HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Josef von Sternberg (1894-1969)

LIFE

> A director who chose to write with a camera in the first person.
> —Andrew Sarris on Josef von Sternberg

Jonas Sternberg (or Stern) was born to a humble family in 1894 in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He recollected some episodes of his boyhood years fondly, particularly Vienna's Prater park, despite a belligerent father and tension in the family. The Sternberg family immigrated to the USA when he was a little boy and returned to Austria a few years later; then permanently settled in New York. As a teenager, now "Josef" Sternberg, he was employed in various manual labor jobs in the textile industry—this experience and familiarity with fabrics would culminate in a recurrent motif of sensuality in his films. Sternberg was an autodidact, who spent most of his spare time in libraries and museums—also parks, where a chance encounter on a rainy day led to a fateful exposure to the kitchen of filmmaking. His new job required handling film stock in various capacities, ranging from cleaning and repairing, to delivering the reels to the theaters; eventually, he began working on the editing of the films. During World War I, he served in the US Army and produced training films. In the early 1920's, he worked as an assistant to American and European directors such as Emile Chautard—during this time, he began to use the 'von' prefix.

Von Sternberg's directorial debut was a charming story of destitute individuals in the Los Angeles Harbor; the project had a very modest self-financed budget and was based on his idea (the co-producer was the only professional actor in the cast). One of the early truly independent films—if not the first—*The Salvation Hunters* was released in 1925. It was an instant box-office success and attracted massive acclaim. Von Sternberg always maintained that fine art—and not other directors—was the main inspiration for his artistic vision; nonetheless, *The Salvation Hunters* hints at the work of Erich von Stroheim as an early influence on von Sternberg. After the film landed in Charlie Chaplin's home theater, von Sternberg was quickly recognized as a genius by a number of Hollywood luminaries.

The following period was a mixed bag with unfinished projects and his subsequent demotion to assistant director. In 1926, he directed *The Exquisite Sinner* and *Woman of the Sea*, which are considered lost films (together with *Dragnet* (1928) and *The Case of Lena Smith* (1929)—a homage to his boyhood Vienna, which is believed to be one of his masterpieces.)

Von Sternberg's breakthrough came with the first ever gangster picture in the contemporary sense, *The Underworld* (1927)—he called it a poet's idea of gangsterism and "an experiment in photographic violence and montage."[1] It displayed his interest in abstraction (rather than character development) and his exploration in visual and aural form—with a focus on gestures, posturing, and gazing.

Underworld's critical and popular success restored von Sternberg's reputation as a brilliant filmmaker*;* it provided him a free hand for his next project. *The Last Command*, starring prominent German actor Emil Jannings and set during the Russian Revolution, dealt with power, representation and authenticity. Its bitter commentary on cinematic production hinted at von Sternberg's future fall out with film studio big shots.

Just as the era of the silent films was approaching its dusk, von Sternberg released what some critics believe to be his masterpiece and the apex of silent cinema—on a par with Murnau's *Sunrise* and Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. *The Docks of New York* was a sensual story that took place in the not yet gentrified New York harbor. The clientele of the rowdy Sandbar featured one of typical von Sternberg crowds: dynamic, fascinatingly busy, unruly, and inward-looking.

Next, von Sternberg directed his first talkie *Thunderbolt*, another progenitor of the gangster genre and one of the pioneers of synchronized sound technology—which he used "sparingly to counterpoint or

compensate the image, add to it—not subtract from it."[2] With a touch of quirky comedy, *Thunderbolt* tackled serious issues such as capital punishment, unemployment (with the Great Depression just around the corner), and race (when racial segregation was mandated by Jim Crow laws).

In 1930, Josef von Sternberg was selected to direct Germany's first major sound film; Paramount Pictures loaned its contract director to Germany's UFA production house to direct Emil Jannings once again. For the leading woman, von Sternberg, guided by his admiration for the art of Félicien Rops and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, personally picked an established, yet internationally unknown, actress named Marlene Dietrich, to play the muse of a helplessly infatuated provincial educator spiraling to madness. Professor Rath's mischievous and sadistically cruel pupils were prime candidates for the ranks of the Hitler Youth, observed Siegfried Kracauer. Two members of the cast of *The Blue Angel*, Kurt Gerron and the Hungarian Károly Huszár would become victims of the Holocaust. There were still a couple of years to the end of the Weimar Republic and the Nazi take-over of power, but the regime was already crumbling; *The Blue Angel* offers a masterful snapshot of its demise.

Back in the USA—with Marlene Dietrich—*Morocco,* intended as a star vehicle to introduce her to the American audience, was released a couple of weeks before *The Blue Angel*. The story of the love triangle set in the Sahara of the French Foreign Legion was followed by *Dishonored*, the adventures of an "Austrian Mata Hari" during World War I. An opening title card stated that "strange figures emerge from the dust of the fallen Austrian Empire," perhaps not excluding the director himself.

Von Sternberg's next stint was a break from Dietrich collaborations; *An American Tragedy* was a realist take on a well-publicized real-life murder case, adapted from a 1925 novel by Theodore Dreiser. It was a riveting character study from the pre-Code era.

Von Sternberg was still on fire in the early 1930s; a string of unique and breathtakingly spectacular Marlene Dietrich films followed. In February 1932, *Shanghai Express* was greeted with "rave reviews and crowded theatres."[3] It was loosely inspired by Guy de Maupassant's 1880 story "Boule de Suif": a motley of passengers travel in hostile territory; tension heightens following a hostage crisis, in which a disreputable woman may play a key role. Next, *Blonde Venus* addressed controversial issues such as single parenting, adultery, and prostitution; at times, it evoked destitution—with biographical elements from von Sternberg's youth and his experiences as an immigrant. Sort of a hinge in von Sternberg's oeuvre, it would be followed by *The Scarlet Empress* and *The Devil is a Woman*, mainly unchained expressions of his unique artistic vision—and box office disasters.

Scarlet Empress reimagined Catherine the Great in a depraved and grotesque Russian palace. With its debauched setting, it is arguably one of the most adult films of the pre-Code era. It is incredulous—and fortunate—that this historical fantasy ended up getting an approval seal. *Scarlet Empress*' commercial failure signaled the director's doom. *The Devil is a Woman* (1935) marked the end of Josef von Sternberg's seven-film cycle with Marlene Dietrich; it would be his last film with high production values. It featured a love triangle between an uncompromising and Carmenesque seductress, her desperate upper-class lover, and a young, dashing revolutionary in early twentieth century Spain, with the bulk of the story taking place during the pre-Lent carnival. Its screening was hindered for more than two decades by the Spanish government, which nearly managed to get the master film stock destroyed.

With his Paramount period over, von Sternberg was assigned to direct *Crime and Punishment*, whose budget was a far cry from the blank check he enjoyed in some of his previous projects. Stylistically, von Sternberg's chiaroscuro lighting prefigures film noir and Peter Lorre's antics anticipate his role in arguably the first film of that cycle, *Stranger on the Third Floor*. In a way, Raskolnikov stands for von Sternberg—of humble origins, he was hailed as a genius, just as abruptly demoted, made a comeback, raised the bar of his breakthrough with spectacular films, then retreated from the limelight, making only a handful of films after 1935 (and getting fired repeatedly).

The King Steps Out (1936), a light comedy about Empress Sisi, and the crime drama *Sergeant Madden* (1939) were followed by *The Shanghai Gesture*, which reinvented China; while mocking and casually subverting racism and colonialism, it featured spectacular examples of Chinoiserie. *The Shanghai Gesture*, "made while the world was engaged in a danse macabre"[4] in 1941, was the last full-length Hollywood film Josef von Sternberg ever completed. War would become the focus of von

Sternberg's next project, a short, gracious, and insightful documentary/propaganda film titled *The Town* (1943).

The Town was von Sternberg's last film in the 1940s. While the Cold War was in full swing, he was contracted in 1949 by Howard Hughes to direct two films for the RKO. The first, the *Jet Pilot*, was a Cold War espionage flick starring John Wayne and Janet Leigh as Jet Age aviator spies—it would be released only years later, in 1957. The second, *Macao*, was shot in 1951 and came out the following year. Set in, what was at the time, a Portuguese colony, it is unique for being the only film noir of a director who had influenced the aesthetics of that film cycle. In both instances, von Sternberg was fired by Hughes.

Josef von Sternberg's last film *Anatahan* was about the experience of castaways isolated from the world. Shot in Kyoto, it was the story of the Japanese survivors of a shipwreck, who remained in hiding until years after the end of the Second World War. The story of Japan's last holdout was used by Josef von Sternberg as a canvas to explore human nature and underscore universal traits. Once again, as the supreme auteur, he was responsible for every aspect of the film, even voiced the narration that he wrote.

Recurrent von Sternberg motifs are compositions with garments, laces, tulle, fishnets, and various nautical props—often in the foreground; masquerades and carnivals with balloons, streamers, and confetti; crowds—dynamic, self-contained, and potentially riotous. His films display mastery of camera movement and chiaroscuro lighting; gestures and postures are often privileged over character development. Many of his films feature cats, which he thought contributed to the scene an element of unpredictability.

Von Sternberg was a member of the American Society of Cinematographers; although he seldom praised his directors of photography (or any of his collaborators for that matter), he worked with talented individuals including Günther Rittau, Bert Glennon, and Lee Garmes. Important art directors such as Otto Hunte and Hans Dreier contributed to his films. Costume designer Travis Banton was the prime mover of the iconic image of Marlene Dietrich. Jules Furthman wrote, or co-wrote, nine scripts for von Sternberg (including some of the lost films). Among Von Sternberg's literary adaptations were works by Lajos Biró, Pierre Louÿs, Heinrich Mann, and Ben Hecht.

Excellent introductory books on von Sternberg have been written by Peter Baxter, Andrew Sarris, and Herman G. Weinberg. He was one of the fourteen "pantheon directors"—the top category in Andrew Sarris' formulation of the auteur theory, reserved for filmmakers "who have transcended their technical problems with a personal vision of the world … and whose films exist in a self-contained world with its own laws and landscapes".[5]

Cultural theorists have intensely scrutinized his films: Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" elaborated scopophilia with a focus on Hitchcock alongside von Sternberg's eight films. *Blonde Venus* and its rich intertextual connections were analyzed by Robin Wood, Florence Jacobowitz, E. Ann Kaplan, Lea Jacobs, Mary Ann Doane, and Janet Staiger. Gilles Deleuze compared expressionism and von Sternberg; Gaylyn Studlar discussed masochism with respect to *Morocco*; Cahiers du Cinema collective commented on the politics of representation in the same film. In "Notes on 'Camp," Susan Sontag famously stated that "the hallmark of camp is the spirit of extravagance … Camp is the outrageous aestheticism of Sternberg's six American movies with Dietrich, all six, but especially the last, *The Devil Is a Woman.*"

Von Sternberg was a painter and a patron of the arts. His portrait was painted by artists (he also created self-portraits) such as David Alfaro Siqueiros and photographed by Edward Steichen; Rudolf Belling sculpted his bust. Around the time *Shanghai Express* was released, von Sternberg was preparing to move to the house designed for him by modernist architect Richard Neutra (demolished in 1972). A moat was included in the design as a physical and symbolic barrier for those who would approach it; and thus was the public image of the director, reserved and laconic. In the early 1960's, he taught film at UCLA—members of The Doors were students of his course. Later in life, he would study and collect Chinese stamps. On a related note, his autobiography would be published in 1965 as *Fun in a Chinese Laundry*. While it is enigmatic and hard to penetrate, the recollections, insights, and anecdotes—not infrequently astounding, hyperbolic, and sometimes even nasty—are priceless.

FILMOGRAPHY

The Salvation Hunters, 1925
The Exquisite Sinner, 1926 (lost film)
A Woman of the Sea, 1926 (lost film)
Underworld, 1927
The Last Command, 1928
The Dragnet, 1928 (lost film)
The Docks of New York, 1928
The Case of Lena Smith, 1929 (lost film)
Thunderbolt, 1929
The Blue Angel, 1930
Morocco, 1930
Dishonored, 1931
An American Tragedy, 1931
Shanghai Express, 1932
Blonde Venus, 1932
The Scarlet Empress, 1934
The Devil is a Woman, 1935
Crime and Punishment, *1935*
The King Steps Out, 1936
Sergeant Madden, 1939
The Shanghai Gesture, 1941
The Town, 1943
Macao, 1952
Anatahan, 1953
Jet Pilot, 1957

OUTLINE of THEMES

1. SOCIETY (Gender-Race-Religion-Identity-Class-Technology-Culture, Modernity-Consumerism-Corruption)
2. JUSTICE (Punishment)
3 POLITICS (Power-Conflict: War and Revolution)
4. RELATIONSHIP (Marriage-Friendship, Bonding, and Loyalty-Love-Desire)
5. APPEARANCE (Deception-Hypocrisy-Authenticity)
6. PSYCHOLOGY
7. FLAW (Vanity)
8. QUEST (Experiment-Introspection)
9. PAST (Transience, Memory, Death)

THEMES

1. SOCIETY

Gender

Underworld. Feathers is a flapper and represents the modern woman. It is suggested that she may not be literate (holding the book upside down); nonetheless, she is a positive character, strong willed and independent. With Rolls Royce becoming Bull's best friend, there emerges a love triangle, but Feathers is not a stereotypical seducer or proto-femme fatale. There is genuine affection between her and Rolls Royce, which is eventually recognized as such by Bull himself. On the other hand, the male characters represent two opposites: Bull is the alpha male, full of hyperbole and flamboyance, while Rolls Royce is submissive and easy-going.

The Blue Angel The Blue Angel offers a provocative reconsideration of traditional gender roles. The film opens with the scene of a female janitor glimpsing at a poster announcing the show at The Blue Angel. The poster features Lola Lola standing in her typically defiant pose, with her legs spread apart. The woman stops cleaning for a moment and mimics the pose. Lola Lola is a disruptive influence in the small town, but she is also a refreshing and subversive role model. During her cabaret performance, she continues in a similar vein, sitting with legs crossed, looking indifferent, and gesturing assertively. The self-confident and world-weary character is too complex to be reduced to being categorized simply as either a flapper or a vamp—as was the case with female characters in many films of the period.

Blonde Venus. 1932 was marked by the Lindberg kidnapping; the baby of the aviator Charles Lindberg was kidnapped in March and his body was found in May. Marlene Dietrich had reasons to fear for her child and took protective measures as *Blonde Venus* was shot. The film parallels her maternal compassion, as she plays a devoted mother and—for the most part—a single parent. When her desires conflict with her motherhood, she seems to split personalities: she is either Johnny's mom or the Blonde Venus, who is having a passionate affair with Nick Townsend. This duality[6] makes her character ambiguous.

When Ned leaves, Johnny asks whether his father is "gone for good"; later, when the detectives are on their trail, he tells his mother that he wishes that they would never be caught. As mother and son remain happy in their seclusion, *Blonde Venus* invites rethinking motherhood outside the family.[7] When, Ned picks up Johnny as the sole custodian of the boy, he too becomes a single parent. Evidently, he is comparably less successful—Helen seems to think so, when she is finally allowed to visit Johnny.

Shanghai Express. Carmichael's racism is matched by his misogyny: After his outrage about the presence of a higher class Asian woman on board, he finds that there is another female who is just as dangerous—"one yellow, one white, just as rotten." A while later, he continues his diatribe somewhere else, talking about a "cargo of sin." He doesn't like the older Mrs. Haggerty either, even though she shares his sentiment about Shanghai Lily and Hui Fei. The self-righteous and gossipy Mrs. Haggerty makes an attempt to socialize with the flapper style women who listen to jazz and enjoy themselves in their compartment; she proudly introduces herself as the owner of a boarding house, where "only respectable people" stay. Right away, conformism emerges as an issue that divides them. Lily makes fun of her emphasis on respectability and Hui Fei openly rejects any pretense to fitting within her moral standards. As they defy and mock her self-righteousness, she leaves the compartment with contempt. The tension between the independent and outcast women versus the prim conformists is one of the themes of *Shanghai Express*.

Von Sternberg's *The Docks of New York* spotlighted disreputable women looking for social acceptance and redemption—Mae thought marriage might redeem her tarnished past and make her 'decent'. In *Shanghai Express*, Shanghai Lily and Hui Fei are self-confident women, but they also seem to view marriage as a way to elevate their status. Madeline seems to be regretful of her transformation to Shanghai Lily. Hui Fei is on her way to Shanghai to get married—Chang's sexual attack in a way aims to spoil her transition to 'decency.'

The Devil is a Woman. Florence Jacobowitz views *The Devil is a Woman* as a "severe critique of the gender relations in a capitalist society."[8] Men try to exploit Concha and she finds ways to dominate them. Pasqual finds out that Concha cannot be bought; even when he pays money, she reframes it as a meaningless transaction between him and her mother. It means nothing to her and she actually admonishes him for it. Ultimately, she asserts her control over Pasqual (his self-defeat in the duel), as well as the governor, Paquito, who humbly serves her by issuing the passports she wants. Vis-à-vis Concha, both Pasqual and Paquito are "bearers of the law, who encounter difficulties in enforcing their oppressive codes."[9]

Race

The Shanghai Surprise For the casting of the major roles*, The Shanghai Surprise* almost entirely relies on "yellowface" actors—the name given to the practice of having white actors play Asian characters. Although this was a common method in the earlier part of the century (notable examples include characters played by Katharine Hepburn, Mickey Rooney, and John Wayne), the approach serves to regenerate stereotypes and would be viewed as offensive by contemporary standards. Notwithstanding the use of yellowface, *The Shanghai Gesture*'s approach to racism is subversive and well ahead of its time. Prejudices and stereotypes are articulated, ultimately to be mocked.

