9. Classical Narration
The Hollywood Example

In fictional filmmaking, one mode of narration has achieved predominance. Whether we call it mainstream, dominant, or classical cinema, we intuitively recognize an ordinary, easily comprehensible movie when we see it. Our survey of narrational modes can properly start with this classical tradition, since it relies on the strongest schemata and the most prevalent extrinsic norms. Our example will be the most historically influential classicism: Hollywood studio filmmaking of the years 1917 to 1960. The concepts developed so far in this book allow us to analyze classical Hollywood narration with considerable precision. We do not need to fall back on clichés like "transparency," "seamlessness," "invisibility," "concealment of production," or "*discours* posing as *histoire*." We can define classical narration as a particular configuration of normalized options for representing the fabula and for manipulating the possibilities of syuzhet and style. This approach will also enable us to suggest a more dynamic account of the spectator's role.[1]

Canonic Narration

The classical Hollywood film presents psychologically de-fined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or with external circumstances. The story ends with a decisive victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem and a clear achievement or nonachievement of the goals. The principal causal agency is thus the character, a discriminated individual endowed with a consistent batch of evident traits, qualities, and be-haviors. Although the cinema inherits many conventions of portrayal from theater and literature, the character types of melodrama and popular fiction get fleshed out by the addi-tion of unique motifs, habits, or behavioral tics. In parallel fashion, the star system has as one of its functions the creation of a rough character prototype for each star which is then adjusted to the particular needs of the role. The most "specified" character is usually the protagonist, who be-comes the principal causal agent, the target of any narra-tional restriction, and the chief object of audience identifica-tion. These features of the syuzhet will come as no surprise, though already there are important differences from other narrational modes (e.g., the comparative absence of consist-ent and goal-oriented characters in art-cinema narration).

Of all modes, the classical one conforms most closely to the "canonic story" which story-comprehension researchers posit as normal for our culture. In fabula terms, the reliance upon character-centered causality and the definition of the action as the attempt to achieve a goal are both salient features of the canonic format.[2] At the level of the syuzhet, the classical film respects the canonic pattern of establishing an initial state of affairs which gets violated and which must then be set right. Indeed, Hollywood screenplay-writing manuals have long insisted on a formula which has been revived in recent structural analysis: the plot consists of an undisturbed stage, the disturbance, the struggle, and the elimination of the disturbance.[3] Such a syuzhet pattern is the inheritance not of some monolithic construct called the "novelistic" but of specific historical forms: the well-made play, the popular romance, and, crucially, the late nineteenth-century short story.[4] The characters' causal in-teractions are thus to a great extent functions of such over-arching syuzhet/fabula patterns.

In classical fabula construction, causality is the prime unifying principle. Analogies between characters, settings, and situations are certainly present, but at the denotative level any parallelism is subordinated to the movement of cause and effect.[5] Spatial configurations are motivated by realism (a newspaper office must contain desks, typewriters, phones) and, chiefly, by compositional necessity (the desk and typewriter will be used to write causally significant news stories; the phones form crucial links among characters). Causality also motivates temporal principles of organization: the syuzhet represents the order, frequency, and duration of fabula events in ways which bring out the salient causal relations. This process is especially evident in a device highly characteristic of classical narration—the deadline. A dead-line can be measured by calendars (*Around the World in Eighty Days*), by clocks (*High Noon*), by stipulation ("You've got a week but not a minute longer"), or simply by cues that time is running out (the last-minute rescue). That the climax of a classical film is often a deadline shows the structural power of defining dramatic duration as the time it takes to achieve or fail to achieve a goal.

Usually the classical syuzhet presents a double causal structure, two plot lines: one involving heterosexual ro-mance (boy/girl, husband/wife), the other line involving another sphere—work, war, a mission or quest, other per-sonal relationships. Each line will possess a goal, obstacles, and a climax. In *Wild and Woolly* (1917), the hero, Jeff, has two goals—to live a wild Western life and to court Nell, the woman of his dreams. The plot can be complicated by several lines, such as countervailing goals (the people of Bitter Creek want Jeff to get them a railroad spur, a crooked Indian agent wants to pull a robbery) or multiple romances (as in *Footlight Parade* and *Meet Me in St. Louis*). In most cases the romance sphere and the other sphere of action are dis-

tinct but interdependent. The plot may close off one line before the other, but often the two lines coincide at the climax: resolving one triggers the resolution of the other. In *His Girl Friday*, the reprieve of Earl Williams precedes the reconciliation of Walter and Hildy, but it is also the condition of the couple's reunion.

The syuzhet is always broken up into segments. In the silent era, the typical Hollywood film would contain between nine and eighteen sequences; in the sound era, between fourteen and thirty-five (with postwar films tending to have more sequences). Speaking roughly, there are only two types of Hollywood segments: "montage sequences" (compromising Metz's third, fourth, and eighth syntagmatic types) and "scenes" (Metz's fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth types).[6] Hollywood narration clearly demarcates its scenes by neoclassical criteria—unity of time (continuous or consistently intermittent duration), space (a definable locale), and action (a distinct cause-effect phase). The bounds of the sequence will be marked by some standardized punctuations (dissolve, fade, wipe, sound bridge).[7] Raymond Bellour points out that the classical segment tends also to define itself microcosmically (through internal repetitions of style or story material) and macrocosmically (by parallels with other segments of the same magnitude).[8] We must also remember that each film establishes its own scale of segmentation. A syuzhet which concentrates on a single locale over a limited dramatic duration (e.g., the one-night-in-a-haunted-house film) may create segments by character entrances or exits, a theatrical *liaison des scènes*. In a film which spans decades and many locales, a series of dissolves from one small action to another will not necessarily constitute distinct sequences.

