

“They’re Selling an Image”

“Hookers Cut to Look Like Movie Stars” in *L.A. Confidential*

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In a well-known scene from director Curtis Hanson’s neo-noir movie *L.A. Confidential* (1997), Hollywood precinct detective Edmund Exley (Guy Pearce) walks into a 1950s bar and, upon sighting a woman who resembles movie starlet Lana Turner (Brenda Bakke), quips, “A hooker cut to look like Lana Turner is still a hooker.” Humiliated, the woman throws her martini in the detective’s face. The punch line: The woman really *is* Lana Turner.¹ Category confusion between actress and prostitute on Exley’s part springs from his knowledge that a high-end prostitution ring operating within the city boasts a cast of sex workers who have been cosmetically altered to imitate Hollywood movie actresses. From a highly complex, tightly knit plot, this chapter teases out the narrative strand pertaining to the prostitution ring and, in doing so, demonstrates how it allegorically reflects late twentieth-century concerns pertaining to the increasing use of computer-generated imagery (CGI) in American cinema. The cosmetically altered, imitative body stands in for the digitally manipulated image.² As I will show, a persistent concern with image fidelity finds full expression in *L.A. Confidential’s* treatment of female characters and speaks to the period of the movie’s production, in which a growing use and awareness of CGI began to notably challenge image credibility.

In the late 1990s, critics, filmmakers, and theorists, observing the greater pervasiveness of digital technology to create and manipulate images, questioned if this upheaval in American filmmaking had changed cinema’s perceived ontological relationship to profilmic reality and how this change might impact audience reception. This chapter does not intend to contribute to such theoretical debates about whether CGI meant a radical break for cinema, but rather emphasizes that these debates were prevalent at this historical moment and occurred across a wide spectrum of film culture.³ In addition to the question of cinematic reality,

trade papers forecasted that digital technologies would restructure the film industry, affording independent productions opportunities to compete with major entertainment studios' pictures.⁴

L.A. Confidential projects contemporary questions relating to digital cinema and the U.S. film industry onto the female body, a site that has historically served to screen anxieties surrounding technologies of visual reproduction.⁵ By extension of allegory, the movie's placement of the female body within a structure of exchange speaks to concerns regarding the financial reforms new cinematic digital technologies presented to filmmaking.

SELLING IMAGES

Setting the scene for *L.A. Confidential's* genesis, screenwriter Brian Helgeland, in his foreword to the published screenplay, describes his first meeting with cowriter and director Curtis Hanson.⁶ Helgeland explains that when the two filmmakers convened to discuss adapting James Ellory's novel, they met on part of Universal's lot that was scheduled for demolition to make way for the *Jurassic Park* portion of the studio tour.⁷ The writer's choice of anecdote to situate *L.A. Confidential's* preproduction phase proves intriguing because it positions the movie in relation to *Jurassic Park* (1993), two films unlikely to be thought of together. One might expect Helgeland to mention movies from within the film noir tradition; however, *Jurassic Park* remains the only movie to which he alludes in his foreword.⁸

Jurassic Park and *Forrest Gump* (1994) are two major 1990s Hollywood movies that significantly brought digital special effects into popular awareness.⁹ While special effects are as old as cinema itself and filmmakers have been employing digital effects in postproduction since the 1970s, it was the radical advancement of digital technologies in the mid-1990s that led people to observe that "unreal images had never before appeared so real."¹⁰ Film scholar Ariel Rogers relates how this greater awareness of CGI and other digital technologies prompted "commentators both within and outside the industry to articulate what they believe cinema can and should do for, with, and to viewers, voicing ideas about cinema's pleasures and dangers that resonate in important ways with historically specific interests and concerns."¹¹ One of the most animated debates surrounding the increasing prominence of CGI, as discussed by nonacademics and theorists alike, was centered on whether CGI weakened cinema's truth value "by challenging photographically based notions of cinematic realism."¹²

