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PLAN

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TEXTE

1 Hollywood's self-censorship notoriously led to a suggestive eroticism, sometimes more effective than an explicit one (Jacobs; Caïra). It found a famous apotheosis in Rita Hayworth's implied striptease in *Gilda*. Did that scene raise any sort of *trouble* at the time? Not exactly, considering that suggesting instead of showing remained the primary goal of the Production Code Administration (PCA). This scene was more erotic than fundamentally subversive and "the fact that Gilda is 'performing,' that is, pretending to be a loose woman in a suggestive musical club setting while not really being a prostitute, allowed the film to work around the censors" (Biesen, 60). Subsequently, during the 1950s, the censors' control grew weaker and many other films featured coded striptease acts which, as arousing as they might feel to the audience, were left during the self-censorship process.

2 But there is more than meets the eye in the very emblematic "Put the Blame on Mame." The understanding of that number cannot be reduced to the eroticism elicited through a fake striptease. Behind what is remembered in film history as a great star turn lies a more complex history, that of the relationship between Hollywood and burlesque theatre, especially during the strict enforcement of the Production Code. Burlesque is indeed a substantial component of the backstage stories of the Pre-Code musicals between 1929 and 1934. In parallel with Mae West's provocations, well embodied by her obvious burlesque queen in *I'm no Angel*, many backstage melodramas, like

Applause, or the Joan Crawford vehicle *Dancing Lady*, related how the heroines of the Great Depression rose from burlesque to Broadway. Later in the 1950s, the mock striptease, both teasing and funny, became a trope of the musical genre when the Production Code Administration lost its efficiency, hence allowing what I would term a "come-back" of burlesque on mainstream screens. Many lavish musicals of that later era feature stylized burlesque acts, like unmistakably *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, typical of the Twentieth Century-Fox taste for lowbrow entertainment. But there are also two suggested stripteases in the supposedly more high-class MGM *Silk Stockings*[1]. By "burlesque," I refer to its Hollywood treatment: mentions of the word without specific contents, or acts implying striptease but where no nudity ever occurs, which is a simplified notion of actual burlesque. The word "burlesque" in the context of this essay will always designate a coded version, or "the sanitized Hollywood representations of 'burley' shows" (Schaefer, 41). It will not indicate the authentic exploitation films which were typically produced in the 1950s for a parallel circuit.

3 Between those two periods, that is between 1934 and the early 1950s, it mostly seems that Joseph Breen's Administration achieved its goal and almost erased burlesque from the mainstream screens. Without denying there was some strong cleaning-up, I argue that the epitome of the classical Hollywood mode of production was not a simple parenthesis. A few musical numbers interestingly anticipated the 1950s trend, and the theme of burlesque remained in some backstage stories. Burlesque actually reappeared clearly in 1943 with *Du Barry Was A Lady* and *Lady of Burlesque*, accompanied by wartime films that frequently included a coded burlesque act, like Gypsy Rose Lee's in *Stage Door Canteen*, and yet Rita Hayworth's in *Tonight and Every Night*. A little earlier, *Dance, Girl, Dance* granted a spacious place to burlesque in its narrative as well as its musical numbers. It did so more significantly than other films from the late 1930s which used burlesque in the narrative but didn't show much of it. In the similar stories of *The Great Ziegfeld*, *King of Burlesque*, or the Fanny Brice biopic *Rose of Washington Square*, characters climb the social ladder from their beginnings in burlesque to legitimate art. But this is less an excuse to offer coarse skits than the expression of a fascination for Broadway revues.