The classical segment is not a sealed entity. Spatially and temporally it is closed, but causally it is open. It works to advance the causal progression and open up new developments.[9] The pattern of this forward momentum is quite codified. The montage sequence tends to function as a transitional summary, condensing a single causal development, but the scene of character action—the building block of classical Hollywood dramaturgy—is more intricately con-

structed. Each scene displays distinct phases. First comes the exposition, which specifies the time, place, and relevant characters—their spatial positions and their current states of mind (usually as a result of previous scenes). In the middle of the scene, characters act toward their goals: they struggle, make choices, make appointments, set deadlines, and plan future events. In the course of this, the classical scene continues or closes off cause-effect developments left dangling in prior scenes while also opening up new causal lines for future development. At least one line of action must be left suspended, in order to motivate the shifts to the next scene, which picks up the suspended line (often via a "dialogue hook"). Hence the famous "linearity" of classical construction—a trait not characteristic of Soviet montage films (which often refuse to demarcate scenes clearly) or of art-cinema narration (with its ambiguous interplay of subjectivity and objectivity).

Here is a simple example. In *The Killers* (1946), the insurance investigator Riordan has been hearing Lieutenant Lubinsky's account of Ole Anderson's early life. At the end of the scene, Lubinsky tells Riordan that they're burying Ole today. This dangling cause leads to the next scene, set in the cemetery. An establishing shot provides spatial exposition. While the clergyman intones the funeral oration, Riordan asks Lubinsky the identity of various mourners. The last, a solitary old man, is identified as "an old-time hoodlum named Charleston." Dissolve to a pool hall, with Charleston and Riordan at a table drinking and talking about Ole. During the burial scene, the Lubinsky line of inquiry is closed off and the Charleston line is initiated. When the scene halts, Charleston is left suspended, but he is picked up immediately in the exposition of the next scene. Instead of a complex braiding of causal lines (as in the films of Rivette) or an abrupt breaking of them (as in Antonioni, Godard, or Bresson), the classical Hollywood film spins them out in smooth, careful linearity.

Something else contributes to this linearity. The mystery film, with its resolved enigma at the end, is only the most apparent instance of the tendency of the classical syuzhet to develop toward full and adequate knowledge. Whether a

: phases. First comes
e, place, and relevant
their current states of
cenes). In the middle
r goals: they struggle,
t deadlines, and plan
e classical scene con-
pments left dangling
new causal lines for
of action must be left
ifts to the next scene,
often via a "dialogue
of classical construc-
oviet montage films
nes clearly) or of art-
interplay of subjectiv-

ers (1946), the insur-
hearing Lieutenant
early life. At the end of
t they're burying Ole
next scene, set in the
ies spatial exposition.
eral oration, Riordan
mourners. The last, a
n old-time hoodlum
hall, with Charleston
lking about Ole. Dur-
of inquiry is closed off
When the scene halts,
is picked up immedi-
ne. Instead of a com-
films of Rivette) or an
ioni, Godard, or Bres-
s them out in smooth,

inearity. The mystery
end, is only the most
he classical syuzhet to
nowledge. Whether a

protagonist learns a moral lesson or only the spectator knows
the whole story, the classical film moves steadily toward a
growing awareness of absolute truth.

The linkage of causal lines must eventually terminate.
How to conclude the syuzhet? There are two ways of regard-
ing the classical ending. We can see it as the crowning of the
structure, the logical conclusion of the string of events, the
final effect of the initial cause, the revelation of the truth.
This view has some validity, not only in the light of the tight
construction that we frequently encounter in Hollywood
films but also given the precepts of Hollywood screenwrit-
ing. Rule books tirelessly bemoan the pressures for a happy
ending and emphasize the need for a logical wrap-up. Still,
there are enough instances of unmotivated or inadequate
plot resolutions to suggest a second hypothesis: that the
classical ending is not all that structurally decisive, being a
more or less arbitrary readjustment of that world knocked
awry in the previous eighty minutes. Parker Tyler suggests
that Hollywood regards all endings as "purely conventional,
formal, and often, like the charade, of an infantile logic."[10]
Here again we see the importance of the plot line involving
heterosexual romance. It is significant that of one hundred
randomly sampled Hollywood films, over sixty ended with a
display of the united romantic couple—the cliché happy
ending, often with a "clinch"—and many more could be said
to end happily. Thus an extrinsic norm, the need to resolve
the plot in a way that yields "poetic justice," provides a
structural constant, inserted with more or less motivation
into its proper slot, the epilogue. In any narrative, as Meir
Sternberg points out, when the syuzhet's end is strongly
precast by convention, the compositional attention falls on
the retardation accomplished by the middle portions; the
text will then "account for the necessary retardation in
quasi-mimetic terms by placing the causes for delay within
the fictive world itself and turning the middle into the bulk of
the represented action."[11] At times, however, the motivation
fails, and a discordance between preceding causality and
happy denouement may become noticeable as an ideological
difficulty; such is the case with films like *You Only Live
Once*, *Suspicion*, *The Woman in the Window*, and *The*

Wrong Man.[12] We ought, then, to be prepared for either a
skillful tying up of all loose ends or a more or less miraculous
appearance of what Brecht called bourgeois literature's
mounted messenger. "The mounted messenger guarantees
you a truly undisturbed appreciation of even the most in-
tolerable conditions, so it is a sine qua non for a literature
whose sine qua non is that it leads nowhere."[13]