Historically, photographs had been thought to be exactly like the object they represent. Because of its ties to photography, cinema had, by extension, also been considered to bear an indexical relationship to its referents¹³; however, resulting from major advancement in digital technology, both *Jurassic Park* and *Forest Gump* present "credible photographic images of things which cannot be photographed."¹⁴ For example, *Jurassic Park* presents living, breathing dinosaurs,



which, of course, cannot exist. In *Forrest Gump*, Tom Hanks's character appears in archival footage from various periods in U.S. history, as Gump meets several long-dead U.S. presidents. In both films, CGI components appear integrated with live action to create composite scenes of both the real and unreal, leading spectators to question, What is real? The implications of this perceived devaluation in cinematic realism for the spectator proved ripe for debate. In 1996, Stephen Prince observed, "Because the digital manipulation of images is so novel and the creative possibilities it offers so unprecedented, its effects on cinematic representation and viewer's response are poorly understood."¹⁵

It seems appropriate that *L.A. Confidential*, a movie produced during a period of rapid technological upheaval, looks back to the 1950s, another era when such visual technologies as television and widescreen were also dramatically transforming filmmaking, spectatorship, and Hollywood business.¹⁶ Intercut period found footage employed in *L.A. Confidential's* opening titles transports the viewer back to 1950s Los Angeles. The opening establishes the movie's thematic concern with the value of images. Accompanying this initial montage sequence, a narrator, with the zeal of a showman, enthusiastically invites the viewer to gaze upon the "City of Angels" and all it offers the (white) American family during this prosperous postwar era. The film cuts from period shots of idyllic sandy beaches to those of burgeoning orange groves and then to those of newly built luxury family homes and neighborhoods. Then the narrator's voice abruptly assumes a sardonic tone that undercuts the welcoming allure of the initial images. "It's paradise on Earth," the narrator informs, before adding maliciously, "That's what they tell 'ya anyway. Because they're selling an image, they're selling it through movies, radio and television." Thus, the spectator is instructed from the film's outset that images have value—they're for selling and for sale.

Indeed, in this film world an entire economy exists based on the flow and exchange of predominantly photographic, voyeuristic images. Ubiquitous photographers lurk in the background of scenes, producing a proliferation of images that circulate in the form of editorial, evidence, pornography, and memorabilia, and, most significantly, for the purposes of extortion.¹⁷ Image value in this world thereby relies on the maintenance of a perceived photographic authenticity. For example, a photograph cannot be employed in advertising (or blackmail) if a dominant belief persists that due to their susceptibility for manipulation, photographic images lack credibility. The film exposes the many ways in which photographs are vulnerable to fakery, staging, and misrepresentation, and it's noteworthy that the movie's first image is of a composite picture postcard that combines illustration with photograph; however, while the filmmakers deconstruct the credibility of the photographic image to reveal how it has never held truth value, they simultaneously communicate the importance that in the film world, photographs retain their believability for the general populous.

SELLING SEX

Having established, via the title sequence, the film's thematic interest in the value of images, *L.A. Confidential* proceeds to loosely follow the plot of Ellroy's novel. The movie trails police detectives Exley, Jack Vincennes (Kevin Spacey), and Wendell "Bud" White (Russell Crowe) as they search for the shooters responsible for killing six people in a Hollywood diner called the "Nite Owl." Each detective independently stumbles upon the illegal dealings of the crime organization responsible for the "Nite Owl Massacre." The crime group controls a prostitution ring, trades in pornography, supplies contract killers, and deals in heroin; it also retains close ties to municipal business and city council officials. The detectives eventually discover that the seemingly disparate leads they've each been chasing are intertwined and the corruption goes all the way up to Hollywood's police captain (James Cromwell). In a final shoot-out, the captain is killed, and the appearance of order is restored to the city.

For their screen adaptation, scriptwriters Hanson and Helgeland worked to considerably expand on prostitution, a peripheral part of Ellroy's novel.¹⁸ Several scenes involving sex workers were constructed for the film. In the movie, wealthy tycoon and pimp Pierce Morehouse Patchett (David Strathairn) runs the prostitution racket, which he refers to as "his little studio." It consists of prostitutes who have received cosmetic surgery to resemble such popular Hollywood movie stars as Rita Hayworth, Marilyn Monroe, and Betty Grable, actresses whose identity and feminine sexuality had arguably been similarly constructed and commodified by Hollywood studios. Supporting Patchett's claim to studio boss, Veronica Lake imitator Lynn Bracken (Kim Basinger) contends that she is a performer and that sex work awards her and other prostitutes in Patchett's employment the opportunity to "still act a little."

