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Below the Stars: How the Labor of Working Actors and Extras Shapes Media Production, by Kate Fortmueller. University of Texas Press, 2021, 216 pp.

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In *Below the Stars: How the Labor of Working Actors and Extras Shapes Media Production*, Kate Fortmueller traces the bottom-up histories of Hollywood by focusing on the perspective of the vast and lesser-known population of working labour, examining their interactions with a variety of industrial forces and breaking down the stratified divisions separating types of actors (e.g. extras vs. character actors), and discusses different conditions actors face working in areas such as film, TV, commercials, and video games. Rather than examining any specific films, the book draws heavily on union documents and individual accounts, as well as numerous interviews Fortmueller conducted with workers and industry insiders from 2014 to 2018. Building on the work of scholars such as Miranda Banks and Danae Clark, Fortmueller seeks to supplement the study of the Hollywood union histories and compensate for what Clark identifies as the "absence of scholarship on acting, labor, and professional norms" in Film Studies (7). Structurally, the book is divided into four chapters, which deal with "four historical moments of industrial and technological upheaval" (4).

Chapter One, "Hollywood Freelance: How Actors and Extras Shaped the Film Industry", discusses various plights extras faced in early Hollywood history, the early attempts of unionising extras, and the emergence of Central Casting. In the section "Actor Inequality", through the example of Leo Rosencrans, an aspiring actor whose letters document his brief foray into the movie business in the 1910s, Fortmueller illustrates some typical difficulties and systemic inequalities extras faced, including the difficulty of finding jobs, the meagre wages that can hardly cover one's basic expenses, exploitative employment agencies overselling their services, inconsistent work, and long hours (22–23). Additionally, using Pamela Robertson Wojcik's definition of "type", which Wojcik defines as "physical characteristics or markers of identity such as race or gender", Fortmueller points out that the criterion of "type" limited the type of roles people of colour might play (to background characters) (24). Another problem was the prevalent nepotism, which posed obstacles for new blood to enter the industry. The section "Organizing Extras" illustrates the difficulties of unionising extras through various unsuccessful attempts, including those initiated by Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), Motion Picture Players Union (MPPU), and Actor's Equity Association (AEA). IWW's attempt in 1914 was bogged down by the fact that the extras were "organizing against the decentralized power of private employment agencies and studio management" (29–30). MPPU, formed in 1918, attempted to increase wages and to eliminate casting agencies. However, it was short-lived and was subsumed by Actor's Equity Association (AEA) in 1920 (30). Fortmueller analyses MPPU's failure by building upon Sam Stoloff's framework of brand image, claiming that since extras did not possess "unique qualities or brands" as the stars did,

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they needed the help of actors with more power to achieve their collective goals (31). AEA tried to help extras find jobs and obtain full daily rates, however, being a theatrical union, it was ineffective in working with screen actors, misjudging their willingness to work for low pay. In the section "From Casting Couch to Central Casting", Fortmueller explains the public perception of Hollywood as a "cesspool of immorality" during the 1920s, and then, observes that Central Casting's primary concern was to fix Hollywood's "symbolic moral image" rather than dealing with "material realities of labor conditions" in the industry (32). Fortmueller then sets out to evaluate Central Casting's influence over labour conditions, suggesting that while Central Casting resolved the issues of exploitative agencies and regulated wages and payroll procedures, it failed to promise extras reliable work and to eliminate nepotism. In the last section, "(Dis)unity Among Actors", Fortmueller analyses the reason that actors were hard to organise: actors as a group were demographically diverse, with individualised career trajectories and experiences, which made them difficult to unite under one set of goals. To support the analysis, Fortmueller mentions AEA's failure in bringing film actors into the union, pointing out the diverging agendas of film actors and theater actors. Fortmueller also mentions the marginalisation of extras within the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), which led to the shifting of jurisdiction over extras to Screen Players Union (SPU), and later, to Screen Extras Guild (SEG).

Chapter Two, "Actors and Television's First Golden Age", focuses on how the emergence of television prompted unions to reorientate of their priorities and to determine the jurisdiction over this new media. The first section, "Understanding Television", focuses on Associated Actors and Artistes of America (4As)'s speculative discussions about the future of television during the medium's formative years. The discussion soon escalated into a coastal battle between unions in New York and unions in Los Angeles because of the geographical divide between the theatre business and the film industry. The next section "An Uncertain Profession From Coast to Coast" explains the situation in New York and Las Vegas separately. Discussing New York, Fortmueller notes that theatre actors needed the additional income stream television would bring, contextualising such need in the expansion of the theater labour market during the mid-twentieth century and the shrinking numbers of productions (62–63). In relation to Los Angeles, Fortmueller notes the film economy's gradual shift towards a predominantly freelance labour system, as well as the increase of international productions, in which U.S. studios took advantage of cheaper non-union foreign labours; Fortmueller claims that opportunities in television would offset the negative consequences of these trends to a degree (65).