The classical ending may be a sore spot in another respect.
Even if the ending resolves the two principal causal lines,
some comparatively minor issues may still be left dangling.
For example, the fates of secondary characters may go un-
settled. In *His Girl Friday*, Earl Williams is reprieved, the
corrupt administration will be thrown out of office, and Wal-
ter and Hildy are reunited, but we never learn what happens
to Molly Malloy, who jumped out a window to distract the
reporters. (We know only that she was alive after the fall.)
One could argue that in the resolution of the main problem
we forget minor matters, but this is only a partial explana-
tion. Our forgetting is promoted by the device of closing the
film with an *epilogue*, a brief celebration of the stable state
achieved by the main characters. Not only does the epilogue
reinforce the tendency toward a happy ending; it also repeats
connotative motifs that have run throughout the film. *His
Girl Friday* closes on a brief epilogue of Walter and Hildy
calling the newspaper office to announce their remarriage.
They learn that a strike has started in Albany, and Walter
proposes stopping off to cover it on their honeymoon. This
plot twist announces a repetition of what happened on their
first honeymoon and recalls that Hildy was going to marry
Bruce and live in Albany. As the couple leave, Hildy carrying
her suitcase, Walter suggests that Bruce might put them up.
The neat recurrence of these motifs gives the narration a
strong unity; when such details are so tightly bound
together, Molly Malloy's fate is more likely to be overlooked.
Perhaps instead of "closure" it would be better to speak of a
"closure effect," or even, if the strain of resolved and unre-
solved issues seems strong, of "pseudoclosure." At the level
of extrinsic norms, though, the most coherent possible epi-
logue remains the standard to be aimed at.

Commonplaces like "transparency" and "invisibility" are

on the whole unhelpful in specifying the narrational properties of the classical film. Very generally, we can say that classical narration tends to be omniscient, highly communicative, and only moderately self-conscious. That is, the narration knows more than all the characters, conceals relatively little (chiefly "what will happen next"), and seldom acknowledges its own address to the audience. But we must qualify this characterization in two respects. First, generic factors often create variations upon these precepts. A detective film will be quite restricted in its range of knowledge and highly suppressive in concealing causal information. A melodrama like *In This Our Life* can be slightly more self-conscious than *The Big Sleep*, especially in its use of acting and music. A musical will contain codified moments of self-consciousness (e.g., when characters sing directly out at the viewer). Second, the temporal progression of the syuzhet makes narrational properties fluctuate across the film, and these fluctuations too are codified. Typically, the opening and closing of the film are the most self-conscious, omniscient, and communicative passages. The credit sequence and the first few shots usually bear traces of an overt narration. Once the action has started, however, the narration becomes more covert, letting the characters and their interaction take over the transmission of information. Overt narrational activity returns at certain conventional moments: the beginnings and endings of scenes (e.g., establishing shots, shots of signs, camera movements out from or in to significant objects, symbolic dissolves), and summary passages known as "montage sequences." At the very close of the syuzhet, the narration may again acknowledge its awareness of the audience (nondiegetic music reappears, characters look to the camera or close a door in our face), its omniscience (e.g., the camera retreats to a long shot), and its communicativeness (now we know all). Classical narration is thus not equally "invisible" in every type of film or throughout any one film.

The communicativeness of classical narration is evident in the way that the syuzhet handles gaps. If time is skipped over, a montage sequence or a bit of character dialogue informs us; if a cause is missing, we will typically be in-formed that something isn't there. And gaps will seldom be permanent. "In the beginning of the motion picture," writes one scenarist, "we don't know anything. During the course of the story, information is accumulated, until at the end we know everything."[14] Again, these principles can be mitigated by generic motivation. A mystery might suppress a gap (e.g., the opening of *Mildred Pierce*), a fantasy might leave a cause still questionable at the end (e.g., *The Enchanted Cottage*). In this respect, *Citizen Kane* remains somewhat "unclassical": the narration supplies the answer to the "Rosebud" mystery, but the central traits of Kane's character remain partly undetermined, and no generic motivation justifies this.

The syuzhet's construction of time powerfully shapes the fluctuating overtness of narration. When the syuzhet adheres to chronological order and omits the causally unimportant periods of time, the narration becomes highly communicative and unselfconscious. On the other hand, when a montage sequence compresses a political campaign, a murder trial, or the effects of Prohibition into moments, the narration becomes overtly omniscient. A flashback can quickly and covertly fill a causal gap. Redundancy can be achieved without violating the fabula world if the narration represents each story event several times in the syuzhet, through one enactment and several recountings in character dialogue. Deadlines neatly let the syuzhet unselfconsciously respect the durational limits that the fabula world sets for its action. When it is necessary to suggest repeated or habitual actions, the montage sequence will again do nicely, as Sartre noted when he praised *Citizen Kane*'s montages for achieving the equivalent of the "frequentative" tense: "He made his wife sing in every theatre in America."[15] When the syuzhet uses a newspaper headline to cover gaps of time, we recognize both the narration's omniscience and its relatively low profile. (The public record is less self-conscious than an intertitle "coming straight from" the narration.) More generally, classical narration reveals its discretion by posing as an *editorial* intelligence that selects certain stretches of time for full-scale treatment (the scenes), pares down others a little, presents others in highly compressed fashion (the

nd gaps will seldom be
motion picture," writes
ing. During the course
ted, until at the end we
ciples can be mitigated
ht suppress a gap (e.g.,
asy might leave a cause
e *Enchanted Cottage*).
s somewhat "unclassi-
wer to the "Rosebud"
ne's character remain
ic motivation justifies

e powerfully shapes the
. When the syuzhet
mits the causally unim-
becomes highly com-
the other hand, when a
tical campaign, a mur-
on into moments, the
ent. A flashback can
. Redundancy can be
world if the narration
times in the syuzhet,
recountings in charac-
he syuzhet unselfcon-
s that the fabula world
y to suggest repeated or
ce will again do nicely,
en Kane's montages for
quentative" tense: "He
America."[15] When the
cover gaps of time, we
ience and its relatively
self-conscious than an
narration.) More gener-
cretion by posing as an
rtain stretches of time
, pares down others a
npressed fashion (the

montage sequences), and simply scissors out events that are
inconsequential. When fabula duration is expanded, it is
done through crosscutting, as we have seen in our consid-
eration of *The Birth of a Nation* (p. 84).

