

Postwar Modernity and the Wife's Subjectivity: Bernstein's Trouble in Tahiti

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Abstract:

Leonard Bernstein's short opera *Trouble in Tahiti* (1951-52) is a humorous but scathing satire on postwar consumerism and bourgeois marriage. Such critiques are now so commonplace that it may be difficult to appreciate the opera's political edge unless it is seen against the backdrop of repression that marked the years following World War II: in an era in which a group as mainstream as the League of Women Voters was denounced as a "communist front organization," *Trouble in Tahiti*'s criticisms risked reprisals.[1]

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Article:

Leonard Bernstein's short opera *Trouble in Tahiti* (1951-52) is a humorous but scathing satire on postwar consumerism and bourgeois marriage. Such critiques are now so commonplace that it may be difficult to appreciate the opera's political edge unless it is seen against the backdrop of repression that marked the years following World War II: in an era in which a group as mainstream as the League of Women Voters was denounced as a "communist front organization," *Trouble in Tahiti*'s criticisms risked reprisals.¹

Many leftists had already been purged from the media and entertainment industries, most notoriously the "Hollywood Ten," the group of screenwriters and producers who were dismissed, indicted, and some imprisoned for refusing to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee.² These individuals were very much on Bernstein's mind during the composition of *Trouble in Tahiti* as he wrote to his sister Shirley from Cuernavaca, Mexico, where he lived during much of the opera's composition, Cuernavaca had become a "great haven for these poor guys."³ Bernstein's letter defends the blacklisted screenwriter Albert Maltz and actor John Garfield, reports that writer/director Robert Rossen appeared "wretchedly lost" without his career and family, and refers to martyr-turned-informer, director Edward Dmytryk as a "ghoul."⁴ "It can

happen to all of us, so we had better start preparing our blazing orations now," wrote Bernstein. "I hope I'm as brave as I sound from this distance when it catches up with me."⁵

Bernstein worried for good reason. He reacted with revulsion to the patriotic rituals of "MacArthur Day" and the "farce of informing in Washington," and he idealistically wished for the "world revolution" to proceed as "bloodless[ly]. .. and as intelligent[ly] as possible."⁶ I deals of that sort earned him a listing in Red Channels, and although his career was never jeopardized, he was called to testify before the committee in 1956.⁷

In the Cold War logic of HUAC and the Dies Committee, all liberationist movements were bracketed together as anti-American, while gay and Jewish people were regarded as suspect *a priori*. Coinciding with postwar affluence, new, virulently heterosexist policies led to purges of gay government workers from their jobs, and the labeling as subversive of groups advocating women's equality, civil rights, or world peace.⁸ Passed over President Truman's veto in 1950, the McCarran Internal Security Act provided legal means to disenfranchise, discredit, and punish these "subversives."⁹ In spite of America's recent and ostensibly moral victory over the Nazi state, hate crimes against Jews continued in the United States during the postwar period, and anti-communism was often a thin disguise for anti-Semitism:¹⁰ the 1950 espionage conviction and 1953 execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg might be seen in this light.¹¹

On such a foundation of reactionary politics, intolerance of difference, racism, heterosexism, and internal terrorism, the newly invented "traditional family" of the 1950s was erected as an American ideal.¹² For an individual like Bernstein - a leftist Jewish musician whose sexual identity fell between the cracks of polarized sex roles - there was much to challenge in bourgeois American culture, yet his "subversive" profile increased his exposure to censure.

The depth and sincerity of Bernstein's political commitments have been called into question recently in Joan Peyser's biography and most infamously by Tom Wolfe in his characterization of Bernstein's and Felicia Montealegre's support of the Black Panthers as "radical chic."¹³ While I would not wish to argue that leftist politics were never incorporated by Bernstein as elements of his hip style, it is unnecessary to hold his personal actions against a standard of ideological purity in order to perceive the political implications in his music-theatrical works or to see their imbrication in the "structures of feeling" of the "cultural front."¹⁴

As a successor to the political music theater of the Brecht-Weill collaborations and of Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937), *Trouble in Tahiti* educates as well as entertains and incorporates popular musical idioms as a democratizing gesture as much as an aesthetic stance. But *Trouble* goes beyond those works in its sensitivity to ways the oppressive regimes of commodity capitalism and heterosexism were inflected by gender: while Sam, the husband of *Trouble in Tahiti*, emerges as a buffoonish caricature of postwar patriarchy, Dinah, his wife, gives expression to the frustration, emptiness and malaise that Betty Friedan was later to call "The problem that has no name."¹⁵ Many of the themes and textual details of *Trouble in Tahiti*

presage those of Friedan's study, and two of these themes—the romanticizing of the South Pacific and the figure of the woman psychiatric patient—are focal points of Dinah's arias.¹⁶

Tahiti's Feminine Mystique

The "feminine mystique," a term coined by Betty Friedan, is an image of feminine modernity that was obsessively marketed to American women from the end of World War II into the 1960s. This image presented love, marriage, and family as woman's *raison d'être*, housewifery as her only legitimate vocation, and the woman herself as a sexualized version of the Victorian "Angel in the House."¹⁷ "Modernity," for American women in the first half of the twentieth century, had signified enlargement of their educational and professional opportunities and entry into civic life, indicated most conspicuously by the achievement of suffrage in 1920. But by mid-century, "modernity" was translated into "New Look" dresses, helpful household appliances, and devotion to housewifery and motherhood.¹⁸ A telling emblem of mid-century feminine modernity was Nixon and Khrushchev's "kitchen debate" of 1959. While the Soviet Premier dismissed America's modern conveniences as "merely gadgets" and noted that Nixon's "capitalistic attitude toward women does not occur under Communism," the vice-president boasted that "in America, we like to make life easier for our women" through labor-saving technology, which incidentally afforded them more time to cultivate their feminine charms.¹⁹

Although the strongest opposition to women's rights organizations came from political conservatives, they by no means held a monopoly on the new feminine mystique. Friedan offers the example of a 1955 commencement address at Smith College by the respected liberal intellectual, Adlai Stevenson:

"Women, especially educated women, have a unique opportunity to influence us, man and boy." The only problem is woman's failure to appreciate that her true part in the political crisis is as wife and mother.... "there is much you can do about our crisis in the humble role of housewife. I could wish you no better vocation than that."²⁰

Stevenson, Friedan reasonably concludes, "dismissed the desire of educated women to play their own political part in 'the crises of the age.'"²¹ While developing nations expanded the rights of women to earn and control their own money and to participate actively in government, the United States seemed intent on turning back the hands of time, refusing, for example, to ratify the UN convention on women's rights.²²

The feminine mystique exacted a high price on American women, for in spite of marrying successful husbands, living in nice suburbs, and raising lots of children, educated, middle-class women who confined their activities to housewifery were frequently unhappy. "I have a great life: I should be happy (but I'm not)" became such a pervasive complaint that medical doctors called it, variously, "housewife's syndrome," "housewife's fatigue," or "housewife's blight." But because the women in Friedan's research (begun in 1957) could not identify the source of their unhappiness, she called it "the problem that has no name."²³

The trouble in Tahiti, that nameless malaise that persists in the face of doing everything by the book, is predominantly Dinah's trouble, *her* unfulfilled longing for intimacy, *her* sense of loss and disappointment. But, whereas women's magazine fiction, Hollywood movies, and psychology books of the late 1940s and 1950s regarded the unhappy wife as somehow personally or psychologically flawed, Bernstein's music and text impart to Dinah's unhappiness a different meaning: the problem lies not within Dinah and her failure to adjust to her feminine role, as so many other texts of the period suggest, but rather within the social system that exacts compliance and conformity in exchange for dull comfort. Like the wives of Friedan's study, Dinah is trapped in her suburban home, reduced to the role of consumer but denied purchasing power. Her trouble takes on metonymical status as an emblem of the alienation inherent in postwar consumerist culture, but in giving center stage to Dinah's discontent, Bernstein also invests it with legitimacy and sympathy, drawing attention to postwar alienation's gendered dimensions.

Alienation and Tahiti's Gendered Spaces

Trouble in Tahiti's seven scenes are organized symmetrically, with duets at the beginning, middle and end, the opening and closing duets set in Sam and Dinah's home, and the central duet on a city street. Each spouse sings a solo on either side of the central duet (see Table 1), and Bernstein calls for the sets for each pair of solos to be placed on the stage at the same time, Sam's scenes 2 and 5 appearing stage left, and Dinah's scenes 3 and 6 stage right. This arrangement facilitates rapid scene changes or "dissolves" through lighting effects (blackouts or fades).²⁴

In spite of the formal and visual symmetry, Sam's and Dinah's solos are qualitatively different. Sam closes a business deal, wins a handball trophy, reveals a flirtation with his secretary, and acts over-generously to a business associate-moments after being stingy with Dinah-always with a self-congratulatory and somewhat ridiculous air: it is only in the duets with Dinah that Sam ever demonstrates that he may have some glimmer of an interior life. But Dinah's solos convey the sense that she is a thinking, feeling subject who interacts with and is affected by her environment.