4 I want to question the *trouble* at stake with the presence of burlesque in films from the classical era, which went under strict surveillance both from the PCA and the local censorship boards. It is worth noting that burlesque was not technically forbidden as a *theme*, even if it involved disreputable places, but as *spectacle*. Stories could mention burlesque houses, but danced acts were more problematic. In the PCA correspondence, they are almost the only type of musical numbers which encounter immediate disapproval when they're mentioned in the script but not yet shot. But considering the stake was to prevent what the PCA called "exposure," it would seem that the mock striptease could be approved if decent enough. Euphemism and suggestion are acceptable; is there hence another kind of trouble with burlesque? If even MGM features fake (and supposedly elegant) striptease acts in films, is there any problem left? The PCA archives suggest that the issue is more complex than simple nudity. I want to analyze the ideology at stake behind the moral condemnation of burlesque in films and explore what made some musical numbers sensitive. Moreover, what made Hollywood producers, directors and actresses want to include burlesque acts anyways in that constrained context? I argue that this occasionally goes beyond the teasing power of the forbidden exposure.

Between Law and "Good Taste"

5 I first want to consider the paradoxical status of burlesque in the history of American censorship, both on stages and screens. Robert C. Allen (243) noted that in the 1920s, burlesque theatre, which was initially a complex and structured type of spectacle, became reduced to varied forms of striptease. It was approached by censorship boards mostly as a display of nudity. Raids, shutting downs of houses and court trials were based on that, more than the potential subversive power of the satirical component of the show. But as Rachel Shteir (222) and Maya Cantu (97) pointed out, the interdiction of burlesque by New York mayor La Guardia in 1937 provoked a transition from shady theatres to the main Broadway stages with a wave of "burlesk-minded" shows. Without resorting to authentic stripteases, Cole Porter's *Du Barry Was A Lady* (1939) and *Panama Hattie* (1940), or Rodgers and Hart's *Pal Joey* (1940) included daring acts. They involved a strong suggestion of sexuality and exposure of female bodies, even

if the stake was not nudity itself, but rather the tough and lewd atmosphere.

6 Considering the significant suppression of entertainment perceived as immoral in the history of American theatre and the audacity of Broadway compared to that of Hollywood at the time, one could have expected burlesque to entirely disappear from the movies. Indeed, the film adaptation of *Panama Hattie*, for example, entirely cleaned up the original show that Maya Cantu (91-97) analyzes as a parody of the censorship against burlesque. In general, as Robert Altman pointed out, burlesque "provides the subject matter for relatively few musicals (e.g. *Applause*, *Dance Girl Dance*, *Gypsy*)" (204).

7 Erasing exhibitionist theatre was presumably the moral goal of Joseph Breen, but practically, the only prohibition involved "suggestive dancing." The Production Code didn't forbid the display of burlesque theatre, as long as it was deprived of its genuine contents. In fact, some executives raised an eyebrow when Hollywood studios started to employ former burlesque dancers as chorus girls. But they were more skeptical at first than Breen himself:

> Quizzed about the buttoned-down Code nuzzling up to the unzipped strippers, Breen replied, "That depends entirely on what is shown on the screen," before tossing the hot tomatoes back into the Boss's court. "At this time, this is not a Production Code matter, but, rather, might be a subject of industry policy for the attention of Mr. Hays" (Doherty, 88).

8 Fake stripteases actually led to interpretations of the Code and to tensions between the literal rule, the spirit of the Code, the studios' policies, and Breen's personal opinion. What disturbed Breen about *There's Magic in Music* (1941) was not as much the vague presence of a shady theatre in the story than the age of the young actress playing in burlesque:

> We still urge and recommend that you do not show your 14-year-old star, Susanna Foster, connected in any way with a burlesque theatre. We are sure that this business will cause widespread offense to audiences generally. We think you should eliminate making Susanna too hard-boiled and showing her smoking cigarettes at several points in this story. In this connection, note also: [...] this business of

> Susanna coming in to have her dress zipped up [...] and also as to her "hula" dance. [...]

> Scenes A-18 and seq.: the entire business of the strip tease by Maidie is unacceptable. The same unacceptability applies also to the leering reactions of the audience in these scenes. (Breen, Letter to Luraschi).