Overall narrational qualities also get manifested in the
film's manipulation of space. Figures are adjusted for mod-
erate self-consciousness by angling the bodies more or less
frontally but avoiding to-camera gazes (except, of course, in
optical point-of-view passages). That no causally significant
cues in a scene are left unknown testifies to the communica-
tiveness of the narration. Most important is the tendency of
the classical film to render narrational omniscience as spa-
tial *omnipresence*.[16] If the narration plays down its knowl-
edge of upcoming events, it does not hesitate to reveal its
ability to change views at will by cutting within a scene and
crosscutting between various locales. Writing in 1935, a
critic claims that the camera is omniscient in that it "stimu-
lates, through correct choice of subject matter and set-up,
the sense within the percipient of 'being at the most vital
part of the experience—at the most advantageous point of
perception' throughout the picture."[17] Whereas Miklós
Jancsó's long takes create spatial patterns that refuse omni-
presence and thus drastically restrict the spectator's knowl-
edge of story information, classical omnipresence makes the
cognitive schema we call "the camera" into an *ideal* invisible
observer, freed from the contingencies of space and time but
discreetly confining itself to codified patterns for the sake of
story intelligibility.

By virtue of its handling of space and time, classical narra-
tion makes the fabula world an internally consistent con-
struct into which narration seems to step from the outside.
Manipulation of mise-en-scène (figure behavior, lighting,
setting, costume) creates an apparently independent pro-
filmic event, which becomes the tangible story world framed
and recorded from without. This framing and recording
tends to be taken as the narration itself, which can in turn be
more or less overt, more or less "intrusive" upon the posited
homogeneity of the story world. Classical narration thus
depends upon the notion of the invisible observer.[18] Bazin,
for instance, portrays the classical scene as existing inde-

pendently of narration, as if on a stage.[19] The same quality
named by the notion of "concealment of production" th
fabula seems not to have been constructed; it appears
have preexisted its narrational representation. (In produ
tion, in some sense, it often did: for major films of the 19
and thereafter, Hollywood set designers created toy se
within which model cameras, actors, and lighting un
could be placed to predetermine filming procedures.)

This "invisible-observer" narration is itself often fa
effaced, for stylistic causes that I shall examine shortly.
we can already see that classical narration quickly cues us
construct story logic (causality, parallelisms), time, a
space in ways that make the events "before the camera"
principal source of information. For example, it is obvio
that Hollywood narratives are highly redundant, but t
effect is achieved principally by patterns attributable to t
story world. Following Susan Suleiman's taxonomy,
can see that the narration assigns the same traits and fun
tions to each character on her or his appearance; differe
characters present the same interpretive commentary on t
same character or situation; similar events involve differe
characters; and so on. Information is for the most part r
peated by characters' dialogue or demeanor. There is als
some redundancy between narrational commentary and d
picted fabula action, as when silent film expository intertit
convey crucial information or when nondiegetic music
pleonastic with the action (e.g., "Here Comes the Bride"
In This Our Life). But, in general, the narration is so con
structed that characters and their behavior produce an
reiterate the necessary story data. (The Soviet montage cin
ema makes much stronger use of redundancies betwee
narrational commentary and fabula action.) Retardati
operates in analogous fashion: the construction of the tot
fabula is delayed principally by inserted lines of action, su
as causally relevant subplots, interpolated comedy bits, an
musical numbers (rather than by narrational digressions
the sort found in the "God and Country" sequence of *Oct
ber*). Similarly, causal gaps in the fabula are usually signale
by character actions (e.g., the discovery of clues in detectiv
films). The viewer concentrates on constructing the fabul

not on asking why the narration is representing the fabula in this particular way—a question more typical of art-cinema narration.

The priority of causality within an integral fabula world commits classical narration to unambiguous presentation. Whereas art-cinema narration can blur the lines separating objective diegetic reality, characters' mental states, and inserted narrational commentary, the classical film asks us to assume clear distinctions among these states. When the classical film restricts knowledge to a character, as in most of *The Big Sleep* and *Murder My Sweet*, there is nonetheless a firm borderline between subjective and objective depiction. Of course the narration can set traps for us, as in *Possessed*, when a murder that appears to be objective is revealed to have been subjective (a generically motivated switch, incidentally); but the hoax is revealed immediately and unequivocally. The classical flashback is revealing in this connection. Its *presence* is almost invariably motivated subjectively, since a character's recollection triggers the enacted representation of a prior event. But the *range of knowledge* in the flashback portion is often not identical with that of the character doing the remembering. It is common for the flashback to show us more than the character can know (e.g., scenes in which she or he is not present). An amusing example occurs in *Ten North Frederick*. The bulk of the film is presented as the daughter's flashback, but at the end of the syuzhet, back in the present, she learns for the first time information we had encountered in "her" flashback! Classical flashbacks are typically "objective": character memory is a pretext for a nonchronological syuzhet arrangement. Similarly, optically subjective shots become anchored in an objective context. One writer notes that a point-of-view shot "must be motivated by, and definitely linked to, the objective scenes [shots] that precede and follow it."[22] This is one source of the power of the invisible-observer effect: the camera seems always to include character subjectivity within a broader and definite objectivity.

Classical Style

Even if the naive spectator takes the style of the classical Hollywood film to be invisible or seamless, this is not much critical help. What makes the style so self-effacing? The question cannot be completely answered until we consider the spectator's activity, but we may start with Yuri Tynianov's suggestion: "Pointing to the 'restraint' or 'naturalism' of the style in the case of some film or some director is not the same as sweeping away the role of style. Quite simply, there are a variety of styles and they have various roles, according to their relationship to the development of the syuzhet."[23] Three general propositions, then.