Akin to a movie studio, Patchett's enterprise sports a logo (a fleur-de-lis) and touts the slogan "Whatever you desire."¹⁹ Patchett's business superficially resembles the movie studios, as it deals in dreams and desire. The sting: Patchett's prostitutes lure city officials into bed and secretly capture them on film in compromising positions. Patchett later uses this photographic evidence to extort the officials for lucrative city contracts. Unusual to the prostitution industry, sex is not the most valuable commodity in Patchett's operation. The highest exchange value ultimately lies in photographic images recording illegal sexual behavior. The film continues to make and resist connections between Patchett's operation and Hollywood movie studios in a manner that not only comments on the movie business of the 1950s, but also addresses the entertainment world of the 1990s, as becomes more evident upon an analysis of the movie's morgue scene.

Considering the morgue scene in terms of its formal construction illustrates the movie's engagement with discourses emerging in the late 1990s concerning the increasing use of CGI in mainstream American cinema.²⁰ The scene takes place in the city's morgue and focuses on the character Susan Lefferts (Amber



Smith), a victim of the Nite Owl killings. In life, Susan, posing as Rita Hayworth, belonged to Patchett's self-described studio. Introducing Susan into the scene are two orderlies who discuss her body in the morgue's corridor. One orderly muses, "When I first saw her I thought she was Rita Hayworth." The other orderly agrees. A moment later the film cuts from the corridor to the inside of a darkened room, where Mrs. Lefferts, Susan's mother (Gwenda Deacon), stands before a curtain. An orderly pulls back the curtain to reveal a glass screen that frames the view to an adjacent, brightly lit room in which Susan's body lies. The use of curtains and a screen inside the darkened viewing room instantly recalls the cinematic screen in a move that exhibits self-reflexivity on the filmmakers' part. The screen frames the imitative body. In her efforts to replicate Hayworth, Susan dyed her hair and had her nose surgically altered. The film's evocation of Hayworth's image proves particularly suggestive given how studies addressing the *real* Rita Hayworth focus on the industry's construction of the star out of the performer Margarita Carmen Cansion.²¹ The cosmetic changes Susan Lefferts had undergone cause her mother difficulty in identifying her body. The confused Mrs. Lefferts states, "I think it's my Susan, but my Susan was a blonde not a redhead." This confusion in response to viewing her daughter's altered body simulates discussions concerning spectator response to viewing CGI's synthetic realities (see figure 10.1).

The scene contains further evidence supporting the suggestion that it allegorically works as an enquiry into manipulated images. Unlike Susan's mother, Detective Bud White, standing at the back of the viewing room as a silent witness to the identification process, recognizes Susan. In one of only two flashbacks to occur in the movie and a rare, overt instance of postproduction manipulation, the cinematic screen momentarily splits, as two shots of Susan are simultaneously placed side by side: Susan alive and Susan dead. White cognitively connects the body in front of him with his recollection of the woman he met on Christmas Eve;



FIGURE 10.1
The real Susan Lefferts? A scene from *L.A. Confidential* (1997).

on this occasion it was a car window that framed Susan's face. Significantly, Susan only appears to characters through some sort of frame.²² When asked in the viewing room if Susan has any distinguishing characteristics, Mrs. Lefferts answers that she has a birthmark on her thigh. A morgue clinician standing beside Mrs. Lefferts knocks on the glass screen, and an orderly on the other side of the glass peels back the sheet to reveal Susan's naked body, along with the marking on her thigh, verifying the body as the real Susan Lefferts and the fake Rita Hayworth, and exposing Susan as an imperfect copy.²³ The allusion to the cinematic screen through framing, accompanied by the film's break from an established naturalism (via an overt visual effect) and the morgue attendant's demonstration of interactivity with the scene beyond the screen, compounds to form the analogous relationship between the imitative female body and the digitally manipulated image, which seeks to simulate profilmic reality.²⁴

THE FEMALE BODY AND REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Discussing *L.A. Confidential* in *American Cinematographer*, director Hanson states that a "key theme in this movie is the difference between appearance and reality." He adds, "[W]e had a beautiful opportunity to examine this theme through Kim Basinger's character, Lynn Bracken, a prostitute who makes herself over to look like the glamorous forties movie star Veronica Lake."²⁵ Hanson does not explain why he thinks the theme of appearance versus reality was particularly pertinent to the era he was working in, an omission that seems unusual given that the film noir genre, along with the revisionist film neo-noirs of the 1970s, consistently reflects or aims to tackle contemporary social anxieties. While Hanson may not articulate it, however, the film's timing coincides with discussions concerning the slippage between what is real and not real in cinema, as triggered by the growing usage of CGI. Hanson also does not elaborate on why he thinks the female body, especially a commodified female body, proves the perfect vehicle for exploring this theme of appearance versus reality. To address this question we might consider the formal principles the filmmakers exploit to present prostitute Lynn Bracken as a conduit for their theme of real versus unreal.