Table 1. Symmetrical Organization of *Trouble in Tahiti*

Prelude	(Curtain closed)	Trio (huddled around mike)
Scene 1	Breakfast in the Little White Dream House	Duet: Sam and Dinah; Trio offstage
Scene 2	Sam's Office	Solo: Sam; Trio (offstage)
Scene 3	Psychiatrist's Office	Solo: Dinah
Scene 2a	Sam's Office	Solo: Sam
Scene 3a	Psychiatrist's Office	Solo: Dinah
Scene 4	Meeting in the Street	Duet: Dinah and Sam
Interlude		Trio (as Prelude)
Scene 5	Sam's Gym	Solo: Sam
Scene 6	A hat shop	Solo: Dinah

Scene 6a	In front of the Little White House	Solo: Sam (continues scene 5)
Scene 7	Inside the House	Duet: Sam and Dinah with Trio

As Friedan and others have pointed out, the calculated development of postwar American women as super-consumers of manufactured goods for their suburban homes served both to prevent contraction of the manufacturing sector from wartime levels and to offer women domestic activities to replace their productive wartime roles, bequeathing those "masculine" roles to returning veterans.²⁵ The postwar "return to normalcy" thus actively emulated the polarized Victorian gender ideology of "separate spheres." A significant way that Bernstein exposed this binary division in *Trouble in Tahiti* was to demarcate the gender of the terrain: the hat shop and psychiatrist's office in which Dinah sings her arias, and the business office and gym in which Sam sings his, would be recognized as, respectively, "feminine" and "masculine" spaces to postwar Americans. Because Dinah's solos always follows Sam's (she sings scenes 3 and 6 to Sam's scenes 2 and 5), they seem to comment on or respond to his vanity and hubris. Significantly, none of these solos is sung from inside their home, ostensibly Dinah's "sphere."

Bernstein also articulates the separation of the "feminine" domicile and the "masculine" place of employment with a musical interlude leading from scene 1 to scene 2: loud brass and percussion in decentering mixed meters play "Presto" and "furioso."²⁶ The tone of this interlude suggests the anger of the embattled couple's scene 1 duet, but it also seems to represent Sam's commuter train, a symbol of physical distance between the masculine site of production and the feminine, suburban site of domestic consumption.²⁷ Rigid gender difference is thus intrinsic to Bernstein's critique of postwar culture, conveyed here through separate, gendered spaces.

Perhaps taking a cue from Brecht's" epic theater, "Bernstein used production techniques to prevent the audience from unreflectively immersing themselves in the characters and plot of the opera, demanding the maintenance of a critical distance. In the score, he offers the following "Notes on Production":

The composer has conceived of the sets as cartoon-like sketches bold, suggestive, and charming. They should all be black and white, almost like a child's version of each scene. The merest indication of skyscrapers, a traffic light, etc., will suffice ... Clothes, rather than costumes, are indicated. The TRIO should wear evening-clothes... DINAH wears a town suit throughout, except in Scene 1, when she has on a morning-coat, or negligee. SAM wears a conservative business suit.²⁸

The "everyday-ness" of *Trouble in Tahiti's* vernacular musics, conversational, idiomatic speech, popular technologies (e.g., commuter train, cinema) and conventional clothing creates a visual dissonance with the deliberately unrealistic, sketch-like sets.²⁹

The Trio, whom Bernstein calls "a Greek chorus born of the radio commercial," creates an additional distancing effect by standing on the set but outside the action (scene 6). They do not comment on the action so much as advertise the pleasures of family life nestled in the bosom of one of the identical, and therefore interchangeable, suburbs they list in the prelude and interlude:

Mornin' sun kisses the walls ... of the little white house in Scarsdale ... Wellesley Hills ...
Ozone Park ... Highland Park ... Shaker Heights ... Michigan Falls ... It's a wonderful life!
.. Two-door sedan and convertible coupe, and a little white house in Elkins Park ...
Bloomfield Hills... Berkeley Heights ... Delaware Pines ... in Beverly Hills!³⁰

If the identical suburbs speak of conformity, Bernstein depicts bland commercialism in the Trio, whom he describes in the production note as singing "in a whispering, breathy pianissimow, hich comes over the amplifying system as crooning. ... They must be as conventionally handsome as possible, and must never stop smiling" (emphasis Bernstein's).³¹ The Trio's litany of suburban virtues-all sung to an upbeat, jingle-like tune-is punctuated by a four-note motto on the word "suburbia" (see Example 1) constructed of the same intervals as "New York, New York," from Bernstein's 1944 musical, *On the Town*.³² The audible reference to the not-suburban underscores the ironic quality of the Trio's anthem: all of the Trio's claims for the wonderfulness of suburban life are flatly contradicted by Sam and Dinah's misery.

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Example 1. "Suburbia!" motto sung by the Trio in the Prelude Leonard Bernstein, *Trouble in Tahiti: An Opera in Seven Scenes* © Copyright 1953 by Amberson Holdings LLC. Copyright renewed. Leonard Bernstein Music Publishing Company LLC, Publisher. Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., Sole Agent. This and all subsequent textual and musical examples from *Trouble in Tahiti* are used by permission.

Hats, Hollywood, and Modern Woman as "Primitive Other"

In her scene 6 aria, "What a Movie," Dinah describes to an invisible milliner the plot of the new musical film *Trouble in Tahiti*, using hats to illustrate the story (see Figure 1).³³ In telling the story, Dinah moves from sarcasm to complete immersion in the movie's plot, a process conveyed musically by the transformation of the aria's refrain into a complete song, the movie's romantic number "Island Magic." Because this process is crucial to the aria's critique of the scripts of heterosexual romance, it warrants detailed discussion.

After its opening recitative, "What a Movie!" is organized like a strophic song with each strophe, which I will call the "verse," followed by a musically contrasting section, which I will call the "refrain," although the text of the refrain does not repeat (see Table 2). From its first appearance, the refrain is distinguished from the verse in several ways. The heavily syncopated melody of the verse, accompanied by broken chords in even eighth notes, exhibits a blues-like harmonic organization: four measures (really four and a half) of tonic (A flat) are followed by four (really

three and a half) measures of subdominant, then a return to the tonic and a cadence that avoids the leading tone (see Example 2). The harmonic move to the subdominant coincides with Dinah's admiration of the movie's "handsome American," where the flatted seventh of the chord (C flat, the "blue" third of the tonic) on the text "really a man" gives the line a slightly salacious inflection. Generally, the verse's similarities to the syncopated song and dance music of the 1920s signal "American," and Dinah conveys the narrative as a critical outside observer.³⁴

In contrast, the refrain uses only the pitches of a hemitonic pentatonic scale based on F flat, the flatted sixth degree of the original tonic, with a raised fourth(B flat) above the new tonic. (F flat is later reinterpreted as E natural to facilitate the half-step modulation to A major at rehearsal 19.) The syncopations of the verse are substantially mellowed in the refrain: gone are the strong off-beat accents, and note values are expanded at the cadences (the words "day" and "delay") and, more significantly, at the word "legend" near the beginning of the refrain. If the verse emulates the slow harmonic rhythm of the blues, there is no harmonic motion at all in the eight measures of the refrain preceding the two-measure return to A flat: rhythmically and tonally, the refrain seems to represent a laid-back island counterpart to the jittery American verse. Using a "South Pacific accent" and the flawed grammar of a fictive island patois, Dinah quotes the film, thus seeming to speak from *inside* the narrative (see Example 3).

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Figure 1. Manhattan School of Music's 1998 production of Leonard Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*. Performer, Elizabeth Shammash as Dinah. Photo, Carol Rosegg. Used by permission.

Table 2. Structure of "What a Movie"

(<i>fff</i>) What a movie! What a terrible, awful movie! (<i>indignantly removing her gloves, hat, etc.</i>) (Rehearsal #1) It's a crime what they put on the screen! (#3) "Trouble in Tahiti," indeed! "Trouble in Tahiti"—imagine! (From here on, she uses the . . . hats . . . to help illustrate the plot.) There she is in her inch or two of sarong, floating, floating, floating all among the floating flowers.	Accompanied recitative
(<i>Allegro molto</i>) (#4) Then she sees him, the handsome American . . .	Verse 1 (Example 2) A flat major; syncopated 2/4
(#6) There's a legend: (<i>in "South Pacific" accent</i>) "If a princess marry white man and rain fall that day . . .	Refrain 1 (Example 3) F flat pentatonic, raised 4th
(#7) (<i>normal accent</i>) Sure enough on the night of their wedding day . . .	Verse 2
(#9) (<i>nasally</i>) As the natives sing Ah! Olé!	Exotic interjection (Example 9)
(#10) They go crazy With the drumming and chanting and the ritual dance, (<i>legato</i>) While the lovers sing a ballad of South Sea romance.	Refrain 2 temple blocks first reference to "Island Magic"
(<i>From here on she becomes less sarcastic, more sincerely caught up in the telling of the plot</i>) (#11) It's so lovely, I wish I could think of it . . . Oh, a beautiful song! I remember it now!	Verse 3
(<i>She is quite sincere in liking this song</i>) (#13) (<i>mp dolce</i>) "ISLAND MAGIC, Where the midnight breezes caress us, And the stars above seem to bless us . . .	Refrain 3 (Example 5) 2/2; F flat major (normal 4 th); beguine rhythms

Table 2. Structure of "What a Movie," cont.