An example of race dynamics is references to language, particularly certain characters' derisive comments on the non-native English speakers' use of the language. Casino's bookkeeper, Ceaser Hawkins—another one of Gin Sling's paladins—keeps adding a "chop, chop" to each and every one of his utterances when he interacts with Chinese individuals. Language comes up as a barrier, and also provides occasions to condescendingly snub the locals. Casino's young Chinese maitre d' speaks English as good as the others, but Hawkins keeps teasing him with his annoying chop chops. Similarly, Charteris is amused by the mannerism of the burly coolie, whose laconism leads Charteris to make assumptions about his English proficiency and intellect. He uses simplified language to patronize the imposing figure, up until the end. Then the tables turn; the very last line of the film belongs to Coolie, who is now talking back sarcastically—"you like-ee Chinese New Year," he asks, mocking Charteris' way of addressing him.

Race is also an issue in the battle of wits between Gin Sling and Poppy. "You'll bring discredit to your race … it's not good for us to see you like this," cautions Gin Sling when an intoxicated Poppy makes a scene. "Behave yourself Poppy. You're in China, and you're white," she adds haughtily, revealing the real power dynamics behind the façade of appearances. Father and daughter Charterises find out that their privileged positions were in fact precarious. Stereotypes about Asians are articulated and caricatured in *The Shanghai Gesture*; in the end the supposedly powerful whites turn out to be clueless and overwhelmed.

Blonde Venus. The single most spectacular scene in the *Blonde Venus* is arguably Helen's first cabaret gig, singing "Hot Voodoo." Dubbed a "Sternbergian bizarrerie"[10] by Herman G. Weinberg, it features Dietrich on stage in a highly realistic gorilla costume, surrounded by African women (mainly in blackface). The dancers carry spears and oval shields with primitive patterns, which denote them to be tribal warriors (anticipating *King Kong*'s [1933] Skull Island). In contrast to the fabulous exoticism of this scene, African-Americans appear as workers engaged in mundane work; there are also instances of stereotypes, such as the stuttering bartender. Reportedly, the original screenplay explicitly located the cabaret in Harlem[11] and it had more references to race.

Shanghai Express. Most of the characters in *Shanghai Express* are unlikeable and flawed. The worst of them is Chang, who is a torturer and rapist; the rebel warlord also orders the killing of unarmed soldiers. In spite of the presence of the deplorable Eurasian villain (he happens to be half white), *Shanghai Express* consistently underscores instances of racism as obnoxious behavior. Right away, Mr. Carmichael emerges as the racist who refuses to share the same compartment with Hui Fei. He keeps bickering about her—he is only distracted when his misogyny proves to be just as powerful; consequently, his hateful language targets the Caucasian courtesan Shanghai Lily. Just like the prim boardinghouse owner Mrs. Haggerty, Carmichael is—initially—presented as a fool and a nuisance. Towards the end, certain events cause him to question his prejudices and he is transformed.

Warner Oland plays the mixed-race Henry Chang in 'yellowface' (the name given to the practice of having white actors play Asian characters). Although this was a common method in the earlier part of the century (noteworthy examples include characters played by Katharine Hepburn, Mickey Rooney, and John Wayne), the approach serves to regenerate stereotypes and would be viewed as offensive by contemporary standards. Von Sternberg's *The Shanghai Gesture* (1941) would make heavy use of yellowface performances. Notwithstanding the use of yellowface, that film's approach to racism is subversive—prejudices are articulated and stereotypes underscored, ultimately to be mocked. Racist conformity of some characters in *Shanghai Express* fulfills a comparable function.

Thunderbolt. The staff and entertainers of the Black Cat nightclub are African-Americans; it has a mixed-race clientele. When Thunderbolt and Ritzie enter, a lively troupe of dancers are on stage and several musicians are performing (Curtis Mosby's band); a little later, singer and actor Theresa Harris gets the spotlight—dressed glamorously, she sings "Daddy, won't you please come home" (Thunderbolt suggestively gazes at her). She and rest of the African-American entertainers are represented with respect. Among the other figures at the Black Cat are a stuttering waiter (Oscar Smith), a sassy and somewhat sullen hatcheck girl, and a friendly cigarette girl. Some of the members of the staff may be considered to be racial stereotypes. Then again, there are African-American customers in the hall (unlike the practice of the famous real-life Cotton Club in its early years). These two tuxedo-clad gentlemen are seen gossiping about Thunderbolt (though only one of them is mostly visible). The nightclub scene quickly becomes tense as Thunderbolt is annoyed by the haughty Caucasian woman sitting behind him and pulls a nasty joke on her. Things get serious when the woman's husband confronts Thunderbolt and brandishes his gun, but is subdued with a punch. At this point, a couple of customers can be seen preparing to come to the man's aid; they are stopped by others who stand by Thunderbolt—these are all Caucasian men, the conflict is generated by non-racial motivations.

Later, Thunderbolt gets locked up in the prison, where fellow inmates play African American gospel music and there is group of a cappella singers. It might be said that in both the club and the prison, African-American characters serve to entertain Thunderbolt and other Caucasians—on the flip side, they are presented with dignity and are basically positive figures. Overall, *Thunderbolt* opens up a dialogue window for inter-cultural communication.

Morocco. In their in-depth analysis of *Morocco*, Cahiers du Cinéma theorists make insightful observations about the multi-layered nature of identity in the narrative.[12] On one level, characters are defined by geography, which points to their national and racial origins. There are the Europeans (Amy Jolly and Captain Ceasar), who are in Africa for a limited period of time. Ceasar's past is not exposed at length, but it is mentioned that he was previously an officer in the German Air Force. It is implied that Madame Ceasar, another middle class European, has a checkered past. Others, such as La Bessier and the proprietor of the tavern Lo Tinto have been residing in Mogador for many years and have much stronger ties to Africa. Lo Tinto is nowhere near as influential as La Bessier, who is clearly the most powerful of the characters. On the other hand, Tom Brown and his fellow legionnaires are Europeans who are in Morocco as a result of their assignments; their economic status is barely distinguishable from the average locals.

Religion

The Docks of New York. The story takes place in the pre-Prohibition era—sometime in the early years of the twentieth century, when steam was still the predominant source of power. A likely timeframe is roughly about a decade prior to the film's release. Yet, *The Docks of New York* is a product of the Roaring Twenties—the Jazz Age. The boisterous crowd of the Sandbar—whose clientele includes flappers—does not care about social norms and authority. Religion is incorporated into daily life as a useful and amusing convenience—"save your soul and money; come to Hymn-Book Harry," reads a flyer advertising the services of the local pastor from the harbor mission. Pastor Harry can be called in, even at short notice, to quickly officiate marriages. The dignified looking and self-important man is probably not a charlatan, he seems to take his function seriously. He is in rapport with the secular crowd of the Sandbar. In a world where everything is turning into a commodity, Hymn-Book Harry has a particular conception about the role of religion.

Crime and Punishment. Sonya is a devout believer. “Don’t take away my faith, I need it” she says in response to Raskolnikov’s skepticism and “unbelief”. Selling her heirloom Bible was a low point in her life and she is very happy to recover it. The Bible is precious for her, but not because of its inherent value (it is inlaid with semi-precious garnets—not diamonds that are sought by the pawnbroker). She tries to inspire Raskolnikov by reading him the story of Lazarus. Her success at steering him towards the good deed basically stems from her belief in God.

Identity

The Last Command. All characters are acting in *The Last Command*: Dabrova appears to be interested in Alexander while she plans his assassination, he feigns being fooled and tests her resolve; junior officers try to sweep their mistakes under the rug, the watchful General puts on an imperious mask; Dabrova ultimately pretends to betray Alexander and then seduces a couple of Bolsheviks as part of her ruse to save his life.

There is a witty scene involving Alexander’s orderly, which vaguely refers to Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Emperor’s New Clothes”. This man has a habit of putting on the General’s greatcoat and smoking his cigars. He is often caught and reprimanded. The revolution provides him an opportunity to settle scores with his commander (and grab the coat). Evidently, the orderly assumes that Alexander’s imposing demeanor and authority over others originates from his appearance (i.e. his majestic coat); it intimidates people and makes him powerful. So he snatches the coat and wears it; next, he sets his eyes on the general’s lover, Dabrova. To get to her, he attempts to bully one of the local revolutionaries. This man is unimpressed by the sight of the comic figure wearing a fancy uniform. The former orderly is shot right away and the coat is taken by his killer, who has a more realistic conception of power.

Dishonored Marie Kolverer is referred to as X-27 except in one instance. It seems that she also prefers her new designation. Prior to acquiring it, when she visits the Chief of the Secret Service, she declines to provide a name to the young lieutenant (her first meeting with this character, whose anti-war diatribe would shape the film’s denouement). The code name is apt, since she assumes disparate identities (street walker, masked adventuress, illiterate maid at rural Russian inn, leather-clad aviator and spy). Similarly, when Colonel Kranau (handicapped clown, officer) becomes a prisoner of war, he refuses to give out his name to the Austrian officers. Names are less relevant as characters adopt different identities, pointing to an emancipatory potential.

Macao. Unbeknownst to the criminals, the cheerful and simple salesman is the police detective they fear, while the cool and mysterious Nick Cochran is simply a war veteran looking for a job, drifting from place to place. Deception is not the prerogative of the investigator; other characters also present themselves less than truthfully. Benton cajoles men to pay for her travel expenses and is apparently no stranger to snatching wallets when she appears most amiable. Halloran operates a casino, but is more preoccupied with dealing in precious contraband—after all; it is the diamond necklace that lures him out of his safety zone. Halloran is ready to cheat his mistress Margie—the dice girl twice delivers blows to him, first by releasing Cochran and later assisting the latter to commandeer the mobster’s boat.

Shanghai Express. Identity in *Shanghai Express* “is not a state, but a process of continuing change and adaptation.”[13] The passengers embark on the train and present themselves to one another—by the end of the journey, it would be revealed that most of these identities were deceptive or fallacious: The French major, who had never taken off his full dress uniform (which boasted his military decorations) was in fact discharged from the army and merely wanted to spare his sister the shame; the gruff and unpleasant German passenger, Eric Baum, was an opium dealer; Mr. Carmichael incessantly complains about the courtesans and later champions the reconciliation of Harvey and Lily; the Eurasian merchant Chang is in fact a warlord.

Class

The Salvation Hunters. **"**Children of the Sun" and "Children of the Mud" are two distinct social identities that are spelled out in the title cards. The Boy feels like he belongs to both (but is somehow trapped among the "Children of the Mud". The City is hardly any better in terms of offering a better life compared to the harbor and its endless mud. It is dangerous and full of strife.

An American Tragedy. The shirt-collar factory in Dreiser's novel has been preserved in the film; Clyde finds out that he is the nephew of a textile manufacturer. His uncle employs him as a foreman in the collar stamping department, mainly because he didn't like the idea of having a relative "working in the shrinking department." The uncle's approach is to keep his relative at a distance, while providing him a decent income and position, so that he doesn't end up embarrassing them. The uncle also invites his underprivileged nephew to dinner to introduce him to his family. As they wait for his arrival, Clyde's relatives briefly discuss potential undesirable outcomes of this family get-together. Their unanimous sentiment is that Clyde shouldn't get the impression that they would "take him up socially"; accordingly, his cousin Gilbert is outright rude to him. When asked about his parents, Clyde explains that "they run a kind of a mission"; his aunt arrogantly repeats Clyde's statement to underscore her disdain for their distant relatives.

"With *An American Tragedy* and *Blonde Venus*, Sternberg was moving increasingly towards portraying the individual experience of economic class in American life."[14] Couple of scenes shows Clyde supervising the female workers, who continuously stamp detachable collars. Their task is obviously repetitive and tedious—anticipating Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* and René Clair's *À nous la liberté* (also from 1931, to be released just a couple of months after *An American Tragedy*). The particular item is itself associated with income and affordability—detachable collars reduced the need for laundry and helped men to struggle less to maintain a middle class appearance. These textile factory scenes are very realistic and actually Paramount Pictures was proud of them—real sewers were employed as the extras, as announced by the studio as part of the film's publicity.[15]

The Devil is a Woman. Gender and class inequality are intertwined in *The Devil is a Woman*. The tobacco factory where the all-female (and underpaid—the gold coin that Pasqual nonchalantly tosses is worth a year's wages, Concha remarks) work force is inspected by lewd administrators, among them Pasqual, who is there to check out the attractive women. Concha ignites a crisis of gender norms by resisting subjugation to the powerful man. Similarly, she also poses a threat to the social hierarchy, as the "empowered class is threatened by those who violate the rules of commodity exchange."[16]

Morocco. The element of economic class conflates with the characters' origins: La Bessier is wealthy; Ceasar and Lo Tinto are middle class; Amy Jolly is somewhat lower on the spectrum and the legionnaires, as well as most of the locals, are near the bottom of the scale. It is possible to change one's class position—Amy Jolly was once a prosperous socialite. She sarcastically laments over her long gone "sable coat" which Tom Brown interprets as a clue to her past identity. Amy Jolly proves that it is possible to move in both ways along the class axis: she becomes a showgirl at an undistinguished venue far away from Europe, then, she once again moves up the class ladder by getting engaged to La Bessier; she quits her job at Lo Tinto's and moves to her fiancé's spectacular mansion. As a result of the significance of economic and geographic factors, an accurate assessment of identity can be made via a matrix that takes both of them into consideration: La Bessier is both upper-class and a Westerner, whereas Tom Brown is a European who is economically on the level of the locals of Mogador.

Technology

The Salvation Hunters. The huge metal claw of the dredger goes back and forth to unload mud. The harbor is a work in progress; there is no stopping industry and technology. People have to watch out for the fast movements of the dredger not to get hurt.

The Blue Angel. The small town has gas lit lamp posts and sometimes lanterns are used. On the other hand, the beer hall is electrically lit and there is even a powerful spotlight, used by the artistes to single out patrons. There is also an electrical doorbell that buzzes. There are no

automobiles or phones. Lola Lola's suggestive photos are obviously amply copied, so photography is quite advanced. The early modern setting is eclectic rather than realistic.

Blonde Venus. *Blonde Venus*' jumps in time also feature allusions to modern transportation technologies—images of trains and ocean liners provide credibility to drastic movements in space and sudden jumps in time. 'Ned is cured' or 'Helen's rebirth' are merely parentheses in a formal narrative; thanks to exciting modern technologies, they are not allowed to distract from the plot. On the other hand, a modern advance is an unsettling cause of concern—radium almost kills Ned (foreshadowing Marie Curie's death in 1934, believed to be a result of long-term exposure to radioactivity).

Macao. The scene that introduces Benton shows her enjoying music and snapping fingers to the tune from her record player. The opening scene's hygrometer also hints at the challenging climate and high levels of humidity. Benton addresses the problem with her portable air fan; later, in a fit of jealous rage, she uses the same gadget when she lunges at Cochran, who takes cover behind a pillow, leaving the room floating with feathers—reminiscent of the dormitory scene in Jean Vigo's *Zero for Conduct* (1933). Modern advances make life more convenient; with respect to the communications technologies, the situation is more ambiguous. Phone calls between Macao and China are not allowed by the political authority. The main method of communication is cable, which can be monitored by the corrupt local law enforcement. Trumble is able to evade the control over communications by using wireless to inform the international police about Halloran's movements.

Shanghai Express. The express train features a variety of ethnic and gender identities; it also showcases technological advances of early twentieth century modernity. The most important technology is the train; by bridging the two distant cities of China, it ossifies the nation-state. On board, it makes improbable encounters possible and facilitates connection between different social identities.

Among other significant technologies is the gramophone. Lily and Hui Fei are more or less isolated in their compartment; they use a gramophone to turn their living space lively. Mrs. Haggerty is enticed by the music and stops by; she finds out that the two women are too modern for her taste. Telegraph also plays a key role in the plot; when the government troops arrest his right-hand man, Chang immediately sends a telegraph to the rebel forces, to order them to seize the train. Another technological convenience is the electrical fan which adds to the luxury and comfort of the dining car—yet it bothers the irascible German Eric Baum, who demands that the fans be turned off.

There are two automobiles: Shanghai Lily makes her entrance with a luxury car, an Austro-Daimler limousine—which signifies her social status (Hui Fei is also a high-class courtesan, but she arrives to the station on a palanquin). The Studebaker Touring car that is later seen was also featured in *Hot Saturday* (1932) and interestingly used a parade car during the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics.[17]

Technologies of war are also prominently displayed. There are numerous carbines and infantry rifles in sight during the earlier scenes. The train is protected by (at least) one armored car that features a formidable artillery turret and a mounted cannon with a gun shield. Both soldiers and rebels possess Maxim machine guns; these are used twice; during the ambush on the train and subsequently, when the rebels execute a large number of troops by mowing them down.

Finally, modern medicine plays a part in the plot: one of the main characters, Captain Harvey is a British officer, but he is also a surgeon. The reason of his travel from Peking to Shanghai is to operate the governor.

Culture and Modernity

The Salvation Hunters. The huge metal claw of the dredger goes back and forth to unload mud. The harbor is a work in progress; there is no stopping industry and technology. People have to watch out for the fast movements of the dredger not to get hurt.

The Blue Angel The small town has gas lit lamp posts and sometimes lanterns are used. On the other hand, the beer hall is electrically lit and there is even a powerful spotlight, used by the artistes to single out patrons. There is also an electrical doorbell that buzzes. There are no automobiles or phones. Lola Lola's suggestive photos are obviously amply copied, so photography is quite advanced. The early modern setting is eclectic rather than realistic.