As with the scene set inside the morgue, the filmmakers rely on formal visual codes to create tension between perceptions of appearance and reality. While the morgue scene positions an on-screen character (Mrs. Lefferts) as witness to the uncanny, scenes containing Bracken seek to produce this sense not just within other characters, but also in the movie's spectator. In accordance with Hanson's statement, the verisimilitude between Veronica Lake and Lynn Bracken juxtaposes real with unreal, as is strikingly communicated in one shot of Bracken standing beside a projected screen image of Lake starring in *This Gun for Hire* (1942).²⁶ When framing Bracken, the filmmakers took further formal liberties to incite a destabilizing, uncanny affect for the spectator. Upon Bracken's first ap-



pearance in the movie, the camera delays presenting a frontal shot of her, instead lingering over her silhouette. She wears a long-hooded, black cloak. The cloak's hood possesses white borders, making the attire reminiscent of a nun's habit (see figure 10.2). Intrigued by this vestal figure incongruously present in a liquor store on Christmas Eve, White approaches Bracken. When Bracken finally turns to face White, she reveals lips painted bright scarlet and hair bleached platinum, markers that traditionally signify something other than virginal (see figure 10.3). Bracken's initial entrance into the movie exploits dominant representations of women by drawing upon the "Madonna/whore" dichotomy.²⁷

Taken to visual extremes, Bracken graphically embodies both virgin and whore, roles that, by definition, are mutually exclusive. In later scenes, the filmmakers repeat the tactic of blurring binaries to have Bracken personify additional dualities. For instance, Bracken reveals to White she has two bedrooms. The first room, at the front of the house, evokes urbanite glamor, while the second room, at the back of the house, chintzy, small-town America. Bracken is both sophisticated and provincial. A further way Bracken is presented as simultaneously occupying two roles often thought of as being oppositional occurs through her claim to being an actress. Bracken defends her sex work in terms of performance. Scholar Kirsten Pullen's book *Actresses and Whores* traces through a series of case studies the history of actresses from their first appearances on the London stage.²⁸ Pullen demonstrates how discourses have often conflated actresses and prostitutes at various historical moments, and the category slippage proves a source of societal anxiety. Virgin/whore, urbane/small-town, actress/prostitute exist as social-cultural oppositional representations that Bracken manages to singularly embody. The boundaries of such oppositions remain locales of social



FIGURE 10.2
Kim Basinger/Lynn Bracken/Veronica Lake in *L.A. Confidential* (1997).



FIGURE 10.3
 “Madonna/whore.” A scene from *L.A. Confidential* (1997).

panic. Occupying dualities, Bracken thereby stands in for the composite image, which combines the polarities of both real and unreal elements, similar to the digitally manipulated image. By invoking and collapsing representational binaries in a blatant way, the filmmakers destabilize meaning and seek to disrupt for the spectator a sense of what is knowable.

As demonstrated, the filmmakers use the prostitutes in *L.A. Confidential* to conduct an examination of the real versus unreal image, an examination prompted, as I suggest, by changes in visual technologies. Why should women’s bodies prove “perfect” for such exploration? Film historian Karen Redrobe Beckman’s book *Vanishing Women* provides a historically grounded explanation as to why women become ciphers for visual technologies.²⁹ Beckman’s research cites how precinematic and early cinematic “technologies enabled the endless reproduction, circulation, and consumption of the female body. Within this modern proliferation and circulation of images of women, the threat of reproduction becomes both feminized and mechanized.”³⁰ Anxieties surrounding visual technologies become inseparable from misogynistic fears of women’s reproductive capacity.³¹ Thus, early filmmakers projected fears surrounding the new medium of reproduction onto women’s bodies. Beckman’s work proves useful here to account for why we see anxieties pertaining to CGI projected onto female bodies in *L.A. Confidential*.