(<i>suddenly recalling the plot</i>) (#14) Well, in any case, the hero is tied to a tree . . .	Refrain 4 Like Refrain 1
(#15) Anyway, all the natives are crazy now, Running wild with lances and knives . . .	Verse 4
(#17) As the natives sing Ah! Olé!	Exotic interjection 2
(#18) But at this point (<i>pesante, alla marcia</i>) Comes the good old U.S. Navy, a-singin' a song. . . .	Refrain 5 (Example 4) F flat; accomp. in 6/8; snare drums
(#19) (<i>con anima</i>) Ev'rything now is cleared up and wonderful; Ev'ryone is happy as pie . . .	Verse 5; A major (a half-step higher); fast countermelody; extension
(Dinah is emoting fully, dancing all over the stage. Trio offstage on mike) (#21) "ISLAND MAGIC!! Where the palm trees whisper together . . . (#22) Island Magic, with the one I love very near . . . (#23) Island Magic, only you, my darling, could weave it . . .	Verse 6 = "Island Magic" F major; Beguine, broader than before Bridge: B flat min; G flat major Dominant pedal (E flat 7)
And I simply cannot believe it really is mine! (#24) Island Magic! Island Ma—" (<i>She comes to her senses</i>)	Arrival in F (Example 5)
(<i>wildly gathering up her things</i>) How long have I been standing here chattering? If I don't get going this minute, there won't be any dinner when Sam comes home!	Tempo primo. Recitative (Example 7)

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Example 2. Scene 6, rehearsal 4 and 5: Syncopated, bluesy verse of "What a Movie!"

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Example 3. Scene 6, "What a Movie!" Refrain at rehearsal 6: Accent on "otherness"

Although the double-voiced structure of "American" verse and "Other" refrain is not consistent throughout "What a Movie!" generally the verses tell about the plot while the refrains enact it. Thus, while the verse remains relatively rigid in its organization, the refrain is able to accommodate the various musical transformations that depict Dinah gradually succumbing to the movie's reality. For example, the fifth appearance of the refrain depicts a rescue and is marked by a meter change in the accompaniment and the addition of snare drums playing military cadences (see Example 4).

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Example 4. Scene 6, "What a Movie!" Refrain⁵ rescue music, *pesante* and *alla marcia*.

But Dinah's fascination with the rescue is less significant than her utter seduction by the ideology of romance, which also uses the refrain as its vehicle. "Island Magic," that "ballad of South Sea romance," is first mentioned, although not by name, at the end of the second refrain, and, as Bernstein's stage directions indicate, it is here that Dinah begins to let down her guard and to move from critical outsider to imagined insider:

Refrain 2: They go crazy with the drumming and the chanting and the ritual dance,
(legato) While the lovers sing a ballad of South Sea romance.

(From here on, she becomes less sarcastic, more sincerely caught up in the telling of the plot, until she is eventually entirely carried away.)

Verse 3: (mp) It's so lovely, I wish I could think of it: Da da dee da da dee da da. It was called "Island Magic," I think it was. Oh, a beautiful song! (ff sub.) I remember it now!³⁵

The third verse is followed by two consecutive statements of the refrain, suggesting perhaps that Dinah wishes to linger there a bit longer. In the second of these refrains (refrain 4, rehearsal 14), Dinah speaks in her narrative, "outsider" voice, but the first (refrain 3, rehearsal 13), immediately following the verse, quotes from the film the beginning of the song "Island Magic" (see Example 5).

"Island Magic" exaggerates the relaxed affect of the original refrain: its metric expansion from 2/4 to cut time, with the quarter note retaining its original value, doubles the time needed for its eight or so measures to unfold, and this more languid pace is most evident on the word "magic," positioned where "legend" appeared in the first refrain. Syncopations are reintroduced to the

melody over a vamping accompaniment based on Latin dance rhythms. But these syncopations are qualitatively different from those of the verse, picking up the hemiola effects of the accompaniment and inviting a more sensuous bodily motion. At this point it is unclear whether the island in question is in the Caribbean rather than the South Seas, but the magic is self-evident: piano and dolce, the song projects romance in the language of 1930s musical comedies, and the flattening of the refrain's raised fourth (to B double-flat) is like turning the lights down low.

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Example 5. Scene 6: Refrain 3; Dinah quotes "Island Magic," which she likes "quite sincerely."

The fourth statement of the refrain immediately follows the first "Island Magic" quotation and seems to "correct" it by returning to the music of the previous refrains and by Dinah's return to her "outsider" voice. And the fifth statement, although it has narrative significance with respect to Dinah's progressive immersion into the movie's fantasy, is something of a detour in terms of the development of "Island Magic" (see Example 4, above). But the sixth appearance of the refrain expands "Island Magic" into a complete song form with its own contrasting bridge.³⁶ A half-step higher and even broader than the initial appearance of the song, "Island Magic" never returns to the verse of "What a Movie," and thus seems to represent Dinah's complete seduction by the romantic promises of the film. Abetted by the backing vocals of the insidious Trio, Dinah "emot[es] fully, dancing, all over the stage."³⁷ Bernstein labeled the song a "beguine," a popular ballroom dance of the thirties (and the subject of a Cole Porter song): of course, Dinah must dance. Fully engaged by the film's fantasy, she is able momentarily to break loose from her prison of housewifery, to transcend her drab existence by "trying on" the various subject positions of the movie, represented by the hats she uses to illustrate the plot.

The bridge of "Island Magic" passes through several third-related harmonies before arriving at an E flat 7, suggesting a resolution to the original tonic, A flat. But instead, it resolves to F, the tonic of "Island Magic," and as it does, it sounds like a Hollywood cliché, accompanied by *glissandi*, a crescendo, and an accented downbeat at the arrival of F. This resolution draws attention to its oddness—a moment of calculated musical excess that forcefully turns Dinah away from the tonality of her earlier critical awareness (A flat) and toward a manipulated happy ending (see Example 6).

"Island Magic" is denied a final cadence as Dinah snaps out of her celluloid-induced trance, but its F tonic persists like a posthypnotic suggestion, concluding scene 6 in a brassy, chromatic cadence whose accents echo the excess and faux triumph of the earlier resolution (see Example 7). In its transformation of the refrain into a seductive beguine, "What a Movie" effectively demonstrates how cultural products engage musical charm to manipulate, placing critical faculties at risk.

Dinah's seduction by the promises of Hollywood is abetted by indiscriminate exoticisms that parody colonialist attitudes. Pentatonic scales depict the exotic in both the recitative that precedes the first verse (Example 8) and in an interjection following the second and fourth verses (Example 9). The two passages bear some similarities (their pitch collections are transpositions of one another, and they share certain melodic gestures, e.g., a 3-1-flat 7 cadence, emphasizing the modal seventh degree and the tritone between it and the third scale degree),³⁸ and each has some degree of heterophony. But each passage projects a different notion of non-Western time: while the additive rhythmic groupings (3+3+2) of the interjection's accompaniment might suggest a South Asian rhythmic cycle, the unmetred rubato and sustained drone of the recitative convey the "floating" indicated in the text, invoking the putative timelessness of non-Western locales. Additional exotic flavor is contributed by the slow decay of a tam-tam (struck at the beginning of the recitative, but not apparent in this reduced score) (see Example 8). A different trope is invoked by the exotic interjection, that of the "restless natives": too inarticulate to speak, they emote nasally in wordless vocalise (rehearsal 9) while temple blocks represent their tribal drums (3 mm. after rehearsal 10). Shouts of "Ole!" underscore their freewheeling otherness in this crazy quilt of cultural signifiers (see Example 9).

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Example 7. Scene 6, A less glamorous ending.

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Example 8. Scene 6, Exotic recitative (2 mm. before rehearsal 4): The "timeless Orient."

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Example 9. Scene 6, "Natives" vocalize nasally in a pentatonic scale, then shout "Oll!" (rehearsal 9, 10). Which South Seas island did you say?

Because parody necessarily reproduces the thing it critiques, parts of the scenario and music are potentially offensive, particularly the dramatic rescue finale, the bastard child of a John Wayne action film and a Busby Berkley production number (rehearsal 14-20; see Example 4, above):

Refrain 4: Well, in any case, the hero is tied to a tree
(Did I tell you he's a flyer who got lost at sea?)

Verse 4: Anyway, all the natives are crazy now,
Running wild with lances and knives;
Then they pile up the wood for the sacrifice,
And the witch doctor comes,
And he sets it on fire.

Interjection: As the natives sing "Ah-! Ah-! Olé!"

Refrain 5: But at this point (*alla marcia*) comes the good old U.S.
Navy, a-singin' a song;
They come swarming down in parachutes, a thousand strong!