9 Breen's commentary sketches the portrait of a burlesque queen according to Hollywood: "too hard-boiled," wearing a dress with zippers (even if they're used "up") and performing exotic dances like the "hula." In spite of Breen's fears, and thanks to a few adjustments at Paramount's, that cleaned film was well met by the local boards of censorship. This is easily explained because it was another burlesque-into-opera success story, based musically-wise on the scores of classical composers.

10 The word "burlesque" is not forbidden in itself, but the precise idea of a striptease is extremely problematic. The PCA's work focused on a few specific details: when the musical numbers were described on paper in striptease terms, Breen usually tried to suppress them entirely, without taking into account the fact that they were intended to be more evocative than explicit. His menaces sometimes seemed out of proportion: while Breen usually suggested minor cuts, he told an RKO executive that "any attempt to portray a 'strip tease' on the screen is in violation of the Production Code and will render the whole picture unacceptable" (Breen, Letter to McDonough). In scripts, the word "striptease" is strictly forbidden. But "act" is acceptable, as is "hula" which is according to Breen a satisfactory substitute. Although he disapproved of a teenager performing a "hula" in *There's Magic in Music*, he had used that very word one month earlier to suggest the replacement of an intended striptease in *Dance, Girl, Dance*, by such an exotic performance: "It was agreed [...] that the suggestion of the 'strip tease' dance will be entirely eliminated from the finished picture, and that a type of 'hula' will be substituted therefor" (Breen, Memorandum). Burlesque dances thus opened a space for negotiation in Hollywood. What is the boundary of "suggestive" for a hula? When is a hula erotic and when is it an inoffensive exotic dance? The line was sometimes delicate to define.

11 MGM's biopic of Florenz Ziegfeld, *The Great Ziegfeld*, exemplifies strikingly the contradictory status of burlesque in films of the classical era. Breen was extremely critical towards a Fanny Brice act – she appears under her own name in the episode where Ziegfeld observes her in a burlesque show and invites her in his prestigious revue. Brice intended to do her parody of a fan dance, a type of striptease made popular by Sally Rand, without actually disrobing. But the PCA decided at the time to forbid fully that type of act. Even a "burlesque of a fan dance" – here "burlesque" means parody or grotesque – was discouraged by Breen who rather stated that "fan dance as we understand it will not be approved. This has been our rule" (Telegram to Hart). That was the crucial issue discussed during production. After the sequence was nevertheless shot, because it seemed that a parodic intent could allow it, Breen deemed it "vulgar" though not technically forbidden (Letter to Stromberg). The PCA head interestingly made it a matter of "good taste" rather than censorship. But consequently, the fan dance disappeared from the film, where burlesque is limited to a few signals indicating a cultural category, but never providing spectacle. Indeed, Brice's belonging to lowbrow entertainment is expressed through the background role of a burlesque queen sharing her dressing room. That character is designated as such by her shiny white skin-tight costume, a Hollywood code to hide in white every shady detail. After that encounter, Brice's inoffensive comedy song is introduced by a shot of the chorus of fully clothed girls, a typical indicator of burlesque. At the end of the production process, Breen seemed proud of that "outstanding musical" he helped produce (Final Summary).

12 But another number of *The Great Ziegfeld*, which is not discussed at all in the correspondence, bears an almost unconscious flavor of burlesque. That number, supposedly that of a lavish revue, reveals about twenty girls in nightgowns dancing around their beds. Its second part uses mobile runways as a key attraction. This is not any shape of a motorized stage. The runway was indeed the dominant feature of burlesque stages, as it can be seen on some of Reginald Marsch's drawings. The film is directed by Robert Z. Leonard, who directed *Dancing Lady* and its introductory scene where the framing and lighting foregrounded the runway. Burlesque is implicitly present in that *Great Ziegfeld* number, because it offers the apparatus

