argues that if you like Gary Cooper or Doris Day, "precisely what you value about them is that they are always 'themselves' – no matter how different their roles, they bear witness to the continuousness of their own selves."[42] In recognizing and admiring the star's favorite mannerisms, fans achieve a transparency of access to the star's "real" personality rather than using transparency to support their belief in the narrative.

"Comedian" comedies built around a comic personality make the tension between star and character especially evident, and undermine the dominance of causal motivation. Comedians such as Bob Hope and Woody Allen first constructed their comic personas outside the cinema, in vaudeville or night-clubs, and brought to their movies a style of performance that involved a direct address to their audience. This mode of direct address makes it uncertain whether the character or the performer is speaking: is it Alvy Singer or Woody Allen who is telling us jokes at the beginning and end of *Annie Hall* (1977)? In *The Road to Bali* (1952), does Bob Hope or Harold Gridley tell us, "He's [Bing Crosby – or George Cochrane?] going to sing, folks. Now's the time to go out and get the popcorn"?[43]

A "screwball" comedy such as *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) is built around a comic loss of the coherence that Formalism argues is supplied to the Hollywood movie by compositional motivation. Professor David Huxley (Cary Grant) continually tries to escape from the chaotic and implausible succession of events in which he is caught up, and get back to the saner, more tranquil world of an altogether more ordinary narrative. But as Susan Vance (Katherine Hepburn) tells him, he has made too much of a spectacle of himself to be allowed back into any simple, believable story. *Bringing Up Baby* demonstrates very little by way of a credible plot logic. It proceeds at breakneck speed, fabricating not narrative progress but what Stanley Cavell calls "purposiveness without purpose" in which "the attempt at flight is forever transforming itself into a process of pursuit."[44] Its effect depends upon the very precise timing and overlapping of dialogue and the subjection of the audience to the pressure generated by this rapid-fire exchange. David's every attempt at the fabrication of a chain of causally related actions is sabotaged by the misunderstandings of other characters, utterly unbelievable coincidences, and an absolute refusal to recognize Cary Grant's industrial status as the movie's major star. The movie's sustained implausibility obliges David to make a spectacle of himself even as he tries to reassert a more orderly storyline. In a restaurant, he finds himself trying to conceal the fact that he has accidentally torn Susan's dress and exposed her underwear by hitting her on the bottom with his top hat. After losing his clothes he is forced to explain to Susan's Aunt Elizabeth (May Robson) that he is wearing Susan's negligee "because I just went gay all of a sudden." Despite his best attempts to preserve the agenda with which the movie has furnished him, David is doomed to succumb to the competing plot logic represented by Susan, even though their romance culminates in the destruction of his brontosaurus.[45]

David Huxley (Cary Grant), unable to escape from Susan Vance (Katherine Hepburn) and Baby into a more rational plot in *Bringing Up Baby* (1938). RKO (courtesy Kobal)

Hollywood regularly uses compositional motivation to serve the exhibition of its stars: in the Western, the reluctant hero is finally forced by narrative circumstance to accept that he must buckle on his gun and display his physical prowess; in the backstage musical the ingenue star eventually gets the lucky break that lets her sing and dance as the audience always knew she would. Hollywood narration must negotiate the pleasurable interruptions of performance or spectacle, before reasserting itself in order to bring them (and consumption) to an end. The two elements of story-telling and spectacle are held in an essential tension, and the movie exists as a series of minor victories of one logic over the other. Narration is therefore crucial to the organization of the audience's pleasure, but this is far from saying that story-telling in itself is the primary source of that pleasure, or the main instrument by which it is provided.

Ambiguity: Narrative and the Regulation of the Erotic

In addition to providing the opportunity for Hollywood to make a spectacle of itself, narrative also allows a movie to control the potential

diversity of meanings accruing from a visual medium. We have already encountered something of this process of control in our discussion of mise-en-scène, which was understood as orchestrating visual meaning to facilitate the audience's comprehension of story-telling. Mise-en-scène can never entirely stabilize narrative meaning, however, and the Hollywood cinema involves many further levels of regulation. Principal among these is the regulation of the erotic, both in the specific sense of the representation of sexuality, and in the more generalized notion that the very act of looking at cinema depends on the **scopophilic** instinct: that is, the eroticized love of looking which spectacle plays upon and satisfies, very often through the display of the human body. We can understand Hollywood's mechanisms of regulation as a form of intertextual motivation: consistent modes of treatment arose from strategies developed to deal with the representation of "sensitive" or "dangerous" subjects.

Hollywood's need to regulate the erotic was most obviously articulated in the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930. The Code's stipulations explicitly state the ways in which narrative might be used to contain the sexually or ideologically disruptive power of the image. The three "General Principles" of the Production Code were,

1. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrong-doing, evil or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.
3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.[46]

The Code's authors were sensitive not only to the problem of difficult subject matter, but to the impact of moviegoing in general upon the industry's diverse audiences. As Father Daniel Lord, largely responsible for the drafting of the Production Code, put it in 1930, "In general, the mobility, popularity, accessibility, emotional appeal, vividness, straightforward presentation of fact in the film make for more intimate contact with a larger audience and for greater emotional appeal. Hence the larger moral responsibilities of the motion pictures."[47] This argument is characteristic of what might be called a "fear of entertainment," whereby cinema's potential for the production of pleasure through the projection and fulfillment of desire is thought to be innately threatening to the moral health of both the individual and the community. We might recognize the legacy of this argument (that entertainment as a process has inevitable negative consequences, regardless of its content) in contemporary anxieties about the effects of television, or the playing of video games.[48]

Although the Code was written under the influence of the assumption that spectators were only passive receivers of texts, the texts themselves

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were constructed to accommodate, rather than predetermine, the variety of their audiences' reactions. The economic logic for that construction came out of what Umberto Eco has called "the heavy industry of dreams in a capitalistic society."[49] Having chosen not to divide its audience by means of a rating system for its product, which would to a certain extent have segregated the "innocent" viewers from the "sophisticated," Hollywood was obliged to devise a system which would allow "sophisticated" viewers to read whatever they liked into a formally "innocent" movie, so long as the producers could use the mechanics of the Production Code to deny that the sophisticated interpretation had been put there in the first place. Much of the work of self-regulation in the 1930s and 1940s lay in the maintenance of this system of conventions, and so it operated, however perversely, as an enabling mechanism at the same time as it was a repressive one: essentially it was designed to find strategies by which socially sensitive subjects could be represented on the screen, rather than to "censor" such material out of existence.