Macao. Trumble, the undercover detective, is introduced as a salesman who deals in coconut oil, pearly buttons, fertilizers, and nylon stockings (his carry-on luggage is loaded with cigars, but apparently these are mainly used for bribing officials). The first of these two items are possibly procured from the East, while fertilizers and nylon stockings are apparently exports of American industry. The colony's welcome to the American businessman comes at a price; he needs to be crafty to get his luggage full of goods released from customs. Similarly, the war veteran Cochran finds that being a WW2 veteran means little here. Lieutenant Sebastian tells Cochran that papers documenting his extensive military service "will not grant you immediate access to this part of the world." This particular enclave is somewhat oblivious to the dawn of the American Century—the international police waiting just outside the city limits is prepared to enforce its jurisdiction and overcome the local forces that favor self-isolation. Culturally, the borders have already mostly vanished: Trumble uses pidgin Chinese English to try to communicate with the female barber, who has fun with him by responding with casual small talk about his favorite baseball team, in flawless English.

Thunderbolt. At the penitentiary, Thunderbolt is assigned a random number. He ignores it—he says he can only be number one. The penal system operates by downplaying the individuality of the detainee; Thunderbolt finds a witty way to hit back—he keeps addressing a particular guard with various names, just as arbitrary as the number that was assigned to him. After being called a bunch of times with common names, the man finally reveals that his name is Aloysius, which makes Thunderbolt laugh hard—just before he enters the execution chamber.

The warden is a bizarre character, both annoying and amusing with his focus on keeping the convicts alive until the execution time. He is genuinely worried when an inmate's health is jeopardized and it looks like he may not last long enough for the execution. Thunderbolt gets examined by a physician, who reports that his heart is "good to last a hundred years"—when he has only a few hours left to live.

Anatahan. Point blank, the narrator defines Anatahan as a "geological joke," one of numerous rocks in the ocean. The colonizer countries that controlled the island are listed—the land has some economic value, thanks to copra (dried coconut kernels). The thick jungle is not welcoming for the castaways and they find themselves reduced to a primitive lifestyle, "human beings with dignity to helpless worms." The progress of centuries is covered within weeks as the sailors forge tools, build makeshift dwellings and excel in making a fire. The discovery of the wreckage of the American airplane presents an interesting contrast, as the cargo plane offers products of advance industrialization, but it is also salvaged for its scrap material that is somehow repurposed. Loudspeakers of an US navy ship, leaflets dropped from an airplane, and ultimately, letters from home gradually reconnect them to the modern world.

The Salvation Hunters. **"**Children of the Sun" and "Children of the Mud" are two distinct social identities that are spelled out in the title cards. The Boy feels like he belongs to both (but is somehow trapped among the "Children of the Mud". The City is hardly any better in terms of offering a better life compared to the harbor and its endless mud. It is dangerous and full of strife.

The Docks of New York. "The Sandbar, a cable's length from the wharf, has vanished now—wiped out by commerce and reform. But that night, it was wide awake and roaring." Thus, one of the opening title cards introduces the center of social life at the docks as a setting from a bygone era. It is a victim of the urban development processes referred to as gentrification after the 1960s. With its non-

stop brawls, prostitution, unruly crowd, and dilapidated shacks, the Sandbar is not romanticized and the transformation of the harbor is not lamented. Yet it stands there, so spirited and vibrant—consequently, strangely attractive. Perhaps it offers a testimony to what is missing in the modern experience of space—intimacy, connection, improbable and exciting encounters between different social identities. With its hectic tavern, the dock is a site of fleeting moments and transience of experiences. As an imagined real space (shot entirely in the studio), it evokes the concept of ambivalent places Michel Foucault refers to as heterotopias.

The Shanghai Gesture. The main setting of von Sternberg's *The Docks of New York* (1928) was the rowdy Sandbar. A title card introduced the wildly shabby and dreamy waterfront tavern—"vanished now, wiped out by reform and commerce." "Mother" Gin Sling's Casino, which "never closes," as its street sign announces, is a similar urban heterotopia. Poppy murmurs that "I didn't think such a place existed … except in my imagination … like a half-remembered dream … anything could happen here." Various ethnicities somehow co-exist in the cosmopolitan venue, which is alluring and dangerous at the same time—a "witches Sabbath" and "a modern tower of Babel" as Poppy observes. Then, Charteris, as the frontman of the Inter-China Trading Company, steps in and attempts to wipe out all traces of the glorious casino with one fell swoop. Standing before a huge map of the downtown district, the top-tier International Settlement, he points out that "it's only a question of making it nice and comfortable for others before they sell." Essentially, the plan Charteris outlines is an instance of the urban development processes referred to as gentrification after the 1960s. The connection *The Shanghai Gesture* makes between colonization and gentrification would be particularly interesting for students of urban studies.

Economy

The Salvation Hunters. "Here your dreams come true"—a billboard greets the picnickers as they get out of The City for a day out. The country seems to be constituted of vacant lots waiting to be commercialized and incorporated into The City.

Blonde Venus. In 1932, Mexican social-realist muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros painted a portrait of von Sternberg and created a mural in Los Angeles titled *Tropical America* (non-extant), which led to his deportation. Peter Baxter regards *Blonde Venus* to be a comparably subversive work, despite mostly successful corporate and institutional efforts to truncate it.

Nick Townsend is the only well-off character—the source of his wealth is never specified, he is introduced merely as a politician. Apart from him, most of the other figures are struggling to survive and scenes of showbiz glamour are undercut by destitute and gritty realism—particularly effective are shots of the Norfolk women's rooming house and the flophouse (possibly inspired by von Sternberg's own experiences as an immigrant).

Prices and value are important topics—point blank, Ned Faraday enters a professor's office to sell his radium-poisoned body for experimentation. He is told that it is not worth much; as a courtesy, the scientist offers to pay fifty dollars for it. This will not be the last reference to bodily commodification; it opens up possibilities for comparison with future references to money: The experimental treatment costs fifteen hundred dollars and Helen's wage at the cabaret is about $250 per week. She doesn't need to wait for her paycheck; all of a sudden, Nick Townsend writes her a personal check (not explained why) for $300—which catapults Ned to the other side of the Atlantic for his treatment. That is six times the amount he could get for his body. There is no reference whatsoever to Nick's payment being for sex; then again, Helen gladly accepts it and it marks the beginning of their affair. When Johnny asks her mom whether eight-five cents is "a lot of money," she is practically broke, but replies that it is not. Helen has nothing to pay the Greek restaurateur and offers to wash the dishes instead. At this point, it is subtly hinted that the lewd man might be excited about something other than the dishes. However, in the next phase of the mother and son's getaway, it is pretty obvious that she is prostituting. As Helen escapes not to surrender custody of Johnny, she is not charged with a specific crime; the sheriff's bulletin states that only information is wanted and no warrants had yet been issued. Soon, Helen finds it impossible to make money by legitimate means and eventually runs out of it. Then, in New Orleans, she is tried for vagrancy—not streetwalking—at the court.

Blonde Venus. Cash value of things—including human interactions—would be explicitly and exhaustively pointed out in von Sternberg's 1932 film *Blonde Venus* (in relation to Ned Faraday's life saving experimental medical treatment and his wife's various actions to cover the high expenses). Although on a lesser scale, *Morocco* too makes it clear that the dreamy world of legionnaires and cabarets in the exotic Sahara is not outside the realm of commodification. During Amy Jolly's side gig of selling apples at the cabaret, Tom Brown dryly observes that the price equals his two weeks' pay. Her response is to gift it ("you can have it for nothing")—this unexpected gesture confuses Brown because he is not used to things that do not have an exchange value. Things indeed have a price—and a cost—as the worldly La Bessier seems to know too well. He intends to impress Amy Jolly with his wealth, which intimidates her love interest Tom Brown, who realizes that he cannot in any way compete with his adversary's offerings to Jolly. Eventually, La Bessier's tactic succeeds, because Amy Jolly understands that she can only save her inamorato's life with the help of this influential suitor.

Corruption

The Salvation Hunters *The Salvation Hunters* unsubtly points to prostitution as a social problem. The opening scenes introduce the harbor with images of rotting; in The City, social corruption corresponds to the physical decay of the dock.

The Scarlet Empress At a time when authoritarianism was in full swing, *The Scarlet Empress* presented a mockery of centralized state authority. The empire's riches and ruthless military apparatus do not conceal the corruptness and ignorance of the self-important officials. The idle and super rich elites of Imperial Russia lead an insouciant existence at the expense of the masses, which rarely enter the frame, then only as victims of oppression and intimidation. During an executive meeting, Elizabeth, who is one of the many illiterates in the palace, says she has no time for trifles as she has a war to wage—apparently with Finland (the story takes place in 1774; although no direct reference is made to it, Russian Empire had just victoriously concluded a war with the Ottoman Empire).

Shanghai Express. The powerhouse behind Charteris is the Inter-China Trading Company. He is just one of many Europeans who come to Shanghai for easy profit—and exploitation. A tight network of individuals controls the nodes of power and Charteris partners with other Caucasian men (e.g. the city commissioner van Elst and the Counselor Jackson). Charteris, van Elst and the rest of the elites pretend to complain about what they regard as a substandard social organization and like to make jokes about it—Chinese jails can't prevent escapes, bribery is a natural part of the system, and so on. Outwardly, they gripe about local matters and institutions, but continue to profit from them and make sure that they endure.

Local people essentially function as servants, with a few rare examples in administrative positions, such as the comprador Montgomery Howe (another yellowface character). Howe's role at the casino seems to be some sort of a public relations executive; he functions as a liaison with top officials (the opening scene introduces him bribing petty officers). Right after the city commissioner delivers Gin Sling the unwelcome news of eviction, the officials tell Howe that they would like to employ him as the chief of police. From being a lieutenant of the underworld's dragon lady, Howe is to smoothly transition into being the city's top policeman. The Europeans are depicted to be perfectly content with the corruption of local politics; and they fuel it by making sure designated (and corrupt) intermediaries such as Howe efficiently take care of the dirty work.

Macao. At the time of filming, Macao was a Portuguese enclave; it remained an overseas province of Portugal until the Carnation Revolution of 1974 ended the authoritarian regime and led to the independence of the colonies. The film was shot in California, mainly at the RKO studios; a camera crew shot b-roll footage in Macao of the coastline, the vibrant downtown and its traffic.[18] These are quite successfully integrated to the main scenes. The opening voiceover highlights not only the exoticism of Macao, but also its dark side. "The Monte Carlo of the East" is described as a hotbed of criminals and a safe haven of fugitives. Macao is depicted as an intrinsically corrupt colony: the chief of police is in cahoots with the number one gangster in the city, bribes can be handed out openly at the customs (officer gladly accepts Trumble's offer of cigars). Representatives of international law enforcement have to wait outside a perimeter and have no jurisdiction in the city. Shortly, Halloran remains untouchable within a three-mile radius. The love triangle between Cochran, Benton, and

Halloran (or a square, if Gloria Grahame's Margie is taken into consideration) and the ensuing intrigues could have taken place pretty much anywhere. That said, events and relationships are shaped by the corruptness of the city.

Otherness

The Blue Angel. In Pabst's *Pandora's Box*, the innocently wanton protagonist—the flapper Lulu—was played by the American Actress Louise Brooks. Somewhat similarly, Lola Lola's background is ambiguous and at least in the context of the German small town, she has a foreign quality. The English language version of *The Blue Angel* identifies Lola Lola as a person who communicates better (or only) in English. That distinction makes her a foreigner visiting a small town; she is not necessarily bound by norms and expectations about German women.

Shanghai Express. In the *Shanghai Express*, the palanquin was used as a signifier of the Chinese courtesan's higher social status; in *The Shanghai Gesture*, rickshaws played a key role—the powerful urban developer Sir Charteris was spied on and ultimately coerced by his rickshaw wallah, the "coolie." In *Macao* too, the main characters use rickshaws for transport. They also take a leisurely ride on the harbor on a sampan. As wandering drifters, the American adventurers enjoy these labor extensive forms of transport without having to assume the negative connotation of colonizers.

Macao. The opening voiceover narration sets the tone as it refers to Macao as "quaint and bizarre … calm and open, veiled and secret." From the get-go, the setting is framed as unfamiliar, mysterious, and dangerous: the opening sequence shows the hygrometer of the passenger ship, with the arrow pointing to very high moisture, "healthy for plants, unhealthy for humans." Characters seem to be unbothered by the climate and humidity; things may not be so different from those they are accustomed to—except for the prevalent corruption.

Shanghai Express. Railroads have played an important role in compressing time; they facilitated the need for punctuality and standardized time zones. In *Shanghai Express*, clocks appear several times, but the setting is not entirely in harmony with the modern conception of time—for instance, Mrs. Haggerty complains that she was handed a newspaper from 1927. The train has to negotiate a hectic marketplace, with animals leisurely occupying the tracks at the Peking Station. China is also dangerously alien—Sam Salt proposes a bet about their likelihood to survive; Chang cautions him that "you are in China, sir, where time and life have no value."

2. JUSTICE

Punishment

An American Tragedy. The absurdly hilarious scene in the courtroom, with lawmen of opposing sides almost engaging into a fist fight, scares Clyde and he begins to lose his composure. Then, he is rattled when someone calls for a lynching. Yet neither of these is the most scandalous moment of the trial. That happens when one juror disagrees with the guilty verdict and another one mildly supports his right to voice his dissent—the others are furious and directly threaten both jurors by saying that they would "run them both out of town." Consequently, the two are subdued. The problem is not that Clyde has subpar lawyers, but rather the jurors judge his intentions and character; yet, their own moral integrity and competency are questionable.

Underworld. Bull has a few cohorts, but he is always seen acting by himself; so it is not clear whether he is the boss of an organized crime syndicate. Still, *Underworld* is considered a modern gangster film because the story is told from the vantage point of the criminals. Then again, the message that prevails is that of the law: the judge lectures Bull about his mistakes (several title cards are used); his point is not focused on ethics—the judge tells Bull that it is simply not possible to beat the law. Accordingly, *Underworld* was released in the United Kingdom as *Paying the Penalty*.

Army grade weapons have been used by the tactical units of police forces throughout the world, increasingly after the 1990s. *Underworld* has a finale that is packed with an assortment of such

weapons and is in a way a prescient note about militarized policing. In this scene, police officers use assault rifles and there is an armor plated motorcycle with a heavy machine gun mounted sidecar. The firepower directed at the apartment's window is devastating, with shards of glass, wood splinters, and holes all over the concrete walls. Overall, the police appear neither very good at dealing with criminals (considering that mobsters hold an annual ball) nor solving crimes (Bull easily gets his rival framed for his own crime)—but they are heavy-handed. *Underworld* offers this picture of law enforcement without commenting on it.

Thunderbolt. Like Bull Weed in *Underworld*, Thunderbolt has a few cohorts, but he is always seen acting by himself. We never actually see him carry out a major crime; when he is prosecuted, it is for his previous warrants. Consequently, it is not clear whether he is the boss of an organized crime syndicate (as in later films of the gangster genre). He is more like the frontman of a small group of daring bank robbers.

Besides the gangster genre, *Thunderbolt* also predates the period sometimes dubbed the "Public Enemy Era" in the United States in the early 1930s. The term denoted notorious gangsters such as Dillinger and Al Capone; also fugitive criminals like Bonnie and Clyde. *Thunderbolt* has a minor character called "Machine Gun Terror," who recalls one of the era's most wanted criminals, "Machine Gun" Kelly. Thunderbolt mockingly calls him "squirt gun" before whacking him.

Thunderbolt's policemen are not as heavily armed as those in *Underworld*, but several carry machine guns. There is much less violence; the action is mostly confined to interiors, such as the nightclub and death row scenes. There is only one exchange of gunfire and that takes place off-screen—the camera shows Ritzie while the shooting takes place outside the nightclub.

The warden is an odd bureaucrat and provides some comic relief in the gloomy setting. He is annoying, but detail oriented—with the focus being that nothing should interfere with the scheduled killing. He gets the help of Thunderbolt to subdue an unruly inmate and later sips the liqueur (the convict's last wish, in this curious death row) to calm his nerves. His peculiarities and the charming music performed by the inmates somewhat overshadow the fact that here, executions are rapidly carried out, not excluding the band members—"I thought I had the quartet broken up, I no sooner get rid of one, they send me another," complains the warden. The death row scenes take up most of the second half of *Thunderbolt*; sugar-coated with some welcome respite from the hilarious interactions, they invite thinking about the nature and scale of capital punishment.

Crime and Punishment. The Motion Picture Production Codes ("**Hays Code**", fully effective as of 1934) dictated that suicide could not be used as a narrative device presenting a way out for criminals—they had to be prosecuted by law. Raskolnikov's farewell to his family could be interpreted to imply his departure or intention to commit suicide. Earlier, Sonya and Raskolnikov stand by a pond and he mentions talking with the dead. Sonya immediately removes any implication of suicide by cheerfully telling him about related verses in the Bible.

While *Crime and Punishment* is respectful of the Motion Picture Production Code, its representation of law enforcement does quite the opposite. Policemen obviously use torture as a basic interrogation method; they are able to secure a confession out of the painter who has been apprehended without substantial evidence.

Raskolnikov is considered to be a brilliant scholar and that's not groundless: Porfiry represents an old-fashioned approach to criminology, along the lines of the self-proclaimed founder of criminology Cesare Lombroso. Porfiry evidently believes that appearance is an indicator of criminality. His approach repulses Raskolnikov, who mocks the inspector's lack of sophistication.