Differing somewhat from prior instances of filmmakers using women’s bodies as ciphers for technology, *L.A. Confidential* situates its female characters within an economic system. Hence, the film encompasses concerns surrounding new digital technologies’ financial impact on the movie industry. As the film instructs, images have value, but knowledge of imitation or image manipulation compromises that value. For example, if we return to the scene in the bar with Lana Turner, we witness how knowledge of the existence of a mock Turner has come

to cheapen the real Turner's reputation. Compromising a star's worth devalues studio brand, and in the 1950s, studio brand was closely tied to the contract stars the studio owned. It's possible to think of Patchett's studio, with its access to a skilled plastic surgeon, as analogous to an independent film studio that comes to use digital technologies in an effort to compete with major studio product.

As Prince wrote in 1996, CGI's "ramifications extend well beyond film theory and aesthetics to encompass ethical, legal, and social issues."³² One area of discourse beyond theoretical concerns focused on the practical opportunities digital technologies would offer independent filmmakers coming up through the "independent movement" of the 1990s. It was predicted that as the cost of digital tools decreased, such tools would allow independent filmmakers and television productions to compete with major studios. CGI now drastically reduces the price of filmmaking: Filmmakers can avoid building expensive sets and employing thousands of extras.³³ In *L.A. Confidential*, however, such an undermining of the major studios via acts of imitation as authored by an independent cannot be permitted to persist.

IMAGE FIDELITY AND FEMALE FIDELITY

The film's crisis point, leading to the suppression of the prostitution ring, is ultimately triggered by a case of image infidelity. One of the film's climatic scenes conflates anxieties, surrounding the fidelity of the image with that of female infidelity. After having struck up a romantic relationship with Bracken, White discovers an excessive amount of photographic evidence that presents Bracken having sex with detective Exley, White's rival at the police bureau. Upon finding a stack of sequential photographs documenting Bracken and Exley's sexual encounter, the horrified White begins turning each photograph over in his hands. The motion creates a crude film roll—White's hands performing the part of movie projector. One after the other, the photographs drop from White's hands and land in the mud, the scene anticipating celluloid film's demise. After viewing the explicit photographs, White seeks out Bracken. Even though White hates violence against women above all other crimes, he breaks from character and punches her in the face. Bracken's facial bruising means her visage no longer resembles that of Veronica Lake's, and from this point onward, Bracken no longer attempts to imitate Lake. Continuing on his violent rampage, White visits Exley and, after throwing him to the ground, forces one of the implicating photographs into his mouth—trying to make him eat the offending image of infidelity. Soon thereafter, Patchett, Bracken's pimp, is found dead, putting an abrupt end to his "little studio's" operations.

Bracken's reconciliation with White at the film's conclusion places *L.A. Confidential* within a category of films that show prostitutes "reformed and rescued by strong men who are not coincidentally police officers."³⁴ But the film's underlying



ethos leaves just enough space for the viewer to question this reading. Bracken never needed rescuing or expressed dissatisfaction with her line of work and always claimed agency. The only moment we see her disempowered is after White beats her. In fact, it's rather the case that Bracken rescues White. At the film's end, we see Bracken driving the injured officer to her hometown in Arizona, where we presume she fulfills her goal of opening a dress shop. Reined in by officials, Bracken performs the work of Hollywood capitalism from afar by selling glamor to the ladies of small-town America. Moreover, the film's handling of the pimp Patchett doesn't precisely condemn him but instead presents him as a successful entrepreneur who discovers a niche in sexual trafficking. While the movie closes on a conservative note, this note falls flat. The so-called "good guys" left standing are not sympathetic characters, but opportunists and violent thugs.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I outline how the prostitution ring in *L.A. Confidential* speaks to late twentieth-century concerns regarding upheavals in the U.S. film industry as introduced by growing digital technologies. Caught between the analog and the digital, the film both resists and asserts Hollywood's dominance over technological methods of visual reproduction and, in accordance with a historical trend, places women at the center of this battle. The movie's treatment of Patchett's small studio and its ambivalence toward the dominant entertainment world may have something to do with the filmmakers' own allegiances. In the British Film Institute companion to the movie, Manohla Dargis describes the film as an art-house picture that Warner Bros. almost unwittingly commissioned and released. Warner Bros., "well versed in high-concept, star-driven movies," didn't know how to market *L.A. Confidential*.³⁵ The film garnered critical acclaim; however, James Cameron's CGI-tastic *Titanic* (1997) eclipsed it at the box office and the Oscars.³⁶ The liminal industry position occupied by the filmmakers of *L.A. Confidential* explains their cynical treatment of the city and the city's interest in protecting the major studios.