– and even an exaggerated apparatus – but not the extensive view. This did not make Breen raise an eyebrow. An obvious code for burlesque like the runway did not compromise the general "good taste" of that "outstanding musical." It seems that what Ziegfeld did on Broadway worked well in Hollywood too: transforming the burlesque dancer into a decent chorus girl, nonetheless revealing her legs, and shifting from individual acts to choral performances that "deemphasize individual talent" (Altman, 204). The fact that this number involves a chorus, and not a solo dancer, might have substantial ideological stakes. Questions of nudity aside, wouldn't fake burlesque be more subversive in Breen's eyes when it involves a single female performer, an identified subject, and not a certain number of anonymous bodies? It is also a matter of distance: choral numbers allow the camera to remain far from the stage and to provide ensemble shots, when an only performer calls for close-ups and another perception of the body.

Stylistic Options for Burlesque Themes

13 Because the fake burlesque acts cannot unveil what they are supposed to, they frequently have to relate to another type of spectacle. The revue represents one possibility, but girls exhibiting their legs in nightgowns still offer a somewhat voyeuristic show. The other two strategies adopted in Hollywood were comedy or the use of a distinct and prominent musical or artistic style. They were both attempts to prevent any arousal from happening during burlesque acts on screen and solutions obeying the Production Code. But in return, they sometimes proved to be a way of making some of these numbers risqué, possibly even subversive.

14 Let us start with comedy. Fanny Brice's previously mentioned fan dance was suppressed because of the fan dance itself, not because it was a parody. Even though Breen did not appreciate its grotesque side, this was mostly a matter of personal taste, which the head of the PCA admitted in some of his remarks. Comedy was routinely accepted when it disqualified the striptease. Gypsy Rose Lee, one of the most notable strippers of the time, transformed her literary strips (authentic ones) into a comedy act in *Stage Door Canteen*. At the very

end of her number, she takes one last scarf off and is still more than fully covered with fabric. The amount of clothing is proportionate to the notoriety of the stripper, major film stars having gone much farther in that direction. But with Gypsy Rose Lee, the act had to remain strictly funny. One of the rare strip numbers in the musicals of the late 1930s is Martha Raye's recurring song in *Double or Nothing*, "It's On, It's Off." The actress shows nothing but seems to suffer from an obsession with undressing expressed in grotesque and of course uncompleted movements. The act is mostly a crazy dance. Another example is given by Lucille Ball's strip number in *Dance, Girl, Dance*, "Mother, What Do I Know?" The PCA files establish that she was initially meant to dance with a torn dress, which Breen disapproved of. After strong warnings, the final film gave it a comic tone, the whole number being about the wind lifting Ball's dress[2]. The act moves towards a cartoonish ending: right after the actress has left the stage, a prop dress flies away, with a whistling sound producing a mickey-mousing effect. Hollywood censors thus considered that comedy could neutralize the suspense of an actual striptease. But this example emphasizes in return a key element of authentic burlesque, the comedy part of the performance. Even if the cinematic numbers of the classical era don't have much critical content, they nevertheless empower the performer: Lucille Ball's comic energy in this scene distinctly establishes her domination over the male audience.

15 The second way of including burlesque gestures on screen is to make them part of a dance with a strongly identified style that works as a mask. Artsy numbers designed by recognized choreographers could more easily reuse burlesque tropes. This is a part of the burlesque wave on Broadway that reached Hollywood through some adaptations. Balanchine's ballet "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue," from the stage musical *On Your Toes* (1936), starts with the entrance of a burlesque dancer on a runway. Because that moment is included in a sophisticated choreography and is performed by a ballerina (Tamara Geva in the original show), it was left without much difficulty in the Vera Zorina part in the Warner Bros. adaptation, all the more so since Geva's black lace dress is replaced by another shiny white outfit.