Verse 5 [faster; half-step higher]: Everything now is cleared up and wonderful;
Ev'ryone is happy as pie;
And they all do a great Rhumba version of ...
"Island Magic," of course!
It's a dazzling sight;
(*ad lib*) With the sleek brown native women
Dancing with the U.S. Navy boys,
and a hundred-piece symphony orchestra!

Beyond its parody of Hollywood convention, "What a Movie!" plays upon and works against popularized notions of the South Pacific as an emblem of a compelling but dangerous primitive past, notions that permeated the American public consciousness during World War II and persisted through the 1950s. While the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical (1949) may be the most conspicuous example of romanticizing the South Pacific, there were many others, including the 1942 film *Song of the Islands* in which Betty Grable played a "native girl" to Victor Mature's (white) American man in uniform.³⁹ Relationships of this configuration became a staple of the genre.⁴⁰

The significance of the white man/native girl trope for American women of the postwar period becomes clear on Betty Friedan's reading of Margaret Mead and "functionalist" anthropology, a linchpin in the construction of the feminine mystique.⁴¹ Mead's studies in the real South Pacific in the 1930s exerted considerable influence throughout the postwar period and were often interpreted to suggest that American women would be more content if only they, like South Sea islanders, would fulfill their "natural" feminine role without protest. Mead's scholarly works—especially *Three Primitive Societies* (1935), *From the South Seas* (1939), and *Male and Female* (1949), which Bernstein himself read⁴²—were frequently quoted and excerpted in publications ranging from textbooks to popular press women's magazines that pointed to the fulfillment and happiness of primitive others whose acceptance of their sexual role—their function—was their guarantee of happiness. By the 1960s Mead commented negatively on the passivity of American women, and she is seen by many today as a pioneering feminist, but during the postwar era, her work contributed, however unwittingly, to the romanticization of the South Seas in an agenda that sought to roll back the economic and social progress that American women had made in recent decades. Like Victor Mature and Betty Grable, American men wore the authoritative uniform of modernity, while American women in the postwar years were asked to take on the role—to wear the hat—of the "primitive," colonized "other".

Much more than a pastiche of exoticisms and vernacular styles, "What a Movie!" represents an application of Bernstein's prodigious musical vocabulary to the tasks of expressing narrative action and emotional transformation, demonstrating both the powerful appeal of the South Pacific's mythological romance and its inability to sustain the burden of our desires: at the height

of her tropical rapture, Dinah's wifely responsibilities reassert themselves, and she rushes off to prepare Sam's dinner and await his return.

A View from the Couch: Modern Woman as a Psychiatric Patient

Dinah's scene 3 aria and the following duet constitute the emotional core of the opera. Significantly, Bernstein titled his self-searching operatic sequel *A Quiet Place* after a line from this aria, just as this opera, *Trouble in Tahiti*, draws its name from Dinah's scene 6 aria: both titles suggest a privileging of Dinah's subjective experience. Scene 3 is intercut with Sam's scene 2 and shares with it a brief ritornello that introduces each strophe (see Example 10). In scene 3, however, the ritornello is played by strings alone—heard here for the first time in the opera. The timbral change creates an effect strikingly different from that of the same melodic material in Sam's scene 2, where woodwinds predominate: perhaps due to their associations with classical music, Dinah's strings impart to her aria a seriousness of purpose not evident in Sam's music.

As Dinah recounts to an invisible psychiatrist her dream of a weed-choked garden, the music of the verse shifts restlessly between major and minor modes and between duple and triple meters. The intervallic similarity between the melody's opening and the trio's "Suburbia!" motif suggests a relationship between the glorification of the suburbs and the loss of the garden (see Example 11). Dinah's refrain, "There is a garden," smoothes the agitation of the verse into regular four-bar phrases in common time with a clear G major tonality, suggesting stability and resolution, while the tune's simplicity and repetitive patterns suggest "naturalness," or perhaps even "genuineness" (see Example 12).

The insertion of Sam's scene 2a into Dinah's scene 3 aria emphasizes the contrast between Sam's buffoonery and Dinah's sincerity: Sam's directionless vocal line and accompanying wide leaps separated by rests (see Example 13) sound even more trivial when juxtaposed with Dinah's straight forward refrain. There is no break in the music from scene 3 to scene 2a, but rather Sam's and Dinah's musics overlap, fading in or out with the lights. Immediately after hearing Dinah pour out her heart to her psychiatrist, we learn in scene 2a that Sam has flirted with (and perhaps sexually harassed) his secretary, giving substance to fears his spouse had expressed in the opening duet. It is evident that Sam's callousness has something to do with Dinah's presence on the analyst's couch, and scene 2a's insertion into Dinah's aria helps to make this clear.

[PICTURE IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT]

Example 10. Scene 3, Psychiatrist's Office. Introductory ritornello.

[PICTURE IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT]

Example 11. Scene 3, opening of verse: Restless in suburbia.

[PICTURE IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT]

Example 12. Scene 3, opening of Dinah's refrain: Resolution in the garden.

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Example 13. Scene 2a, at rehearsal 11: Sam recalls making a pass at his secretary.

Dinah's longing to resuscitate an edenic past sets the tone for the ensuing scene 4 duet, where the refrain from her scene 3 aria, recast into triple meter and played at "tempo di 'Gymnopédie'" (see Example 14), serves as the orchestral accompaniment. The couple meet by chance on the street, make excuses to avoid each other's company, and reflect on their relationship, but they reflect individually, neither facing nor engaging each other. Although they both express the desire to "get back to the garden," the impossibility of doing so is suggested by the staging (in italics and parentheses) set against the alienating, sketchy sets:

D: I'm on my way to lunch with Susie.

S. And I've got a date with old A. J. Same old bus'ness lunch. Too bad we can't have lunch toge...

D: I must run I'm late already. See you tonight. (*She continues on*)

S: (*not turning*) See you tonight. (*continues on. They both stop suddenly, back to back*)

Both: Why did I have to lie... S: To avoid another hour together?

[. . .]

S: ..where is our garden with the quiet place?

Both: Why can't we try to find the way again? ... Can't we find the way back to the garden where we began?

(Dinah looks tentatively back at Sam, sees his back turned, and exits slowly.)

Sam looks tentatively back at Dinah, sees her walking off, and continues sadly on.)

On the heels of Sam and Dinah's heart-wrenching duet, the Trio's peppy commercial for suburbia (Interlude) is particularly devastating, exposing the falsity of suburbia's claims and emphasizing a causal relationship between those claims and the couple's alienation. A reprise of the prelude with additional verses, the interlude takes on new meaning in this context, ringing cynical and even sinister against the couple's misery.

[PICTURE IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT]

Example 14. Scene 4 duet, based on Dinah's refrain from her scene 3 aria.

Because Dinah sings scene 3 in her psychiatrist's office, she evokes another cultural commonplace of the 1940s and 1950s: the woman psychiatric patient. Betty Friedan argued that during the postwar years, psychoanalysis was routinely used to "adjust" women to their "feminine role": a successful analysis resulted in the woman's marital contentment.⁴³ Films of the postwar period-notably *The Snake Pit* (1949) and *Three Faces of Eve* (1957), but also Hart and Weill's wartime musical, *Lady in the Dark* (1941; filmed in 1944)-adopted this premise: under the guidance of a male psychiatrist, maladjusted female patients are remade into wife material.

Each story ends with or gestures toward marriage as an emblem of resolution.⁴⁴ Even though in practice men also underwent analysis, the psychiatric patient of popular films and plays was nearly always female, a gender convention whose unquestioned acceptance is underscored by the background of *Lady in the Dark*: although Moss Hart drew his inspiration for the story partly from his own experiences in psychoanalysis, he chose to make the psychiatric patient in his play a woman, rather than a man, which conformed to the prevailing expectation.⁴⁵

Bernstein's take on psychoanalysis in *Trouble in Tahiti* differs from that of contemporaneous films in several respects. Although it is Dinah, not Sam, who sees the psychiatrist, the term "psychiatric patient" is not categorically female in Bernstein's opera: we know this because in scene 1, Dinah counsels Sam, "You should go, too."⁴⁶ Because Dinah's psychiatrist is invisible and never speaks, there is no male authority figure to interpret her dream, correct her behavior, or "adjust" her to her feminine role, thus undoing the gendered premise of the conventional psychiatric plot of the period. Rather, Dinah uses her therapy hour as an opportunity for soliloquy, projecting the subjective depth of her character: she recounts; she emotes; she sings; she weeps; she leaves.

Finally, the marriage trope as an emblem of resolution is eschewed in *Trouble in Tahiti*. Following several failed attempts at honest conversation against the backdrop of the Trio's crooned commercial for the cozy comforts of the bourgeois domicile (scene 7), Sam finally proposes—in startling spoken dialogue—that the couple go a movie, "that new musical, *Trouble in Tahiti*." Dinah acquiesces, and they proceed mournfully toward the false promises of "Island Magic," evidently the only way they know to escape the cloying sterility of the hearth. Nothing has changed: as a concluding gesture, Dinah dons her hat—not the hat of some exotic character, but that of an unreconstructed, unfulfilled housewife.⁴⁷ She is never "adjusted," and satisfactory resolution is denied.

