

PRODUCTION

CODE BASICS

CHAPTER 3

PRODUCTION PROCESS

Still photography was an integral part of a movie's production process. It started BEFORE the actual filming and was going on simultaneously DURING the filming process until the film was completed.

This was one of the expanded control steps discussed earlier AND most important to our topic of discussion.

Still Photography

Each major studio normally had a **Unit Photographer** on staff for general photography purposes. In addition, particularly on larger productions, additional photographers were sometimes brought in for either overflow purposes or special assignments.

Secondary or Color Photographers were sometimes used for major productions, such as one photographer taking black & white and one taking color shots.

Also, on some major productions, **Special Assignment Photographers** were hired by the studios at the request of certain actors or publications. We will cover these in Chapter 6.

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Unit Photographer

The images taken by the unit photographer or overflow photographer were developed daily and distributed to various departments for specific purposes.

The following outlines his work and the departments utilizing his stills. Each area will be addressed in detail in the following pages.

- 
- Pre-Production
 - Casting
 - Hair, Makeup and Costume
 - Production
 - Scene Continuity
 - Filming
 - Publicity
 - Key Set Creation
 - Production Code Assignment
 - Exclusives
 - Portraits
 - Advertising
 - Creation of Posters
 - Creation of Lobby Cards
 - Creation of Advertising Clips
 - Press Use - Studio/National Screen Service
 - New York Newspaper Set

PRODUCTION CODE BASICS FOR MOVIE STILL

Color Photographer

In early days and on smaller productions, the color photographer was also the unit photographer effectively pulling double duty.

For larger productions, it was common for a second photographer to be used on the set just to produce the color stills. This really increased in the 1960's when magazines and major publications started demanding more color.

These color stills were handled exactly the same as the standard black and white stills EXCEPT that they were a separate operation with different personnel. This operation was called the "Color Desk."

While this book focuses on production codes, the ultimate objective is to help identify that unknown movie still. You will probably run into all of these types and many times, just knowing the production code is not enough.

Like a detective, you have to continuously look for clues, so the more you understand the process, the more clues you will spot to help clear up more of those on-the-line questionable stills.

Let's follow the above outline through the different departments. We will be placing more emphasis on the areas that pertain more to production codes and all will become clear.

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Pre-Production

The first stills taken on a film were normally shot long before filming actually began. They were incorporated into the initial planning and development of the project.

Basically, this means that THESE stills are NOT what this book is about as they did not utilize production codes.

These particular photographs were used in a variety of ways, including storyboarding, administrative decision-making, and conceptual artwork for early advertising campaigns. They also took wardrobe tests, hair and makeup tests and publicity tests.

A lot of times the original release still had a snipe or writing on the back to give the details. But again, this book is not about identifying “original” or any other type of authentication. We are assuming that there is NOTHING on the back and what you see on the front is what-you-get.

Some of these pre-production stills were used as “casting stills” as they featured photos of a “proposed” cast (as sometimes they would change before the actual production began).

For example, the image on the following page features a casting still showing Elizabeth Taylor in costume for the role of Lygia in the film *Quo Vadis*. But, by the time filming started, she was replaced by Deborah Kerr.

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APR 12 49 9 - 9 6 0 6' MINATI 9 8



This casting still is identified by the black informational board in the lower left. It reads: "Elizabeth Taylor as Lygia, Costume 5-7 Quarry Costume."

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The following two images are casting stills featuring Ann Sheridan as “Randy” in the film *Kings Row*. These examples demonstrate the inconsistency in the way studios marked, or didn't mark, their pre-production stills, even within the same film. For example, the still below was NOT marked.



