***Working Girl* and Second Wave Feminism: Re-Viewing the Eighties**

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The 1988 edition of Chambers English Dictionary defines the yuppie with reference to a preceding, more active, noun:

**yuppie, yuppy** (both also with *cap.*), *yup’i, n.* a *y*oung *u*rban *p*rofessional, a dismissive designation for the young city careerist, the word now being commoner than **yumpie** (q.v.) and even explained by some as derived acronymically from *y*oung *u*pwardly-mobile people.

The now-defunct and forgotten formulation of the yumpie or Yumpie was more explicit in its account of eighties mobility: ‘one of the *y*oung *u*pwardly mobile people’ – also a ‘dismissive designation’ – albeit this time aimed at ‘young *rising or ambitious* professionals’ (my emphasis). This etymology clearly outlines the temporality of the yuppie as a term, a concept and perhaps as a tribe. The yuppie quickly became historical, deployed in critical works to reference a particular moment. Barry Keith Grant’s 1996 essay on yuppie horror film looks back on ‘an emergent and seemingly distinct class of young urban professionals … that embraced values of conspicuous consumption and technology as unambiguously positive’ (5). Grant’s subsequent debate references *After Hours* (1985), *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985) and *Something Wild* (1986); all films which feature yuppie protagonists that stray from the straight and narrow. Such narratives address a perceived crisis for protagonists who have achieved upward mobility and are anxious to secure their social status (Grant 1996). These examples also evidence the ways in which gender politics shadow the yuppie through all his – and her – incarnations. This essay returns to a yuppie romantic comedy which addresses debates in the eighties that continue into the present; women in the professions. The ‘ironic’ double-entendre of Mike Nichols’ *Working Girl* (1988) alludes to the prostitutive quality of corporate culture, featuring a protagonist who is not yet a yuppie and charting her yumpie progress through the corporate jungle.

*Working Girl* was a box-office hit on its release, offering audiences a Hollywood narrative of one woman’s success in the workplace (Hallam 1994: 173). Tess McGill (Melanie Griffith) takes the Staten Island ferry every day with her best friend Cyn (Joan Cusack) to a secretarial job in a Manhattan brokerage. *Working Girl* follows Tess’s journey from secretary to manager, from working class to professional, via an impersonation of her female boss, Katherine Parker (Sigourney Weaver). On the way to her happy ending, Tess meets Jack Trainer (Harrison Ford), notoriously assuring him that she has “a head for business and a bod for sin.” Tess’s journey is thus geographic, economic and cultural. In order to achieve her goal – and to “pass” as management – Tess has to divest herself of her big hair, big jewellery, makeup and her two-timing boyfriend (Tasker 1998: 39-43). Tess is stripped back – figuratively and literally, with several scenes focussing on a near-naked Griffith – and re-built as a bourgeois woman. The film represents a popular feminism firmly sited in the emotional rather than the political sphere, tracing a Cinderella narrative of the poor girl who makes it in the big city. Contemporary reviews and critical readings of *Working Girl* have noted the derogatory characterisation of Katherine Parker and the film’s skewed vision of feminist solidarity (Hallam 1994).

Framing the film as a Hollywood attempt to address a perceived effect of second wave feminism – women entering management in larger numbers – I want to re-examine *Working Girl* as a fantasy of potential achieved and battles won. How does this account of corporate culture look in the harsh light of 2016? How can we understand *Working Girl* a quarter of a century after its initial release and what can this story tell us about feminism and popular culture in the 1980s and the 2010s? In particular, how do we now read the film’s rousing ending, with Tess in her own office, with her own secretary, and a new boyfriend, as the soundtrack proposes a “New Jerusalem”? Charlotte Brunsdon (1997), writing about *Working Girl* nearly a decade after its release, notes ambivalences in that ending. Yet how much more ambivalent is *Working Girl*’s “New Jerusalem” after the economic boom and bust of the 1990s and 2000s, after the attacks on the World Trade Centre and after debates about post-feminism, the third wave and the emergence of a fourth wave feminist movement? In this essay I propose that the fantasies of escape and “liberation” that yuppie films such as *Working Girl* offer should not simply be dismissed as bad faith. Rather these narratives may be understood through what George Lipsitz (2003) has called “memory as misappropriation”; as a means of negotiating women’s histories and desires.