Bernstein's "Labor Feminism" and Cultural Front Aesthetics

Trouble in Tahiti's significance as a political statement has been underestimated by a number of recent commentators, and there may be several reasons for this. In the absence of clear-cut agit-prop, critics frequently seek personal rather than social meanings in works, looking to composers' biographies to the exclusion of cultural contexts. For example, recent Bernstein biographers have pointed to *Trouble in Tahiti*'s similarities to his parents' marriage or cited the close proximity of the opera's composition to Bernstein's own reluctant marriage to Felicia Montealegre, arriving at biographical or even psychoanalytic readings of the opera. Joan Peyser notes that "Sam" and "Dinah" were the names of Bernstein's father and grandmother, but she also sees in Sam and Dinah Lenny and Felicia. Naming such an undesirable character "Sam," Peyser reasons, was Bernstein's revenge against his father, a scenario that fits the Oedipal paradigm of her biography.⁴⁸ It is also tempting to read the short opera backwards from its sequel, *A Quiet Place* (1983), into which *Trouble in Tahiti* was later incorporated. But reading retrograde is

risky, for the interval of more than thirty years between the composition of these works spans two very different eras in which Bernstein had different musical, political, and personal goals.

Less biographically, but still focused on individuals rather than society, other interpretations have faulted the characters of Sam and Dinah, suggesting that they must have psychological problems to be so unhappy in the midst of material plenty, labeling the marriage as "dysfunctional," or calling the opera "a portrait of a marriage on the rocks."⁴⁹ But I submit that this is not a portrait of any marriage in particular, but rather a landscape of gender politics in postwar America. Thus, if Bernstein did make an autobiographical connection with *Trouble in Tahiti*, I would expect him to identify not with Sam, the unimpeachable patriarch, but rather with Dinah, the devalued "other" in a regime of rigid cultural expectations valuing capitalism, consumerism, and heterosexual marriage.⁵⁰

More than a symbol of his own political, ethnic, and gender marginality, however, *Trouble in Tahiti* enacts Bernstein's ideals of writing socially significant music in accessible styles. Although the work is remarkable in its anticipation of the themes of *The Feminine Mystique*, especially because feminism was not a particular concern of the political company Bernstein tended to keep, his efforts to unite the political and the aesthetic are clearly informed by the precedents of the "cultural front," the site at which the "Popular Front" met the "cultural apparatus."⁵¹ Comprised of leftists of various stripes-not only communists-the (mainly) 1930s social movement known as the Popular Front coalesced around the positions of pro-labor, antifascism, and antiracism.⁵² Although not everyone in the Popular Front held this belief, the artists and intellectuals of the cultural front thought that the cultural apparatus-the institutions that made available for consumption such cultural products as music, education, literature, and television-could be "refunctioned" to serve egalitarian, humanitarian, and "culturally uplifting" purposes. It was from this principle that Bernstein expressed his desire to compose socially significant music, and his role as a popularizer of "high" art through the new medium of television is consonant with these cultural front goals.⁵³

According to cultural historian Michael Denning, the personnel of the cultural front most often hailed from three groups: antifascist emigres, such as Kurt Weill and Berthold Brecht; disaffected modernists, such as Aaron Copland and Marc Blitzstein; or ethnic, second-generation Americans born between 1904 and 1923, who were raised during the Depression by working-class immigrant parents.⁵⁴ Leonard Bernstein, born in 1918, was a member of this Depression generation. The artists of the Depression cohort of the cultural front sought in particular to create distinctly American art forms that did not erase ethnicity and blend into Anglo-American protestant culture, and opera and musical theater were particularly interesting to them.⁵⁵ The infusion of vernacular idioms into "high" art forms-for example using jazz music in opera-was one way they attempted to convey this "ethnic American-ness."⁵⁶

Bernstein's own ethnicity left more identifiable marks on later works such as his Third Symphony, "Kaddish" (1963), but his concern to find and to define-a truly American musical style emerged early in his career. His bachelor's thesis at Harvard, "The Absorption of Race Elements in American Music" (1939), argues for a distinctly American idiom, "formed by integration of the spirit of Negro and New England idioms with the composer's own ethnic music," and for the composer's obligation to serve society.⁵⁷ That the aesthetic goal of creating an American music was also a political one is clear from Bernstein's discussion of Roy Harris's *a cappella* choral work, *A Song of Occupations*, on a text by Walt Whitman: Bernstein writes, "Harris achieves a glorification of the American language-the staccatos and irregular accents of American daily speech; the glorification of American labor, of American progress."⁵⁸ Excessive glory aside, it is evident that Bernstein's musical aesthetics were imbued with the spirit of the "progressive era," the "age of the CIO."

Bernstein's participation in the 1937 Harvard Student Union recreation of the premier of Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* is well known: just as Blitzstein had been compelled to do, due to a Federal Theater Project shutdown, Bernstein directed and played (from memory!) all of the orchestral parts from a piano on stage, sufficiently impressing Blitzstein that he became a mentor to the younger composer in matters both musical and political. A member of the Communist Party until 1949, Blitzstein-like Bernstein-worked with prominent cultural front artists such as Lillian Hellman, Orson Welles, and Bert Brecht, and at the time of his murder by antigay thugs was composing an opera about the duo *célèbre*, Sacco and Vanzetti.⁵⁹ Although Blitzstein's works range from the straightforward agit-prop style of *Cradle* and *No for an Answer* (1941) to the more artsy *Regina* (1949, based on Hellman's *The Little Foxes*), his only commercial success was his translation of the Brecht/Weill *Threepenny Opera*. That success he owed in part to Leonard Bernstein, who gave the translated work its premier at the same Creative Arts Festival where *Trouble in Tahiti* premiered, at the new Brandeis University (1952). As festival director, Bernstein staged *Threepenny Opera*, although its premier at New York City Opera had been canceled due to anticommunist pressure.⁶⁰ Both operas fit Bernstein's conception for the festival, whose keynote he envisioned as a challenge to the Cold War siege on the arts.⁶¹

In the mode of the cultural front, Blitzstein unabashedly called his works for the musical theater "operas," and he shared with Bernstein the desire to craft opera that was socially meaningful and specifically American. Bernstein dedicated *Trouble* to Blitzstein, as Blitzstein had dedicated *Cradle* to Brecht,⁶² and at least one early reviewer, Leonard Burkat (who had known Bernstein since their days at Boston Latin School), recognized *Trouble's* relationship to both Blitzstein's operas and to Brecht and Weill. Burkat based his comments about *Trouble* on rehearsals for the Brandeis production and on the performance of the revised version at Tanglewood in 1952, and he prefaced these remarks with a substantial discussion of Weill and Blitzstein, opining that Bernstein was to Blitzstein as Blitzstein was to Weill. Burkat saw in the works of all three composers

the musical play-with-a-purpose in a language and idiom obvious and accessible to all but concealing from all save the initiate the extent of its art. This was a means of expression of special value, for it made possible a simultaneous release of creative energies and communication of a social message.⁶³

Bernstein's use of vernacular musics in high art forms was motivated by a political agenda, but it also had an expressive purpose: as *Trouble in Tahiti* shows, musical styles carry particular connotations and thus signify in ways both subtle and more obvious. His 1949 discussion of Blitzstein's *Regina* demonstrates Bernstein's notions of musical style as serving not only illustrative functions, but also ironic or evocative ones:

Regina. .. perhaps one of the most ruthless characters in show business, sings melodies of enormous gentility and suaveness precisely at the moments when she is being most unscrupulous and heartless[. .. She] extorts from her brother. .. in a heavenly Brahmsian phrase. She flirts with an old beau ... in a dolce waltz that conceals some of the most venomous lyrics known to man. And she blackmails her two brothers in a noble Handelian recitative. [...] In the "Cradle" and *No for an Answer* ... [Blitzstein] has been using straight jazz, quasi-symphonic music, Mozartean recitative, romantic recitative, ballads, comic songs of a burlesque-show nature-anything that suits the purpose at hand With Regina we have a kind of apex, a summation of what Blitzstein has been trying to do.⁶⁴

Trouble in Tahiti is clearly informed by similar principles, calling upon Bernstein's expansive stylistic vocabulary to give the story and its details depth and nuance as well as broad humor, all in the service of a social critique projected in an American idiom. If this results in eclecticism, it is an eclecticism come by honestly, motivated by musical and social aims that are inseparable from its aesthetic presentation.

As profound an influence as Blitzstein was, Bernstein's leftist politics preceded this relationship. His brother Burton regards Bernstein's Harvard activities and the Spanish Civil War as radicalizing influences,⁶⁵ but Bernstein's labor roots go even deeper, and this background bears on the gender sensitivity evident in his critique of postwar culture. Although his father's position as a successful businessman, his relative affluence, and his Ivy League education did distinguish him from the average individual of the cultural front's Depression cohort, Bernstein's mother's family, the Resnicks, had strong labor sympathies and had worked in the textile factories in Bernstein's hometown of Lawrence, Massachusetts.⁶⁶ His mother, Jennie Resnick, and her father, Samuel Resnick, were present during the great Lawrence textiles strike of 1912, the most significant labor action before the Congress of Industrial Organizations was formed in the 1930s. Thus, if we wish to seek the influence of Bernstein's family history on *Trouble in Tahiti*, his mother's left-wing sympathies might be a more significant place to look than Oedipal conflict with his father.