16 In parallel to high art, swing music also provided an excellent cover for burlesque moments. Swing dances could indeed be substitutes for burlesque movements, for they justified a deep involvement of the

body and "hot" performances. The displayed energy was connected to a musical fashion rather than sexual suggestiveness. Swing numbers could involve slight burlesque codes in energetic dances that were safe for the Production Code. Lucille Ball performs her "Jitterbug Bite" in *Dance, Girl, Dance* while taking her fur coat off and swaggering on a runway in front of a fascinated male audience. Many visual codes for Hollywood burlesque are there, but the music redirects the number towards the popular dance. Barbara Stanwyck performs an even safer swing number at the beginning of *Ball of Fire* (1941). Her glittering costume disclosing her legs, and mostly her poses backstage on a chair opposite Gary Cooper clearly designate her character as a burlesque queen. But her musical act doesn't exactly match. "Drum Boogie" is indeed a jazzy nightclub number with a big band including drummer Gene Krupa. There are a few visual clues suggesting burlesque: Stanwyck is introduced by a close up on her hand playing with the curtain before her entrance, and her legs show very much. But the staging is careful, long shots are favored and no dancing movement is emphasized as possibly sensual. The energy rather comes out of the upbeat music and musical rhythms.

17 Firstly, swing dances made possibly risky numbers acceptable. They allowed the presence of a few clues to knowledgeable audiences behind the striking appeal of contemporary popular music. Secondly, they could display the performer's energy and authority. They justified hot dances with renewed gestures and thereby empowered the actresses by conveying the control involved in the performance and how it impacts the diegetic audience. The change of style and the dressing of serious art or swing music allowed burlesque to appear in acts and not only in the narrative. Some of these acts valued the performers and made great star turns, as for Ball and Stanwyck, but others were quite sanitized and annihilated the spirit of burlesque.

18 A good example of the latter category is the transformation of Mary Martin's "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," a showstopper on Broadway in *Leave It to Me!* in 1938. Its first film version, in *Love Thy Neighbor* in 1940, tried to save the fur coat and the sitting poses, but without any striptease gestures or specific rhythmical energy. The number thus became literal and static: the fur coat is a fur coat, which is a symbol of social status and wealth. It is supposed to be elegant. It is

not any more the instrument of subversion that it was on Broadway, where burlesque acts aimed at criticizing the "genteel traditions" (Cantu 74) and where "lady" was one of the most ironic words of the time. Mary Martin, like Ethel Merman, Mae West or Gypsy Rose Lee were the antithesis of expected femininity. Their outrageous behaviors on stage were perceived as a critical stand both on class and gender. When transposing their numbers on screen, the movie industry drove them back to their literal meaning, erasing the irony. In Hollywood, "ladies" were supposed to be genuine ones.

Performance and audience participation

19 Some acts, and I should say some performers, nevertheless retained a spicy taste of what could be seen more frequently on stages. The most intense numbers are not necessarily the most daring in suggesting nudity. They are rather those who reestablish audience participation – a strong dynamic in burlesque. This would require an extensive study, and I will merely sketch the broad outlines of three situations preserving an effect of burlesque in films.

20 The first type of audience involvement in Hollywood burlesque numbers relies on a shared knowledge of what is forbidden. Some sequences managed to ridicule the process of censorship, something that was getting common in Broadway shows. Instead of playing on the possible suggestiveness of erotic exhibition, these scenes handle the stripping theme to make fun of either the censorship laws, or simply Hollywood conventions. Viewers aware of recent stage productions and reading in the newspapers about the raids and the misfortunes of burlesque queens drawn into courts, could find echoes of those topics in films. Off and on the publicity also foregrounded the burlesque element to strengthen the clues, which could make the audience especially aware of the subject behind entertaining acts. Significant films with a burlesque topic include representations of raids or trials. Considering that the burlesque acts disclose almost nothing, the raids and trials seem completely out of proportion (besides the following examples, *Eadie Was a Lady* is another compelling burlesque-themed film with raid scenes). The court scenes make the institution surprisingly ridiculous, considering

the rules of the Production Code and its careful treatment of the Law. A prime example is the ending of *Dance, Girl, Dance*, years before the more famous court scene of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. At the beginning of the sequence, Lucille Ball's character shows her hurt legs and back to the judge: therefore, she unties her bulky fur coat, revealing more of her body than she did until then in the burlesque house. In musical acts, fake courts with clowns emphasize the parody: there is one in *Lady of Burlesque* and Ginger Rogers's rendering of "the Saga of Jenny" in *Lady in the Dark* (1944) also associates burlesque with a mock trial.