Sexuality was the primary site of private pleasure to be simultaneously concealed and disclosed in public. Those charged with administering the Code worked in cooperation with the studios to devise complex strategies of ambiguity in order to address more than one audience at the same time. As Ruth Vasey has argued, the early sound period in which the Production Code was developed was of central importance to this process.[50] In a letter to Will Hays during the production of *The Smiling Lieutenant* (1931), a Code administrator detailed his successes in making changes to the script:

> The scenes in which Franzi, who wants to put off Niki, says, "First tea – then dinner – and then, maybe – maybe breakfast," and the succeeding action which fades in to show them having breakfast together, indicating that Niki persuaded her to spend the night with him, will be changed as follows: Franzi, after saying "First tea, etc.," will definitely *leave the apartment* and go away, breaking the sequence. The camera will then fade in on a tea set, indicating that they are having tea together at a later time, then on supper dishes, indicating that they are having a supper together, and then to the scene on the balcony where they are having breakfast. This will, of course, delicately indicate that Franzi is Niki's mistress, but the time element removes most of the worry and adds a delicacy of treatment in my opinion.
>
> The scenes in which Franzi is shown gathering her negligee, stockings and a handkerchief from under Niki's pillow, etc., which serve only to pound home the fact that she was his mistress, will be altered to show her gathering up her music, her violin, etc., things which first brought them together. This will remove the personal property, the body connection, of the scene, and be far less offensive. In fact it should leave them rather in doubt of their connection.[51]

On the one hand the Production Code strove to eliminate any moral ambiguity in a movie's narrative progression by imposing a rigidly deterministic plot-line that ascribed every character a position on a fixed moral

spectrum. But at the same time, precisely the same forces obliged movies to construct strategies of ambiguity around the details of action which they were not permitted to present explicitly.[52] On September 18, 1931, Darryl Zanuck, then head of production at Warner Bros., wrote a memo to his scriptwriters dealing with the script treatment of an illegal operation in *Alias the Doctor*:

> We should stress the point that the operation is not an abortion, but at the same time the audience will guess that it is an abortion but in all dialogue and everything, it must be treated as merely an operation, and at the climax when Carl is found with the girl, he is not arrested for performing an abortion, but is arrested for illegally operating because of the fact that he is not yet a graduated doctor.[53]

Two months later, Colonel Jason Joy, head of the Studio Relations Committee, wrote to him pointing out that the inclusion of an abortion was prohibited by the Production Code and would make the movie "utterly unusable in censorship territories." Zanuck replied that he was "amazed and bewildered" at Joy's suggestion: "We make mention of an operation, but this has nothing whatsoever to do with an abortion." When Joy insisted that, "abortion . . . will be the inference which the audience and the censors will draw from the picture," and that "the mere insertion of a medical term for the operation to indicate that it was not an abortion will not be sufficient to escape the fact," Zanuck blustered defensively,

> If it is impossible for us to tell a story of a boy who has a love affair with a girl – gets tired of the girl – avoids her, and then in a drunken argument causes an accident to occur to her, then illegally operates to save her life and instead causes her death, we might just as well quit making motion pictures. . . . The trouble, if I may be permitted to say so in this case, is whoever has been handling this script with you is reading between the lines and reading in conditions which cannot possibly prove to be facts.[54]

The knowing double-entendre, whose greatest exponent was Mae West, "the finest woman who ever walked the streets," was a step toward a satisfactory economic solution to the problem of censoring sexuality. In providing pictures that, as the trade paper *Film Daily* put it, "won't embarrass Father when he takes the children to his local picture house," it accommodated both the sophisticated and the "innocent" viewer at the same time. Through the 1930s, Hollywood developed the double-entendre to the point reached by Zanuck in this argument, where the responsibility for the sophisticated interpretation could be displaced entirely onto the sophisticated viewer ("whoever has been handling this script with you is reading between the lines and reading in conditions which cannot possibly prove to be facts"). Late 1930s movies achieved a particular "innocence" by presenting a deadpan level of performance that acted as a foil to the secondary "sophisticated" narrative constructed within the imagination of

the viewer. In screwball comedies and Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers musicals, characters remained innocent of the suggestiveness that typically underpinned their social relations. The more the movie world diverged from what audiences knew went on in the real world, the more the movies took on a comic sophistication of their own. They gained a wit, a knowingness that audiences could take pleasure in, because it revealed and rewarded their own sophistication.

Screwball comedies such as *Bringing Up Baby* require that we disregard their considerable implausibility, and tease us into reading beneath their surfaces through innuendo and symbolization. But because the comic and erotic effects of these movies are so dependent on what each individual viewer recognizes as lying beyond the rapid-fire dialogue and the disintegration of plot logic, their meanings become impossible either to determine in any absolute sense, or to regulate. Stanley Cavell describes the position of the viewer who is encouraged to make an interpretation of *Bringing Up Baby* that the movie, at another level, denies:

> While an explicit discussion, anyway an open recognition, of the film's obsessive sexual references is indispensable to saying what I find the film to be about, I am persistently reluctant to make it very explicit. Apart from more or less interesting risks of embarrassment (for example, of seeming too perverse or being too obvious), there are causes for this reluctance having to do with what I understand the point of the sexual gaze to be. It is part of the force of this work that we shall not know how far to press its references.[55]

An audience willing to play a game of double-entendre could find hidden, "subversive," or "repressed" meanings in almost any movie by supplying "from its own imagination the specific acts of so-called misconduct which the Production Code has made unmentionable."[56] They might in the process supply more plausible motivations for the behavior of characters in scenes that had been designed, according to Elliott Paul, to "give full play to the vices of the audience, and still have a technical out" as far as the Production Code was concerned.[57] In the case of adaptations from novels, the repressed of the text might often be the original story, the "unsuitable" or "objectionable" elements of which had been removed in the process of adapting it to the screen.[58] Looked at in this way, regulatory motivation raises questions about the extent to which Hollywood movies were and are characteristically "transparent," and suggests that narration in Hollywood movies has had as much to do with promoting ambiguity as with maintaining clarity.

In the journey that a knowledgeable audience takes through a Hollywood narrative, they always know where they are going, and they never know the route. Imagining that it is "being made up as they go along" is the intertextually innocent response to this combination of a determinate outcome and an unpredictable progression. The "sophisticated" viewing of a movie, on the other hand, can be an act of fatalistic resistance to the

inevitability of its moralistic ending. In the early days of the Production Code, reformers often castigated the industry for having "invented the perfect formula – five reels of transgression followed by one reel of retribution."[59] But as the implementation of the Code developed, it insisted on an ever-more coherent narrative, and audiences "viewing against the grain" found themselves also viewing against what David Bordwell has called the "stair-step" construction of narrative causation. "Sophisticated" or perverse viewing strategies survived within Hollywood cinema, because compositionally coherent story-telling was overlaid with, or even constructed from, plot implausibility, character inconsistency, melodramatic coincidence – all opportunities for audiences to escape from the conventional moral constraints of the movie-as-text, to allow the repressed of the text to return in some parallel imagined version, no less implausible than the one on the screen. But for the "sophisticated" audience, the "escape" from Hollywood convention is only temporary, a momentary optimism that the narrative will end somewhere other than where it always does, with transgression just for once triumphant.