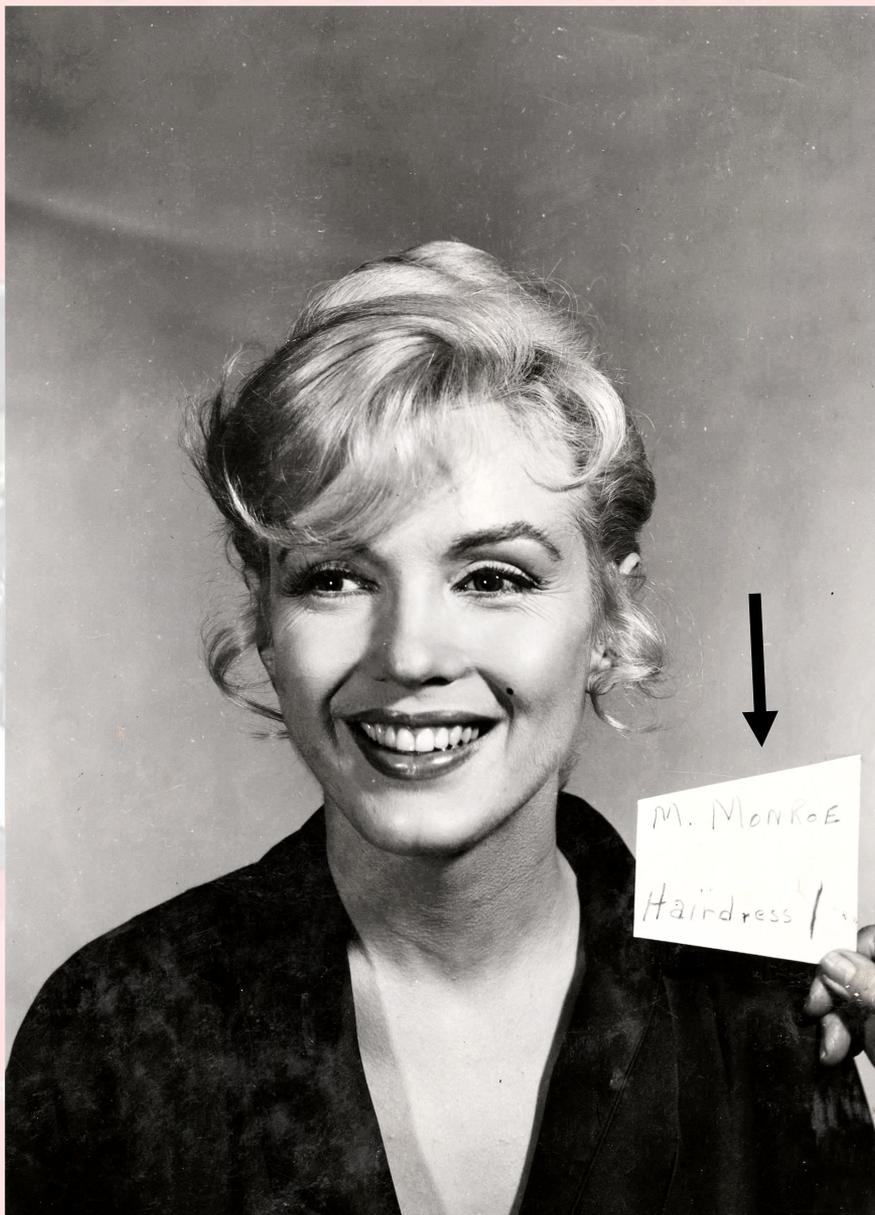


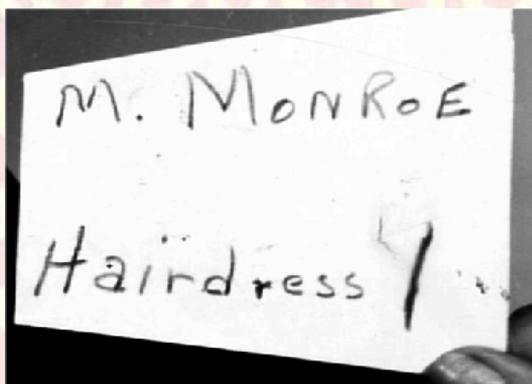
Unlike the still on the preceding page, this still is clearly marked.