21 The second type of audience involvement happens through editing and staging when the directors found a way to restore the sensuality in stripteases. Indeed, filming even a fake striptease was technically complicated, considering Breen made very specific suggestions about the choice of frames – he rarely delivered such comments about film technique on other topics. The correspondence during the production of *There's Magic in Music* provides many examples. We have noted earlier how Breen forbade reaction shots. In addition, he had shots cut very late in the production process: a postscript on the visa demanded that "the specific shot of the garment falling to the floor in front of the girl's legs will be eliminated" (Visa). Moreover, Breen defined possible ways to perform dancing scenes and specific lateral movements. A cooch dance in *The Great Ziegfeld* was authorized if the name was withdrawn from the dialogue and providing that "the actual execution of the dance, if shown on the screen, must be limited in general only to side-ways motion of the hips, without backward and forward motion or rolling of the abdomen" (Breen, Letter to Zehner). That description would also perfectly fit Barbara Stanwyck's hips movements in the previously mentioned "Drum Boogie."

22 Eroticism, according to Breen, seems to lie in a "deep" construction of the image. Out of fear of audience absorption, the striptease acts in Hollywood are usually staged in a frontal way in order to look "flat." The most erotic ones are indeed those reinstating depth, or those inventing suggestive sideways dances. Dorothy Arzner's directing in *Dance, Girl, Dance* is genuinely creative and remarkably transgressive for the era, inasmuch as it bypassed almost all of Breen's requests. Lucille Ball's hula sequence, which is not a striptease, is her most erotic performance in the film. It was performed in spite of Breen's

warnings that "there must be nothing whatever sex suggestive about Bubble's dance. Otherwise the whole scene will be unacceptable" (Letter to McDonough). That comment was relevant to the script before shooting. The staging in the film seems to follow the usual recommendation of laterality, but in a spirit which clearly disobeys the intent. Arzner insists on the bulging eyes of the producer auditioning Lucille Ball's character. Ball then dances, her lateral movements outlined by the camera panning, which could seem to satisfy Breen's demands. But she spanks herself and clearly expects to inflame vigorous reactions with that gesture. Instead of abandoning the dancer afar (like Hawks in "Drum Boogie"), Arzner resorts to closer shots which reinforce Ball's presence. *Dance*, *Girl*, *Dance* is directed by a woman, it features two actresses in the main parts, and the writing team additionally includes several women. It is a landmark of feminist film history because of another sequence with the ballerina character; but the interest of the burlesque theme is slightly underestimated and I find it significant that a film of the classical era so strongly resisting the Production Code through burlesque, is a mostly feminine project.

23 This leads me to the third type of audience involvement, the one built by the performance. Some burlesque acts, performed by single females and not a chorus, grant them a strong empowerment. They establish complicity with the audience by indicating how the actress dominates her diegetic audience. One of the choicest examples can be found with Barbara Stanwyck in *Lady of Burlesque*, notably because she is not *any* performer at the time but one of the most famous and best paid female stars. (Lucille Ball in the previous example was still at the beginning of her career). As we have seen, Stanwyck's number in *Ball of Fire* is far from burlesque, even though her control of the performance is to be noticed. The star was therefore criticized by real burlesque dancers who thought she did not do justice to the actual shows. A brief note in *Showmen's Trade Review* stated that burlesque dancers locally protested against screening of the film: in Akron, Ohio, "the burlesque strippers and chorus girls of the Gayety Theatre [...] picketed the Palace with signs which stated that Barbara Stanwyck was unfair to burlesque artists" (29). Whether it was in answer to that protest or not, the star became more daring in her following part in *Lady of Burlesque*. The film is adapted from

Gypsy Rose Lee's 1941 autobiography, *The G-String Murders*, another part of the late 1930s/early 1940s burlesque wave on the East coast. During production, Breen had some acts suppressed (Leff and Simmons, 130), but other musical numbers located on a burlesque stage remained.