Working in industries closely related to textiles, members of the needle trades, along with mineworkers, constituted the core of the radical CIO, and their objectives exceeded the pay-and-benefits model that most folks now regard as the purview of unionism to embrace a new social vision.⁶⁷ Although the union leadership of the needle trades was almost exclusively male, the workers were overwhelmingly female, and it was here, in the needle trades, that women workers gave voice to their particular needs and aspirations in an incipient "labor feminism." Their concerns were given expression in the 1937 labor revue *Pins and Needles*, which combined "Popular Front political satire [with] a song cycle of working class romance."⁶⁸ Premiering concurrently with *The Cradle Will Rock*, *Pins and Needles* played to working-class New York audiences for three years, making Broadway history and becoming a Popular Front icon.

Like *Trouble in Tahiti*, *Pins and Needles* uses romantic love as a lens through which to examine society more generally, and it does so from the perspective of women.⁶⁹ For example, "Nobody Makes a Pass at Me" "is the lament of a woman betrayed by advertising's sexual sell,"⁷⁰ recognizing both the powerful appeal of the promises of commercial culture and their ultimate inability to deliver on those promises:

I wash my clothes with Lux, my etiquette's the best,
I spend my hard-earned bucks on just what the ads suggest.
O dear, what can the matter be? Nobody makes a pass at me.
I use Ponds on my skin, with Rye-Crisp I have thinned,
I get my culture in, I began *Gone with the Wind*.
O dear, what can the matter be? Nobody makes a pass at me.⁷¹

Far from being a strictly interpersonal matter, romance is a commodity that is sold to us with consequences that are both politically charged and gender-specific, a view that parallels that of "What a Movie!"

Some of the lyrics for *Pins and Needles* were written by John LaTouche, who also wrote lyrics for Popular Front cabaret and collaborated with Bernstein and the cultural-front notable Lillian Hellman on *Candide*. It is likely that Bernstein either saw or heard about *Pins and Needles* at least by the summer of 1939, after his graduation from Harvard, when he spent the summer in Greenwich Village with Adolph Green, fraternizing with left-wing artists like Judy Holliday and Betty Comden, and occasionally playing piano for "The Revuers" (Green, Comden, and Holliday) at the Village Vanguard.⁷² Comden and Green later collaborated with Bernstein on *On the Town* and, more significantly for the present argument, *Wonderful Town*, which is set in Greenwich Village in the 1930s—a time and place that Bernstein idealized, and a hotbed of cultural front activity. *Wonderful Town* (1953) followed immediately on the heels of *Trouble in Tahiti* and is informed by a similar feminist sensibility. Adapted from the play *My Sister Eileen* by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov, *Wonderful Town*'s original source was the autobiographical tale of left-wing feminist Ruth McKenney, also titled *My Sister Eileen* (1938). The real Ruth McKenney made her name as a comedy writer, although her aspiration was to be a

"proletarian writer" (and she did indeed publish a documentary account of United Rubbers Workers in Akron, Ohio: Industrial Valley, 1939).⁷³ Her character in *Wonderful Town*, Ruth Sherwood, struggles to be taken seriously and repeatedly encounters conflicts between her professional goals and her personal relationships in ways that are specific to the situation of working women. Significantly, the idea to set *My Sister Eileen* to music seems to have come from Bernstein's (working-woman) sister, Shirley.⁷⁴

Wonderful Town was written for Rosalind Russell, who had successfully played Ruth Sherwood on stage. "Ros" was a paragon of the strong, smart, wisecracking woman of 1940s films—a character-type that became an endangered species after World War II. In the song, "100 Easy Ways (to Lose a Man)," Ruth Sherwood's potential love interests flee from her intellect, worldliness and outspokenness.

Now the first way to lose a man,
You've met a charming fellow, and you're out for a spin,
The motor fails, and he just wears a helpless grin.
Don't bat your eyes and say, "What a romantic spot we're in."
[spoken rapidly] Just leap out and crawl under the car with a gasket
and fix it in two seconds flat with a bobby pin.
That's a sure way to lose a man.
He takes you to a baseball game, you sit knee to knee.
He says, "The next man up at bat will bunt, you'll see."
Don't say, "What's a bunt? This game's too hard for little me,"
[spoken] Just say, "Bunt! Are you nuts? With one out, two men on
base, and a left-handed batter coming up, he'll walk right into a
triple play, same as the fifth game in the World Series in 1923."
That's a sure way to lose a man!
A sure, sure, sure, sure way to lose a man, a splendid way to lose a
man—just throw your knowledge in his face, he'll never try for
second base.⁷⁵

If, as I have argued, *Pins and Needles*, *Trouble in Tahiti*, and *Wonderful Town* all share a sensitivity to gender politics—to the gender-specific ways that social conventions, ideologies, relationships, and cultural products like movies and advertising bear on individuals—they do so in ways specific to their milieus. Postwar America was a place quite different from 1930s New York, for the radical culture of the Popular Front had been decimated by the Cold War fear of communism and all that was associated with it. Ruth Sherwood could appear in a period piece set in the 1930s, but could not represent the concerns of women in the postwar era: for that, we need Dinah. Yet *Trouble in Tahiti*'s ties to the labor culture of the age of the CIO are strong. Marc Blitzstein (who did not "get" *Trouble in Tahiti*), said of his own labor opera, *The Cradle Will Rock*, that it was a parable for the middle class: "big business . . . is ready to engulf [the middle class], buy and sell them out exactly as it does labor, exploit and discard them at will."⁷⁶ The opera showed "various degradations suffered by the middle class—some of them funny, some

of them less funny."⁷⁷ *Trouble in Tahiti* updated that parable for the postwar era, showing new and more modern degradations: ostensibly privileged, the middle-class couple suffers from the rigid division of gender roles, pressures to conform and to consume, and a lack of intimacy. As *Trouble in Tahiti* and *The Feminine Mystique* point out, under such a regime all genders suffer, although it is women who appear to have the "problem."

Notes

I first presented these arguments in a paper for the Society for American Music at Toronto 2000. Subsequently and independently, Carol Oja has developed similar arguments regarding *Trouble in Tahiti*, and these will appear in her forthcoming book on Leonard Bernstein in the Yale Broadway Masters series from Yale University Press, Geoffrey Block, series editor. I thank Professor Oja for her generosity in sharing her work on this topic prior to publication. My arguments remain my own.

1. This claim was part of Walt Disney's testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee, October 24, 1947. Thomas M. Leonard, *Day by Day: The Forties* (New York: Facts on File, 1977). Facts in this reference source are organized by date; subsequent references will cite only the date.

2. The communist purge of Hollywood appears to have begun with the HUAC investigations (June 30, 1945), and to have been fueled to a substantial degree by the desires of studio owners and executives, for example, Walt Disney, Jack Warner, Sam Wood, and Louis B. Mayer, to rid themselves of the constraints of powerful writers' and actors' unions (September 20 and October 20, 1947). The "Hollywood Ten" refused to testify before HUAC in October and November of 1947. The U.S. Motion Picture Association announced that they would be fired on November 25, 1947, and they were indicted for contempt by a federal grand jury on December 5, 1947. That same year, Hanns Eisler had been deported for his communist sympathies. See Joan Peyser, *Bernstein A: Biography*, rev. and updated (New York: Billboard Books, 1998). The Screen Writers Guild and the Screen Actors Guild eventually cooperated with the push to remove communists from their ranks, the SAG finally requiring loyalty oaths (January 14-15, 1948). It is difficult to assess how much of this compliance was a result of intimidation and fear and how much was motivated by the genuine reservations many American liberals had about what they perceived as totalitarian aspects of Soviet communism. See Ronald Radosh, "The Legacy of the Anti-Communist Liberal Intellectuals," *Partisan Review* 67, no. 4 (April 2000). Available online: <<http://www.bu.edu/partisanreview/archive/2000/4/radosh.html>> (accessed Nov. 10, 2000). In addition to targeting the film industry, J. Edgar Hoover set his sights on a number of other cultural institutions, such as newspapers, books, radio, some churches, schools, colleges, and fraternal orders (September 30, 1946). The extent to which HUAC was seen as a patriotic institution is suggested by the fact that protests against its violations of personal freedom were broken up by angry war veterans (November 1, 1947).

3. Letter to Shirley Bernstein dated May 16, [1951], held in the Leonard Bernstein collection of the Library of Congress. This and following letters available online: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/lbhtml/lbhome.html>.

4. Maltz was one of the original Hollywood Ten. Garfield had appeared in Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty*, among other leftist vehicles, and died of a heart attack in 1952 after years of uncertain work and continuous FBI surveillance. Spartacus Education, U.K., available online: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAGarfieldJ2.htm>. Rosen had been blacklisted after refusing to testify before the committee, but returned to the United States in 1953, admitted his membership in the Communist Party, and named others. Dmytryk was one of the original Ten, but returned to the committee as a "friendly" witness in 1951, apparently the ghoulishness to which Bernstein refers.