Clarity and Ambiguity in *Casablanca*

> Whatever a spectator *first believes* may be enough to drive the story forward. Just as essential plot details are usually repeated several times to promote clarity, so a variety of motivations circulating in the text may be useful options in filling out, and making definite, causal sequences. . . . This allows the story to be made "unique" in many different ways to many spectators . . . it would be better to think of narration not as a single process, but as several processes moving on different levels, proposing and abolishing contradictions with varying degrees of explicitness and success.
>
> Edward Branigan[60]

> I've heard a lot of stories in my time. They went along with the sound of a tinny piano playing in the parlor downstairs. "Mister, I met a man once," they'd always begin.
>
> Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) in *Casablanca*

Casablanca is regularly cited as exemplifying the ways in which the Hollywood movie constructs and explains its storylines. However, the movie's idiosyncrasies also indicate the flexibility of Hollywood's narrative conventions. The movie has, it seems, been all things to all critics: while much of the popular criticism of the movie has described it as perfectly blending "a turbulent love story and harrowing intrigue," Umberto Eco has, with equal affection, insisted that it is "a hodgepodge of sensational scenes strung together implausibly," its plot and its characters "psychologically incredible." It endures, he argues, because of its "glorious ricketiness."[61] In part because of its enduring popularity as "America's most beloved movie," in part because of the frequent claims for its typicality – Eco suggests that *Casablanca* "is not *one* movie. It is 'movies'" – *Casablanca* makes a particularly suitable case for the examination of the practice of Hollywood narrative.[62]

Normally, argues Edward Branigan, "the classical narrative does not give the appearance of ambiguity, nor does it encourage multiple interpretation, but rather, like the chameleon, it is adaptable, resilient and accommodating. It will try to be what the spectator believes it to be."[63] *Casablanca* is at least two movies at once, and in that respect it is quite typical of Hollywood's product, in which the heterosexual romance is counterpointed by an alternative plot. In *Casablanca* a romance and an adventure-war story coexist as separable commodities, and although it is possible to reconcile them into a unified whole, it is not necessary to do so. Different viewers can, as Branigan suggests, construct different stories from the variety of motivations the plot provides, and the accommodating "classical, chameleon narrative . . . will congratulate the spectator for his or her particular selection by intimating that that selection is uniquely correct."[64]

The plot of *Casablanca* is skeletal. An introductory voice-over describes the refugee trail from Europe to America, arriving at Casablanca, which is controlled by the Vichy French government. Then the movie announces what formalist criticism would identify as its "first cause," an initial act of villainy. Letters of transit allowing their bearers to leave Casablanca unhindered have been stolen from their German couriers.[65] Meanwhile, Gestapo Major Strasser (Conrad Veidt) arrives in Casablanca in pursuit of escaping Resistance leader Victor Laszlo (Paul Henreid). Ugarte (Peter Lorre) arrives at the Café Americain run by expatriate American Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) and persuades him to conceal the letters of transit, which Ugarte intends to sell to Laszlo. Moments later, he is arrested by the local chief of police, Captain Renault (Claude Rains).

Renault introduces Rick to Strasser, but Blaine refuses to be drawn on his opinions or beliefs. "Your business is politics," he tells Strasser, "mine is running a saloon." Then Laszlo arrives at the café with Ilsa Lund (Ingrid Bergman). She and the café's piano-player Sam (Dooley Wilson) recognize each other, and despite his alarm at seeing her, he reluctantly agrees to play "As Time Goes By" "for old time's sake." The music brings Rick over for the first of a string of tense encounters with Ilsa, but the revelation of their past is delayed by Strasser's ordering Laszlo to meet him at Renault's office the next day. Later that night, Rick gets drunk remembering his love affair with Ilsa in Paris, interrupted by the German invasion. When Ilsa comes to the café to explain why she did not leave Paris with him, Rick cannot forgive her, and she leaves.

Next morning, Strasser and Renault tell Laszlo that he will never leave Casablanca. Meanwhile, Rick meets Ilsa in the market, and attempts an apology, but now she refuses him, telling him that she and Laszlo are married. Ferrari (Sydney Greenstreet), the "leader of all illegal activities in Casablanca," tells the Laszlos that even he cannot obtain exit visas for both

of them, but suggests that they ask Rick about the letters of transit. That evening, all the protagonists assemble at the café. Rick's discarded lover Yvonne (Madeleine LeBeau) arrives in the company of a German, and he and a French officer start a fight. Rick stops it, telling them to "lay off politics, or get out." However, his neutrality is weakening: he rigs his own roulette table for a young Bulgarian couple to enable them to purchase exit visas from Renault. Laszlo offers to buy the letters of transit, but Rick refuses to sell, telling Laszlo to ask Ilsa for an explanation. When German officers in the café start singing the "Wacht am Rhein," Rick consents to Laszlo leading the band and other customers in a stirring rendition of the Marseillaise. Infuriated by this affront, Strasser orders Renault to close the café.

On their second night in Casablanca, the Laszlos go their separate ways; Victor to a meeting of the local resistance, Ilsa to see Rick in an attempt to obtain the letters of transit. Becoming desperate, she threatens him at gunpoint, but breaks down. They are reconciled, and she explains that she abandoned him in Paris because she had just discovered that Laszlo, her husband, was alive and on the run from the Germans. He accepts her explanation and she tells him, "I ran away from you once. I can't do it again. Oh, I don't know what is right any longer. You'll have to think for both of us, for all of us." Events now accelerate. Laszlo returns from the meeting to the café. Before he is arrested he asks Rick to take Ilsa to America. Rick persuades Renault to release Laszlo by promising to frame him with the letters of transit, but when Renault attempts to arrest Laszlo that night, Rick restrains Renault at gunpoint. At the airport Rick sends Ilsa away with Laszlo and shoots Strasser. He and Renault plan to leave Casablanca together, to continue the fight against Germany.

As this summary suggests, there is more talk than action in *Casablanca* and the movie repeatedly stresses the immobility of its central characters. Casablanca is a staging post that few can leave, and the movie rarely strays from the confines of Rick's café. Plot and story times are clearly explained, and events for the most part occur in their chronological order. The passage of time is registered by transitions from daytime to night-time sequences and the daily departure of the Lisbon plane. However, parallel and sub-plots abound in the movie, introducing areas of meaning that are far less integrated into the narrative than the summary suggests. Although the credit sequence in which Bogart, Bergman, and Henreid are given joint billing tells us that the Rick–Ilsa–Laszlo plot-line will be the emotional center of the movie, much of *Casablanca*'s early development remains incidental to this familiar "triangle" plot. Rick's appearance is delayed until contextual material has established the milieu, discussed the plight of refugees from occupied Europe, and set up the letters of transit as the trigger to the causal chain of events which motivates the majority of the action. Even when the movie's trio of stars has moved to the center of our attention, *Casablanca* suspends its storyline for autonomous performances such as the Marseillaise scene.

