the eggs that both Tess and Gerald demand that Sam whip up for them both on such short notice part way through the film and, now in the film's final sequence, the eggs that slop onto the woefully undomesticated Tess's egregious shoes. From the 1960s vantage of the liberation of women and (gay) men which Cukor's filmmaking might be seen incipiently to anticipate, admittedly I'm also drawn to not a little egg on director Stevens's own face. For as Jacques Lacan expatiates upon this emblem in connection to the surplus Real informing his own psychoanalytic project upon which Žižek's previous comment is based, "Whenever the membranes of the egg in which the foetus emerges on its way to becoming a new-born are broken," Lacan observes, "imagine for a moment that something flies off, and that one can do it with an egg as easily as with a man, namely the *hommelette*, or the lamella" (197). Exactly what "flies off" in the face of the Cold War ideologue, if he be the clausttrally astringent realist filmmaker or the exponent of sexism, racism, and homophobia in the person of Sam in the very filmmaking itself, is simply that which cannot be contained, controlled, or curtailed—surely

the point of Cukor's unique collaborative style—no matter how many eggs are beaten or how many champagne bottles are smashed.¹⁴

According to Žižek, the surplus of the Real coincides, especially in Hitchcock, with “the threatening gaze of the other” (530). But if what we see in a character like Tess Harding, to go with the unusual hardness of her name rather than the clichéd heartfulness, is an “intellectual woman [who] looks and analyses,” then in so “usurping the gaze, she poses a threat to an entire system of representation.” Construed thus “as the site of an excessive and dangerous desire,” as Mary Ann Doane rightly remarks, inevitably she “mobilizes extreme efforts for containment, and unveils the sadistic aspect of narrative” (504), and, in the Cold War context of George Stevens's particular project, the sadistic aspect of Hollywood realism inaugural with Sam's smashing of the champagne in the launching of Gerald off-screen as a means of bringing the gender conflicts of *Woman of the Year* to a definitive termination.¹⁵ And so, to return approximately to the place where we began our analysis of Stevens, what we truly see in Tess's halting performance on the radio quiz show by the end of the film is a total collapsing of that distance between the rather unusual men and women of the year—way out in left field, shall we say?—and the home plate that is America *circa* 1942. “Mark your distance,” Deleuze cautiously advises. “It is a question of keeping at a distance the forces of chaos knocking at the door” (*Thousand Plateaus* 319–20).¹⁶ To put some

14 Here, I'm reminded therefore of Emma Newton's insistence on folding in the eggs into her own batter at an important moment in Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* released the following year (1943) as a means of making her homey domesticity palatable for a photographer insistent upon putting Emma's ideal family on display for the delectation of a national audience of pulp magazine subscribers. For a much more detailed elaboration of the argument in the context of Alfred Hitchcock's postwar canon of “film noir” in America, see my “Frye and Film Studies: Anatomy of Irony,” in *Northrop Frye: New Directions from Old* (Canadian Symposium Series), University of Toronto Press, forthcoming.

15 The Cold War containment of the excessive female here Elsie Michie finds applicable to Emma Newton and Jo McKenna (in Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943] and *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1955], respectively) who, like Tess Harding, may also be perceived as “a site of resistance in a figure who has traditionally been read as *the* embodiment of conservative feminine values.” And as with Tess's comical performance in Stevens's concluding scene, Emma and Jo invite viewers “to hear the contradictory impulses at war within the breast of the ‘true’ wife and ‘good’ mother” (49).

16 “Furthermore,” Deleuze remarks, “we must simultaneously take into account two aspects of the [distanctiated] territory: it not only ensures and regulates the coexistence of the members of the same species by keeping them apart,

distance between ourselves, therefore, and the highly constrained system of representation within which Stevens's notion of Hollywood realism is solidly invested would require a complete transposition to another cinematic style entirely, and perhaps to a different genre, where the filmic representation, split between "fascination and ... [a certain] ironic distance toward its diegetic reality" (Žižek 527) tends to make filmmaking and film viewing far more open and daring and exploratory. In that final scene, Katharine Hepburn's somewhat manful suspenders slipping away from her shoulders as she unwittingly goes about parodying the daily ritual of the family breakfast to great comic effect gestures ever so slightly in the direction of such ironic distance. But in the leaden hands of mainstream directors like Stevens, it's an ironic effect too easily lost in the "aweigh" of anchors clanging *Woman of the Year* to its strident close. In *Adam's Rib*, on the other hand, our watchword at the falling curtain, to repeat, is "*Vive le difference!*" In hurrying that "little difference," Cukor's teamwork aims to recuperate much of the irony lost on Stevens's inaugural pairing of Tracy and Hepburn—an irony, no doubt, made promise of in the gentle ribbing of the title to *Adam's Rib*, a controversial collaborative project that might otherwise pass as one of America's least promising postwar films.

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but makes possible the coexistence of a maximum number of different species in the same milieu by specializing them" (320). See further Jarraway, *Going the Distance*, "Introduction."

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