5. Letter to Shirley Bernstein dated May 16, [1951].

6. Letter to Helen Coates dated April 30, 1951. Bernstein concludes this paragraph, "Oh, where is FDR?"

7. American Business Consultants, *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television* (New York: Counterattack, The Newsletter of Facts to Combat Communism, 1950), 16-17. *Red Channels* was a pamphlet distributed free to those in a position to hire those in the entertainment industry, as a sort of updating of the blacklist-entertainment figures who were not called before the committee in the first round of testimony. It was compiled by TV producer Victor Harnett and former FBI agent Theodore Kirkpatrick from FBI files, the right-wing journal *Counterattack*, and *The Daily Worker*. The 151 listings included not only Bernstein, but also Blitzstein, Copland, Pete Seeger, and Piedmont blues singer Josh White (Paul Robeson had been blacklisted during the first round of testimony). The affiliations listed under Bernstein's entry include the National Negro Congress, a petition protesting the deportation of Hanns Eisler, The Scientific and Cultural Conference for World Peace, and People's Songs, Inc. See Spartacus Education.com for a description, and Authentic History.com for photos of selected pages: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USARedC.htm>; <http://www.authentichistory.com/images/1950s/redchannels/redchannels.html>. See Peyser, *Bernstein*, 244, for one account of Bernstein's 1956 questioning.

8. The groups deemed subversive included the Congress of American Women (HUAC, October 22, 1949) and the Women's International Democratic Federation, a UN consultative body (Senate Judiciary Committee, May 10, 1949). The Senate voted to fund an investigation of "homosexuals and other moral perverts" (May 24, 1950), and, according to a State Department report, 425 employees were dismissed for their "homosexual proclivities" between 1947 and 1953 (April 12, 1953).

9. The McCarran Act instituted the Subversive Activities Control Board. The intensification of communist purges in 1950 coincided with U.S. entry into the Korean war (1950-53), officially and popularly construed as a war against communist aggression, although there are other interpretations. (See, e.g., I. F. Stone, *The Hidden History of the Korean War* [New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969; c. 1952].)

10. An increase on attacks against Jews in the United States was reported in 1951 (December 10, 1951).

11. Although there remains some question as to whether Julius Rosenberg spied for the Soviet Union, the lack of due process during the trial and appeal process, the prosecutorial and judicial misconduct, perjured testimony, unduly harsh and probably illegal sentencing, and the unprecedented speed of the execution demonstrate that the Rosenbergs were treated with considerable prejudice. They remain the only Americans to have been executed for spying against the United States, despite the demonstrable damage by latterday (gentile) double-agents Aldrich Ames and Robert Hanssen, and they are featured on the anti-Semitic website "Jewwatch.com." For documents from the Rosenberg trial, see the "Famous Trials" website of Professor Douglas Linder of the Law School of the University of Missouri, Kansas City: <<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROSENB.HTM>>(accessed Jan.19, 2004). For a critique of the trial, see the website of the National Committee to Reopen the Rosenberg Case: <<http://www.rosenbergtrial.org>> (accessed Jan. 19, 2004). For critiques of more recent evidence (the declassified "Venona cables" and testimony of former KGB agent Alexander Feklisov), see Walter Schneir and Miriam Schneir, "Cables Coming in from the Cold," *The Nation* (July 5, 1999), available at <<http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?I=19990705&s=schneir>>(accessed Jan. 19, 2004), and Walter Schneir, "Tales from the KGB," *The Nation* (April 7, 1997): 5-6.

12. For a compelling assessment of the construction of gender and concepts of family during the postwar era, see Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992). Coontz points out, for example, that, although postwar America attempted to emulate Victorian families, the emphasis on female sexiness created contradictions: it is difficult to play simultaneously the roles of Angel in the House and sex kitten. On the notion of tradition as something that is invented, see Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

13. Peyser is clearly critical of what she seems to regard as the insincerity or at least inconsistency of Bernstein's politics. See, for example, her account of Bernstein and racial equality in chapter 31, 411-20. Humphrey Burton, who knew Bernstein personally and was involved in a number of his productions, seems more conflicted, sometimes seeming to portray Bernstein as a good liberal, other times downplaying Bernstein's connections to radical politics, appearing to rationalize them to seem more "mainstream." Humphrey Burton, *Leonard Bernstein*

(New York: Doubleday, 1994). See, for example, his account of Bernstein's investigation in connection with the NBC Symphony of the Air (254), or his account of the "radical chic" incident (398ff.). *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996).

15. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963; rpt., New York: Dell, 1964). Friedan's research included interviews with individual women and readings of a variety of texts, including women's magazine fiction, textbooks, and cinema. More recently, *The Feminine Mystique* has been challenged by some feminist scholars who have argued that Friedan's samples of women's literature and choice of interview subjects were not representative, and that Friedan herself reproduced the racist and heterosexist presumptions of the Cold War period. See Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 229-62. In Friedan's defense I note that, like their nineteenth-century model, postwar gender norms were ideals more than lived experience for many working-class women, but such gender ideals are one way that elites wield cultural power. *The Feminine Mystique's* status as a bestseller attests to its resonance with the experiences of large numbers of women. Other important articles in *Not June Cleaver* point to various ways that women resisted the roles they were asked to take on after the war. Also valuable for understanding how ideologies and policies affected women, and how some women resisted them, is Brett Harvey, *The Fifties A: Women's Oral History* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

16. Both *The Feminine Mystique* and *Trouble in Tahiti* level criticism at conformity, suburban culture, and consumerism, and they share some surprising details, such as Friedan's account of doctors advising housewives to relieve their suburban boredom by going to town to see a movie (which is precisely what Dinah does), or Friedan's retelling of a wife's frustration because, lacking an income of her own, she has to ask her husband for money (which Dinah does in scene 1).

17. See Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*. Not incidentally, the postwar period saw the origin of breast augmentation surgery and estrogen replacement therapy: Robert Wilson's now notorious *Feminine Forever* (New York: Evans, 1966) is only the most conspicuous example of selling to women postwar ideals of femininity along with new medical technologies.

18. The "New Look," a style introduced by Christian Dior in 1947, used many more yards of fabric than clothing of earlier decades and featured a "feminine" pinched waistline and a full skirt. These skirts were supported by stiff petticoats, analogous to Victorian crinolines. See Pauline Weston, "1950's Glamour" (n.d.) on the Fashion-Era. Com web site: <www.fashion-era.com/1950s-glamour.htm>(accessed March 18, 2003).

19. Transcript of the "Kitchen Debate," a public discussion between Nixon and Khrushchev at a model home in the American National Exhibit in Moscow, July 24, 1959, available online: <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?documentprint=176> (accessed Jan. 19, 2004). Most of the text of the debate also appears in "The Two Worlds-A Day Long Debate," *New York Times*, July 25, 1959, 1, 3. The relationship to leisure and beauty was emphasized in the *Times* article by noting Nixon's admiration of some swimsuit models immediately before his remark to Khrushchev that, with the automatic sweeper in the display, "you don't need a wife." Other American periodicals contrasted the image of leisured and well-groomed American housewives to "bedraggled" Soviet women. See Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 10-11.

20. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* 5, 3-54.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Following the UN convention on women's rights, the 1950s saw women's first participation in electoral politics in El Salvador (February 2, 1950), Peru (October 28, 1954), Honduras (January 24, 1955), Mexico (July 4, 1955), Tunisia (May 5, 1957), Iraq (March 26, 1958), and Nepal (February 18, 1959); and laws granting women legal and property rights on a par with men were enacted in Cuba (December 12, 1950) and Spain (April 17, 1958). Significant holdouts in this movement toward women's equality were Egypt, where the Grand Mufti condemned women's agitation for suffrage as contrary to Islamic law (May 2, 1952), Switzerland, whose male voters rejected a referendum to allow women to vote and hold office (January 31, 1959), and the United States, whose Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, announced to the Senate that the Eisenhower administration would ratify neither the UN convention on equal rights for women (already ratified by eighteen nations, including Russia, France, and Yugoslavia), nor the UN Human Rights Covenant (April 6, 1953).

23. Friedan, "The Problem That Has No Name," 11-27.

24. As Bernstein indicates in the production notes, "Much depends on precise and imaginative lighting... The piece should move swiftly, avoiding any pause for set changes." Leonard Bernstein, *Trouble in Tahiti: An Opera in Seven Scenes* @ Copyright 1953 by Amberson Holdings LLC. Copyright renewed. Leonard Bernstein Music Publishing Company LLC, Publisher. Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., Sole Agent. Reprinted by permission. All text and music quoted refer to the piano-vocals core (New York: G. Schirmer, 1953).

25. Friedan, "The Sexual Sell," chap. 9 of *The Feminine Mystique* 1, 97-223.

26. *Trouble in Tahiti*, rehearsal no. 17 of scene 1.