The usual suspects: Captain Renault (Claude Rains), Victor Laszlo (Paul Henreid), Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart), and Ilsa Lund (Ingrid Bergman) in *Casablanca* (1942). Warner Bros. (courtesy Kobal)

Setting the scene of the story also elaborates the psychology and ideological beliefs of the movie's central character, Rick: reluctant hero, noncombatant, and isolationist, insistently aloof from the dramatic crises around him, but unable to return to America for reasons that are never explained. His reluctance to act (he is first introduced playing chess against himself) initially displaces the responsibility for narrative progress onto a circle of subsidiary characters, all of whom seem intensely goal-oriented and desperate to change the story's initial situation. The movie's delays intensify our desire for Rick's eventual intervention as a fulfillment of his "true" character, hinted at by Renault when he points out that he had fought for the Loyalist cause during the Spanish Civil War, and implicit in Bogart's star image. Rick's cynicism and instinct for self-preservation provide far more resistance to his taking on narrative responsibility than any external obstacles. The delay that occurs while Rick struggles with his conscience creates a correspondingly greater level of satisfaction when he finally decides to act. *Casablanca* needs its hero: only when Rick commits himself to effecting a resolution can the central plot assert its priority and the movie pull toward closure. To put it another way, only when the

production values of its credit sequence come into synchronization with the priorities of its storyline can the audience's act of consumption be concluded.

Casablanca is a remarkably "knowing" movie. Not only does it verbally acknowledge its dependence on coincidence ("of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she has to walk into mine"), it also suspends plot chronology to justify that dependence by inserting supplementary information which will make it plausible. Placed at the precise moment when we require information about Rick and Ilsa's earlier relationship, the Paris flashback confirms the hypotheses we constructed from the worried looks between Sam and Ilsa and the interlocked gazes of Ilsa and Rick in the bar. When we return from the flashback in time for Ilsa's appearance, Rick's hostility seems justified on the basis of what has "just" occurred. It takes a further flashback of sorts, although not a visual one, to engineer Rick's conversion to the cause of both the Resistance and the progression of *Casablanca*'s narrative. This time the narration itself grants Ilsa the time to explain why she abandoned him, and as she tells her story the camera shows her to us, supplying the evidence by which we judge her truthfulness. But even with Rick convinced, motivated, and narratively engaged, the plot continues to withhold information from us about his plans. This concealment increases the moral force of his responsible action in asserting fidelity and self-sacrifice in the name of a greater cause at the movie's end: "Ilsa, I'm no good at being noble, but it doesn't take much to see that the problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world."

Casablanca is committed to clarity in the sense that its storyline articulates a propagandist message which seems utterly unambiguous to present-day audiences.[66] Its drama of personal relations is, however, much less clear, and causal connection much harder to establish. Very early on in *Casablanca* we come to understand that the movie will be centrally concerned with the relationship between Rick and Ilsa, without really knowing any details of that relationship. We must formulate hypotheses about, for example, the reactions of Rick and Ilsa to each other and Ilsa's reaction to Renault's enigmatic description of Rick: "He's the kind of man that, well, if I were a woman, and I were not around, I should be in love with Rick." Above all, the sustained close-ups of Bergman's expressionless face declare themselves to be pregnant with significance, without specifying exactly what is being signified: viewers are invited to supply their own interpretations, or else simply to contemplate her luminously photogenic features.

Casablanca's "chameleon narrative" is most evident in an ellipsis at the center of the movie's romance, when the lovers are reconciled in Rick's apartment. As they kiss, the image dissolves to a shot of the airport tower, and then back to the apartment, with him standing looking out of the window. He turns to Ilsa, sitting on a sofa, and asks, "And then?" She resumes her story of events in Paris as if there has been no interruption.[67]

The audience must guess the length of the ellipsis, and what, if anything, happened in it. Lacking any incontrovertible evidence in the scene itself, each viewer must decide whether their regenerative romance has been consummated or not on the basis of his or her interpretation of convention. Is the tower a phallic symbol, is that a post-coital cigarette Bogart is smoking? Or has Rick's decision to provide the young Bulgarian couple with money to pay for their exit visas so that Annina (Joy Page) will not have to do "a bad thing" with Renault established his commitment to marital fidelity? The movie provides equally persuasive evidence for either interpretation, and returns self-consciously to the ellipsis in an exchange between Rick and Laszlo in its final scene:

Rick: You said you knew about Ilsa and me?
Victor: Yes.
Rick: You didn't know she was at my place last night when you were . . . she came there for the letters of transit. Isn't that true, Ilsa?
Ilsa: Yes.
Rick: She tried everything to get them and nothing worked. She did her best to convince me that she was still in love with me. That was all over long ago; for your sake she pretended it wasn't and I let her pretend.
Victor: I understand.

What that means is anybody's guess, but like Stanley Cavell's embarrassed concern with the sexual references in *Bringing Up Baby*, the issue at stake in this instance is more substantial than a merely prurient concern with whether these two characters had sex or not.[68] In an important demonstration of Hollywood's contradictory refusal to enforce interpretive closure at the same time as it provides plot resolution, the movie neither confirms nor denies either interpretation. Indeed, it goes beyond this ambiguity to provide supporting evidence for both outcomes, while effectively refusing to take responsibility for the story some viewers may choose to construct. This is a particularly fruitful example of the principle of deniability in action. As Lea Jacobs has argued, under the Code "offensive ideas could survive at the price of an instability of meaning . . . there was constant negotiation about how explicit films could be and by what means (through the image, sound, language) offensive ideas could find representation."[69] At this later stage of the Code's operation, the groundrules of "delicate indication" had been tacitly established between producers and regulators, replacing the earlier, more overt discussions of the desirability of the double-entendre. Two letters PCA Director Joseph Breen wrote to Jack Warner over *Casablanca* illustrate this mutually cooperative understanding:

With a view to removing the now offensive characterization of Renault as an immoral man who engages himself in seducing women to whom he grants

visas, it has been agreed with Mr Wallis [the producer] that the several references to this particular phase of the gentleman's character will be materially toned down, to-wit:

Page 5: the line in scene 15 "The girl will be released in the morning" will be changed to the expressed "will be released later." . . .

Page 75: The word "enjoy" in Renault's line is to be changed to the word "like." "You like war. I like women."

. . . [The scene in Rick's apartment] seems to contain a suggestion of a sexual affair, which would be unacceptable if it came through in the finished picture. We believe this could possibly be corrected by replacing the fade out . . . with a dissolve, and shooting the succeeding scene without any sign of a bed or couch, or anything whatever suggestive of a sex affair.[70]

To a large extent what is at issue here is the relationship between the boundaries of the text and the boundaries of interpretation. On several occasions *Casablanca* invokes offscreen space: in doing so, it invites its audiences to imagine narrative events not represented within its plot-chain. Some of these events also lie outside the permissible sphere of textual representation; as "offensive ideas" their presence can only be indicated by drawing our attention to their absence. We must, for example, decide what Annina means by her oblique reference to doing "a bad thing." Much of the work in the narration of any Hollywood movie involves offering the audience incentives to "read into" or activate these absences in a way that opens up an intertextual field of possible meanings that the movie-as-text does not itself articulate explicitly.