During the 1980s a number of popular Hollywood films addressed corporate culture. In her 1991 essay Judith Williamson writes: “the great achievement of Hollywood cinema in this period has been to dramatize both business achievement *and* the social indignation it engenders” (151). Williamson examines ambivalent accounts of corporate culture in yuppie films such as *Trading Places* (1983), *The Secret of My Success* (1987), *Wall Street* (1987), *Baby Boom* (1987), *Big* (1988) and *Working Girl* (1988). She contradicts nostalgic popular versions of the eighties and the perception that 1980s films about big business were uncritical or wholly celebratory. Williamson asserts the ability of Hollywood, rather than Leftist discourse or independent filmmakers, to “channel and express a real popular moral and spiritual indignation at capitalist values,” even as such narratives re-establish the status quo in a statutory “happy ending” (1991: 160). *Working Girl* and *Baby Boom* represent problematic examples of such “moral and spiritual indignation,” however, in the light of subsequent accounts of their role in the development and endorsement of post-feminism (cf. Brunsdon 1997, Hollows 2006, Leonard 2007, McRobbie 2009).

*Baby Boom* and *Working Girl* have become historical texts, situated within a feminist canon which is referred to, in passing or in detail, during debates about popular responses to second wave feminism. These films are frequently cited as examples of the onset of a postfeminism which denies the achievements of the second wave in favour of a neoliberal consumer culture myopically focussed on the self. Kathrina Glitre reads *Baby Boom* as “a prescient example of the postfeminist ‘retreatist’ narratives discussed by Diane Negra” (2011: 21). Since Charlotte Brunsdon’s analysis of *Working Girl* in the 1990s, much feminist citation of Nichols’ film attests to its limited worldview, regarding it as one of several films of that era which attempted to put women back into their place following the perceived threat of the second wave. Sarah Gilligan, for example, deploys *Working Girl* and *Fatal Attraction* (1987), as a foil to more recent ambivalences in 1990s American teen movies, naming the eighties films as “postfeminist backlash films” (2011: 178). Such citations indicate the extent to which these yuppie films have calcified in academic discourse, becoming part of an array of referents that are repeatedly hailed as embodying particular positions in cultural and political debates. In a similar manner many feminist critical works of the eighties and early nineties have either been forgotten, or have themselves become fossilized as historical documents.

In this essay I return to an examination of *Working Girl*’s closing sequence, re-viewing the ambivalence of the film’s ending, as a means of working through the twenty-first century resonances of Nichols’ film and of Charlotte Brunsdon’s 1990s reading of it. Brunsdon’s close reading of *Working Girl* placed it alongside *Pretty Woman* (1990) as a “post-feminism and shopping” film, but also noted the particular moment and address of these fantasy narratives. They are both “aimed at, and enjoyed by, a female audience,” but are distinct from the “independent women” films of the 1970s (1997: 81). In these terms *Working Girl* is very much a “girl’s film,” not least through its “complex address” to a variety of potential audiences; Brunsdon cites how Nichols’ film deploys “bodily display” as a treat for “reluctant husbands and boyfriends who might be in the audience” (1997: 81). She examines *Working Girl* and *Pretty Woman* in relation to a more clearly feminist cinema of the 1970s: “Certainly, each film has a very different relationship to feminist discourse than that we find in what now, retrospectively, seem the rather innocent and optimistic films of the 1970s cycle” (1997: 83). Brunsdon’s project in this essay is “to look at each film in detail to show how it is formed by, but also disavows, feminism” (1997: 83). Her examination of Nichols’ film – itself a product of a particular moment in critical methodology with its emphasis on close reading and textual examination – is thus framed by a retrospective aesthetic, in relation to a particular understanding of the filmic and feminist work from the previous decade.