In the following section, "Location, Location, Location", Fortmueller discusses the process and outcome of the debate over the merger of all performers' unions, a debate that was triggered by discussions over television jurisdiction. Those opposing the merger worried that collapsing the various types of acting practices would diffuse the union's interests, thereby weakening the identity and solidarity of that union. Those in favour of the merger felt that it would provide more and more streamlined experience to those working across venues, making it easier for them to develop individualised creative careers. Eventually, because of the resistance from the West Coast unions, SAG and SEG, the merger plan had failed. Afterward, 4As proposed a separate unit to bargain for television called Television Authority (TVA). SAG, however, secured jurisdiction over filmed television and retained its autonomy from the TVA, which secured jurisdiction over live programmes. The section "The Margins of Television" discusses and evaluates the role SEG played in the television jurisdiction. Since early television programs rarely needed extras, SEG remained relatively marginalised in the discussions about television. Still, SEG's alliance with SAG in thwarting the merger plan helped SEG retain control over film work in Los Angeles in the face of the new medium. The section "A New

Mode of Production or Distribution" picks up the discussion about TVA and looks at the aftermath of its establishment. TVA and SAG had conflicting opinions over the jurisdiction of telefilms: while SAG believed it should have jurisdiction over telefilms, since telefilms and films had similar production processes, TVA viewed television and films as separate modes of distributions, and therefore, believed that it should have jurisdiction. The National Labor Review Board (NLRB), the arbitrator, ruled in favour of SAG, agreeing with SAG's logic that film and telefilms rely on the same "technical process" (85). As a result, for other unions, there was no more leverage or incentive to lure SAG and SEG into a merger, leading to 4As implementing an alternative plan: merging TVA and American Federation of Radio Artists (AFRA) into the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA).

Chapter Three, "Reuse and Replace", focuses on the unions' efforts to devise a workable system and bargaining for residuals, a type of payment for reuse of materials, which, according to Fortmueller, represents a "financial acknowledgment of the continued value of performances" (91). In the section "Replay-Ability and The Specificity of Screen Performance", Fortmueller traces the process through which residual had become increasingly important as the technology advanced, no longer irrelevant as it used to be in the pre-television era, arguing that strike for residuals reflects a shift of focus from insufficient workdays to residuals as means to offset underemployment. The "Acting Goes (More) Commercial" section discusses how the rise of commercials in the late 1950s influenced labour conditions. Even though commercials opened new job opportunities for union labour, the competition for jobs only intensified because of the expanded membership of SAG, a result of SAG's extended jurisdiction into numerous new venues. The membership expansion also led to confusion of union boundaries, which resulted in the resurfacing of the merger discussion. Fortmueller then proceeds to discuss the first success SAG had in negotiating for residuals, achieved through a thirty-three-day standoff. The section titled "The Brief Trouble with Reruns" discusses how reruns had transformed from an audience member's problem into a union problem that entailed lost workdays, charting SAG's efforts, including a petition with the government, which aimed at eliminating the Prime Time Access Rule, and the Save Television Original Programming (STOP) campaign, which was aimed at convincing government to cap reruns and at obtaining residuals equal to 100% of an actors' salary for each replay. Fortmueller observes that while residuals would become an important point of connection between SAG and AFTRA, it further excluded SEG from the concerns of the actors' union (107). In the section "Reruns of Racism and Sexism", Fortmueller examines reruns in relation to the condition of women and minority groups, discussing the effort of Women's Committees and Ethnic Minority Committees in addressing systemic discrimination in casting, claiming that reruns worked against the goals of these committees by limiting original programming and thereby limits "the casting opportunities for more diverse groups of actors" (110). In "Residual Revisited", Fortmueller discusses how SAG and AFTRA navigated through the shifting media landscape in the 1970s and 1980s, in which television production companies increasingly turned to the quiz show format. Since this type of non-narrative show relied on participants rather than performers, the trend made it more difficult for actors to find jobs. The rise of videocassettes technologies pushed SAG and AFTRA to "draw a hard line with VHS and other supplemental market agreements", and through negotiations and strikes, managed to settle on a high rate of 4.5 percent of the producers' gross (116). Fortmueller claims that the victory demonstrated "the effectiveness of joint bargaining" between SAG and AFTRA, which prompted the two unions to reconsider a merger (116). Fortmueller also illustrates the marginalisation of SEG by tracing its two unsuccessful attempts to merge with SAG.