The intertextual field of a movie is part of its commodity existence, in which there is a constant interplay between innocence and sophistication in intra- and intertextual response. When Ilsa tells her version of events in Paris, for example, the camera's soft-focus close-ups on Bergman's face validate her testimony and suggest how much Rick has misjudged her. This is an indication of the extent to which the narration relies not only on the act of showing, but on the appearance of the star. As in every star vehicle, it is the conviction of the central performances, the extratextual information of star biographies, and our innate understanding of the commercial operation of stardom that furnish the plot and establish the trustworthiness of the characters, not simply the verifiability of their statements.

The audience may know nothing about Rick Blaine ("cannot return to America, the reason is a little unclear . . .") and Ilsa Lund ("we said no questions . . ."), but we know a good deal about Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman from other movies we have seen, and from fan magazine articles, newspaper stories, or biographies we have read. We would, therefore, be astonished if a movie starring Bogart and Bergman did not involve them having a love affair, although their previous histories in other movies do not necessarily lead us to assume that the affair will have a happy outcome. Our knowledge of how the plot will progress means that narrative energies that might otherwise be directed to the manufacture of the

couple can be diverted into the movie's explicit ideological project, "the overcoming of its audience's latent anxiety about American intervention in World War II,"[71] to which *Casablanca* was as institutionally committed as it was to its observance of the Code. At one point Bogart asks rhetorically, "If it's December 1941 in Casablanca, what time is it in New York? I bet they're asleep in New York. I bet they're asleep all over America." This concern in fact determines its ending, whatever the production anecdotes about its script being written as it went along, with no one knowing the outcome of the romance, might suggest.[72]

No other ending is possible: in order to avoid the suggestion of an "illicit sex affair," Rick and Ilsa can only be united at the death of Laszlo, but to have the Nazi villain kill a Resistance leader who has "succeeded in impressing half the world" would clearly undermine the movie's ideological project. While it might succeed in satisfying the sophisticated viewers of the movie's entirely deniable sex scene, any outcome that united Rick and Ilsa would be at the expense of the movie's essential premise. It would represent, in other words, an insupportable change of heart. The charm and power of *Casablanca*'s production mythology lie in their suggestion that an alternative ending was possible: one that transgressed the rigid control of the Production Code, one that permitted the escape of repressed desire from the confining closure of a deterministic narrative, and one that did not remind its audience that Hollywood's products were inevitably trivially conventional. That ending could not exist on the screen; it could only exist in its audience's imagination.

Narrative Pressure

> What do we "consume" when we go the cinema? We consume a story, certainly, but not a story that could be recounted by a friend or summarized in prose to the same effect. Our experience of film is tied more to the specific telling of the story than to the abstract result of that telling, the story told. Our pleasure, in short, follows from our engagement in the film as process.
>
> Richard deCordova[73]

> I didn't allow any dull moments to develop in my films. I was always afraid that the audience might get ahead of me and say to themselves: "That guy is going to get killed in a minute." Therefore, I had to go faster than them.
>
> Raoul Walsh[74]

The broadly Formalist accounts of Hollywood story-telling that we have been discussing make up the dominant paradigm by which narrative in Hollywood cinema is discussed. The possibilities of a more consumerist account have been less fully explored, but a starting point is provided by an essay by Thomas Elsaesser entitled "Narrative Cinema and Audience-oriented Aesthetics."[75] Elsaesser examines the aesthetics of Hollywood not simply as a narrative cinema, but as a particular response to the temporal

and sensory regime of the movie theater. The psychological terms of this discussion provide a more complete framework for considering what we have previously suggested about the Hollywood cinema's benevolence to its audiences. According to Elsaesser, the primary material of cinema is not celluloid but the viewing situation itself: "in the cinema we are subjected to a particularly intense organization of time, experienced within a formal structure which is closed, but in a sense also circular: we are 'captured' in order to be 'released,' willingly undergoing a fixed term of imprisonment."[76]

This almost physical explanation of Hollywood narrative sees the cinematic experience as potentially anxiety-provoking, as the viewer is rendered uncomfortable by the restrictions imposed by the viewing situation. Anyone who has had to sit through a movie he or she absolutely loathed will recognize the discomfort that can be imposed by the experience. (In an extreme example within a movie, in *A Clockwork Orange*, 1971, Alec [Malcolm McDowell] is forced to watch movies with his eyelids taped open and his head clamped facing the screen as part of an aversion therapy program.)[77] The pressure that the cinema's organization of experience places upon the viewer is an important element in the sensory experience we purchase when we enter the movie theater. Elsaesser argues that this pressure has "a strong psychic component" that demands "some form of manipulation and cathexis," meaning that it must be relieved by its transference to other subjects or agents. The viewer must sit still in a darkened space for a fixed period of time. With no opportunity for the expression of physical motor energies, he or she must rely on the screen to provide an outlet for psychic energy, through a process of transformation.

According to Elsaesser, transformation occurs at a variety of levels in the process of the interaction between the viewer and the events on the screen. The viewer's psychic energy is transformed into segments of action on the screen, which in turn provoke an emotional response from the viewer. He or she transforms that emotional response into a consistent interpretation of the screen events, providing the coherence that the screen events themselves lack, by filling in the gaps between events in a manner akin to the way he or she fills in the gaps between the movie's successive still images. The viewer then transforms events into plot, and plot into story:

> The fact that the spectator is pinned to his seat and has only the screen to look at, causes impulses to arise which demand to be compensated, transferred and managed, and it is on this level that style, ideational content, causality, narrative sequence, plot, themes, point of view, identification, emotional participation enter into the viewing situation: whatever else they are, they are also ways in which the film manipulates, controls and directs the defenses and impulses mobilized by motor-paralysis.[78]

At its most basic level, this provides an explanation of Hollywood's enthusiasm for action, as a vicarious substitute for the movement the viewer has been deprived of. As we have discussed, early cinema presented movement as a spectacle in itself, and the exhilaration of movement remains one of the pleasures of the Hollywood movie. But narrative also offered possibilities that the "cinema of attractions" could not by itself fulfill. As it developed from 1912 to 1917, the feature-length movie transformed the performance and spectacle of early cinema into a variety of goal-oriented activities. In an economic sense, the feature extended the act of purchase; by persuading the spectator to buy longer periods of time, exhibitors could charge higher entrance fees at the box-office. Narrative added another commodity, the story, that the movie could sell. The story also fitted the psychic requirements of the viewing situation. Unlike the cinema of attractions, a story has a clearly marked beginning and end that match the sense of closure and enclosure characterizing the cinematic experience.[79] In this account, narrative is the dominant form of cinema not because the movies acquired an established aesthetic from the realist novel, or for reasons to do with the aims and desires of filmmakers or questions of commercial competitiveness, but because it provided the most effective means of satisfying the inherent psychological needs established by the viewing situation itself.