Brunsdon’s examination of *Working Girl*’s ambivalent feminism is echoed by other critical accounts from the 1990s. Amelia Jones’ discussion of the “New Women” films of the eighties and nineties proposed them as symptomatic of a backlash against the feminist gains of the sixties and seventies:

The one positive aspect of *Working Girls* [*sic*] and *Baby Boom* is their allowance of both sexuality and professional skills to a woman. Typically, however, both continually undermine this by emphasizing the sexuality and traditional feminine behaviour over the professionalism and intelligence of the women. *Working Girls*, for example, constructs the Melanie Griffith heroine as giggling and sexualized rather than as a serious and competent adult. This construction heavily qualifies, if not negates, any liberatory effect. (1991: 320)

This passage tends toward a troubling attempt to quantify the *properly* feminist narrative or performance; a strategy that Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley note as reductive in its identification of “good” and “bad” feminist objects: “Underpinning many discussions of popular feminism is the assumption that there is a better ‘unpopular’ form of feminism” (2006: 11). This is not the main thrust of Jones’ work however. Her argument asserts the failure of such popular films to contain the “new woman”:

Like texts on “postfeminism,” these films strive to signal the end to something they cannot control, something that will not be ended. But both “feminism,” at least in many of its practically achieved forms, and the new woman are active and actual. They cannot be erased or repressed by contemporary cultural discourses that work to close them down. (1991: 315)

This argument is familiar from feminist work on the *femme fatale* in classic and neo-noir film; the proposal that the powerful performance of the active, dominant female character sustains her continued existence in audiences’ memories beyond her narrative containment through death or marriage. With regard to *Working Girl*, however, I propose that a different dynamic is in play. Rather than Griffith’s role overcoming the narrative closure of a romantic happy ending with Jack Trainer (Harrison Ford), her girlish, “giggling and sexualized” performance as Tess McGill rather adds to the ambivalences evident in the film’s rousing conclusion.

Charlotte Brunsdon refers to this ambivalent ending, aptly, in an endnote:

As many commentators have recognized, the final image of the film is ambivalent. On the one hand, as I have here discussed, we have Tess with a room of her own. On the other, as the camera recedes and “The New Jerusalem” swells in volume, Tess’s room is shown to be one of many hundreds in her block, again shown to be one of many. (1997: 203, n.12)

Carly Simon’s soundtrack music, with the Oscar-winning song “Let the River Run” framing the narrative, haunts Tess’s symbolic journeys back and forth across the river from New Jersey to Manhattan. The track was later used in an advertisement for the United States Postal Service. “Let the River Run” powerfully deploys the St Thomas Choir of Men and Boys singing of a new Jerusalem:

*Working Girl* starts and finishes with its heart-rending theme song, “The New Jerusalem” [*sic*] – “*Oh … my heart is aching …*” – which, accompanying the ferry ride to Manhattan at the beginning, suggests a yearning for success and recognition in the big city. But by the end it suggests more: a yearning for righteousness, for moral value. These films, easy to criticize politically, can also prove deeply moving because they are about delving into your heart for the material of business – a process which throws up a range of other qualities and emotions such as courage, loyalty and honesty. (Williamson 1991: 160)