1. *On the whole, classical narration treats film technique as a vehicle for the syuzhet's transmission of fabula information.* Of all modes of narration, the classical is most concerned to motivate style compositionally, as a function of syuzhet patterning. Consider the very notion of what we now call a shot. For decades, Hollywood practice called a shot a "scene," thus conflating a material stylistic unit with a dramaturgical one. In classical filmmaking, the overriding principle is to make every instantiation of technique obedient to the character's transmission of fabula information, with the result that bodies and faces become the focal points of attention. Film techniques are patterned to fit the causal structure of the classical scene (exposition, closing off of an old causal factor, introduction of new causal factors, suspension of a new factor). The introduction phase typically includes a shot which establishes the characters in space and time. As the characters interact, the scene is broken up into closer views of action and reaction, while setting, lighting, music, composition, and camera movement enhance the process of goal formulation, struggle, and decision. The scene usually closes on a portion of the space—a facial reaction, a significant object—that provides a transition to the next scene.

While it is true that sometimes a classical film's style becomes "excessive," decoratively supplementing denotative syuzhet demands, the use of technique must be minimally motivated by the characters' interactions. "Excess," such as we find in Minnelli or Sirk, is often initially justified by generic convention. The same holds true for even the

he style of the classical
amless, this is not much
e so self-effacing? The
wered until we consider
 may start with Yuri
o the 'restraint' or 'natu-
e film or some director is
the role of style. Quite
s and they have various
p to the development of
ositions, then.
on treats film technique
ismission of fabula in-
on, the classical is most
tionally, as a function of
y notion of what we now
 practice called a shot a
tylistic unit with a dram-
g, the overriding princi-
f technique obedient to
la information, with the
the focal points of atten-
d to fit the causal struc-
on, closing off of an old
usal factors, suspension
hase typically includes a
rs in space and time. As
s broken up into closer
setting, lighting, music,
 enhance the process of
sion. The scene usually
acial reaction, a signifi-
ion to the next scene.
 a classical film's style
supplementing denota-
chnique must be mini-
interactions. "Excess,"
s often initially justified
holds true for even the

most eccentric stylists in Hollywood, Busby Berkeley and Josef von Sternberg, each of whom required a core of generic motivation (musical fantasy and exotic romance, respectively) for his experiments.

2. *In classical narration, style typically encourages the spectator to construct a coherent, consistent time and space for the fabula action.* Many other narrational norms value disorienting the spectator, albeit for different purposes. Only classical narration favors a style which strives for utmost denotative clarity from moment to moment. Each scene's temporal relation to its predecessor will be signaled early and unequivocally (by intertitles, conventional cues, a line of dialogue). Lighting must pick out figure from ground; color must define planes; in each shot, the center of story interest will be near the center of the frame. Sound recording is perfected so as to allow for maximum clarity of dialogue. Camera movements aim to create an unambiguous, voluminous space. "In dollying," remarks Allan Dwan, "as a rule we find it's a good idea to *pass* things .... We always noticed that if we dollied past a tree, it became solid and round, instead of flat."[24] Hollywood makes much use of the *anticipatory* composition or camera movement, leaving space in the frame for the action or tracking so as to prepare for another character's entrance. Compare Godard's tendency to make framing wholly subservient to the actor's immediate movement with this comment of Raoul Walsh's: "There is only one way in which to shoot a scene, and that's the way which shows the audience what's happening next."[25] Classical editing aims at making each shot the logical outcome of its predecessor and at reorienting the spectator through repeated setups. Momentary disorientation is permissible only if motivated realistically. The hallucinatory murder in *Possessed* that at first appears to have objectively occurred is justified retrospectively by the protagonist's increasing madness. Discontinuous editing, as in Slavko Vorkapich's montage sequence depicting the earthquake in *San Francisco*, gets motivated by the chaos of the action depicted. Stylistic disorientation, in short, is permissible when it conveys disorienting story situations.

3. *Classical style consists of a strictly limited number of particular technical devices organized into a stable para-*

digm and ranked probabilistically according to syuzhet demands. The stylistic conventions of Hollywood narration ranging from shot composition to sound mixing, are intuitively recognizable to most viewers. This is because the style deploys a limited number of devices and these devices are regulated as alternative depictive options. Lighting offers a simple example. A scene may be lit "high-key" or "low-key." There is three-point lighting (key, fill, and backlighting on figure, plus background lighting) versus single-source lighting. The cinematographer also has several degrees of diffusion available. Now, in the abstract, choices are equiprobable, but in a given context, one alternative is more likely than its mates. In a comedy, high-key lighting is more probable; a dark street will realistically motivate single-source lighting; the close-up of a woman will be more heavily diffused than that of a man. The "invisibility" of the classical style in Hollywood relies not only on highly codified stylistic devices but also upon their codified functions in context.

A similarly restricted paradigm controls the framing of the human figure. Most often, a character will be framed between *plan américain* (the knees-up framing) and medium close-up (the chest-up framing); the angle will be straight on, at shoulder or chin level. The framing is less likely to be an extreme long shot or an extreme close-up, a high or low angle. And a bird's eye view or a view from straight below is very improbable and would require compositional or generic motivation (e.g., as an optical point of view or as a view of a dance ensemble in a musical).

Most explicitly codified into rules is the system of classical continuity editing. The reliance upon an axis of action orients the spectator to the space, and the subsequent cutting presents clear paradigmatic choices among different kinds of "matches." That these are weighted probabilistically is shown by the fact that most Hollywood scenes begin with establishing shots, break the space into closer views linked by eyeline matches and/or shot/reverse shots, and return to more distant views only when character movement or the entry of a new character requires the viewer to be reoriented. An entire scene without an establishing shot is unlikely but permissible (especially if stock or location footage

age or special effects are employed); mismatched screen direction and inconsistently angled eyelines are less likely; perceptible jump cuts and unmotivated cutaways are flatly forbidden. This paradigmatic aspect makes the classical style, for all its "rules," not a timeless formula or recipe but a historically constrained set of more or less likely options.[26]

These three factors go some way to explaining why the classical Hollywood style passes relatively unnoticed. Each film will recombine familiar devices within fairly predictable patterns and according to the demands of the syuzhet. The spectator will amost never be at a loss to grasp a stylistic feature because he or she is oriented in time and space and because stylistic figures will be interpretable in the light of a paradigm.