The film's final credits affirm Hollywood studio hegemony. As the credits roll at the end of the picture, a final scene is inserted. Two characters from the movie, the city's district attorney and a television actor, walk side by side. They have been superimposed into 1950s archival footage of a Hollywood parade. The scene employs postproduction technology similar to that used for the presidential scenes in *Forrest Gump*. Promising order and continuity, the power to make images remains tightly under Hollywood control.

NOTES

1. This scene was employed in movie trailers and presented at the Seventieth Academy Awards to support the film's nine nominations, of which it won two: Best Supporting Actress (Kim Basinger) and Best Writing (Adapted Screenplay).



2. The relationship between CGI and cosmetic surgery has previously been noted. For example, commenting on Michael Jackson's hugely expensive and popular music video for "Black and White" (1991), where digital artists employed CGI to present shots of heads morphing into different heads, Jeremy Welsh writes, "There is arguably a close connection between computer "morphing" and reconstructive surgery. For instance, the use of morphing techniques in Michael Jackson's music video [for] "Black and White" comes uncannily close to the "biomorphing" plastic surgery the singer himself has undergone." Jeremy Welsh, "One Nation under a Will (or Iron), or; the Shiny Toys of Thatcher's Children," in Julia Knight, ed., *Diverse Practices: A Critical Reader on British Video Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 143.

3. Frequently cited academic works discussing whether the use of digital technology in postproduction has transformed the ontology of cinema include Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Thomas Elsaesser, "Digital Cinema and the Apparatus: Archaeologies, Epistemologies, Ontologies," in Bruce Bennett, Marc Fursteau, and Adrian McKenzie, eds., *Cinema and Technology: Cultures, Theories, Practices* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 226–40; Stephen Prince, "True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory," *Film Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 27–37; John Belton, "Digital Cinema: A False Revolution," *October* 100 (Spring 2002): 98–114; Tom Gunning, "Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality," *Differences* 18, no 1. (2007): 29–52.

4. Discourse often conflated the three distinct practices of digital technology that occur at various stages of the filmmaking process: shooting on digital cameras, postproduction digital technology, and digital projection. So, for instance, discussion about the opportunities the digital camera offered independent filmmakers merged with discussions addressing CGI's possibilities; it all fell under the same rubric of the "digital."

5. Karen Redrobe Beckman's monograph traces how anxieties surrounding precinematic and early cinematic technology are projected onto the female body. This chapter draws on Beckman's work. Karen Redrobe Beckman, *Vanishing Women: Magic, Film, and Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

6. Brian Helgeland, Curtis Hanson, and James Ellroy, *L.A. Confidential: The Screenplay* (New York: Warner, 1997), xiv.

7. James Ellroy's novel *L.A. Confidential* is the third book in his L.A. Quartet series.

8. In contrast, Ellroy, who writes a generous introduction to the screenplay, name-drops *Plunder Road* (1957) and *Vertigo* (1958).

9. When situating *L.A. Confidential* against a backdrop of high-profile blockbusters that employ CGI, one might also consider *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), *Toy Story* (1995), and *Titanic* (1997).

10. *Westworld* (1973) was one of the first films to use digital image processing, as outlined in John Whitney Jr., "Creating the Special Effects for *Westworld*," *American Cinematographer*, November 1973, pp. 1,477–80, and Prince, "True Lies," 34.

11. Ariel Rogers, *Cinematic Appeals: The Experience of New Movie Technologies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 2.