The film’s affective appeal contributes enormously to its ambivalent ending. From a twenty-first century perspective the narrative is remarkably uncritical of corporate culture. *Working Girl* depicts corporate sexism and the glass ceiling; instead of helping her realize her ambitions Tess’s male colleagues fix her up with their seedy friend, a young Kevin Spacey in a memorably skin-crawling role as coke-snorting lecher Bob Speck. Yet big business is also shown to have ethics and heart. Oren Trask (Philip Bosco) finally listens to Tess’s account of how she put Trask Industries and radio together through reading gossip columns, but only after Jack refuses to back Katherine Parker (Sigourney Weaver). Trask’s ethical turn is predicated on the expulsion of Katherine; his repetition of Tess’s insult about Katherine’s “bony ass” underlines the extent to which he is now on the side of the angels, while Katherine’s demonization is complete. She is irredeemable; a snob, an egotist (unforgivable in a female character) and a liar, but also a comedy “bit.” Weaver plays the part for laughs, making it a memorable role; as Suzanne Moore wrote, when the film came out on video a year after its cinema release:

My sympathies were with Katherine. She is so completely set up as a male fantasy of a ball-breaking career bitch – her viciousness in the boardroom matched only by her voraciousness in the bedroom – that it’s hard not to fall in love with her. (Cited in Brunsdon 1997: 91 and Tasker 1998: 208, n.17.)

The demonization and expulsion of Katherine marks the onset of Tess’s happy ending; Jack Trainer takes Tess’s part by telling Trask “She’s your man” and then kissing Tess in front of her friends in the typing pool, who applaud and call: “Way to go, Tess, way to go…” (Brunsdon 1997: 87). This aspect of *Working Girl*’s conclusion is entirely conventional and in line with other films of the era, such as *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982), whose narrative of social transformation Nichols’ film echoes. The famous scene where Navy officer Zack Mayo (Richard Gere) arrives on the factory floor in white dress uniform to sweep working girl Paula Pokrifki (Debra Winger) off her feet is also heralded by her friend Lynette’s (Lisa Blount) closing line: “Way to go, Paula, way to go!” If *Working Girl* had also ended at this point it would offer a far more unequivocal resolution to the romantic narrative. The senior, unwomanly woman is ousted by her younger, more vivacious rival, good triumphs over evil and the appropriate couple have their kiss in close up, to approving applause from their peers and, potentially, the cinema audience. *Working Girl* offers a resistance to the neatness of this Hollywood resolution by adding a coda to the story; we are shown the “after” of the happy ending.

The film cuts to the future; after the confrontation between Tess and Katherine, after Trainer and Trask recognize Tess as authentic and valuable, after Trask offers Tess an entry-level role in his organization. This is the “after” of Tess’s transformative yumpie journey from working girl to middle class professional. Yet this postscript does not initially take us into her new life at the office, rather it begins at home, in a new apartment and a new kitchen; her new yuppie life with Jack. The romantic storyline is thus foregrounded, albeit framed in somewhat unsettling terms. Their companionate breakfast, sharing the same piece of toast, exchanging cups of coffee, is interrupted by the presentation of a gift. Jack has bought Tess a retro lunch tin for her first day at the office. It has her initials on it and is filled with juvenile treats, such as a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, Twinkies and “an apple for the teacher”; Jack tells her to “Play nice with the other kids and make sure you’re home before dark.” Yvonne Tasker notes this “infantilizing gesture” with its “paternalizing overtones,” and also argues that Jack himself is not entirely at home in the corporate environment:

In this context Trainer prefigures the paranoid world of *Disclosure* [1994] with its ghostly redundant male executive who takes the ferry like a zombie, seemingly out of habit. Tess is a young woman with aspirations in the world which men fear being displaced from whilst women accept temporary contracts and entry level pay as the first step on the ladder. If the film celebrates achievement, it also associates dynamism and energy with women. (1998: 43)

The kitchen sequence is thus loaded with unresolved questions about gender roles, offering an odd reflection on the subsequent “triumphal” conclusion.

As Tess arrives at Trask Industries for her first day in her new job Carly Simon’s soundtrack haunts her movements. When she arrives at her office her secretary, Alice Baxter (Amy Aquino) is on the phone with her feet up, so that Tess thinks she is the assistant and Alice is the executive. Certainly Alice is distinct from the “girls” in the typing pool; she is confident, sassy and independent. The initial confusion over roles and the subsequent dialogue hints at a changing order:

Tess: When I saw you in here on the phone with your feet up I figured this was your office…

Alice: I’m sorry about that, Miss McGill, it won’t happen again, *ever*.