27. The last words Sam utters before the interlude are "I'm late for my train," and one available video production depicts Sam traveling in the train during the interlude. Leonard Bernstein,

Trouble in Tahiti, video recording (Kultur, 1992). Recorded in 1973; produced in association with London Weekend Television. Dinah: Nancy Williams; Sam: Julian Patrick. Trio: Antonia Butler, Michael Clark, and Mike Brown. Columbia Wind Ensemble, Leonard Bernstein conducting.

28. "Notes on Production, "Trouble in Tahiti.

29. Trouble in Tahiti's everydayness, including its theme of a troubled marriage, clearly had precedents in the Zeitopern of the interwar period. On this subject, see Susan Cook, *Opera for a New Republic: The Zeitopern of Krenek, Weill, and Hindemith* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1988).

30. "Prelude" and "Interlude," *Trouble in Tahiti*. The production notes give the location of the action as "any American city and its suburbs."

31. "Notes on Production" in *ibid*.

32. The intervallic similarity was also noted by Jack Gottlieb in *The Music of Leonard Bernstein A: Study of Melodic Manipulations* D, MA diss., University of Illinois, 1964, 41, although he does not attribute ironic significance to it.

33. Bernstein indicates as much in the stage directions in scene 6, four measures after rehearsal 3.

34. How vernacular music with African American origins comes to signify unmarked "American-ness" is a problem, but one beyond the scope of the present argument. Jazz style in *West Side Story* works much the same way vis-a-vis the ethnically marked "Latin" music of the Puerto Ricans.

35. Trouble in Tahiti, scene 6, rehearsal 10-12. Words in italics are Bernstein's musical or stage directions.

36. I count the third refrain as the first eight measures of this song form. There are several extra measures, but it is organized like a typical thirty-two-bar song form with a statement (reh. 13), a repeat (reh. 21), a bridge (reh. 22), and a return (6 mm. after reh. 23).

37. Stage directions, scene 6, rehearsal 21, *Trouble in Tahiti*.

38. I refer to the A-F-E flat that Dinah sings at the end of example 8, and the G-E flat-D flat she sings immediately before "O!" in example 9.

39. The James A. Michener book *Tales from the South Pacific* (1947) preceded Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical, and the stage production was followed by a film version in 1958.

40. The white man in uniform/native girl trope is, of course, familiar to us from a number of operas, including *Carmen*, *Madam Butterfly*, and *Lakmé*.

41. Friedan, "The Functional Freeze, the Feminine Protest, and Margaret Mead," chap. 6 of *The Feminine Mystique* 1, 17-41.

42. Letter to Shirley Bernstein dated April 26, 1950. Leonard reports that Male and Female is "more than fascinating." Much of the eight pages of this letter, hand written from Israel, are devoted to sorting through his feelings about Felicia, compared to whom "other girls (and/or boys) meant nothing," which suggests that Bernstein may have turned to Mead to try to understand his sexuality.

43. Friedan, "The Sexual Solipsism of Sigmund Freud," chap.5 of *The Feminine Mystique*, 95-116.

44. But compare Hitchcock's film *Spellbound* (1945) with Ingrid Bergman and Gregory Peck, where the genders of psychiatrist and patient are reversed, but the script of heterosexual romance remains in force.

45. Geoffrey Block, *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical From Show Boat to Sondheim* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 137.

46. Compare this to *Lady in the Dark*, which bears no suggestion that men could benefit from psychoanalysis. Bernstein himself was a psychoanalytic client for many years, but this in itself, of course, does not account for his inclusion of men in the category of "psychiatric patient."

47. Dinah's last words spoken alone are "I'll get my hat" (scene 7, one measure before rehearsal 9), and the stage directions indicate that she puts the hat on (9 mm. after rehearsal

9). These directions are not followed in the 1973 London production, but they create an elegant resonance with "What a Movie!" when they are.

48. Peyser, *Bernstein*, 208. Humphrey Burton and Burton Bernstein also note the family names, and Humphrey Burton further subscribes to Peyser's revenge theory. *Burton Bernstein, Family Matters: Sam, Jennie, and the Kids* (New York: Summit Books, 1982), 79; *Burton, Leonard Bernstein*, 223.

49. Grace B. Jackson, "Trouble in Tahiti," *Opera News* 17 (Oct. 27, 1952): 13; John Allison, "Opera around the World: Melbourne and Sydney," *Opera* 50, no. 2 (February 1999): 198-200; *Burton, Leonard Bernstein*, 222.

50. If Bernstein entertained such a cross-gender identification, it would not have been the first time: at fourteen he staged a transvestite production of *Carmen* with neighbor children playing cross-gender roles and himself in the title role. See Peyser, *Bernstein* 2, 8-29.

51. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1997), x viii-xix. "Cultural apparatus" is a term Denning takes from the radical social theorist C. Wright Mills.

52. Ibid., 4.

53. In addition to his television appearances conducting the New York Philharmonic and the NBC Symphony of the Air, Bernstein appeared in programs with explicit pedagogical aims, beginning with *Omnibus*, a magazine show, in 1954, and later the Young People's Concerts on CBS. In these shows, Bernstein spoke directly to the audience on a number of musical topics, including Beethoven, jazz, and musical theater. He also conducted *Trouble in Tahiti* for television a few months after its stage premier on November 16, 1952.

54. Denning, *Cultural Front*, 58-62.

55. Opera was also thematized by cultural front artists who were not musicians, for example in Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*. See Denning, *Cultural Front*, 19-20.

56. Ibid., 9, 319-22.

57. Leonard Bernstein, "The Absorption of Race Elements in American Music," bachelor's thesis, Harvard University, 1939; reprinted in Leonard Bernstein, *Findings: Fifty Years of Meditations on Music* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 39, 40. This concern for ethnic specificity might provide us with another clue that the couple of *Trouble in Tahiti* represents the dominant culture rather than Bernstein's family members, for some of the suburbs mentioned (like Wellesley Hills) were "restricted" (from entry by Jews) during Bernstein's youth.

58. Ibid, 89.

59. In 1932 Blitzstein wrote a play on Sacco and Vanzetti's execution, *Condemned*.

60. Peyser, Bernstein, 227. Bernstein had turned down an invitation to conduct *Threepenny Opera* in 1951 during the time he was living in Cuernavaca, composing *Trouble in Tahiti*, and trying to establish himself as a composer rather than a conductor.

61. Letter to Helen Coates dated January 6, 1951. He proposes an opening convocation "with a very distinguished speaker who will talk on ... the Arts and Society in America today. Someone like [prominent left-wing writer Archibald] Macleish."

62. Denning, *Cultural Front*, 289.

63. Leonard Burkat, "Current Chronicle: Boston," *Musical Quarterly* (1953): 94-98.

64. Leonard Bernstein, "Prelude to a Musical Adaptation," *New York Times*, Oct. 30, 1949, copyright © 1949 by The New York Times Co. Reprinted with permission. Also reprinted as "Prelude to an Opening," liner notes of Marc Blitzstein, Regina, New York City Opera production (Columbia Masterworks recording, © 1953).

65. Bernstein, *Family Matters* 1, 31.

66. Ibid., 46-48. Meryle Secrest also ascribes importance to Bernstein's mother's labor background in her biography, *Leonard Bernstein A: Life* (New York :Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

67. Denning, *Cultural Front*, 7 .

68. Ibid., 296.

69. Of course it is not unusual to refract the political through the personal, to use interpersonal relationships as allegories for broader issues. Many of Orson Welles's plays and films, for example *Citizen Kane*, were parables about fascism told through individual tragedies. Discussed in Denning, *Cultural Front*, 377ff. *Citizen Kane* has some interesting similarities to *Trouble in Tahiti*, especially the use of the breakfast table as a site to display the deteriorating marriage (set in *Kane* to a theme and variations by Bernard Herrmann).

70. Denning, *Cultural Front*, 304.

71. "Nobody Makes a Pass at Me" from the musical *Pins and Needles* by Harold Rome ? 1938 (Renewed) Florence Music Co. Inc. All rights administered by Chappell & Co. All rights reserved. Used by permission. Warner Bros. Publications U.S. Inc., Miami, Florida 33014. Also reprinted in Denning, *Cultural Front*, 304-5.

72. "Vanguard," of course, is a political term. The periodical of the short-lived Composers Collective was titled *Music Vanguard*. Denning, *Cultural Front*, 288.

73. Denning, *Cultural Front*, 142.

74. In the letter of May 16 [1951], Bernstein writes, "Tell me more about the Chodorov play. Is it just a play, or is there [a] chance for real music? The idea is fine."

75. "One Hundred Easy Ways to Lose a Man" by Leonard Bernstein, Betty Comden, and Adolph Green @ 1953 (Renewed) Chappell & Co., Inc. and Universal-Songs of Polygram International Inc. All rights administered by Chappell & Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission. Warner Bros. Publications U.S. Inc., Miami, Florida 33014.

76. Quoted in Denning, *Cultural Front*, 290. Original source seems to be the *Daily Worker*. Blitzstein's assessment of *Trouble in Tahiti* was that the music was lively, but the subject matter "dreary." Quoted in Burton, *Leonard Bernstein*, 435.

77. Denning, *Cultural Front*.