3. POLITICS

Power

The Last Command. Both the filmmaker Leo Andreyev and the Grand Duke Sergius Alexander are characters with tyrannical traits. Andreyev maintains absolute control at the set via his underlings. A hilarious scene shows him denying all but one of his assistants (evidently the designated and senior one) the privilege to light his cigarette. Similarly, the General is domineering and watchful. Then, there are the petty tyrants; in the 1928 episode, the director's assistant who bullies the extras provides an example, and in 1917, members of the revolutionary mob obviously revel in their new-found power.

Scarlet Empress. A key scene is emblematic of the power games in the palace; it shows the archimandrite collecting donations from the most powerful figures. The humble looking wise man represents clergy, an important clique; each response reveals the character (and in hindsight, seals the fate of the donor). Calculated and excessive generosity (Catherine, Captain Orlov, and Count Alexei) is intended to earn the sympathy of the clergy; judging by the archimandrite's demeanor, it is a successful approach. These three would eventually end up as the winners in the power struggle. One of the losers, the Chancellor is thrifty; he drops a coin, which annoys the old man. The Chancellor is not more corrupt than the others, but just short-sighted. Another one, Countess Lizzy recklessly tosses a piece of leftover food to the donations tray. She is an important player in the power struggle, but Catherine will emerge as the winner; Lizzy is solely counting on her proximity to Peter. Finally, Peter slaps the man of religion, who is bold enough to hit back with the line, "that was for me, now what have you got for the poor?" This scene, for which von Sternberg personally composed a short violin composition, displays the power dynamics and shifting alliances in the palace. Catherine observes the system and adapts very well to the conditions. In the final stage of her fascinating ascent to power—in the company of dozens of Cossack cavalrymen—she rides atop her horse all the way up the marble stairs to the throne floor. Catherine is enthroned in full Hussar uniform, exalted and omnipotent.

Anatahan. "Some are driven by lust, while some are hungry for power," observes the narrator/director von Sternberg, mainly with the character of Amanuma in mind. This warrant officer is eager to lead the men as if nothing has happened, and remain vigilant for a defense of the island. There are two interesting aspects of his leadership: first, his power rests on the approval of the castaways, as opposed to being dictatorial—"obedience at the point of a gun is no obedience," proclaims the pontifical narrator. Amanuma commands the heavy machine gun, which curiously has no effect on the power struggle. For a while, the men are satisfied to have him assert control and maintain order. Then, with the introduction of coconut wine and with nerves wearing thin, a mutiny breaks out, with Nishio physically challenging and overpowering him. Consequently, he loses the respect of the sailors and retreats to the jungle. "A good part of our life is spent in trying to gain the esteem of others," the narrator comments sagaciously, "to gain self-esteem, however, we usually waste little time." The second aspect of his leadership is highlighted by a twist that follows the unexpected news—that the war is over—broadcast from loudspeakers of an US naval vessel. The castaways are in denial of the fact that their country has lost the war, yet they are confused too. So they appeal to Amanuma to lead them once again, bringing an element of stability when things are becoming increasingly uncertain.

Conflict: War and Revolution

The Last Command. Russian Revolution is an important part of the plot and its representation is arguably ambiguous. A scene shows an "obscure" group of people, a revolutionary committee which has members that resemble Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin. The short meeting held in an unspecified location leads to a decision to start the revolution. The top cadre of revolutionaries is composed of shady figures, and the whole setting looks rather sinister. They operate at a safe distance from the strife and signify puppet masters. The brief spotlight on the committee and its unidentified members implies revolution from above; then again, there are instances that provide an image of a widely popular revolt; these scenes show ordinary people who resent the monarchy and wholeheartedly embrace the revolution. Among examples are the locomotive drivers of the General's train that cheer the revolutionaries and the guard at the jail that saves Leo Andreyev from a brutal officer. It should be noted that these are common people, but not necessarily positive characters. These characters often willingly partake in the violence.

Underworld. The gansters' ball is a once a year event, "a delirious carnival of luminosity and exquisitely choreographed chaos"[19]. The violent criminals somehow manage to make it through the evening in the spirit of a truce. Von Sternberg includes a sequence with cuts to faces men and women, about two dozen extras shown in rapid succession. They look carefree and happy. The gangsters' ball scene is remarkable for portraying the wildly energetic crowd as an autonomous entity—as a collectivity of individuals not just a mass of people/extras.

Russian philosopher Mikail Bakhtin's concept of "carnivalesque" is helpful to understand the function of crowds in von Sternberg's films. Focusing on François Rabelais' *Gargantau and Pantagruel*, Bakhtin points to the distruptive and potentially emancipatory practices embedded in a carnival setting. In *Underworld*, the self-contained crowd (criminals) exists outside the realm of law and enforces its own rules ("no guns allowed"). There is even an instance of "mock crowning"—another Bakhtinian concept—in the form of the gangsters' own beauty pageant. Voting process is taken very seriously (votes can also be bought, after all they are crooks) and competition results are displayed in real time. Von Sternberg's *Dishonored* and *Devil is a Woman* also feature carnivalesque moments. Especially *Devil is a Woman* is remarkable for suggesting how the carnival can potentially turn subversive—the plot took place in Spain and the film was banned there (prior to and during the Franco regime). Spanish government also successfully halted the international distribution of the film and came close to getting the film stock destroyed.

Dishonored. After X-27 masterfully snatches the top-secret plans of the Russian attack and manages to convey it to the Austrian H.Q., a decisive battlefield victory is ensured; all the enemy officers are captured. With its focus on the romance and espionage, *Dishonored* recaps this particular battle in the form a very brief segment. The clip showcases modern weapons of destruction, with infantrymen attacking the trenches; they get mowed down by heavy machine guns positioned behind barbed wire, while tanks and warplanes play their parts in the obliteration. We learn that one side has won, but the visual representation makes the nature and cost of the victory obvious.

Just before the climactic ending, the young lieutenant in command of the execution squad tosses his ceremonial sword and fiercely yells: "I will not kill a woman. I will not kill any more men, either. Do you call this war? I call it butchery! You call this serving your country? You call this patriotism? I call it murder!" The execution is duly (and solemnly) carried out, but his protest leaves a deep mark. As a 1930s film that looks back at the Great War, *Dishonored* is hardly sentimental about it (or war in general). Surely, there are instances of heroism, and patriotism is praised, but war itself is not glorified. Taken together, the WWI sequence and the young officer's protest are strong reminders of the destruction of war

Dishonored. The approximately seven minutes long masked ball scene (which has very little dialogue) is not central to the plot, but one could argue that shooting scenes such as this one would be the main motivation for Josef von Sternberg to make this romantic spy film. Aesthetically, some of his favorite visual devices are there: steamers, balloons, and an abundance of confetti fill the frame. Conceptually, the dreamy masked ball, where a woman and two men interact peculiarly (via semi-irritating party horns and popping balloons) exemplifies von Sternberg working with the notion of the carnival. At this point, it is useful to refer to Russian philosopher Mikail Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque to understand the function of crowds in von Sternberg's films. Focusing on François Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Bakhtin points to the disruptive and potentially emancipatory practices embedded in a carnival setting. In *Dishonored*, the carnival is the moment that the strong female character asserts herself.

Von Sternberg's *Underworld*, *Devil is a Woman*, and *The Scarlet Empress* also feature carnivalesque moments. Especially *Devil is a Woman* is remarkable for suggesting how the carnival can potentially turn subversive—the plot took place in Spain and the film was banned there (prior to and during the Franco regime). Spanish government also successfully halted the international distribution of the film and even came close to getting the film stock destroyed.

The Devil is a Woman. The story of *The Devil is a Woman* takes place during Spain's Restoration Period (1874-1931); the film was released during the period known as the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939). The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) between the Republicans and the Nationalists was just around the corner; it would pave the way for the authoritarian regime of General Franco. The political implications of the *The Devil is a Woman* led the film to be banned in Spain (prior to and during the Franco regime). It bothered Spanish diplomats so much so that they pressured

Paramount to withdraw the film from circulation and destroy the film stock.[20] They successfully halted the international distribution of the film; a master copy was indeed publicly destroyed, but another one survived to resurface in 1959.

Spain protested the representation of its officials in the film; the scene deemed specifically unacceptable was one that showed the Civil Guard troops getting drunk. It is likely that the entire masquerade context, with its rowdy and unpredictable crowds, formed the backbone of the censorship demands. In the film, the top administrator of Seville, Governor Paquito is unnerved by the carnival crowd, ambiguously ordering his troops to refrain from interfering with the "people's enjoyment," but also instructing them to summarily execute trouble makers rather than arresting them. The young Antonio is a Republican and a dashing revolutionary. He uses the carnival as a cover, blending in with the masked crowd. Ultimately, he manages to evade the Civil Guard and escape to Paris. When the carnival is over, the governor orders his troops to unmask the population as a way to reassert political control.

Russian philosopher Mikail Bakhtin's concept of "carnivalesque" is helpful to understand the function of crowds in von Sternberg's films. Focusing on François Rabelais' *Gargantau and Pantagruel*, Bakhtin points to the disruptive and potentially emancipatory practices embedded in a carnival setting. *Devil is a Woman* is remarkable for hinting how the carnival can become subversive.

The Devil is a Woman Pierre Louÿs 1908 novel *The Woman and the Puppet* was adapted by novelist John Dos Passos (*U.S.A.* trilogy, *Manhattan Transfer*, 1929). Passos went to Spain during the Civil War and was a supporter of the Republicans. *The Devil is a Woman*'s portrayal of the Civil Guard in brief scenes subtly hint at his aversion to methods of police states. In Spain, Passos was disenchanted after witnessing comparable measures carried out by the Republican side and stated that "the trouble with an all powerful secret police in the hands of fanatics, or of anybody, is that once it gets started there's no stopping it until it has corrupted the whole body politic."[21]

Anatahan. Von Sternberg's voice and diction—pontifical and unemotional—gives the impression of a distant and objective narrator; yet he frequently utters epigrams that not only point to universal concepts, but also offer a judgmental view of human nature. "There is no medicine against stupidity," he remarks, pointing to the self-destructive behavior of the castaways. Early on, way before murderous violence grips the island, his narration foreshadows what is to come: "The enemy was not in the planes overhead; or venomous plants or lack of food medicine … How could we know we had brought the enemy with us in our own bodies." The inhospitable jungle is likened to a "twisting and haunting labyrinth"; it serves a motif for the darkness of human nature. The narrator retrospectively blends this bleak view of human society with fatalism; "the cruel destiny of men" seems to haunt them right from the beginning. The narrating voice supposedly belongs to one of the survivors, but knows more than any of them at any stage of the narrative; even when the colony of Anatahan is hopeful and resilient, he hints that disaster is just around the corner.

Anatahan. A peculiar entity on the island is the heavy machine gun that Amanuma had salvaged from the wreck of their flotilla. The formidable looking and apparently operational weapon rests on a tripod, ready to fire at an enemy that never comes. The narrator stresses that it was never even used. Interestingly, it also makes no contribution to Amanuma's position as leader; it is his patriotism and discipline that makes him lead the men, until he is toppled by the restless sailors. On the island, a knife, harpoon, and a revolver are deadlier—the machine gun somehow remains irrelevant. This striking categorization of weapons is in line with von Sternberg's epigram that the men needed no enemies to destroy themselves and that the deadly threat comes from human nature itself.

4. RELATIONSHIP

Marriage

The Docks of New York. Mae is presumably a prostitute and she is all of a sudden enlivened by the idea of marriage—she seems to believe that it may redeem her past. The concept of 'decency' is frequently brought up. Mae and Bill bring up their sexual histories, he proudly, while she is in remorse. Mae thinks that her decency is tarnished, yet Lou is skeptical that marriage would be the solution to her problems. Not due to—as Mae believes—her checkered past, but because Lou views marriage itself as the problem; she points to her own marriage as the decisively corrupting influence on her own life. "Hope you have better luck—but I doubt it" she shouts at Mae, before she is arrested for shooting her estranged husband Andy.

Friendship, Bonding, and Loyalty

The Docks of New York. From the get-go, Andy's bitter wife Lou approaches Mae as a supportive older sister; she is the one who helps her recuperate from her near-drowning at the harbor, and then watches out for her, keeping an eye on her own husband, who is eager to enter the vulnerable younger woman's room. Lou initially reacts with sarcasm to the wedding idea; but it seems that she has a change of heart and wholeheartedly endeavors to make it a happy occasion for the bride. Although her own marriage—still officially in effect—turned sour, she sincerely wishes and hopes that it would be different for Mae. The scene is a powerful turning point in the film, with Mae coming out of her depression and looking optimistic for the future. Lou plays a key role in the reversal and almost steals the show by passionately kissing Mae—a scene that would be unthinkable within a couple of years. The pre-Code era was just around the corner; filmmakers were still relatively unencumbered by the moral criteria to be set forth in 1929 and to be enforced from 1934 onwards.

The climactic scene prior to Bill's departure, with him restlessly spending a few more minutes in the room with Mae, is charged with tension—not only because of the conflicting motivations of the couple, but also due to the intervention of Bill's friend Steve. "His pal"—as the credits refers to him—keeps trying to pull him away from Mae, to the safety of the boiler room of the steamer where there are only men. Bill and Steve's relationship is unlike the bond between the two women. While the solidarity between Lou and Mae is admirable and strong, Steve acts like a pest with his annoying attempts at manipulation. An example is when the latter offers to light cigarettes while Mae is sewing the torn pocket back to its place. Steve lights his cigarette, then Bill's, and proceeds to light Mae's with the same match. Irked and wary, she knocks his hand away and asks him if he is trying to bring bad luck to her. This is related to 'three on a match,' a superstition that dated back to the battlefields of the 19th Century—other cinematic references can be found in *Scarlet Street* (1945, Fritz Lang) and *Dive Bomber* (1941, Michael Curtiz).

Steve is good natured and well intentioned; he also provides some comic relief—but Bill ultimately has to break free from his influence to be really independent. For an example of a similar character—and to see how far it can go towards a toxic portrayal—see *Moontide* (1942, Archie Mayo) with Jean Gabin's Bobo struggling with his supposedly protective and extremely annoying friend Tiny (Thomas Mitchell), who ultimately comes to be perceived as a despicable nuisance.

Love

The Docks of New York. *The Docks of New York* is a sensual film; the moment that best exemplifies this quality is the sewing scene. In the morning, Bill is confused and hesitant; he is urged by his friend to leave Mae and report to the ship. She, on the other hand, is already quietly lamenting his imminent departure; but also trying to prolong their final moment together. Steve keeps pulling Bill, whose shirt pocket gets torn during the hassle. The narcissistic stoker is disturbed about the ding to his appearance; his anger subdues Steve, while Mae offers to solve his problem. She takes her kit in order to sew the torn fabric—but she can't, because of the tears in her eyes. At this point, the blurry needle is shown as her point of view. Bill grabs the needle and threads it. Now, he can no longer pretend to ignore her tenderness, and he has just revealed a bit of his affectionate side. So did he actually 'thread the needle'? Apparently not, because Steve makes another move and finally manages

to get Bill away from Mae. Not before long, Bill will make up his mind and jump overboard to unite with her. Von Sternberg pointed out that, for this specific scene, he was inspired by *The Miracle Man* (1919) and Lubitsch's *Montmartre*/*Die Flamme* (1923).[22]

Shanghai Express. Doc Harvey is unsure whether he can trust Madeline. During the course of their conversations when they confront their past, it is revealed that five years ago, she had attempted to make him a little jealous by pretending to be interested in someone else. He had taken her act as infidelity and walked out. This is the fateful event that turned Madeline to Shanghai Lily, a high-class prostitute. Now, on board the train, Harvey is faced with the same problem; he is suspicious about her faithfulness and is hesitant to commit again. When he overhears Chang propositioning Shanghai Lily, he assumes that she is willing to have an affair with the warlord—when she was in fact desperately searching for a way to save Harvey from captivity and torture. It will not be easy for him to understand her real motivation and the selfless nature of her action. Thanks to Reverend Carmichael's efforts as an intermediary, Harvey is finally persuaded and they reconcile.

The Devil is a Woman. Concha keeps urging Pasqual to prove that he loves her. As he desperately tries to win her heart, Concha's demand sounds irrational and insincere, as if it is part of her sadistic scheme to play with Pasqual. However, the question is actually not only valid, but also profound: she is asking how deep his love is and how different it is from infatuation. Subsequently, she observes that it is not love, but vanity; that she amuses and excites him, but he does not really love her. Concha and Pasqual's relationship is at odds with conventional representations of lovers in classical Hollywood. In a rare positive contemporary review, *The New York Times* critic perceptively observed that "it is not hard to understand why Hollywood expressed such violent distaste for Josef von Sternberg's new film. For the talented director-photographer, in *The Devil Is a Woman*, makes a cruel and mocking assault upon the romantic sex motif which Hollywood has been gravely celebrating all these years."[23]

The Scarlet Empress. While its sexual references are not as explicit as *The Scarlet Empress* (which was one of the last films to more or less evade the Code that was fully enforced in 1934), *The Devil is a Woman* also includes dialogue that the Hays Code, in theory, would not embrace. Pasqual persistently makes sexual advances on Concha; the proprietor of the shabby nightclub mentions that Concha packs them [men] in like sardines; Concha says that her "mother can climb anything." Innuendo contributes to hilarious situations, such as when the ballroom waiter leaves Concha and Antonio alone in the private room and is baffled when he is told to bring playing cards.