24 "Play-It on the G-String," Stanwyck's first act, is assuredly but skillfully drawing on the limit of suggesting bumps and grinds on screen without compromising the film's PCA visa. But what is especially noticeable is the way the star runs the whole gamut from distance to dedication to her performance. She goes from boredom, to indifference to her possible suitor and to what seems to be genuine fun in her sensual body movements. The energy is expressed even in shots obeying the Breen regulation (hip movements invisible in some close shots, but suggested by the upper body and the raised arms). In the end, when Stanwyck strongly shakes the stage curtain, the camera angle avoids facing the stage strictly. This is not the usual "flat" image of burlesque shows that are legion in Hollywood films; on the contrary, the framing gives space to the performer and allows the audience to feel her live intensity.

25 Lucille Ball's performances in *Dance, Girl, Dance* bear many similarities. But what is fascinating with Stanwyck is her status at the time. She is a first-grade Hollywood star, a legitimate actress and, to my knowledge, the only one to play a burlesque queen so explicitly under the PCA reign – Mae West aside. Stanwyck was perfect for this: First, she had a Pre-Code aura, and her hardboiled and strong roles of the early 1930s found an echo in her later burlesque-themed films. Her real past as a chorus girl and her fictional past as a heroine of the Great Depression established elaborated characters beyond the burlesque moments. Second, she had glamour to compensate the vulgarity of her characters. This was reinforced by her supposedly ideal real-life marriage to Robert Taylor, omnipresent in magazines of the early 1940s. Third, the star retained credibility as an actress. Even if she did not win an Oscar for *Stella Dallas* and *Ball of Fire*, she was nominated twice for the Award; she already appeared at the time as one of the most versatile American actresses – if not the most. An advertisement for *Lady of Burlesque* promoted the audacity of the film with a quotation from producer Hunt Stromberg: "I have a hunch I've started something." Visually, on a poster showing a full-size Stan-

wyck dressed as a burlesque queen with a raised hand, it also looks like the star is saying so.

Conclusion

26 In conclusion, Joseph Breen put a great deal of energy in making cinematic burlesque acts boring. But some of the rare numbers remaining in Hollywood under the Production Code have, nonetheless, interesting stakes. My main point is that they were less morally shocking than provocative in the way they empowered some female performers. Whilst giving up nudity, the acts banked on the spirit of burlesque: the energy, the toughness, the authority and distance of the performer. They stood for strategic spots for the actresses to display their singularities and obtain spontaneous expression. Their goal was not realism, and the mainstream stars of course did not intend to turn into real burlesque queens and disrobe. But they could explore ways to perform control and letting go. And even though that part is never discussed, it implicitly was "bad taste" for Breen, and it had to be discouraged.

27 My second point is about the musical genre: astonishingly, the most unusual numbers during the golden age do not occur in traditional musicals, but in melodramas or criminal films with musical numbers. Before the musical genre went "Looking for trouble," to refer to the title of a Jane Russell song in *The French Line* (1953), an obvious sexual display of the 1950s, other genres were more daring in recycling the inheritance of the old burlesque stage. Lucille Ball's or Barbara Stanwyck's less sexual acts from the 1940s were probably as troubling in their own times. They were nevertheless more complex in the way they challenged male audiences: they expressed the subjectivities of the performers while resisting any exposure. At the same time, more conventional musicals were usually less daring, though this genre would be expected to be one of the more permissive ones.