When we consider the relation of syuzhet and style, we can say that the classical film is characterized by its obedience to a set of extrinsic norms which govern both syuzhet construction and stylistic patterning. The classical cinema does not encourage the film to cultivate idiosyncratic intrinsic norms; style and syuzhet seldom enjoy prominence. A film's principal innovations occur at the level of the fabula— i.e., "new stories." Of course, syuzhet devices and stylistic features have changed over time. But the fundamental principles of syuzhet construction (preeminence of causality, goal-oriented protagonist, deadlines, etc.) have remained in force since 1917. The stability and uniformity of Hollywood narration yield one reason to call it classical, at least insofar as classicism in any art is traditionally characterized by obedience to extrinsic norms.[27]

The Classical Spectator

The stability of syuzhet processes and stylistic configurations in the classical film should not make us treat the classical spectator as passive material for a totalizing machine. The spectator performs particular cognitive operations which are no less active for being habitual and familiar. The Hollywood fabula is the product of a series of particular schemata, hypotheses, and inferences.

The spectator comes to a classical film very well prepared. The rough shape of syuzhet and fabula is likely to conform to the canonic story of an individual's goal-oriented, causally determined activity. The spectator knows the most likely stylistic figures and functions. He or she has internalized the scenic norm of exposition, development of old causal line, and so forth. The viewer also knows the pertinent ways to motivate what is presented. "Realistic" motivation, in this mode, consists of making connections recognized as plausible by common opinion. (A man like this would naturally . . .) Compositional motivation consists of picking out the important links of cause to effect. The most important forms of transtextual motivation are recognizing the recurrence of a star's persona from film to film and recognizing generic conventions. Generic motivation, as we have seen, has a particularly strong effect on narrational procedures. Finally, artistic motivation—taking an element as being present for its own sake—is not unknown in the classical film. A moment of spectacle or technical virtuosity, a thrown-in musical number or comic interlude: the Hollywood cinema intermittently welcomes the possibility of sheer self-absorption. Such moments may be highly reflexive, "baring the device" of the narration's own work, as when in *Angels over Broadway* a destitute playwright reflects, "Our present plot problem is money."

On the basis of such schemata the viewer projects hypotheses. Hypotheses tend to be probable (validated at several points), sharply exclusive (rendered as either/or alternatives), and aimed at suspense (positing a future outcome). In *Roaring Timber*, a landowner enters a saloon in which our hero is sitting. The owner is looking for a tough foreman. Hypothesis; he will ask the hero to take the job. This hypothesis is probable, future-oriented, and exclusive (either the man will ask our hero or he won't). The viewer is helped in framing such hypotheses by several processes. Repetition reaffirms the data on which hypotheses should be grounded. "State every important fact three times," suggests scenarist Frances Marion, "for the play is lost if the audience fails to understand the premises on which it is based."[28] The exposition of past fabula action will characteristically be placed within the early scenes of the syuzhet, thus supplying a firm

ilm very well prepared.
a is likely to conform to
goal-oriented, causally
knows the most likely
he has internalized the
ient of old causal line,
the pertinent ways to
tic" motivation, in this
s recognized as plausi-
his would naturally . . .)
picking out the impor-
st important forms of
ng the recurrence of a
d recognizing generic
we have seen, has a
al procedures. Finally,
it as being present for
e classical film. A mo-
ity, a thrown-in musi-
ollywood cinema inter-
sheer self-absorption.
e, "baring the device"
in *Angels over Broad-*
Our present plot prob-

ewer projects hypoth-
e (validated at several
as either/or alterna-
a future outcome). In
a saloon in which our
for a tough foreman.
ke the job. This hypo-
d exclusive (either the
he viewer is helped in
processes. Repetition
s should be grounded.
s," suggests scenarist
f the audience fails to
based."[28] The exposi-
teristically be placed
thus supplying a firm

basis for our hypothesis-forming. Except in a mystery film, the exposition neither sounds warning signals nor actively misleads us; the primacy effect is given full sway. Characters will be introduced in typical behavior, while the star system reaffirms first impressions. ("The moment you see Walter Pidgeon in a film you know he could not do a mean or petty thing."[29]) The device of the deadline asks the viewer to construct forward-aiming, all-or-nothing causal hypotheses: either the protagonist will achieve the goal in time or he will not. And if information is unobtrusively "planted" early on, later hypotheses will become more probable by taking "insignificant" foreshadowing material for granted.

This process holds at the stylistic level as well. The spectator constructs fabula time and space according to schemata, cues, and hypothesis-framing. Hollywood's extrinsic norms, with their fixed devices and paradigmatic organization, supply the viewer with firm expectations that can be measured against the concrete cues emitted by the film. In making sense of a scene's space, the spectator need not mentally replicate every detail of the space but only construct a rough relational map of the principal dramatic factors. Thus a "cheat cut" is easily ignored because the spectator's cognitive processes rank cues by their pertinence to constructing the ongoing causal chain of the fabula, and on this scale, the changes in speaker, camera position, and facial expression are more noteworthy than, say, a slight shift in hand positions.[30] The same goes for temporal mismatches.