Tess: It’s OK.

Alice: Maybe now would be a good time to go over what you expect of me.

Tess: (Pauses, clears her throat) I expect you to call me Tess. I don’t expect you to fetch me coffee unless you’re getting some for yourself. And, um, the rest we’ll just make up as we go along.

Alice: (Looking surprised and pleased) OK… I’ll be right outside if you need anything.

Tess: Fine.

It is at this point that Tess sits at her new desk, lifts the phone and calls her best friend – “Cyn? Guess where I am!” – and the music swells with the gospel lyric of Carly Simon’s “Let the River Run.” There is a lot happening in this short sequence. Tess’s conversation with Alice mirrors a similar encounter between Katherine and Tess earlier in the film, where Katherine’s apparently egalitarian approach is immediately mitigated by patronizing advice:

Katherine: I consider us a team, Tess, and as such we have a uniform – simple, elegant, impeccable. Dress shabbily and they notice the dress. Dress impeccably and they notice the woman. Coco Chanel.

Tess: How do I look?

Katherine: Terrific. You might want to re-think the jewellery.

Katherine *does* expect Tess to fetch her coffee; her friendly demeanour is shown to be more about managing her secretary than treating her as an equal. Tess, however, seems to establish some parity – and respect – between herself and Alice, not least in the hesitant suggestion that “the rest we’ll just make up as we go along.” This is not an interaction that establishes power over a subordinate figure, but rather a discourse which frames their relationship as creative, interactive, and collaborative. This is in contrast to Katherine, who strategically deploys her upper class white femininity. When Trask refers to Katherine’s “bony ass” she icily asserts that she “just won’t stand for such language” before stalking into her office, just as she fakes a faint in the boardroom to elicit sympathy when Tess accuses her of lying.

In this respect Tess’s arrival in her new office, with her own secretary, may be understood as indicative of a new order. Not only has a working class “girl” made it into management against all the odds, but she apparently has the confidence to suggest that the workplace might be organized differently, in a way that does not contain, subdue or disadvantage other women. This is one reading of the phone call, which includes Cyn and the women in the typing pool in Tess’s triumph; that she has not forgotten where she came from. The “New Jerusalem” here is that of a more egalitarian, meritocratic corporate culture in which women have not only arrived but are able to change the game. Although this conclusion acts as a postscript to or even supplants the traditional Hollywood romance, it too has a romantic edge which is specifically American. *Working Girl*’s opening shot circles around the Statue of Liberty and Tess’s triumph echoes the American dream of “making it” in the New World. Once again, however, this is not quite the end. As “Let the River Run” continues to soar Cyn is shown standing in the middle of the office full of women, relaying the good news, her voice drowned out by the rising soundtrack:

Let the river run,  
let all the dreamers  
wake the nation.  
Come, the New Jerusalem.  
Silver cities rise,  
the morning lights  
the streets that meet them,  
and sirens call them on  
with a song.  
It's asking for the taking.  
Trembling, shaking.  
Oh, my heart is aching.

We are now outside the window, looking in at Tess as she continues to talk to Cyn on the phone, but we cannot hear her. The camera, in a sweeping helicopter shot, zooms out from her window to reveal the building bathed in the pink morning sun, then more windows and more buildings until the whole Manhattan financial district is displayed and finally the whole island fills the screen as the credits roll. As Brunsdon remarked, this ending is ambivalent in its representation of Tess as, finally, an infinitesimal cog in the corporate world. The visual aesthetic, while stirring, appears to contradict a reading of the final scenes that propose Tess’s achievement as the first step in a revolution. Rather her achievement is literally and figuratively put into perspective; as one among many thousands of corporate workers how far will this “New Jerusalem” be able to go?