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Dance, Girl, Dance. Directed by Dorothy Arzner. RKO Radio Pictures, 1940.

Dancing Lady. Directed by Robert Z. Leonard. MGM, 1933.

Double or Nothing. Directed by Theodore Reed. Paramount Pictures, 1937.

Du Barry Was A Lady. Directed by Roy Del Ruth. MGM, 1943.

Eadie Was A Lady. Directed by Arthur Dreifuss. Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1945.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes. Directed by Howard Hawks. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1953.

Gilda. Directed by Charles Vidor. Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1946.

I'm no Angel. Directed by Wesley Ruggles. Paramount Pictures, 1933.

King of Burlesque. Directed by Sidney Lanfield, 20th Century-Fox, 1936.

Lady in the Dark. Directed by Mitchell Leisen. Paramount Pictures, 1944.

Lady of Burlesque. Directed by William Wellman. Hunt Stromberg Productions, 1943.

Love Thy Neighbor. Directed by Mark Sandrich. Paramount Pictures, 1940.

On Your Toes. Directed by Ray Enright. Warner Bros., 1939.

Panama Hattie. Directed by Norman Z. McLeod. MGM, 1942.

Rose of Washington Square. Directed by Gregory Ratoff. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1939.

Silk Stockings. Directed by Rouben Mamoulian. MGM, 1957.

Stage Door Canteen. Directed by Frank Borzage. Sol Lesser Productions, 1943.

Stella Dallas. Directed by King Vidor. The Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1937.

The French Line. Directed by Lloyd Bacon. RKO Radio Pictures, 1954.

The Great Ziegfeld. Directed by Robert Z. Leonard. MGM, 1936.

There's Magic in Music. Directed by Andrew L. Stone. Paramount Pictures, 1941.

Tonight and Every Night. Directed by Victor Saville. Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1945.

NOTES

1 Other significant examples are provided by Vera-Ellen's "Naughty but Nice" in *The Belle of New York* (Charles Walters, 1952), Ann Miller's "Too Darn Hot" in *Kiss Me, Kate* (George Sidney, 1953) and several numbers in *Pal Joey* (George Sidney, 1957).

2 This number might have inspired the scene of Marilyn Monroe's dress being lifted by the subway wind in *The Seven Year Itch*.

RÉSUMÉS

English
This essay tackles musical numbers indirectly inspired by the burlesque stage in classical Hollywood films from the late 1930s and 1940s. Those mock stripteases were sparse and carefully examined in the self-regulation process, mostly while the Production Code Administration was operating. I argue that the stakes in controlling those numbers went beyond the forbidden nudity. The article analyzes some film sequences through the prism of the PCA correspondence to define the boundaries between the rules and what was only "good taste" at the time. Through transforming and stylizing burlesque, the staging and performances in these numbers could seem to have erased their models. But the article shows how these paradoxical acts sometimes managed to bring up the spirit of burlesque theatre and empower the female performers, and therefore inspire some inexpressible trouble.

Français
L'article étudie un type de numéro musical des films hollywoodiens des années 1930 et 1940 indirectement inspiré par le théâtre *burlesque* : le faux striptease. Pendant la période classique et l'apogée du système d'autorégulation des films, ce type de numéro assez rare fait l'objet d'une vigilance particulière, mais pas seulement pour les raisons évidentes d'un interdit de représenter la nudité. L'article analyse des numéros au regard des archives de l'Administration du Code de production, pour établir les limites entre les règles strictes et ce qui relève seulement du « bon goût ». À force de transformer et de styliser les traits du *burlesque*, la mise en scène et la performance de ces numéros semble l'avoir effacé. Mais ces numéros paradoxaux ont parfois su restituer l'esprit originel du théâtre *burlesque* et de ce fait pu susciter un trouble plus indicible par leur manière de donner du pouvoir aux actrices.

INDEX

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