Morocco. There are two love triangles in *Morocco*: the first is composed of La Bessier, Amy Jolly, and Tom Brown; the second has Tom Brown, his commander Captain Caesar, and the latter's wife Madame Ceasar. The dynamics of the two sets of relationships sharply contrast. In the first triangle, La Bessier emerges as a loving and selfless figure. He explains that his love for Amy Jolly entails his willingness to do whatever it takes to make her happy; he is compassionate and conciliatory. Following the death of one (or perhaps both) of the thugs that Madame Ceasar unleashed on Tom Brown, the legionnaire faces a severe punishment and La Bessiere intervenes on his behalf to save him. La Bessier not only saves his rival to please Amy Jolly, but ultimately selflessly escorts her, as she frantically searches for Tom Brown in Amalfa. He takes her to Tom Brown's garrison with his limousine and kisses her goodbye as she leaves him to follow the legion into the desert. As opposed to the courtesy in the first love triangle, the second one is toxic. In the second triangle, both Ceasars are possessive, spiteful, and scheming. Once she sees him with Amy Jolly, Madame Ceasar arranges thugs to assail Tom Brown. Captain Ceasar's jealousy is just as murderous; realizing that his wife is in love with Tom Brown, he plots to eliminate him. He attempts to get the legionnaire killed at the Amalfa Pass, but fails gets shot himself.

Desire

Dishonored. In *Dishonored*, death is associated with desire. "You trick men into death with your body," Kranau happily reproaches her, as a consequence of being infatuated with his very competent adversary. He views his own predicament as a choice between desire and life. When the irresistible temptress urges him to stay longer—so that she could get him captured—he resists the urge—"If you kept me here for another minute, I'd not only be in danger of losing my life, but of falling in love with you." Kranau's confusion is not at all groundless; prior to him, X-27 swiftly gets the better of two foes—

the treacherous Colonel von Hindau and the haplessly lustful Russian adjutant. With the latter, she laterally plays a game of cat and mouse, meowing at him just before he is thoroughly intoxicated and passes out. This deadly temptation signifies the allure of Marlene Dietrich's screen persona, so meticulously crafted by her and von Sternberg.

Blonde Venus. Von Sternberg and Dietrich's original treatment intended to explore the question whether it is possible for a woman to be in love with two men at the same time. The final screenplay and the film, as the outcome of a series of negotiations and compromises, ends with the restoration of the family; hence, Helen and Nick Townsend's love affair has to end (once again) abruptly. If one were to disregard the ending, Helen could have kept both her son and her love interest. In *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*, Janet Staiger argues that *Blonde Venus* points to the possibilities of fandom and the ability of spectators to imagine alternatives.[24] An example is a short story version of *Blonde Venus*, published in the September 1932 issue of *Screenland* magazine. Written by Mortimer Franklin, this story has major differences to the film—noteworthy is the ending, with Nick Townsend cunningly blackmailing Helen's husband to drop out of the picture and share custody. This story does not end with the reconciliation of Ned and Helen. Staiger maintains that notwithstanding the shaping of the narrative by the industry, fans "may have been resisting or even laughing at the official version,"[25] as they continue to imagine interpretations in which desire and emancipation prevail.

Anatahan. Keiko and Kusakabe's relationship is multi-layered: the narrator describes it as an "elastic bond" formed over a long time. It has elements of master and slave dynamics (which might vaguely recall von Sternberg's own relationship with Marlene Dietrich); Kusakabe is jealously possessive and has bursts of violence, as well as moments of subservience. The rest of the men react differently to her presence on the island. We were "slave to our own bodies," the narrator points out early on, before he begins to refer to Keiko as the Queen Bee, and five of the men as her drones—"we were all in bondage to Keiko." Desire both shapes and reveals the individuals' identity. Even those that seem indifferent to her, such as Amanuma, the military man, or Rokoriru, the older and kindly musician, eventually prove that she is a central part of their Anatahan experience: even Amanuma is among those who pull the strings to 'win' Keiko; similarly, Rokoriru is delighted when she offers him sexual favors to let her get away from the searching party and consequently escape the island.

5. QUEST

Experiment and Introspect

The Last Command. The film opens with a title card introducing Hollywood as the modern Mecca. *The Last Command* is one of the first films about filmmaking and presents a detailed and accurate picture of the process. Numerous extras rush through the studio gate (dubbed "the bread-line of Hollywood" with a title card) and collect their costume and props; they are like factory workers, and at the same time, items that are manufactured on an assembly line. Indeed, *The Last Command* likens Hollywood to a factory.[26] Efficiency is the main concern, functionaries are ruthless, and working conditions are oppressive.

The Blue Angel. Various artistic talents are commodities showcased for a price at The Blue Angel Tavern. The story takes place in late 19th Century, so the troupe represents an early form of showbiz. When the members of the troupe discuss their work as being art, it is intended to be hilarious. Similarly, Lola Lola and other chanteuses remind Kiepert that they are "artistes". He is a businessman (he doubles as a magician) who cares little about art and mocks his employees. Then again, when Professor Rath appears in the backstage, Kiepert hails it as an encounter between art—represented by himself—and science, which Rath stands for.

Dishonored. *Dishonored* has a gripping plot based on a treatment written by von Sternberg himself. However, towering above all the themes of the script is his preoccupation with the formal qualities of the film. In his interview with Peter Bogdanovich, responding to a question about *Morocco* (1930), von Sternberg asserts that abstraction is a quality of all of his films.[27] In his memoirs, he granted that *Dishonored* "contained some interesting experiments in visual and tonal effects"[28]; it can be considered one of his most abstract films.

Von Sternberg's exploration in formalism in *Dishonored* is most evident in key scenes such as Marlene Dietrich's X-27's recruitment by the Chief of the Secret Service (both their first interaction and the subsequent interview at his office) and the masked ball where there is very little dialogue. In fact, the plot can be considered to function as a binder for such scenes that obviously interested von Sternberg more.

Visually, movement of characters, their posturing and gestures all contribute to the unique style of the film. Aurally, as von Sternberg's fourth sound film, *Dishonored* makes interesting use of diegetic sound with music played by characters in the film (often X-27 playing the piano). Iosif Ivanovici's "Waves of the Danube" plays a special part in the plot, it is performed in variations; these signify the main character's mood or her sophistication compared to others (such as the Chief). Also, a melody is used as a cipher to convey the secret agent's report.

6. PSYCHOLOGY

7. Flaw

Vanity

Anatahan. In the first few minutes of *Anatahan*, the Japanese flotilla appears, travelling slowly, without any escort ships and only a meager number of marines aboard the vessels. This is explained by over-confidence and vanity, as the narrator mentions that they had no thoughts about defeat. Subsequently, stranded in Anatahan and losing connection to the world, they continue to reject the idea of the enemy winning the war, which leads to confusion when the American warship announces the surrender of Japan with her loudspeakers. Von Sternberg is keen to hint that the weaknesses of the castaways indicate universal flaws in human nature and vanity is one such trait—"we carry no mirrors," he bitterly observes.

8. APPEARANCE

Deception

The Blue Angel. *The Blue Angel*'s financier Hugenberg was annoyed with the film, because of its depiction of moral hypocrisy. The Blue Angel, with its traveling troupe, is the pot stirrer in the seemingly peaceful small town—where individuals (teacher, headmaster, policeman, captain, etc.) are shown respect because of their professional titles). The cabaret shows that the townsfolk's prudishness was just a façade. In the finale, the residents flock to the tavern to taunt the educator they once superficially respected. Similarly, on the surface, the students respect their teacher; in fact, they despise him and do everything they can to destroy him at the first opportunity.

Dishonored. Names, words, texts, in short, anything in writing has a dubious relation to reality in *Dishonored*. A curious character is seen making chemistry experiments in the office of the Chief of the Secret Service. The unidentified man is evidently a senior associate of the Chief (perhaps a doppelganger), who is busy working on a formula to make text invisible. This theme comes up time and again; Colonel Kranau tries to discover invisible ink in the paper that X-27 has used to jot down the secret plan in the form of a musical composition. The invisible ink is just an amusing oddity, von Sternberg suggests that it is pointless to search for such novelties as a gateway to reality—which is often hidden in plain sight and accessible via gaze and intuition.

9. PAST

Transience, Death, and Memory

Dishonored. "I am not afraid of life," Marie Kolverer (before she becomes X-27) responds to the building manager, who sardonically remarks that she is likely to die soon—just like her neighbor, also a streetwalker, who committed suicide. She adds that "I am not afraid of death" either—this second bit alerts the Chief of Secret Service, who happens to be standing by. Her statement triggers him to consider her as the female agent he had been searching for. Indeed, at the end, when faced with the priest's question, "you have no fear of this death?" she answers that "it's only another exciting adventure. A perfect end to an imperfect life." X-27 keeps bringing up the subject of death with an attitude of defiance. It seems that espionage work appeals to her for the possibility of qualifying death with meaning. She explains it as a form of redemption: "I've had an inglorious life. It may become my good fortune to have a glorious death." Perhaps this explains why von Sternberg wasn't happy with the title of the film—according to his perspective, the ending brings X-27 honor. X-27's counterpart, adversary, and love interest H-14 (Colonel Kranau) has a comparably nonchalant attitude in relation to death, he associates it with his specialty, as aviators "fly or are killed." Compared to X-27, his conception is more poetic. He describes "death as a beautiful young woman wearing flowers."

Anatahan. *Anatahan* is a complex and innovative musing on remembrance; the narrator recounts events at some point in time following the survivors' return to Japan. This is no simple task, as "to look back on something is not the same as living with it," von Sternberg points out. At first glance, the narrator of *Anatahan* appears to be omniscient. However, several key scenes are actually laden with ambiguity. For these, the narrator's explanation is a version of the phrase, "all of this we found out later." The most striking of ambiguous scenes are the murders that mostly take place off-screen; the spectators need to use their imagination to picture what might have really happened. Does Keiko kill Yoshiri, the last of the five drones, in self-defense or to avenge Kusakabe? Possibly the answer is a combination of both and the spectators are free to draw their conclusions. Similarly, the castaways initially assume that Keiko and Kusakabe are married. It takes quite a while for them to realize that her husband had never returned from visiting his sister. Hence, the reconstruction of incidents on the island relies on a playful strategy and can be deceptive: It involves not only the castaways, but the public at large; touching other issues such as patriotism and propaganda. When the survivors come home, their welcoming compatriots are told that the young Yanaginuma (the one-time powerful possessor of one of the firearms, who was eventually stabbed by Kusakabe) was killed in action during the war and "died like a good soldier."

Desire and lust are intrinsically linked to death, as well as fatalism. Keiko's presence and the passage of time inevitably lead to murders, with Anatahan's "days as fatal as bullets." She was "the only one on earth," reminisces the narrator, as the castaways lament her loss after she makes her exit with an American ship. There was "no more trouble," he adds, but also "no more life."

CHARACTERS (Experience – Social – Work – Psychology)

EXPERIENCE
1. Open
- Imaginative: *The Salvation Hunters* (The Boy)
- Lively: *The Docks of New York* (Bill)
- Adventurous: *Shanghai Express* (Shanghai Lily)
- Sensitive: *Thunderbolt* (Thunderbolt)

2. Closed
- Lifeless: *The Last Command* (Alexander); *The Docks of New York* (Mae); *The Scarlet Empress* (Peter); *Shanghai Express* (Doc Harvey)
- Nontraditional: *The Devil is a Woman* (Conchita)

SOCIAL
3. Agreeable
- Friendly: *Crime and Punishment* (Ins. Porfiry); *Underworld* (Bull Weed)
- Loving: *Crime and Punishment* (Raskalnikov); *The Docks of New York* (Bill); *Dishonored* (X-27); *Morocco* (Amy Jolly, La Bessier)
- Helpful: *Crime and Punishment* (Sonja); *The Last Command* (N. Dabrova); *The Devil is a Woman* (Don Pasquale); *Anatahan* (Keiko); *Morocco* (La Bessier)
- Engaged: *The Docks of New York* (Mae)
- Trusting: *An American Tragedy* (Roberta)
- Loyal: *Dishonored (*X-27)

4. Disagreeable
- Vanity: *Crime and Punishment* (Raskolnikov); *The Docks of New York* Bill, *Anatahan* (Amanuma)
- Disloyal: *The Blue Angel* (Lola Lola)
- Dishonest: *An American Tragedy* (Clyde); *Shanghai Express* (Chang); *Shanghai Express* (Baum); *Dishonored* Kranau)
- Cruel: *Blonder Venus* (Ned)
- Unfriendly: *Anatahan* (Kusakabe)

WORK
5. Conscientious
- Determined: T*he Last Command* (N. Dabrova); *The Docks of New York* (Bill); *Blonde Venus* (Helen Faraday)
- Controlled: *Morocco* (La Bessier)
- Succesful: *The Scarlet Empress* (Catherine)
- Responsible: *Morocco* (Tom)
- Planner: *The Blue Angel* (Rath); *The Shanghai Gesture* (Gin Sling)

6. Unconscientious
- Failure: *The Scarlet Empress* (Peter)

PSYCHOLOGY
7. Emotional
- Unstable: *Crime and Punishment* (Raskalnikov); *The Shanghai Gesture* (Poppy)
- Insecure: *An American Tragedy* (Clyde); *Shanghai Express* (Doc Harvey)
- Scornful: *The Last Command* (Alexander)
- Coward: *The Salvation Hunters* (The Boy)
- Unhappy: *The Docks of New York* (Mae)
- Dissatisfied: *An American Tragedy* (Clyde)
- Anxious: *An American Tragedy* (Roberta); *Shanghai Express* (Shanghai Lily)
- Obsessed: *Anatahan* (Kusakabe); *The Devil is a Woman* (Don Pasquale)
- Moody: *Macao* (Judie)

8. Rational
- Calm: *The Shanghai Gesture* (Poppy); *Macao* (Nick)
- Brave: *The Devil is a Woman* (Antonio)
- Satisfied *The Devil is a Woman* (Don Pasquale)
- Confident: *The Blue Angel* (Lola Lola)

Experience

1. OPEN

Imaginative

Boy (*The Salvation Hunters*) Even when there is no hope that their situation would improve, The Boy keeps daydreaming about the grand times to come—his fantasy features a footman (resembling a live tin soldier) who leads a trio of majestically uniformed servants that escort the couple to their mansion.

Lively

Bill Roberts (*The Docks of New York*) The physically imposing Bill is a force to be reckoned with; at the same time, he is a likeable simpleton. The burly stoker substitutes "mannerism for emotion"[29]; he surprisingly moves delicately, almost like a ballet dancer—notice how he saves Mae at the wharf; he does not jump from the pier with a splash, but only after tossing his cigarette and taking off his jacket, he quietly and slowly lets himself into the water.

The Sandbar doesn't exactly welcome Bill; instead, he is greeted there with testosterone rivalry. It takes him to decisively and quickly overpower an array of aggressive types to establish his machismo—then it is finally time to show off muscles in front of the mirror and let Mae appreciate his many tattoos from exotic lands. Actor George Bancroft (*Stagecoach*, *Angels with Dirty Faces*, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*) played tough guys many times; he made four films with von Sternberg (*Underworld*, *Thunderbolt*—Bancroft nominated for an Oscar, *The Drag Net*—a lost film).

Bill works hard and parties hard. The tramp ship's boiler room is his home, except for the occasional respite when the cargo reaches the destination port. The raunchy seaman has girlfriends at several ports—he has their names etched on his arm, which is full of tattoos. Bill is cheerful and always ready for a good brawl. His arrival to the Sandbar is marked by jostling and tussling with about half a dozen individuals; ultimately, the foreman Andy earns a punch from Bill for bothering Mae. She likes this boisterous, amusing, and larger-than-life character.

Bill and fellow stokers at the boiler room of the steamer stand in front of graffiti scribbled on the wall—a collage of chalked female names and associated nude figures. The men are covered in coal dust and sweat; there is steam all around. Deep shadows contrast sharply with bright light coming from the opening to the deck, as well as flames occasionally bursting out from the furnaces. The heavily stylized representation of men's bodies contrasts with the chalked and simplistic outlines on the wall. This machismo aesthetics is cinematographically not unlike von Sternberg's glamorous portrayal of female leads Evelyn Brent, Marlene Dietrich, Gene Tierney, and others. In *The Docks of New York*, Betty Compson as Mae is as beautiful and alluring as any of von Sternberg's other female leads, but the focus on hyper-masculinity is exclusive to this 1928 film.

Adventurous

Shanghai Lily (*Shanghai Express*) The moment she arrives at the Peking station, Lily causes a stir on board the train. Someone mentions that she is a "coaster"—and explains that the word means a "woman who lives by her wits." She has lived in China for the last eight years. The adventuress on board the oneiric Chinese train has made significant contribution to the persona of Marlene Dietrich and the character has had an enduring legacy on popular culture—designer Tom Ford's luxury fashion house has paid homage to the notorious courtesan with a fragrance, its *Shanghai Lily eau de parfum*—dubbed "tantalizing, opulent, elegant."[30]

Sensitive

Thunderbolt (*Thunderbolt*) When Bob's mother pleads with Thunderbolt to acknowledge her son's innocence, Ritzie also begs him, acknowledging that he is "fair," in spite of his violence and criminality. Bob's affectionate side is underscored by his fondness for the stray dog, which remains in his cell until the end. Similar to Marlene Dietrich's black cat in *Dishonored*, the interaction with the dog provides some insight to the character; it shows that Thunderbolt is capable of compassion.

Social

Catherine II (*The Scarlet Empress*) Princess Sophia Frederica becomes Catherine; she is cut off from her family, her religious and national identities are replaced by new ones. Initially, the innocent young woman has trouble adapting to the new setting, but learns quickly and eventually thrives in the intrigue-laden and corrupt environment.