What is rare in the classical film, then, is Henry James's "crooked corridor," the use of narration to make us jump to invalid conclusions.[31] The avoidance of disorientation we saw at work in classical style holds true for syuzhet construction as well. Future-oriented "suspense" hypotheses are more important than past-oriented "curiosity" ones, and surprise is less important than either. In *Roaring Timber*, imagine if the landowner had entered the bar seeking a tough foreman, offered the job to our hero, and he had replied in a fashion that showed he was not tough. Indeed, one purpose of foreshadowing and repetition is exactly to avoid surprises later on. Of course, if all hypotheses were steadily and immediately confirmed, the viewer would quickly lose interest.

Several factors intervene to complicate the process. More generally, schemata are by definition abstract prototype structures, and procedures, and these never specify all properties of the text. Many long-range hypotheses await confirmation. Retardation devices, being unpred able to a great degree, can introduce objects of immed attention as well as delay satisfaction of overall expectat The primacy effect can be countered by a "recency eff which qualifies and perhaps even appears to negate our impression of a character or situation. Furthermore, the structure of the Hollywood scene, which almost invaria ends with an unresolved issue, assures that an eve centered hypothesis carries interest over to the next quence. Finally, we should not underestimate the ro rapid rhythm in the classical film; more than one pra tioner has stressed the need to move the construction of st action along so quickly that the audience has no time reflect—or get bored. It is the task of classical narratio solicit strongly probable and exclusive hypotheses and th confirm them while still maintaining variety in the concre working out of the action.

The classical system is not simpleminded. Recall th under normal exhibition circumstances the film view rate of comprehension is absolutely controlled. The cue of probable, exclusive, and suspense-oriented hypothese a way of adjusting dramaturgy to the demands of the viev situation. The spectator need not rummage very far into the film, since his or her expectations are aimed a future. Preliminary exposition locks schemata into p quickly, and the all-or-nothing nature of most hypothe allows rapid assimilation of information. Redundancy ke attention on the issue of immediate moment, while judici lacks of redundancy allow for minor surprises later. In classical narration manages the controlled pace of film v ing by asking the spectator to construe the syuzhet and stylistic system in a single way: construct a denotative, vocal, integral fabula.

By virtue of its centrality within international film com merce, Hollywood cinema has crucially influenced m other national cinemas. After 1917, the dominant form filmmaking abroad were deeply affected by the model

storytelling presented by the American studios. Yet the Hollywood cinema cannot be identified with classicism *tout court*. The "classicism" of 1930s Italy or 1950s Poland may mobilize quite different narrational devices. (For instance, the happy ending seems more characteristic of Hollywood than of other classicisms.) But most of classical narration's *principles* and *functions* can be considered congruent with those outlined here. A group of Parisian researchers has come to comparable, if preliminary, conclusions about French films of the 1930s.[32] Noël Burch has shown that in the German cinema, a mastery of classical style is displayed as early as 1922, in Lang's *Dr. Mabuse der Spieler*.[33] As a narrational mode, classicism clearly corresponds to the idea of an "ordinary film" in most cinema-consuming countries of the world.

Seven Films, Eight Segments

The many variants of classicism make any overall periodization of the mode very difficult. Even the history of Hollywood norms is notoriously hard to delineate. This is partly because significant periods in the history of studios or technology will not necessarily coincide with changes in stylistic or syuzhet processes. Broadly speaking, we could periodize classical Hollywood narration on two levels. With respect to *procedures*, we could trace changes within classical narrational paradigms, according to what options come into favor at certain periods. Here we should look not only for innovations but for normalization, majority or customary practice. Connecting scenes by dissolves is possible but rare in the silent cinema, yet it is the favored transition between 1929 and the late 1960s. With respect to narrational *principles*, we could study how classical films assume narrative causality, time, and space to be constructed. Spatial continuity within a scene can be achieved by selecting from several functionally equivalent techniques, but such continuity rests on broader principles too, such as the positing of the 180-degree line, or axis of action; and changes in this postulate can be traced across the Hollywood cinema. Also within the domain of principles are the fluctuations of broader narrational prop-

erties. For instance, narration in the silent cinema tends to be somewhat more self-conscious than in the sound cinema, if only because of expository intertitles. Similarly, an insistent suppressiveness emerges in many films associated with the grouping known as *film noir*.

No single film, or even a dozen films, can exhaustively characterize a narrational mode. Because particular devices vary across periods, and because norms tend to be organized paradigmatically, any film must choose only a few possibilities to actualize. Part 1 has already considered four classical Hollywood films in some detail: *Rear Window*, *The Big Sleep*, *Murder My Sweet*, and *In This Our Life*. These have exemplified the viewer's role, the patterned fluctuations of narrational processes, and the effect of genre on narration. Rather than analyze yet another classical film in depth, we can more usefully broaden our scope to survey the breadth of the Hollywood paradigm and to map, however roughly, historical changes in syuzhet construction and stylistic composition. Let us, then, consider eight segments from seven films, arranged chronologically from 1917 to 1957. The seven films represent different studios, various genres, a range of directorial renown (from Lubitsch and Hawks to John Emerson and Lloyd Bacon), and a spectrum of stylistic trends (early talkie, *film noir*, wide screen). The segments are also laid out in syuzhet sequence, as if this were all one macrofilm running from prologue and opening scene to climax and epilogue.

Wild and Woolly (Artcraft, 1917)

A prologue establishes the romance of the Old West and contrasts it with the West today. The story proper begins in the mansion of Collis J. Hillington, a railroad tycoon. His son Jeff is obsessed with the Old West: he has a tepee in his room, dresses cowboy style, and is an expert roper and pistol shot. At breakfast Hillington tells his butler, Judson, to fetch Jeff to leave for the office. After Jeff playfully ropes Judson to a chair, demonstrates his marksmanship, and rides Judson downstairs like a rodeo star, Jeff leaves with his father.