This argument disposes of one of the most frequent critiques of Hollywood: that its stories are psychologically unrealistic, mechanically conventional, "melodramatic," implausible, excessively dependent on coincidence, or however the particular version of the charge is phrased.[80] An interviewer once complained to Alfred Hitchcock about the implausibility of one of his plots. Why, he asked, did the characters not simply go to the police? Because, replied Hitchcock, then the movie would be over. In that answer we can see not only the workings of an industrial logic that dictates the duration of a movie, but also the logic of a narrative system that functions less in terms of a psychological realism among the characters than in terms of the construction and release of a suitable amount of pressure exerted on both characters and audience.

The possibility of exerting this pressure allows the movies to construct stories in quite different ways to literature. Faced with a scriptwriter's complaint that he was making a character behave illogically, *Casablanca*'s director Michael Curtiz allegedly responded, "Don't worry what's logical. I make it so fast no one notices."[81] An action movie like *White Heat* (1950) is bound together not so much by characterization or causal explanation as simply by the pace at which it moves. Driven by the momentum of the image stream, the audience race to keep up with Cody Jarrett (James Cagney) as he places everyone around him under intense physical and psychological stress. We grow restless during the movie's longeurs when the FBI agents tell each other what is going on. Cody Jarrett is provided with a personality disorder, but only the most psychoanalytically committed of critics could take his Oedipus complex seriously.[82] Rather, *White Heat* is typical of action movies in which the central protagonist is defined dynamically as "the focus of perpetual agitation and motion," reflecting

and catalyzing "the pressures and constraints which the psychic matrix mobilizes in the spectator."[83] Elsaesser points out the recurrence of "plots of pursuits, quests, treks and themes centered on the ambition to arrive, make it, get to the top, or avenge, control," which require characters to respond to pressure, struggle against deadlines, or solve a puzzle. Elsaesser's persuasive account of the persistence of these patterns is worth quoting at length:

> The narrative tradition developed by Hollywood is based on strongly profiled, "typical" plots: geometrical in shape (linear, though occasionally circular or tangential), consecutive, generated by an alternating rhythm of conflict, climax, resolution. ... These dramatic configurations engineered through plot and protagonists are evidently important structural constants in the American cinema ... precisely because of the high degree of schematization the plots provide a possible way of regulating psychic pressure. ... This would help to account for the inordinate emphasis of the Hollywood tradition on action, violence, eroticism, the predominance of energy-intensive heroes, the graphs of maximum investment of vitality, phallic models of identity and self-assertion, instinctual drive-patterns, the accentuation of voyeuristic and fantasizing tendencies and projections, as well as the value placed on the spectacular, the exotic, the adventurous. Being quite possibly subliminal ways of charting a course of energy expenditure/management, these plots compensate very directly, and from a psychological point of view very efficiently, motor inhibitions and allow for massive discharges of anxiety feelings through the arousal of less primary but dramatically or intellectually validated tensions and "suspense" which is then managed by the plots and the action.[84]

Elsaesser's account provides a fuller articulation of the notion, nervously anticipated by the authors of the Production Code, that the peculiar physical characteristics of cinema produce effects that are inevitably erotic, scopophilic, and potentially transgressive, and that its careful management is a cultural necessity. In part, this management involves the use of narrative to control Hollywood's pleasures by restricting what can be said or shown to what can be delicately, ambiguously, and above all deniably indicated. If entertainment is to function smoothly within the general requirements of the organization of work and leisure under capitalism, it must open the Pandora's box of pleasure, but then reseal it by the end of the movie, confining the expression and satisfaction of desire to the safe space of licensed public fantasy. That is why narrative closure appears to be so heavily stressed in the Hollywood movie. At one level it asserts the determinist morality of the Production Code. At another, it licenses the movies as a site for the expression of desire, by emphasizing their artificiality and the extent to which they are governed by the external forces of the viewing situation, rather than being spontaneously generated by the logic of their own narratives.

Just as we construct a history around the still picture, a movie can only exist as a selected portion of a temporal continuum, and a specific location

within potentially infinite offscreen surroundings. In this sense, narrative closure is less secure than it appears. *Casablanca*, for example, concludes with an opening rather than a closing statement: "Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship." The story is "to be continued" even though the plot is over.[85] This is characteristic of Hollywood's ambivalence toward closure: put the camera on the other side of the mesa toward which Henry Fonda rides at the end of *My Darling Clementine* (1946) and you have the opening shot of another Western. The residual feeling of a narrative process extending beyond the confines of the particular plot events in any movie is an important element in the economic patterns of movie consumption preferred by Hollywood cinema.[86] *Casablanca* typically presents a crisis in the lives of its characters, but it is important for the audience to accept that these characters have existences before and after this crisis in order for us to feel that the story is in any way significant. It is a means by which the cinema can both complete the individual narrative and at the same time renew the audience's enthusiasm for the repeat experience of narration as process. Narrative closure releases the viewer from the movie in full awareness that the story never really ends, and thus arouses, satisfies, and, crucially, reawakens the desire to be entertained.

Notes

1. Edward Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 3.
2. Jane M. Gaines, "Introduction: The Family Melodrama of Classical Narrative Cinema," in Jane M. Gaines, ed., *Classical Hollywood Narrative: The Paradigm Wars* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 1.
3. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 12.
4. Branigan, p. 1; Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 76.
5. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 31, 20.
6. Branigan, p. 100.
7. William Goldman, *Adventures in the Screen Trade: A Personal View of Hollywood and Screenwriting* (New York: Warner Books, 1983), p. 37.
8. E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927), p. 130.
9. Edward Branigan suggests that narrative requires knowledge to be unevenly distributed. In a universe in which all observers were all-knowing, "there can be no possibility of narration since all information is equally available and already possessed in the same ways." So "narration is the overall regulation and distribution of knowledge which determines *how* and when the spectator acquires knowledge, that is, how the spectator is able to know what he or she comes to know in a narrative." Branigan, p. 76.
10. Arthur C. Danto, *Narration and Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. xii; Branigan, p. 168.
11. Colin MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," *Screen*

15:2 (Summer 1974), p. 8. See also Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1988), p. 171.

12 Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 1st pub. 1813 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 1.

13 Sarah Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-over Narration in American Fiction Film* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), p. 25.

14 Roland Barthes, "The Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 32–51.

15 Plato, *Republic*, in D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom, eds, *Classical Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 31.

16 Russell and Winterbottom, p. 30.

17 Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Gerald F. Else (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), p. 13.

18 Slomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 97, 107–8.

19 David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 3.

20 Steven Cohan and Linda M. Shires, *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 2–3.

21 Eric Smoodin, "The Image and the Voice in the Film with Spoken Narration," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 8 (Fall 1983), p. 19.

22 MacCabe, pp. 8–9, 10.

23 MacCabe, p. 11.

24 For instance, the camera style used in Bree's scenes with her analyst marks them as more "documentary," and therefore more "truthful," than the fiction that surrounds them, while Jane Fonda's performance in the psychiatric encounter emphasizes the confessional verity of her statements by comparison to her dissembling in other scenes. The confident dismissal of the closing contradiction between sound and image assumes, rather than demonstrates, the hierarchy of image over sound. In the particular case of *Klute*, it could be argued that the soundtrack has received more support as the authoritative discourse in the movie. MacCabe, p. 11. Bordwell offers a sharp critique of MacCabe's analysis, p. 20.