Little Sophia has a strong-willed and ambitious mother who doesn't want her to play with toys—"she is seven!" she admonishes her nanny. Her mother would like her to grow up quickly and make a successful marriage. In Russia, she will be subjugated by another powerful mother figure, Empress Elizabeth. When she first arrives in Moscow, Catherine is innocent, polite, and sweet-natured. She is expected to be a submissive and obedient wife; the question is, will she play along?

Catherine's adaptation entails her transformation from ingénue to a debauchee. This transformation parallels her struggle to survive and attain power in the palace. Is Catherine a seductress? The process of her sexual empowerment leads to political power in a network of relations, where promiscuity is more or less the norm.

Visible

"Bull" Weed (*Underworld*) The flamboyant Bull is full of hyperbole. He is an extrovert who likes displays of power and craves the attention. However, when he is convicted and read his sentence at the court, he appears tamed and clueless—as the judge reprimands him about his criminal lifestyle. Super strong and defiant on the surface, Bull is a child at the core.

Talkative

Trumble (*Macao*) Dealer of coconut oil, pearly buttons, fertilizers and nylon stockings is in fact a New York detective sent to lure Macao's gambling kingpin out of the three-mile zone, where he can be arrested by the international police. The happy-go-lucky and good-natured character is able to deceive Halloran and everyone else about his real identity. William Bendix plays the voluble and cheerful salesman. Bentix had been in Hitchcock's *Lifeboat*; he was also well-known as the star of the radio show *The Life of Riley*, in which he voiced the gullible and clumsy factory worker. In *Macao*, the one person who looks as if he has nothing to hide turns out to be the deceiver. The friendly and jovial salesman is the New York detective who is after Halloran.

Transparent

Bob Moran (*Thunderbolt*) After getting fired, Bob tries to keep up his spirits at home and his mother does her best to console him. There is a lengthy scene when the two jovially joke and laugh in the bathroom as she attends to his hand wound (Bob has just punched Thunderbolt's associate and the mobster's arrival is imminent.) Mother and son try to appear optimistic to Ritzie, but can hardly conceal how disheartened they are. At the end, Bob's innocence is established and he is saved from the death penalty, but he will soon be joining the ranks of scores of unemployed. Bob Moran and his mother anticipate Clyde and Mrs. Griffiths in von Sternberg's *An American Tragedy*; which similarly culminates in a death sentence and the mother pleading for the life of her son.

2. CLOSED

Lifeless

Alexander (*The Last Command*). In 1917, Alexander was watchful and domineering; nothing of that remains a decade later, as he is humble, weary, and insecure. He walks around with a head tremor and bleary eyes. This second character is the polar opposite of his previous self. The fascinating aspect of *The Last Command* is that, the bleary-eyed Alexander gets to portray the eagle-eyed version of himself.

Mae (*The Docks of New York*) Mae is presumably a prostitute who has lost her desire to live. She is introduced as a silhouette reflected on the dark and still water of the harbor. If Bill did not happen to be passing that spot on the pier, her suicide attempt would have been a success. It is only later, when he takes her to the shack and after she is resuscitated, that we get to see her face. The happy-go-lucky stoker is baffled that she would want to quit life. Bill's zest for living and his various antics uplift her mood and she decides to try once again.

Mae is disillusioned and suicidal; even after she recovers from her near drowning at the wharf, she is sullen. When she recuperates and laments her failure to die, Bill's immediate and uncalculated reply is "all right. Make believe you died—make believe you're starting all over again." This line proves to be effective. Bill's buffoonery and optimism counterbalances her lassitude. He boastfully claims that if she would only give him a chance and accompany him for the night, she would change her mind about suicide. He raises her spirits and she gradually comes to think of a new life with him as a way out of her despondency.

Peter the Great (*The Scarlet Empress*) Peter's eyes are constantly shiny, as if he has just cried or laughed really hard, but his blank stare reveals no emotions. People refer to him as a halfwit and imbecile; Empress Elizabeth obviously thinks similarly of her nephew. Years of being looked down has turned Peter into an introvert, who is content with his own peculiarities. Peter is either busy with his toy soldiers or the real ones—his Hessian guard—a modern infantry unit (as opposed to the traditional Cossack cavalry). He likes to march them around when the weather permits and inside the palace when it is rainy—the indoor parade scene is introduced by a humorous intertitle to underscore his eccentricity.

Doc Harvey (*Shanghai Express*) The passengers speak somewhat monotonously; when von Sternberg was asked about this, he explained that it was intentional that their speech and conversations were slow, in order to mimic the rhythm of train.[31] This is particularly true of Harvey, who is laconic and stiff. As the leading man, he may be less than charming, but he helps to direct the spotlight on Marlene Dietrich.

Asocial

Boy (*The Salvation Hunters*) The Boy is a good-natured introvert; he is an optimist who lives a better life in his dreams. His self-contentment and lack of ambition frustrates The Girl.

Professor Rath (*The Blue Angel*) Rath's antisocial ways and clumsiness amuses Lola Lola. He spends his time alone in his lodging and is totally out of his habitat in the back streets of the town and The Blue Angel. The tension in the story builds upon Rath's infatuation with Lola Lola, for whom he steps out of his secure existence. He gives up his position at the high school, which meant for him not only a job, but an opportunity to be masterful. His infatuation leads to total loss of power. Rath is coerced (by Kiepert) and coaxed (by Lola Lola) to accept the ultimate humiliation and appear on stage in his home town as a clown—specifically an Auguste clown. At the end, Emil Jannings comes up with an unsettling and memorable portrayal of insanity, perhaps one of the greatest in the history of film. Can you think of comparable examples?

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Keiko (*Anatahan*) Keiko and Kusakabe are accustomed to living in Anatahan in total seclusion—their established way of life gets disturbed by the sudden arrival of a dozen castaways. Kusakabe is unfriendly and Keiko is cautiously distant to the strangers, who immediately take note of her beauty. Keiko remains reserved for a long time; the small island offers little opportunity for privacy and encounters between her and the sailors are frequent. It appears that she intimately savors the attention.

Secretive

Clyde Griffiths (*An American Tragedy*) Clyde is Stony-faced. Newspaper coverage of *People v. Gillette* was extensive in 1906 and the defendant's actions, as well as demeanor were reported in detail. "Unruffled" was the word used in one front-page article to describe Chester Gillette.[32] Most of the time, it is difficult to understand what Clyde is thinking and what his pouted lips signify. Clyde is stolid during the initial phase of the trial when his life is at stake and at its conclusion—when all is lost; but that was pretty much how he had always been. When his rich relatives had invited him to their home, he was basically polite and appreciative, but more interestingly, he was unresponsive to their derogatory remarks. His "opacity"[33] contrasts with Roberta's transparency. It is possible that he is just as clueless about his own character—as he puts it himself during the trial: "You see, I never had any real plans to do anything."

When he didn't immediately get what he wanted from Roberta, Clyde was able to confuse her with his cold and expressionless face; when she finally relented, there was an indication of triumph and a half-smile on his still impassive face. Later, he smiles once again, at a most unlikely moment, in the denouement, when his death sentence is announced. Fascinating scene and great acting by Phillips Holmes—Clyde is an unsympathetic yet complex character.

Catherine II (*The Scarlet Empress*) Long and masterful shot of Catherine during the religious ceremony shows her behind a veil. In this scene, the archimandrite is baptizing her as a Russian Orthodox. The sequence is captivating because of her ambivalence. Her husband Peter is also there, malevolently grinning as usual; Catherine is obviously concerned and seems to be taking thoughtful glances in his direction. There is also Count Alexei; at this stage, the two are enamored with each other. In a conventional melodrama, this scene could have pointed out to love and her bonding with Alexei as a solution to her entrapment in the palace. Despite lack of dialogue, lengthy shots of her veiled face imply that she is on her own and is not looking for a savior. Alexei is standing in the hall somewhere, just as Peter is. She will soon recognize the Count as the womanizer that he is and teach him a humiliating lesson. Von Sternberg's use of light and shadows highlight Catherine's ambivalence and independence.

Gin Sling (*The Shanghai Gesture*) "Mother" Gin Sling is a self-made and very well-connected businesswoman who—to put it mildly—operates in the grey areas of the law. Her background is only partially revealed. There are very few known facts about her: the older woman that appears by her side as a silent confidant, "The Amah," is the mother figure in her life and Gin Sling was at one time briefly married to Charteris.

"Who are you? What's behind this mask of yours?" cries Guy Charteris, feeling cornered as Gin Sling drops a hint of his secretive past. Actress Ona Munson not only impersonates an Asian, she seems to carry a mask that reveals little about her real emotions. Her mood shifts, voice, and mannerism indicate contempt, fear, and cunning; however, her facial features remain more or less the same.

X-27 (*Dishonored*) Her real name—Marie Kolverer—is uttered only once in the film. Not much is known about her background, except that she is a Great War-widow and works as a streetwalker. These reveal little about her personality; more insight is provided by the dangling and bouncing sewn dolls in her room, her piano playing, cutouts from magazines on her walls, and above all, her black cat that follows her everywhere.

X-27 hardly reveals her emotions. She is stoic in the face of danger and reserved during moments of emotional intensity. Even her voice sounds more or less similar in diverse contexts; e.g. “what appeals to me is the chance to serve my country” has a similar intonation to “will you take off my gloves?” Her apathy and sphinx-like demeanor pose a difficulty for the men who interact with her, not just her admirers, but also someone like the Chief of the Secret Service. She seems to enjoy flirting with Kranau, but the next moment she doesn’t hesitate to kill him by pulling the trigger of her pistol (previously—wisely—unloaded by him). It appears that this particular mannerism and ambivalence is a key aspect of the iconic Marlene Dietrich image, just as important as her allure and the Travis Banton costumes.

Omar (*The Shanghai Gesture)* Omar the charming gigolo operates as a semi-autonomous contractor in the casino and is instrumental in Gin Sling’s manipulation of individuals. Nothing is known about his past, except for his claim that he was born in Damascus and his father was an Armenian tobacco dealer. Omar defines his role at the casino as being an errand boy for the omnipotent “Mother” Gin Sling. “A trifle shady,” one character calls Omar, mainly because he “carries water on both shoulders without spilling any … a go-between,” whose loyalty can be bought. When he seems to be passionately flirting with Poppy, Omar makes sure to make extra cash by reaching out to her father in order to sell the necklace she lost in a game of roulette.

Guy Charteris (*The Shanghai Gesture*) The entrepreneur is in Shanghai to launch a large scale development project. Thanks to the vast funds he controls, Charteris is able to buy a chunk of land in the downtown district. Initially not much is known about Charteris and his past, except for his wealth and that he has a daughter who has just graduated from a Swiss school. One hint about this character comes from Dixie Pomeroy, who implies that he is a womanizer—mentioning his “orderly/flunkey,” who takes care of his dirty work. Suave looking gentleman comes to Shanghai with the backing of a huge corporation and exceptional personal wealth. The “Sir” prefix also identifies him as an aristocrat, apt for someone who is not hiding his colonizing ambitions. However, it turns out that like Gin Sling, Charteris has a checkered past. Gin Sling reveals that he is just as blemished as she is. His claim to aristocracy and refined manners serve to mask his shadowy past. The finale reveals that “Sir” Charteris’ real name was Victor Dawson. He belongs to the same league of fake and shady characters, together with Gin Sling and Omar.
Amy Jolly (*Morocco*) Amy Jolly is alluring and pleasant, but hardly transparent; she reveals very little about her past (the long gone sable coat is a hint to a more prosperous lifestyle) and her emotions (she waits to be fully sure that Tom Brown loves her, before she admits her feelings about him).

<u>Quiet</u>

Nick Cochran (*Macao*) At the time, Robert Mitchum was an established star, famous mostly for *Out of the Past* and his other films noir (his darker characterizations in *The Night of the Hunter* and *Cape Fear* were yet to come). Mitchum’s low-key performance here almost suggests lassitude, yet it is quite apt for the portrayal of a war veteran who has been perpetually drifting. To Judie Benton, Cochran reveals his vulnerable side; how he felt alone on the New Year’s Eve in the Times Square and why he later refused a job offer to manage a plantation on a Melanesian island—because of his fear of loneliness.

Shanghai Lily (*Shanghai Express*) With *Shanghai Express*, “Dietrich’s screen persona of disillusioned world weariness was clinched.”[34] The characters, particularly Shanghai Lily (and Harvey), languorously mimic the pace of the train.[35] She doesn’t speak much and when she does, it is not so much her words that matter, but movement and mannerism, engulfed in chiaroscuro. Von Sternberg demonstrates his “ability to suggest the inner emotional experience, merely with a control of light and shadow.”[36]

Social

3. AGREEABLE

Friendly

Inspector Porfiry (*Crime and Punishment*) Like Raskolnikov, Porfiry has a dual nature: he is kind and cordial towards the eccentric criminologist, but his underlings and the detainees fear him. Porfiry meets Raskolnikov after having read his article. He is an admirer and treats him like an esteemed colleague. He amiably puts up with Raskolnikov's antics and sarcasm. Ultimately, the inspector's friendly attitude confuses Raskolnikov and his arrogance results in self-incriminating moments. The eagle-eyed inspector is often cheerful and friendly, but he is always watchful and does not fail to notice Raskolnikov's culpability. Not before long, Porfiry is certain of his guilt, even though substantial evidence is lacking.

Raskolnikov may act way too relaxed in the presence of Porfiry, but make no mistake, the cordial figure is a senior police official in Imperial Russia and people obviously fear him. He acknowledges that inspiring fear ("of law or the god") is his main instrument for securing confessions. The scenes that take place at the police station do not show violence, but the detainee (the drunken painter who was wrongfully apprehended for the murder of the pawnbroker) appears terrified—he was evidently interrogated under torture. As a consequence, the man soon confesses, which temporarily relaxes Raskolnikov.

"Bull" Weed (*Underworld*) Bull is strong enough to bend a coin and strikes fear in rival mobsters—but von Sternberg is less interested in recounting his daring crimes than exploring his displays of emotion and interactions with other characters. Bull generously helps Rolls Royce get "on his feet"; he finds him an honest job, gives him cash, and settles him comfortably at his old hideout. In return, he wants nothing—"I help people, people don't help me", Bull laughingly says. The Robin Hood of gangsters is not only presented sympathetically, he is at the center of the plot—this is the quality that leads to *Underworld* being called the first modern gangster film.

Loving

Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*) Raskolnikov is both loving and hateful. A title card introduces the central theme of *Crime and Punishment* as human hearts' response "to love and hate; pity and terror". An aspect of Raskolnikov's dualism is his capacity for love and hate. He is compassionate towards his sister and mother, as well as his friend Dmitri. His love for Sonya brings an end to his suffering by confessing his crime and feeling relieved. On the other hand, the encounter with the pawnbroker demonstrates his capacity for hate. He also has a tendency to demonstrate contempt when faced with official figures such as the clerk at the police station and Antonya's obnoxious fiancé who has two government positions.

Bill Roberts (*The Docks of New York*) Bill may be vulgar, but he eventually reveals his sensitive side. The sewing scene is climactic because of the tension—is Bill going to leave Mae for good or is there a chance that he might choose to end his seafaring and settle down? When she fails to thread the needle because of her watery eyes, Bill does it for her; he can no longer pretend to ignore her sorrow and his mannerism shows how affectionate and confused he is. If it was not for the corrosive influence of Steve pulling him, perhaps Bill's decision to unite with Mae would not have to wait for the denouement at the night court.

X-27 (*Dishonored*) "You are a cheat and a liar" says Kranau, realizing that X-27 is asking him to stay longer so that she can get him captured. It is a little unclear at what point her love for him prevails; ultimately, she sacrifices herself to let him live. Up until that climactic moment, her feelings are possibly ambiguous; she is infatuated with him and yet also focused on getting the better of him as an adversary. Kranau is confused by the danger she poses and says he detests it—"you bring something into war that doesn't belong in it; you trick men into death with your body." Yet, he also adds that her dangerous side makes her "even more exciting." The lethal quality of X-27 prefigures the femme fatales of film noir in the following decade.

In the casino scene, X-27 is greeted warmly by all the women at the bar. As she moves towards Kranau, she affectionately embraces an unidentified woman sitting on a stool. A less subtle signifier of her sensuality is her black cat, which is seen in many scenes. Her interaction with the cat contributes to the story by hinting at her feelings and mood. The feline theme goes even further; in a later scene, she plays a game of cat and mouse with a randy Russian adjutant in Borislav. When the man is thoroughly intoxicated and excited, she impersonates a cat and meows—just before she steals the precious secret document from him.

X-27 may be a patriotic and tough operative prepared to shoot rivals and willing to send traitors to death, but she is also compassionate. She makes the ultimate sacrifice to save the man she loves.

Amy Jolly (*Morocco*) Amy Jolly is afraid of falling in love with Tom Brown mainly because she is not sure of his feelings, especially after he changes his mind and decides not to go to Europe with her—choosing instead to leave the town for another mission with his unit. She confronts him at a shabby tavern in Amalfa; a terse exchange leads to nothing and it seems that they are both willing to break up—then she notices the carving of her name on the table; close-up shows her relief and satisfaction, now fully assured that her love is reciprocal.

La Bessier (*Morocco*) La Bessier finally gets what he wants: Amy Jolly has to accept his offer to help and consequently, his proposal—which he hopes, would eventually lead to reciprocal love. However, her affection comes at a price—she wants to save Tom Brown and La Bessier is in a position to help the man she really loves. From the beginning, it is clear that La Bessier is able to be close to Amy Jolly only because of his role as an accessory for her real romantic relationship. Fascinatingly, not only does he accept the situation, he does his best to help her overcome obstacles in her relationship with Tom Brown. La Bessier explains that he does so because he truly loves Amy Jolly and hence wants her to be happy.