The last chapter, "New Media, Old Labor Conflict", examines how the new media environment, while opening up new opportunities, brought new challenges to actors,

demanding the adoption of nonspecialised skills, challenging the cultural significance of professional actors, and exacerbating worker instability. The chapter draws heavily upon the interviews Fortmueller conducted with an array of actors at different stages of their careers. In the section "Valuing Voice Acting", Fortmueller explores the labour condition of voice actors. The chapter briefly sums up the history of voice acting since the 1930s, noting the recent trend of star-driven voice-over in studio-animated films, which had pushed trained voice actors out of prominent roles in most visible animated projects. Fortmueller then moves on to discuss the characteristics of voice acting, noting the expectation that actors should be able to do a variety of distinct voices. In video games, the expectation translates into recording sessions in which actors would run through vast numbers of different types of dialogue such as ambient dialogue, AI cues, and cut scenes, while offering variations to a given take. Based on her interviews with several voice actors, Fortmueller reveals two common problems actors encounter doing voice acting for games. First, a lack of transparency existed as regards performance expectations: actors were often asked to read in-game lines without being provided the basic contexts of these lines nor informed about the project. Second, there was no definition of or regulation over excessive vocal strain to protect actors from voice damage. The section "Industrial Foundations of Deregulation" identifies a series of changes concurrent to the deregulation including the rise of reality television, the collapse of SEG, and the increase in distribution platforms—changes that posed new challenges for workers. Networks turned to Reality TV to offset the rising production costs, taking advantage of its cheaper production costs and capitalising over nonunion labour and participants. The annexation of SEG into SAG had given extras more power yet created a new level of stratification of interests within the union. Fortmueller then moves on to discuss SAG-AFTRA's achievement of a new contract over jurisdiction of internet commercials, which pushed advertisers into union-voiding strategies such as overseas location shooting. The section "Home/Office" Convergence" examines the trend in which self-recorded audition has replaced in-person booth audition as the dominant model for auditions. Sending the auditions through the internet accelerates the process of casting but takes away the learning and networking opportunities the actors would have in in-person auditions. The new model also creates new expectations towards performers, such as the possession of technological tools and versatile skillsets that combine "aptitudes of the critic, artist, and technician" (145). Fortmueller then discusses the challenges the new condition imposes upon union activities, citing McRobbie's argument: the increasing isolation of many contemporary actors prevents them from developing "identities as part of a group of professionals" and collectively finding solutions to systemic problems (147). The section "The Voice Actors Strike" focuses on the process and consequences of the 2014 SAG-AFTRA's negotiation with nine game companies on the problem of residuals, the lack of transparency in performance expectations, and the risks associated with vocal strains. Fortmueller comments that this bargain was unique in that it was the first time SAG-AFTRA confronted businesses outside of traditional Hollywood labour structures, notes the absence of a history of unionisation in the video game industry, and claims that the increasing connections between Hollywood and the game industry would push the "Silicon Valley cultures" into ceding ground to the talents (154).

Summing up, Fortmueller reminds the reader of the importance of grounding the present in history, as she suggests, "focusing solely on the present-day lives of actors obscures the reality that labor's present is the culmination of past events and struggles," noting the reoccurring patterns such as Hollywood's capitalist impulse to minimise labour costs, as well as the continual resurfaces of exploitative agencies and services (156–57). Additionally, Fortmueller casts doubt on the popular discourse that one should do whatever one needs to do to "stay in touch with the craft", suggesting that such discourse "perpetuates the existing culture of Hollywood" and that viewing one's work as "purely rooted in love and passion" undermines one's position as a worker (158).

Overall, the book is a valuable read that untangles, with exceptional clarity, the convoluted histories of labour unions in various media landscapes and stages of technological developments, presenting a comprehensive picture of industrial forces from the unique vantage point of below-the-star actors. The last chapter, structured around a range of interviews, is especially vivid and flows more smoothly than the three denser chapters preceding it, which are somewhat challenging to grasp. The challenge, I would argue, lies in the complexity of the histories the book is dealing with and in the book's ambition to faithfully reflect this complexity.

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