25 Andrew, pp. 75–6.

26 Kozloff, p. 115.

27 Kozloff, p. 115.

28 Kristin Thompson discusses this case and several other instances of duplicity in "Duplicitous Narration and *Stage Fright*," in *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 135–61.

29 A. Lindsley Lane, "The Camera's Omniscient Eye," *American Cinematographer* 16:3 (March 1935), p. 95; quoted in Bordwell, p. 161.

30 Bordwell, p. 161.

31 Quoted in Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, p. 34.

32 Thompson, p. 39. Thompson has argued for the retention of the terms "syuzhet" and "fabula" for the distinctions between plot and story being made here, pointing out that "the English terms also carry the burden of all the other senses in which non-Formalist critics have used them, while fabula and syuzhet relate only to the Russian Formalists' definitions" (p. 38). Our preference, here as elsewhere, is to aim for a greater precision in the use of a non-specialist, everyday critical vocabulary.

33 Gaines, p. 1.

34 Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, p. 17. Quotations from Francis Taylor Patterson, *Cinema Craftsmanship* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1920). Michael Hauge's insistence that every screenplay have three acts, discussed in chapter 7, is a case in point.

35 Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, p. 18. Quotation from Barrett C. Kiesling, *Talking Pictures* (Richmond, VA: Johnson Publishing Co., 1937), p. 2.

36 Lewis Herman, *A Practical Manual of Screen Playwriting for Theater and Television Films* (New York: New American Library, 1974), pp. 87–8. Bordwell quotes the latter part of this passage, p. 18.

37 Aljean Harmetz, *Round Up the Usual Suspects: The Making of Casablanca – Bogart, Bergman, and World War II* (New York: Hyperion, 1992), p. 267.

38 Barbara Klinger, "Digressions at the Cinema: Reception and Mass Culture," *Cinema Journal* 28:4 (Summer 1989), pp. 10, 14, 16.

39 Thompson, p. 70.

40 Quoted in Rudy Behlmer, ed., *Memo from: David O. Selznick* (New York: Avon, 1973; 1st pub. New York: Viking, 1972), p. 394.

41 Branigan, p. 190.

42 Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 11.

43 Steve Seidman, *Comedian Comedy: A Tradition in Hollywood Film* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), pp. 19–57; Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 104.

44 Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 113.

45 George Segal has exactly the same problem with Elliott Gould in *California Split* (1974).

46 "A Code to Govern the Making of Talking, Synchronized and Silent Motion Pictures," Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc. (hereafter MPPDA), 1930, reprinted in Raymond Moley, *The Hays Office* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1945), p. 241.

47 "The Reasons Supporting Preamble of Code," in Moley, p. 245.

48 Recent examples of these arguments are Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (London: Heinemann, 1986), and Michael Medved, *Hollywood vs America: Popular Culture and the War on Traditional Values* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

49 Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), p. 9.

50 Ruth Vasey, *Diplomatic Representations: The World According to Hollywood, 1919–1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, forthcoming).

51 Lamar Trotti to Hays, February 2, 1931. Production Code Administration Archive, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles (hereafter PCA), *The Smiling Lieutenant* file.

52 Little in these strategies changes. In March 1991 the British Board of Film Classification concluded 18 months of deliberation and gave Nagisa Oshima's *Empire of the Senses* (*Ai No Corrida*) an 18 certificate without asking the distributor (the British Film Institute) to make "a single cut." The scene that caused most difficulty in this decision was a "very, very brief" shot of the central female character touching a boy's penis. "The final solution was an ingenious optical distortion so that, as one BFI spokeswoman put it, 'We know everything happens . . . you see what she's doing but you don't fully see what she's doing.'" Farrah Anwar, "The Empire Strikes Back," *Guardian* (March 28, 1991).

53 "Mr Zanuck's Suggestions on Proposed Treatment of 'Environment,'" September 18, 1931. Warner Bros. *Alias the Doctor* Production File, University of Southern California.

54 Joy to Zanuck, November 23, 1931; Zanuck to Joy, November 24, 1931; Joy to Zanuck,

November 24, 1931; Zanuck to Joy, November 30, 1931, PCA *Alias the Doctor*.
55 Cavell, pp. 116–17.
56 Harold J. Salemson, *The Screen Writer* (April, 1946), quoted in Ruth Inglis, *Freedom of the Movies: A Report on Self-regulation from the Commission on Freedom of the Press* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), pp. 183–4.
57 Elliott Paul and Luis Quintanilla, *With a Hays Nonny Nonny* (New York: Random House, 1942), pp. 63–4.
58 Richard Maltby, "'To Prevent the Prevalent Type of Book': Censorship and Adaptation in Hollywood, 1924–1934," *American Quarterly* 44:4 (1992), pp. 554–83.
59 "Virtue in Cans," *The Nation* (April 16, 1930), p. 441.
60 Branigan, pp. 30–1.
61 Umberto Eco, "*Casablanca*: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage," in *Travels in Hyperreality* (London: Picador, 1987), pp. 197–8.
62 Entry on *Casablanca*, in *Cinemania Interactive Movie Guide* (Microsoft, 1992); Eco, "*Casablanca*," p. 208.
63 Branigan, p. 98.
64 Branigan, p. 149.
65 *Casablanca*'s letters of transit are an archetypal instance of the "Maguffin" of a movie plot. Alfred Hitchcock defined the term as "the device, the gimmick, if you will, or the papers the spies are after. . . . the 'Maguffin' is the term we use to cover all that sort of thing: to steal plans or documents, or discover a secret, it doesn't matter what it is. And the logicians are wrong in trying to figure out the truth of a Maguffin, since it's beside the point. The only thing that really matters is that in the picture the plans, documents, or secrets must seem to be of vital importance to the characters. To me, the narrator, they're of no importance whatever." François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, revised edn (London: Paladin, 1986), pp. 191–2. The whole of *Casablanca's* plot hinges on the implausible presumption that the permission to leave Casablanca granted by the letters cannot be rescinded, even if they are in the hands of "an enemy of the Reich." It also relies on the Nazis' observance of the city's neutrality in their pursuit of Victor Laszlo, on no grounds other than those Laszlo himself offers Strasser, that "Any violation of neutrality would reflect on Captain Renault." *Casablanca*'s narrative, like that of many Hollywood movies, is dependent for its coherence on its own system of internal pressures, not on the accuracy of its external references. "Suspension of disbelief" somehow seems too mild a term to describe the audience's required relationship to such fictions.
66 Historian Richard Raskin, however, notes that at the time of the movie's release, American foreign policy was actually more hostile toward the Free French than is enacted in *Casablanca*: "men like Victor Laszlo were being arrested by the police of the administrators the U.S. supported in North Africa." Richard Raskin, "*Casablanca* and United States Foreign Policy," *Film History* 4:2 (1990), p. 161.
67 The published script, which does not describe its source, describes the action at this moment in the following terms: "Rick has taken Ilsa in his arms. He presses her tight to him and kisses her passionately. She is lost in his embrace. Sometime later, Rick watches the revolving beacon at the airport from his window. There is a bottle of champagne on the table and two half-filled glasses. Ilsa is talking. Rick is listening intently." Howard Koch, *Casablanca: Script and Legend* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1973), p. 156.
68 For the prurient, such instances abound, even in movies well worked over by critics. Lea Jacobs has pointed out another elliptical Bogartian indiscretion, in his encounter with Dorothy Malone in the antiquarian bookstore in *The Big Sleep* (1946).
69 Lea Jacobs, "Industry Self-regulation and the Problem of Textual Determination," *The Velvet Light Trap* 23 (Spring 1989), p. 9; Jacobs' argument is enlarged in *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928–1942* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