NOTICE: both of these stills have 3 punch holes going down the left side. These holes will be covered in the next chapter.

PRODUCTION CODE BASICS

Some stills have NO identifying markings, while others show just minimal information.





For example, the still on the preceding page shows only a hand holding a piece of scrap paper identifying Marilyn Monroe in a hairdress test. (Image above) We have NO CLUE what film this is from as there is just not enough information to cross reference.

When you are dealing with pre-production stills, you have inconsistent markings, usually very little information and no assurance that the actor was even in the film. Sometimes you can luck out and get a cool inside shot even when the title isn't shown. The image on the next page is an example of this.

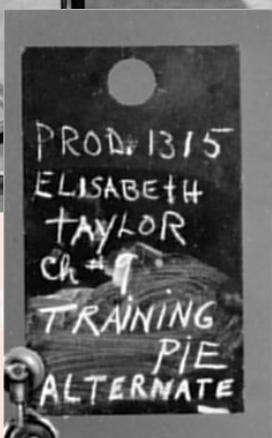
The still features a young beautiful Elizabeth Taylor. While there is no title on this wardrobe still, the top line on the board identifies "Prod. 1315." Production Code 1315 was for the MGM film *National Velvet*.

The words "Training Pie" apparently refer to a working title since the horse in the film was named Pie. (Production codes will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4).

(And yes, you can also see that Elizabeth Taylor's name was misspelled - Elisabeth Taylor).

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Learn How To Use Your Own Known Movie Stills

Learn How To Use Your Own Known Movie Stills

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Once filming began on a film project, the unit photographer had several responsibilities. Here are just some of the duties of a movie set's unit photographer.

Scene Continuity

The unit photographer took photographs throughout the course of day's film shoot. These were used for a number of reasons. Some of these shots were used specifically for "scene continuity."

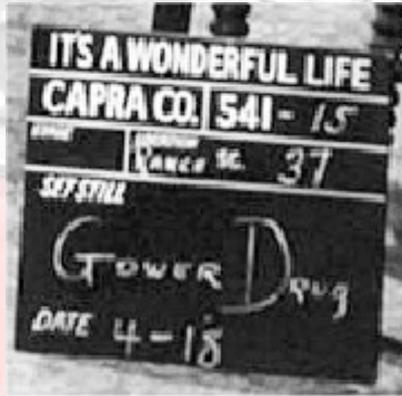
At the end of a day's film shoot, these scene continuity stills were used by the director and his production staff to make sure that each subsequent day's scene layout and props would match exactly with the prior day's scene.

This was a very important aspect of the unit photographer's job. These shots were essential to avoid filming mishaps such as appearing and disappearing salt shakers, curtains changing color, tables and chairs placed in different locations, etc.

These stills were marked and numbered in a WIDE variety of ways, but normally done together in a batch at the end of the day. Not all of these photographs would have the informational clapboard.

The still shown on the following page features a scene continuity shot from the 1946 RKO film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, starring James Stewart and Donna Reed.

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Learn How To identify and understand Movie Stills

Again, these are for your understanding and not part of the standard production code process.

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Filming

During the production, the unit photographer was responsible for capturing thousands of still shots of the production. The photographer would stand next to a movie camera operator and take photographs that would appear almost identical to specific scenes in the film.

Some of the shots would offer a completely different angle than the motion picture camera and some of the shots would be behind the scenes with actors and directors or special set up for publicity shots.

At the end of the day, the motion picture film went one direction and the still camera film went a different direction, each to a completely different process.

After the production still shots were taken each day, the photographer would take the rolls of film negatives and place each role on a “contact sheet.”

These contact sheets were created by laying the negatives on a piece of printing paper and exposing them to light to create a set of mini prints the same as the film frames.

The advantage to using a contact sheet was that all of the film negatives, generally around 36 images, could be viewed at one time with a “ring” or magnifying glass.

The negatives and contact sheets were then sent to the publicity department for review to pick out the best images to use for publicity.

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The image below shows a typical contact sheet.



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