<u>Helpful</u>

Sonja (*Crime and Punishment*) Raskolnikov first pities Sonya; he then admires her goodness. Gradually, she becomes a more important influence on him, in a way replacing his idols Napoleon and Beethoven. Sonya's piety counterbalances Raskolnikov's lack of faith. "Don't take away my faith, I need it" she responds to his skepticism and "unbelief". Actresses in von Sternberg's previous films—Marlene Dietrich, Evelyn Brent, Betty Compson—were portrayed glamorously; this time Sonya's social class does not call for glamour, nonetheless, she radiates an aura of goodness. Sonya gently persuades Raskolnikov to confess. She succeeds where Inspector Porfiry fails. Through confession, Raskolnikov's suffering ends and he is redeemed.

Natalie Dabrova (*The Last Command*) Once she realizes that Sergius Alexander is truly patriotic, Dabrova not only falls in love with him, but goes above and beyond to save him from certain death at the hands of the Bolsheviks.

Don Pasqual (*The Devil is a Woman)* In the first flashback scene at the derailed train, Pasqual emerges out of nowhere to offer Concha his support in a somewhat difficult situation. He looks imposing and self-confident in his full dress uniform that displays his military medals and signifies his social status. She is gratified with the attention and finds it useful; the mere opportunity to act as a powerful protector makes Pasqual smug and puffed up.

Keiko (*Anatahan*) Two attempts to make the castaways surrender fail; it is only when Keiko makes it to Japan that she goes out of her way to contact the relatives of her fellow cohabitants of Anatahan. The letters convincingly inform the men about the situation back home and they realize that resistance is futile. When they jubilantly show up at the airport, amid fanfare, the narrator believes he also sees Keiko. Evidently, she is lamenting about the four dead castaways and Kusakabe.

La Bessier (*Morocco*) La Bessier first offers to help Amy Jolly in Mogador as they meet on board the ferry, later, he buys one of her apples at a high price, and ultimately, he is sincerely supportive of Amy Jolly's attempts to unite with Tom Brown. La Bessier is resourceful and is keen to share what he has in order to facilitate a relationship.

Engaged

Mae (*The Docks of New York*) Mae is sensual and shrewd. The Sandbar scenes, just before the wedding ceremony, are visually pleasing and full of details, with the lively crowd providing a dynamic background to Bill and Mae's chat. At the edge of the frame, Andy, who is jealous of Bill, is lecherously staring at Mae the whole time. When he finally feels confident enough, he attempts to intimidate Bill; reminding him that he is the foreman to snatch Mae from him. A one-sided fist fight ensues and the other customers scramble to stop Bill from battering the third engineer. A tracking shot shows Mae watching the altercation, initially indifferently, then deciding to intervene and calmly walking towards Bill. She holds his arm affectionately and quite effortlessly drags him back to his seat. Lou is very satisfied with the pounding her obnoxious husband Andy receives; Mae is equally pleased with her influence on the brute that a roomful of people can't control.
The wedding is a high-point in *The Docks of New York*—chairs are rearranged, space is made for a make-shift lectern for Hymn-Book Harry, and finally the unruly crowd of the Sandbar suddenly behave themselves. What starts as a joke, turns quite serious and Mae gradually warms to the idea. Throughout the ceremony, she is contemplating and unsure, but is serious when Pastor Harry asks her for her wedding vow.

Trusting

Roberta Alden (*An American Tragedy*) Roberta was raised in a farm and has moved to New York to work in the textile plant. Her affair with Clyde hits a dead end once the latter hooks up with the wealthy Sondra. Roberta is pregnant and demands that Clyde marry her. She is meek and naïve, but her persistent calls for action increasingly annoy Clyde. Roberta remains sympathetic and unsuspecting.

Shelley Winters (the gullible widow in *The Night of the Hunter* [1955] and the pathetically lovesick Charlotte Haze in *Lolita* [1962]) portrayed Alice in the other *An American Tragedy* adaptation, *A Place in the Sun*, as an annoying and pestering character. There is hardly anything negative about Roberta, she is exquisite and delicate. She resists Clyde's attempts to spend the night at her place, but caves in after he tactically ignores her for a while and pretends to be determined to end their relationship. She finally sends him a note to signal her capitulation; then, his reaction is a controlled smirk. At this moment, her heartfelt and happy smile sharply contrasts with his cold and triumphant stare.

Loyal

X-27 (*Dishonored*) "You are a clever woman and a very loyal one," the stiff Chief of Secret Service remarks, displaying restraint as a man who gives the impression that he rarely extends praise to underlings—judging by his attitude, even less so to women. She repeatedly proves that she is indeed a very competent spy and devoted to her country. X-27 comes up with an ingenious way to copy the Russian battle plans which directly leads to a major battlefield victory; also, she isn't fooled for a moment when the Chief tests her by pretending to recruit her for an enemy intelligence service.

4. DISAGREEABLE

Vanity

Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*) Raskolnikov is Napoleonic. Despite all the hardship, he keeps fighting and is inspired by his two idols, Napoleon and Beethoven. After all, he achieved exceptional academic distinction in the same circumstances thanks to his belief in his powers. The film does not go into the character's ideology or the notion of the Nietzchean superhuman that is important in the novel. There is not much dialogue concerning this concept and first person narration by Raskolnikov is never employed. Instead, glimpses of the portraits of these two figures effectively provide a visual cue about Raskolnikov's mindset. He achieves success and recognition, parallel to becoming more assertive.

The dual nature of Raskolnikov's character means that he oscillates between meekness (e.g. his submissiveness when bullied by the patrolling officer and the drunken painter) and moments of reckless arrogance (mocking Inspector Porfiry by calling him professor—"because you profess to know things").

Bill Roberts (*The Docks of New York*) Bill likes partying, but he is self-centered. When he is with Mae at the Sandbar, he takes a moment to spend time in front of the mirror. Mae has put on the nice evening dress he stole from the pawn shop and her beauty makes her the center of attention at the Sandbar—where hell is breaking loose anytime—but Bill is mainly concerned about his own appearance; checking out his hair; flexing biceps and showing off his tattoos.

Amanuma (*Anatahan*) Von Sternberg views Anatahan as a microcosm of human society and explores universal characteristics. The Japanese colony on the island may be tiny, but there is a great deal of power struggle going on. From the beginning, Amanuma is assertive about his claim to leadership: "our leader, the boss of the island—that is, boss for a while—was not opposed to a display of his authority". The narrator also suggests that Amanuma savors his position as the leader as "some men are drunk on wine. Some are drunk on power."

Disloyal

Lola Lola (*The Blue Angel*) The lyrics of the German songs sang by Lola Lola stress her sensuality: "I am, head to toe, ready for love". The English version changes the tone with "falling in love again, can't help it." The latter downplays the overt sexuality of the German lyrics, but still, Lola Lola has a sexually charged presence. Lola Lola's songs hint at her inclination for infidelity. Still, it is a devastating blow for Rath when he sees her openly having an affair. She simply fancies Mazeppa the Strongman and decides to flirt with him.

Concha Perez (*The Devil is a Woman*) *In Devil is a Woman*, Marlene Dietrich sings only once, in the penultimate flashback; apparently she is no longer employed at the factory and works as a chanteuse at a lowly establishment. Pasqual happens to be present when she sings the hilarious "Three Sweethearts Have I" song:

> But believe me, please believe me.
> When I tell you that I haven't got a sweetheart.
> Chorus: Do you mean to say that you have none?
> Did you hear me say that I had none?
> No, I only said I haven't one.

Pasqual has to endure the song and when she comes by, he desperately begs for her affection. A little later, she will allow him to be near her, only to leave for a country outing with her lover Morenito.

Dishonest

Clyde Griffiths (*An American Tragedy*) Clyde is "Hamlet-like" and Untruthful. He is often hesitant and indecisive; then, at times he acts impulsively (e.g. the murder plan, courting Sondra, protesting his innocence during the trial). He is also a liar—the first instance of him lying is during the job interview for his hotel bellhop application. At the court, his lawyers decide to build their case on his flaws, mainly his tendency to lie. This leads to the argument of the defense that Clyde was actually untruthful in occasions when his statements incriminated him. As Susan Herman points out in her comparative analysis of the novel and the actual court case, this trial took place decades before the Miranda warning would be given to suspects in order to protect them from self-incrimination. Scared of authority and irresolute, Clyde incriminates himself by speaking.

Henry Chang (*Shanghai Express*) Even after the Chinese government accepts Chang's terms of the hostage exchange, he attempts to take his revenge from Harvey by maiming his eyes. Lily tries to stop him by bribing; Chang dismisses her offer, saying that "all the money in the world cannot wipe out his insult to me." Her protests for not honoring the hostage agreement (at that stage, the government of China has fulfilled its part of the deal and delivered his lieutenant safely to him) is also futile—"I am not concerned about your ideas about justice," Chang mutters, "I live by my own code."

Major Lennard and **Eric Baum** (*Shanghai Express*) Minor characters—the Frenchman is polite and pleasant; the German is irritable and uncommunicative. They have a common trait: both are liars. Lenard pretends to be an active duty officer, whereas he has been—presumably not honorably—discharged from service. Baum claims that he owns a coal mine in China, but Chang doesn't buy that for a second. They are both impostors; Lenard wishes to continue making his sister proud and Baum is dealing opium. Lenard's lie saves him because Chang categorizes him as someone who has no worth as a hostage; Baum's lie—together with his previous "insolence"—gets him tortured.

Kranau (*Dishonored*) In their first encounter at the masquerade ball, Kranau's walking sticks are part of his disguise as he pretends to be a handicapped clown. X-27 feels bad for cautioning him to stand up when the national anthem is played. Colonel von Hindau is there to conduct spy business with Kranau, but he is also ecstatic at the prospect of spending the evening with X-27. Von Hindau obviously wants to get rid of Kranau quickly; he also feels obliged to offer the handicapped man a ride home. The tension naturally continues in the car with the trio's (still wearing masks) wacky interaction; Kranau attempting to assert his virility, slightly bothering von Hindau and only amusing X-27. Later in the film, Kranau and X-27 spend the evening together at the Borislav garrison; he is obviously gratified and feels that he has finally achieved the 'conquest'. It is at this moment, when he has dropped his guard that X-27 turns the tables; she drugs him and easily gets away after he helplessly falls asleep.

Cruel

Ned Faraday (*Blonde Venus*) Ned calls Helen "rotten" and wants the sole custody of Johnny; when she takes the boy and runs away, Ned unleashes detectives to trail her and pursues them relentlessly. He recalls some of the prim and haughty passengers of von Sternberg's *Shanghai Express*, such as Mrs. Haggerty and Mr. Carmichael (the latter calls the two modern courtesans in the train "rotten"). When Ned comes to the Galveston train station to pick up Johnny, he is untouched by how devastated Helen is.

In 1932's *Screenland* magazine's story version of *Blonde Venus* (written by Mortimer Franklin), Ned is considerably different and so is the ending: Nick approaches Ned to let Helen be free; when he refuses, Nick blackmails him by his dubious relationship with a young maid—Ned instantly yields and is out of the picture. This story was possibly based on the earlier version of the screenplay, which reminds us of the various possibilities the plot could have evolved into.

Unfriendly

Kusakabe (*Anatahan*) From the get-go, Kusakabe is annoyed by the sailors and apparently views them as intruders. "An unfriendly man … unfriendly to us and unfriendly to himself," explains the narrator. Keiko is the only person he likes to have around. He tries to keep his interactions with the castaways to a minimum. The narrator suggests that jealousy and his possessiveness of Keiko might not be the only reasons for Kusakabe's hostility: "Kusakabe objected to anyone paying attention to Keiko—that was easy to diagnose. More difficult to understand was why he was so antagonistic to us, and to himself. "Kusakabe seems content being isolated from the world. The photo of his wife and child in the shack suggest that the loss of his family is a cause of Kusakabe's desolation.

Work

5. CONSCIENTIOUS

Determined

Natalie Dabrova (*The Last Command*) Member of the Kief Imperial Theatre is a revolutionary. Initially, she plans to assassinate Grand Duke Alexander but eventually falls in love with him. Ultimately, she selflessly saves his life. Dabrova's first scene is with Andreyev, they are looking at Alexander—at the height of his glory—inspecting the troops. "His days are numbered", Andreyev remarks with contempt and Dabrova affirms, "same as everyone dragging Russia down". She also

tells him that they don't have the "luxury to be impatient" for revolution. They appear to hold equivalent positions as revolutionaries, but she is the more intelligent and level-headed one.

Bill Roberts (*The Docks of New York*) Bill is ductile and resilient. In his 1934 assessment, Rudolf Arnheim called Bill "Herculean" and a "sinewy Parcifal."[37] Arnheim thought that the unyielding character of Bill reflected Joseph von Sternberg's own standing in Hollywood and his resilience. Bill can adapt, but his core remains unchanged. Although physically unlike the formidable George Bancroft, like Bill, von Sternberg was "ductile and as strong as a bar of steel."

Helen Faraday (*Blonde Venus*) Helen's dressing room in her Paris show has the following two lines of a Rudyard Kipling poem—"The Winners" (1922)—handwritten on her mirror: "Down to Gehenna, or up to the throne, he travels fastest who travels alone." Helen returns from Europe to the USA triumphantly; she has achieved success without the support of men—both Ned and Nick are basically "superfluous, Helen can exist without them."[38]

How she bounced back after total defeat in Texas is not shared with the spectator. Yet, we may assume that solidarity with other women would have made a positive contribution to her struggle. This can be inferred from some of her previous interactions with women: the Norfolk woman manager (whose appearance and mannerism hints at queerness) had tipped her about Ned aggressively searching for her—she had empathetically advised her to stay away from cabarets not to get caught ("I've a kid of my own"); Helen's African-American maid Cora, in the final part of her adventure, was a sweet friend who took care of her—she had carefully sized up Detective Wilson to help Helen thwart the threat; the desperate woman in the flophouse who considered suicide—Helen had defiantly handed her all the money Ned gave her, in order to start from scratch. In *Blonde Venus*, female bonding "subverts the system."[39]

Controlled

La Bessier (*Morocco*) La Bessier is quite firmly rejected by Amy Jolly twice (on board the ferry and later at Lo Tinto's tavern). Yet he maintains his composure and is unruffled even after Amy Jolly turns him down in front of his own social circle. He is restrained and yet intrigued by her aloofness.

Succesful

Catherine II (*The Scarlet Empress*) The denouement shows Catherine (now Catherine II, the Empress of Russia) jubilantly standing by the throne, after she and her loyal Cossacks gallop up the stairs of the palace. The state's capacity for oppression—previously hinted at—is now in her control and she is exalted at her own omnipotence. The smile is so much different from the bizarre grin of Peter; whereas the latter was pointless and malevolent; her grimace signifies her delight in attaining absolute power.

Responsible

Tom Brown (*Morocco)* He is an impetuous adventurer; the ultimate question is, will he change and commit to a life with Amy Jolly? Brown's first scene shows him flirting with a local Mogador woman as soon as the legion returns to its barracks; his second appearance is at the cabaret, where he is openly flirting with Madame Ceasar, his former inamorata and the wife of his commanding officer. At this point, he catches the eye of Amy Jolly and their mutual attraction develops into a tension charged relationship. During their first meeting, Amy Jolly tells legionnaire Brown that "I never found a man good enough for that," indicating marriage—to which he responds,"that's just the way I feel." Gradually, they both realize their own willingness to commit. Initially Tom Brown is wry and frivolous; eventually, the carefree character becomes serious and thoughtful.

Planner

Professor Rath (*The Blue Angel*) "Prof. Dr. Immanuel Rath" (as per his door sign) is a bachelor who teaches English literature. Prior to his fateful encounter with Lola Lola, Rath seems to have little life outside the school. He is a man of routine; Rath's idle life is secure and offers no chance of a surprise. His room is a bit messy but he is prompt and predictable—signified by him regularly waking up with the chimes of the town's clock tower. It all changes from the moment he sees Lola Lola's suggestive photos.

Gin Sling (*The Shanghai Gesture*) "You are plotting your revenge like an engineer," comprador Howe observes, as Gin Sling is going over her plans for the New Year party using a specially made chess set with figures representing the guests. Feminist theory has underscored the traditional assumption that women are somehow closer to nature—more emotional and less rational compared to men. Cinematic representations of gender tend to adhere to this distinction, with unusual examples like Gin Sling in *The Shanghai Gesture*, who emerges as a cold and systematic thinker—while the main male character Omar is primarily a seducer.

Powerful, intelligent, and deceitful, Gin Sling personifies the dragon lady, a stereotype reserved for Asian women. "Warlord of the Chinese underworld" is domineering and demands absolute loyalty from her underlings. Outside the casino, her notorious reputation generates a blend of respect and fear. Her power rests on her lucrative business, but it is her methods that guarantee that it remains unchallenged. It is revealed that "Mother" Gin Sling is adept at blackmail and extortion—elites of Shanghai are intimidated by her because of her knowledge of their secrets. Behind the façade of a legitimate business, the Dragon Lady is prone to instrumental violence and is somewhat of a mobster. Coolie (film noir actor with imposing physique, Mike Mazurki) is her enforcer. When Charteris ignores Gin Sling's approaches, Coolie coaxes him. Like the appraiser and the croupier in the casino, the tough guy is simply one of her agents.