70 Breen to Wallis, June 5, 1942; Breen to Warner, June 18, 1942. Quoted in Gerald Gardiner, *The Censorship Papers: Movie Censorship Letter from the Hays Office 1934 to 1968* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1987), p. 3.
71 Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930–1980* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 90. See also Richard Maltby, *Harmless Entertainment: Hollywood and the Ideology of Consensus* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1983), pp. 193–210.
72 Several recent accounts of the production of *Casablanca* have established the inaccuracy of many of these anecdotes. The ending of the movie was never in doubt, in that no version of the script ever concluded with Ilsa staying with Rick. See Harmetz; Frank Miller, *As Time Goes By* (London: Virgin Books, 1993); Harlan Lebo, *Casablanca: Behind the Scenes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).
73 Richard deCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), p. 13.
74 Oliver Eyquen, Michael Henry, and Jacques Saada, "Interview with Raoul Walsh," in Phil Hardy, ed., *Raoul Walsh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Film Festival, 1974), p. 43.
75 Thomas Elsaesser, "Narrative Cinema and Audience-oriented Aesthetics," in Tony Bennett, Susan Boyd-Bowman, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott, eds, *Popular Television and Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1981), pp. 270–82. This is an abridged version of a British Film Institute Occasional Paper, first published in 1969.
76 Elsaesser, p. 271.
77 Other movies, including *The Ipcress File* (1965), have also used the apparatus of cinema as an instrument of torture.
78 Elsaesser, p. 272.
79 Although this argument might appear to support Dudley Andrew's suggestion in Andrew, p. 76, that narrative is "natural" to the movies, in fact it confirms that narrative is a convention which aids in the industrial standardization of Hollywood entertainment, and not an aesthetic goal in itself. Significantly, a cinema of attractions persists not only in avant-garde cinema but also in many Hollywood-produced short subjects, while the production of pleasure by means of technological spectacle and performance persists within the general framework of the feature-length narrative movie.
80 It is worth noting, in passing, the extent to which such charges insist that Hollywood movies precisely do not fulfill the objectives outlined by Lewis Herman in the passage we quoted from his screenwriting manual.
81 Otto Friedrich, *City of Nets: A Portrait of Hollywood in the 1940s* (London: Headline, 1987), p. 137. A different version of the same anecdote appears in Harmetz, p. 185.
82 Lucy Fischer provides a valuable contextualization of the movie's psychology in "Mama's Boy: Male Hysteria in *White Heat*," in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, eds, *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 70–84.
83 Elsaesser, pp. 275–6.
84 Elsaesser, pp. 274–5.
85 *Casablanca* has been the site of a multiplicity of alternative narratives, from the unproduced play on which it was based, *Everybody Goes to Rick's* ("revived" as *Rick's Bar, Casablanca* in London in 1991), to the unmade versions starring Ronald Reagan or George Raft or Ann Sheridan, to two television series in 1955 and 1983, to Woody

Allen's *Play It Again, Sam* (1972), which enacts the ritual relationship between cult spectator and movie when film critic Allen Feliz (Woody Allen) renounces his best friend's wife (Diane Keaton) at an airport by reciting Rick's "hill of beans" speech and adding, "That's from *Casablanca*. I've waited my whole life just to say it," to Robert Coover's "You Must Remember This," a piece of *Playboy* postmodernism that inserts four sex acts into the elided encounter between Rick and Ilsa. Robert Coover, "You Must Remember This," in *A Night at the Movies or, You Must Remember This* (London: Paladin, 1989), pp. 185–6. The story was originally published in *Playboy* (January 1985).

86 "In our common experience films move to the end that is their very closure as 'films,' achieved commercial units. At the same time, however, it has also to be seen that a film must never end, that it must exist – and even before it begins, before we enter the cinema – in a kind of englobingly extensive prolongation. The commerce of film depends on this, too . . . since the individual film counts for little in its particularity as opposed to the general circulation which guarantees the survival of the industry and in which it is an element, a unit, film is a constant doing over again, the film as an endless variation of the same." Stephen Heath, "Screen Images, Film Memory," *Edinburgh Magazine* 1 (1976), p. 34.

9 Politics

A conservative director may work with a liberal writer, or vice versa, and both, even if they are trying to impose their politics on their films (which often they're not), may be overruled by the producer who is only trying to make a buck and thus expresses ideology in a different way, not as a personal preference or artistic vision, but as mediated by mainstream institutions like banks and studios, which transmit ideology in the guise of market decisions: this idea will sell, that one won't. The very question "Will it play in Peoria?" masks a multitude of ideological sins. . . . Hollywood is a business, and movies avoid antagonizing significant blocs of viewers; they have no incentive to be politically clear.

Peter Biskind[1]

Hollywood is too deeply embedded in America's culture to be isolated from its politics.

Ronald Brownstein[2]

Despite its promise of "escape" from the everyday world, Hollywood remains a social institution, and its movies describe recognizable social situations in their plots and themes. But Hollywood's engagement with "the other America out there in reality" is most often indirect. In *America in the Movies*, Michael Wood notes the presence of two newspaper headlines in *For Me and My Gal* (1942), a Gene Kelly–Judy Garland musical set in World War I. At one point, Harry Palmer (Kelly) is holding a newspaper headlined "Germans Near Paris," but he is not reading the story. Later, he is asleep under a paper headlined "Lusitania Sunk." Wood sees in these unnoticed events a paradigm of the way entertainment works: "the world of death and war and menace and disaster is really there, gets a mention, but then is rendered irrelevant by the story or the star or the music." Movies, he argues, dramatize "our semi-secret concerns" in a story, allowing them a "brief, thinly disguised parade": "Entertainment is not, as we often think, a full-scale flight from our problems, not a means of forgetting them completely, but rather a rearrangement of our problems into shapes which tame them, which disperse them to the margins of our attention."[3]

Hollywood movies contain themes of social relevance not so much because their viewers need to have those issues dramatized as because that thematic material establishes a point of contact between the movies' Utopian sensibility and the surrounding social environment of its audience.