Watching this conclusion after the global financial crisis of 2007-8 which was triggered by the sub-prime mortgage market in the United States, such ambivalence comes to the fore. The location of that closing sequence is highly loaded, both in the late eighties and the twenty-first century. Tess’s new office is in Tower Seven, the third tower to collapse in the attack on the World Trade Centre in September 2001, probably due to fires caused by debris as the twin towers fell. In the aftermath of 9/11 Tower Seven was the subject of a number of conspiracy theories which proposed that it had fallen as a result of planned demolition (Rudin 2008). Tower Seven, or 7 World Trade Centre, was in the news in the eighties too. Larry Silverstein, the developer who built this prime piece of corporate real estate in uptown Manhattan, had brokered a mortgage deal and tax breaks that meant he made a profit by charging high rents and keeping the building largely empty (Berg 1988). The empty spaces of Tower Seven made it an ideal location for *Working Girl*, but the backstory of the space in which those final scenes were filmed underlines the extent to which corporate culture in the eighties was not seen as a body which served the public good. This is echoed in eighties reviews, several of which comment on its Cinderella fantasy narrative (Hinson 1989; Maslin 1988). Janet Maslin in the New York Times notes that “*Working Girl* is enjoyable even when it isn’t credible, which is most of the time,” concluding:

One of the many things that mark *Working Girl* as an 80s creation is its way of regarding business and sex as almost interchangeable pursuits and suggesting that life’s greatest happiness can be achieved by combining the two.

*Working Girl*, always fun even when at its most frivolous, has the benefit of cinematographer Michael Ballhaus’s sharp visual sense of board room chic, and of supporting characters who help carry its class distinctions beyond simple caricature. Chief among these, along with [Alec] Baldwin, is Joan Cusack as the no-nonsense Staten Island girlfriend who lets Tess know that she takes a dim view of magical transformations. “Sometimes I sing and dance around the house in my underwear,” she says witheringly. “Doesn’t make me Madonna. Never will.”

Maslin’s review, together with the scandals surrounding Tower Seven and its subsequent collapse, reiterate the dubious triumphalism of *Working Girl*’s concluding sequence. This is not a film which offers a convincing account of its own happy ending. It is viewed as a fluffy addendum to its directors’ oeuvre. Mike Nichols’ work, as a comedy performer and as a director, usually offers a sceptical account of the American dream. In *Silkwood* (1983) a worker at a plutonium plant is deliberately contaminated in order to prevent her exposing the company’s safety violations (James 1990). With such narrative ambivalence within the film itself, together with its critical reception and the contextual details that inform the final sequence, how can we understand the ending of *Working Girl* now?

While Tess’s methodology, her combination of economic savvy and knowledge of the gossip pages, is coded as feminine, this film does not unequivocally endorse a feminist “new Jerusalem,” nor the sisterhood of working women. The closing scenes are contradictory and confusing; they do not stand up to close examination but continue to carry powerful emotional affect. Feminist politics, if they are present at all, are present here as a structure of *feeling*. In March 2013 *Working Girl* was screened at the Tyneside Cinema in Newcastle upon Tyne as part of a series of events to celebrate International Women’s Day. I suggested the film, having not seen it for some time and thinking that it would attract a wide audience and raise some interesting issues about class, gender and big business in the 2010s. I had forgotten how strong the ending was and, in the post-screening discussion, several members of the audience remarked on the song, the sense of hope it engendered and the emotive quality of *Working Girl*’s concluding scenes. This suggests a different way of understanding the closing moments of Nichols’ film; as offering a *nostalgia* for feminist politics rather than a feminist politics in itself.