12. Prince, "True Lies," 29.
13. From photography's invention, theorists made arguments for the indexicality of the medium, insisting that it was a mechanical recording of the world. Roland Barthes claims that photograph and object "are glued together" and that the photograph was a record of the object's presence. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Richard Howard, trans. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 5. Other theorists who support this classical theory include Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997 [1960]), ix; André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* Vols. 1 and 2, Hugh Gray, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–1971), 14; Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 16–23.
14. Prince, "True Lies," 28.
15. Prince, "True Lies," 27.
16. Unlike the novel, which spans seven years, *L.A. Confidential* takes place at the turn of 1953, just a few months before widescreen would be premiered. References to television repeatedly surface. Ariel Rogers compares and contrasts the cinematic technological upheavals that occurred in the 1990s with those of the 1950s (with two chapters devoted to the coming of widescreen and two chapters to the rise of digital technology). Rogers, *Cinematic Appeals*.
17. A common motif in the film is to have a photographer take a photo of a scene and for the film to then cut to a black-and-white still of said scene, stressing photography's capacity to document and creating a tension with other scenes that reveals photography's susceptibility for manipulation.
18. In her British Film Institute book on *L.A. Confidential*, Manohla Dargis references how such a prostitution operation belongs in Hollywood history. Dargis quotes screenwriter Budd Schulberg's memoirs, which recall a bordello that employed a mock Carole Lombard, Jean Harlow, Claudette Colbert, and Nancy Carroll. Manohla Dargis, *L.A. Confidential* (London: BFI Publication, 2003), 61; Budd Schulberg, *Moving Pictures: Memoirs of a Hollywood Prince* (London: Allison & Busby, 1993).
19. Regarding studio slogans, one might consider how in the 1940s, MGM billed itself as the studio that contained "more stars than in heaven."
20. The following scene does not occur in Ellroy's novel but was created for the screen adaptation.
21. This is the subject of Adrienne L. McLean, *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).
22. On the only occasions we see Susan she appears framed: by a car window, the morgue window, in an array of photographs on display at her mother's house which the camera lingers over.
23. The scene also proves unique for its graphic presentation of nudity. In the only two instances of nudity in the film, nudity is desexualized, which seems unusual for



a film that sold itself on an erotic premise. It's possible that the film suggests that women who are in some way considered synthetic lack the appeal of the authentic. It was occasionally argued that CGI models lacked a sensual appeal when compared to the real thing. It is stressed that Lynn Bracken's character, the romantic interest, has not received cosmetic surgery but simply dyed her hair; this lack of modification possibly preserve's Bracken's sexual appeal and ultimately makes her "redemption" possible.

24. Interviewed for *American Cinematographer*, celebrated cinematographer Dante Spinotti explained that Hanson, in an effort to avoid nostalgia for the era, favored a naturalistic approach that eschewed artificiality, particularly the stylized look of the film noir genre. Eric Rudolph, "Exposing Hollywood's Sordid Past," *American Cinematographer*, October 1997, pp. 46–55.

25. Curtis Hanson, quoted in Rudolph, "Exposing Hollywood's Sordid Past," 48.

26. The moment recalls early practices of rear projection, reemphasizing that image manipulation is nothing new.

27. It's argued that women in mainstream Hollywood film have been cast as either virgin or whore, supporting the idea that these must remain mutually exclusive roles. As explicated by psychoanalysis, these roles are created according to men's needs and experiences, thereby such representations of Madonna or whore serve the patriarchal order. For a detailed description of Freud's "Madonna-whore" complex and how it operates in some key Hollywood films, see Harvey R. Greenberg, *Screen Memories: Hollywood Cinema on the Psychoanalytic Couch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). See also Sigmund Freud, "A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men," in Benjamin Nelson, ed., *On Creativity and the Unconscious* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 162–72.

28. Kirsten Pullen, *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

29. Beckman, *Vanishing Women*.

30. Beckman, *Vanishing Women*, 5.

31. Beckman, *Vanishing Women*, 191.

32. Prince, "True Lies," 36.

33. Rama Venkatasawmy writes, "Working in digital allowed low-cost productions to achieve high-quality, stylized images with levels of craftsmanship and precision usually associated with big-studio feature films" (151). Venkatasawmy also states, "By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century digital filmmaking and VFX were enabling the relatively rapid production of profitable motion pictures on medium to low budgets" (4). Rama Venkatasawmy, *The Digitization of Cinematic Visual Effects: Hollywood's Coming of Age* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2013).

34. Pullen, *Actresses and Whores*, 141.

35. Dargis, *L.A. Confidential*, 83.

36. By 1998, *Titanic* had become Hollywood's highest-grossing film, "Hollywood's first ever billion dollar movie." See "Titanic Sinks Competitors without a Trace," *BBC News*, February 25, 1998. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/59913.stm> (accessed April 20, 2015).

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