6. UNCONSCIENTIOUS

Failure

Peter the Great (*The Scarlet Empress*) Peter is the heir to the Russian throne, unless a more suitable candidate emerges—this is what his aunt strives to achieve by bringing Catherine from Germany as a bride. The "halfwit" that no one really takes seriously, plays with tin soldiers and proudly drills his private Hessian guard detachment—hinting to the fact that he is extremely frustrated with his powerful aunt's domination. Peter may actually have ambitions of his own and Countess Lizzy has already placed her bet on him. His brief shot at imperial power is a series of proclamations that announce his irrational measures and unleash a wave of political terror; we get the feeling that the indiscriminate violence and uninhibited abandon are outcomes of a lifetime of personal subjugation.

Peter's cruelty reaches its peak when he gets to hold the reins of the empire; his proclamations unleash a wave of terror. It is hinted that the irrational violence is a consequence of his subjugation by an authoritative aunt. In spite of Peter's comedic madness, the later banquet scene has a touching moment when he, as the emperor, demands a toast for his "friend" Countess Lizzy. Catherine isn't pleased and spoils the occasion before walking out, but it is interesting that no one really cares about Peter's choices; the Grand Countess replaces the Empress and Peter continues to be subjugated.

Psychology

7. EMOTIONAL

Unstable

Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*) Raskolnikov is hesitant and Unbalanced. He is confused about what to do, panics easily, and does unpredictable things—such as his second visit to the crime scene, which only makes his situation worse by alerting Porfiry. According to Frederic Will, the novel's Raskolnikov is characterized by his tendency to be "unsure". That involves doubting his sanity and mental powers. The film's Raskolnikov does not appear to go that far.

Poppy Charteris (*The Shanghai Gesture*) starts out self-confident and controlled; gradually she becomes obsessed with Omar—at one point she even calls him "master". She makes a scene at his apartment's door and begs him to let her in. The sado-masochist relationship is reminiscent of von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (in reverse, with Poppy paralleling Professor Rath's demise and Omar facilitating the degradation, like that film's Lola Lola). The composed Poppy eventually becomes a neurotic slave.

Insecure

Clyde Griffiths (*An American Tragedy*) The peculiar smile at the denouement raises the question—is Clyde defiant? When confronted with authority (or even the likelihood of such encounters), he is known to choose to flee. He escapes from the car crash even though he was innocent and does the same when the police raid the pool saloon. When things get more serious, Clyde is dumbified by the social forces closing in on him. The sheriff's posse so easily locates and apprehends him, without even the need for the anticipated manhunt; subsequently, he is swiftly convicted by the jurors in the trial. The farcical trial—with its physical altercation between the lawmen, display of the canoe, and, not least, a dozen grim-looking male jurors, all older than him—is obviously too much for him. Clyde seems to say anything that would make the prosecutors give him a break. He is disconcerted and his statements are inconsistent. Clyde is overwhelmed.

Doc Harvey (*Shanghai Express*) Harvey is still struggling with Madeline's "a woman's trick" from five years ago. Although she explains to him that she had simply wanted to make him a little jealous and test his love, Harvey had left her then and is still not sure whether she had cheated him. This is the event that led to her becoming Shanghai Lily. Before the rebel attack and Chang's harassment, Harvey appeared to be willing to trust her again; in spite of not really accepting her version of what took place five years ago. Lily remarks that "when I needed your faith, you withheld it; and now, when I don't need it, and don't deserve it, you give it to me." Soon, he is going to withhold it again. Harvey continues to display insecurity; he suspects that Lily might have willingly consented when Chang propositioned her. Even when the fundamentalist Carmichael realizes that her motive was to save Harvey from torture, he keeps grumbling about the incident (an insubstantial allegation, as Hui Fei got rid of Chang before anything could even happen). In that respect, Harvey sounds a lot like the prim Mrs. Haggerty. Towards the end, he goes even further and stupidly commends Carmichael for his earlier misogyny and contempt of Madeline—his "amazingly correct diagnosis of Shanghai Lily." Interestingly, the previously self-righteous reverend has moved on; now, he insists that there is a solid reason to change that perspective, but Harvey is adamant and says that defending her action amounts to "rubbish." Carmichael observes that Harvey's problem is his lack of faith—"love without faith, like religion without faith, doesn't amount to much."

Scornful

Alexander (*The Last Command*) Former Imperial Russian army general is an aristocrat (a grand duke and the cousin of the Czar). Momentous events transform him from eagle-eyed to bleary-eyed. Alexander is imperious of necessity; after all, Alexander is the commander of Russian armies. In a scene, his orderly puts on the general's great coat and smokes his cigars; the domineering Alexander personally scolds and disciplines the envious private. As a general, Alexander's penetrating

eyes terrify his inferiors. Obviously nothing escapes him and his inspections are a nightmare for the troops. This is one facet of the dual nature of the character Emil Jennings plays.

Professor Rath (*The Blue Angel*) The self-important petit-tyrant enjoys power games in the classroom. He is domineering and strikes fear in the hearts of the students with his tiny black book, in which he carefully evaluates their conduct and class performance.

Cowardly

The Boy (*The Salvation Hunters*) The soft-spoken Boy has a mild demeanor and shows no interest in quarrelling, let alone fighting. At the sight of The Brute abusing the little kid, The Boy wants to intervene, but is unconfident. He continues to remain timid and unassertive in The City, even after The Man's scheme becomes obvious.

Unhappy

Mae (*The Docks of New York*) Mae is remorseful and bitter. "Georgette, Tava, Chiquita…" etched on Bill's forearm as tattoos, are some of the names of Bill's past girlfriends from exotic lands. When he jokingly says that he is not bragging about his long list of paramours, Mae regretfully says that she does not brag about hers either. What makes Bill proud is shameful for her. She is troubled by the society labeling her as indecent. Another remorseful character, the more experienced Lou, compassionately supports her as a younger version of herself. Andy's estranged wife Lou doesn't believe marriage is the way out—"I was decent until I married"—but she hopes that Mae would have a better experience.

Dissatisfied

Clyde Griffiths (*An American Tragedy*) Clyde doesn't want to live as a poor and selfless missionary like his parents; he wants to climb the social ladder. To what extent is the society going to let him fulfill his ambitions? Also, to what extremes is he prepared to go, when his options for social mobility turn out to be extremely limited? During the trial, his defense team characterizes Clyde as "spineless" and a "coward", but the character is more complicated.

Clyde is ambitious and hankering; he is not happy with his parents helping strangers in their street missionary work and is not interested in their selfless way of life. Leaving his family and jobs at luxury hotels brings him closer to the social circles he admires; but he wants to be with them, not serve them. An early scene shows him trying to ditch a chambermaid for a weekend outing; this comes right after he is teased by a flirtatious hotel guest. That weekend, he unenthusiastically goes to a party with his co-workers; a night of drinking ends with the fateful car crash. When his mother reproaches him for his choice of friends, his reply is appalling but sincere—he says that he needed to befriend them because he had no other alternatives. When he meets Sondra, he feels that the tide has turned. She represents access to the upper class; boating and horse riding with her exalts him—"how I love this life, this music, this kind of life".

Anxious

Roberta Alden (*An American Tragedy*) Roberta's pregnancy could not have been so openly stated in a post-1934 film. Abortion is also implicitly referred to, but its more explicit discussion would (and did) bother the MPPDA. Once it is clear that Roberta has no option left but to give birth to the baby, she becomes more resolute. It is clear that Roberta's anxiety is turning to desperation and she is firmly demanding a response from Clyde. At this moment, Clyde is seeing Sondra, so her attempts at communication are mostly via phone calls and letters. During the trial, Brown's letters were read out aloud as evidence.[40] Accordingly, in the novel, Dreiser uses Brown's original letters. This impactful device conveys her sense of urgency; as if she "almost shrieked or screamed," comments the novel's narrator at one point.[41] Following several lengthy letters, the narrator reveals Clyde's calculating

mindset: “He must not write her any long and self-incriminating letters. That would be foolish in the face of his determination to marry her.”[42] In the film, title cards and the Roberta’s handwritten notes frequently appear, to persuasively convey her sincere desperation.

Shanghai Lily (*Shanghai Express*) Another visually powerful scene spotlights Shanghai Lily’s hands after she has conversed with Harvey. He is still accusatory and skeptical about her actions; “you appear to be nervous,” he observes, noticing that her hands are trembling. She responds that it is because he has touched her as he lighted her cigarette. Not much comes out of the dialogue and she returns to her compartment; in the dark, while she smokes, her hands are visibly shaking.

Obsessed

Kusakabe (*Anatahan*) The bond between Kusakabe and Keiko has developed over the years in isolation from other humans and it has elements of a master-slave relationship, with roles frequently changing. Kusakabe is obsessed with Keiko; he is watchful when she interacts with any of the sailors. After she defies his authority and freely flirts with Senba, Kusakabe gets violent. When he realizes that he can no longer physically control her, he gets subservient and begs Keiko to stay with him.

Don Pasquale (*The Devil is a Woman*) In a matter of a few flashbacks, Pasqual moves from being jealously protective to pathetically jealous. He interrupts Concha and Antonio’s tryst at the ballroom and yells that he is ready to fight not to lose her—then she shows him his place, fiercely responding with the question, “how can you lose what you never possessed?” During the confrontation, Pasqual is standing in front of a large painting depicting a seemingly epic bull fighting scene. He then demonstrates his marksmanship skills to impress Concha and intimidate Antonio prior to the duel. Despite his bravado, it only takes a moment before he gets humiliated once again by Concha’s admonishing question. Now, the painting is seen more clearly and from a better angle; the scene depicted in fact has a cartoon quality that mirrors his situation.

Moody

Judie Benton (*Macao*) When conversing with Judie Benton, Cochran and Halloran both refer to the chip on her shoulder. She explains that belligerence is a quality necessary for her to survive. She has a temper and acts on a whim. She likes to answer only “small questions” and tries not to reveal too much about herself.

The other prominent female part in *Macao* is Gloria Grahame’s Margie. She is reserved and chooses her words carefully; Margie is as laconic as Cochran, who likens her to a sphinx. Judie Benton is more or less the opposite, she is spontaneous and impulsive. With the help of the blind panhandler, Benton finds where Cochran is held captive; here she gets the wrong impression that Margie and Cochran are romantically involved. Later, in one of the visually interesting scenes of Macao, in a fit of jealousy, she attacks him with an electric fan.

8. RATIONAL

Calm

Poppy Charteris (*The Shanghai Gesture*) The wealthy tycoon’s daughter is prim, spoilt, and petulant. The story follows her demise from being glamorous and self-confident to a neurotic addict and wreck. The finale reveals that she is also Gin Sling’s daughter. Poppy is initially a reserved observer. When Omar and Gin Sling take turns to approach her at the casino, she is languid and prim. Everything is fine as long as she is winning at the roulette table; even when she runs out of luck and her funds evaporate, she is careful to maintain her dignity and self-respect by tipping the croupier. Yet, as she keeps playing, her spoilt nature makes it difficult to digest the losses. Parallel to her addiction to gambling and alcohol, her infatuation with Omar grows and Poppy becomes obnoxious and nasty.

Gin Sling may be the harridan eager to boss and manipulate Poppy, yet the latter is initially calm and controlled; she stands her ground when the two women interact, even wittily teases her about choosing the particular liquor as her obviously made-up first name—the answer is one of the rare moments that Gin Sling ends up revealing a little about her secretive past: “there was a girl called Whisky Soda, too ... and another one called Miss Martini. One called Scotch Highball and another Bénédictine. In other places I might have been called Rose, or Violet, or Lily... or even Poppy!” This is as close to anyone gets in getting a glimpse of the domineering person behind the mask. Similarly, the manipulative Omar finds that Poppy has a high degree of self-confidence. When he tries to cajole her into spending more time at the roulette table, she mildly reproaches him for failing to appreciate the strength of her character—“there's something you don't know about me. I can stop whenever I want to.” These dynamics change for the worse for Poppy as her addiction to gambling and alcohol grows stronger; she becomes subservient to both Omar and Gin Sling.

Nick Townsend (*Blonde Venus*) Nick is a notorious playboy and tolerates no competition when he first approaches Helen; yet he is surprisingly detached—so much so that at critical moments he asks her questions about her love for Ned and reminds her of the necessity to reunite with her son. When her husband returns from Europe and she decides to break up with Nick, he reacts with moderation and simply declares his intention to leave for Europe.

Brave

Antonio Galvan (*The Devil is a Woman*) Antonio Galvan is a sympathetic character and a Republican; which would have most likely factored in to the aversion of the Spanish government to *The Devil is a Woman*. As opposed to Pasqual, Antonio is young and virile; he is able to catch the attention of Concha from a distance during the tumultuous carnival. With his mask, trying to blend in with the crowd and evade the Civil Guard, the dashing character recalls the *Mark of Zorro* (1920) which featured the first film appearance of the masked hero. When they meet, Concha would like to see him without a mask (anticipating the governor’s order to unmask the carnival crowd to exert control and dominate).

Satisfied

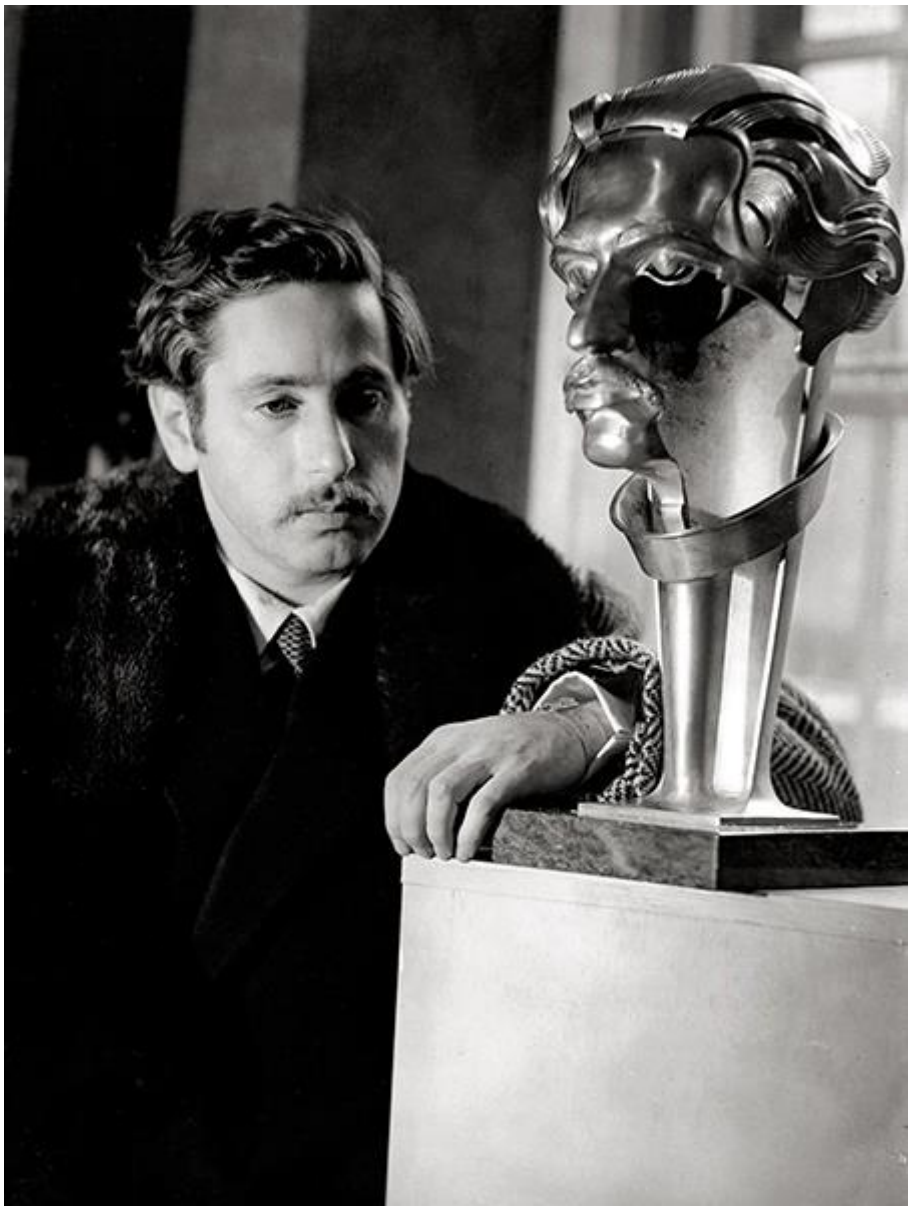
Don Pasquale (*The Devil is a Woman*) In the first flashback scene at the derailed train, Pasqual emerges out of nowhere to offer Concha his support in a somewhat difficult situation. He looks imposing and self-confident in his full dress uniform that displays his military medals and signifies his social status. She is gratified with the attention and finds it useful; the mere opportunity to act as a powerful protector makes Pasqual smug and puffed up.

Confident

Lola Lola (*The Blue Angel*) Lola Lola performs confidently with a disinterested look; she doesn’t care about her audience and she makes no effort to hide the fact that they mean little to her. She is experienced and is used to the attention. Her world-weary demeanor contrasts with Rath’s boyish excitement—not unlike that of his pupils. Lola Lola’s performance as well as her gestures are self-confident and assertive, almost contemptuous. This is most striking at the end; when Rath walks away ruined, Lola Lola sings indifferently—almost cruelly.

Josef von Sternberg (https://thecinemaarchives.com/2019/05/08/the-26th-best-director-of-all-time-josef-von-sternberg/)

With Marlene Dietrich (Wikimedia Commons)



Von Sternberg with his bust by Rudolf Belling (https://bizarrela.com/2018/07/josef-von-sternberg/)

Josef von Sternberg (1932) by David Alfaro Siqueiros

(https://socalarchhistory.blogspot.com/2011/05/richard-neutra-and-california-art-club.html)

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