Even as it was released in the late eighties *Working Girl* referenced an ideal of social change, of better times, that was always already framed by its past-ness. Critical readings of the film in the nineties proposed it as not properly feminist in relation to second wave feminist film making; as “formed by, but also disavow[ing], feminism” (Brunsdon 1997:83). *Working Girl* also referenced a cinematic nostalgia for the proletarian women’s film and career-girl comedies of 1930s and 1940s Hollywood (Hallam 1994: 175). What the film means continues to evolve, so that in the twenty-first century *Working Girl* stands for a particular fantasy of social progress that is manifestly non-existent. Liberal demands for equality in the workplace have not been sanctioned. The Equal Rights Amendment has never been passed in the United States and equal rights legislation in the United Kingdom has only sporadically been enforced, so that women continue to earn less than men and occupy fewer positions in higher ranking roles. *Working Girl* may certainly be read as a narrative which proposes the fiction of what Angela McRobbie has called the equality norm (2013), or the “postfeminist masquerade” of the twenty-first century young woman who “enjoys her status as a working girl without going too far” (McRobbie 2009: 79). Yet its ambivalent multiple endings may also be understood as already mourning the loss of revolutionary ideals; that social change is not achieved and feminism is not finished: “Although the postfeminist text is often marked by amnesia, its historicizing manoeuvres leave traces of the very histories they seek to erase” (Munford and Waters 2014: 30). The rousing lyrics of Carly Simon’s song speak of “dreamers” and an “aching” heart, not of a finished project. What *Working Girl*’s closing sequence speaks to is a hope for the future that has yet to be seen.

In an essay about a 1950s sitcom, its paratexts and contexts, George Lipsitz argues that *Mama* (CBS, 1949-56) should not simply be understood as “an example of the media’s power to naturalize oppression,” but as “modelling an alternate past” through “memory as misappropriation” (2003: 9-10). At a 1985 retrospective at the Museum of Broadcasting in New York, in which the reassembled cast spoke of their experience of making the show, and the audience spoke of their experience of watching it, the Norwegian immigrant family at the centre of the sitcom were fondly remembered as offering a substitute for less positive family experiences:

The fact that so many of the speakers at the symposium treated vicarious memories of a family life that none of them actually had, one that in fact ran directly counter to their own experience, illumines an important function of memory within popular culture in general – memory as managed *misappropriation*. (Lipsitz 2003: 9)

A similar misappropriation is at work in the closing sequence of *Working Girl*. For all its contradictions and inconsistencies, the end of this yumpie Cinderella narrative leaves its audience with a nostalgia for what has not yet happened. It is a nostalgia for hope, for possibilities not yet fulfilled, and all the more worth acknowledging for that reason. *Working Girl* confronts issues around women in white-collar managerial roles; about how they get there and what they do once they are in post. These issues were current in the 1980s and they are still current today. While the gender balance may have improved in some areas women are still objects of scrutiny in public life, subject to abuse if they go too far, want too much or speak too loudly. The Fawcett Society’s 2013 analysis of women and business in the UK observes:

Women are underrepresented in our economic and financial institutions. Women are largely absent from the higher echelons of business, with FTSE 100 directorships being held by women standing at merely 17%. Although considerable efforts have recently been made to change this, progress is stalling. There are now only two women chief executives running UK FTSE 100 companies. This lack of power affects women themselves but also the quality of decision-making in these institutions. At the current rate of change, it will take 70 years to achieve gender-balanced boardrooms in the UK.

In the light of such grim statistics – and the chilling fact that in the current economic climate women are even more likely to be at the bottom of the heap – *Working Girl*’s Cinderella story appears charmingly naïve. It has become an historical artefact offering a fantasy of system change; a fantasy of corporate culture which is meritocratic and ethically sound. Tess McGill’s “head for business and a bod for sin” exemplifies the Hollywoodization of second wave feminism and the shift to a postfeminism centred on the individual consumer. The layering of ending on ending in the closing sequence, however, exposes the gaps in this postfeminist amnesia, allowing for feminist rememory to persist through subsequent viewing and re-viewing. It provides a space for memories and contradictions to surface, a moment of affect, reminding us that the “new Jerusalem” has yet to appear.

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