The prologue introduces an omniscient and frankly com-

heavily saturated symbolism that Parker Tyler calls the "pedantic" side of Hollywood.[39]

The six sequences in *Say It with Songs* constitute a convenient anthology of most of the montage devices and functions that would dominate Hollywood narration after 1930. The chief absence is a strongly *subjective* montage, such as the delirious ones in *Blues in the Night* (1941). "In a film based on a psychological theme," one writer suggests in 1949, "montage is quite often used to portray the confused or abnormal state of mind of one of the characters."[40] By the early 1930s, montage sequences became so common that we can say that the classical Hollywood film consisted of only two types of decoupage units: *scenes* and *summaries*.[41] The montage sequences may become slightly foregrounded as deviations from the film's normal scenes, but their very difference is inevitably relocated as the principal alternative within the extrinsic norm. Someone like Slavko Vorkapich could make a career as a montage "specialist" by subjecting clichéd montage tropes to visual hyperbole: canted angles, slow and fast motion, diagrammatically bold compositions, snazzy wipes, and so forth. Always an overtly rhetorical moment, the montage sequence became codified as a likely site of spectacle and a self-conscious narrational gesture.

His Girl Friday (Columbia, 1939)

Reporter Hildy Johnson has agreed with her ex-husband and ex-editor, Walter Burns, to write one last article before she marries her fiancé, Bruce Baldwin. The assignment involves interviewing Earl Williams, who awaits execution for shooting a policeman. Meanwhile, Walter schemes to thwart Hildy's marriage by having Bruce arrested on a trumped-up robbery charge. While Hildy has gone to get Bruce out of jail, her fellow reporters read the opening of her story, still in her typewriter carriage.

Louis Marcorelles has called *His Girl Friday* "le film américain par excellence,"[42] and indeed wherever one looks one finds evidence of pristine classicism: deadlines, narrational covertness, interdependent plotting of romance and nonromance lines.[43] The scene I have picked out is of in-terest in two chief respects: its exemplary stylistic patterning and its frank "laying bare" of principles of classical causality.

In the silent cinema, each piece of a scene's action would be filmed in a separate take, to be combined with other shots in the editing. With the multiple-camera shooting procedures of early talkies like *Say It with Songs*, however, one camera filmed the entire scene in long shot or medium long shot; this "master shot" provided a complete, synchronized sound record of the scene and allowed the editor to cut back to a reestablishing shot at any time. By 1933, multiple-camera shooting became rare, reserved for spectacle (a mammoth musical number) or unrepeatable actions (a fire, a car tumbling down a precipice). But the master shot hung on. It became conventional to film the entire scene once in establishing shot (the master shot) and then reshoot portions in medium shot and close-up. Some studios, directors, and producers adhered to this work plan quite rigidly: Darryl Zanuck was famous for insisting on having many different shots to juggle in the editing.[44] While in certain respects the master shot scheme encouraged a more formulaic shooting and cutting, some directors, such as Howard Hawks, seem to have used it to allow decisions at the moment of filming. When Leigh Brackett began to script *The Big Sleep*, he was told: "Just master scenes, do it all in master scenes."[45]

The style of *His Girl Friday* is an example of the complexity available within master shot procedures. The film's average shot duration (15 seconds) is quite long for its period, creating an intrinsic norm that is signaled in the very first scene, Hildy's visit to Walter's office. The shots also display a dense organization of characters within the frame. The scenes in the pressroom of the Criminal Courts Building are particularly striking in this regard. Compared with shots in *Wild and Woolly*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, or *Say It with Songs*, a medium long shot around the card table in *His Girl Friday*, such as figure 9.54, packs its figures on various planes and in varying degrees of lighting. The shots use most of the screen space; even a small hole is a cue for us that a character will enter to fill the spot (figs. 9.55–9.56). The lateral pans across the action, initiated by the master shot camera of early talkies, has become a fluid reframing that

ary stylistic patterning
s of classical causality.
a scene's action would
bined with other shots
mera shooting proce-
: *Songs*, however, one
g shot or medium long
mplete, synchronized
the editor to cut back
e. By 1933, multiple-
rved for spectacle (a
eatable actions (a fire,
the master shot hung
e entire scene once in
and then reshoot por-
me studios, directors,
in quite rigidly: Darryl
having many different
in certain respects the
re formulaic shooting
Howard Hawks, seem
e moment of filming.
The Big Sleep, he was
master scenes."[45]
ample of the complex-
dures. The film's aver-
te long for its period,
naled in the very first
he shots also display a
thin the frame. The
al Courts Building are
mpared with shots in
: *Fan*, or *Say It with*
card table in *His Girl*
s figures on various
g. The shots use most
is a cue for us that a
igs. 9.55–9.56). The
d by the master shot
fluid reframing that

glides from one dense composition to the next. Accompany-
ing this saturation of shot space is an emphasis on spreading
the sources of sound across the frame. In figure 9.54, for
instance, the dialogue is carried by figures dotted around the
shot; conversation ricochets. This has an important con-

sequence: since the long takes refuse to cue the spectator w
cuts, sound guides the viewer to look at one speaker, in on
portion of the frame, then shift his/her attention to anothe
spot. Of course, figure placement allows us to make some
plausible hypotheses, so that in figure 9.54, the most prom
inent figures (Hildy and McCue are highest in the frame an
most clearly lit) become the most probable sources of pri
cipal dialogue, while the chatter of the cardplayers become
secondary. This hierarchy of attention can be seen eve
more vividly when Molly Malloy, Earl Williams's frien
confronts the reporters.

In the scene that occupies us here, the reporters ar
gathered around Hildy's typewriter and Sanders reads ou
her story.

1. The first shot begins with a characteristically packe
composition (fig. 9.57) while the camera tracks back t
establish the group (fig. 9.58). After Sanders has finishe
reading, he straightens and remarks, "But I ask you guy
can that girl write an interview?" The dialogue starts t
ricochet around the frame, from McCue (standing on th
right) to Bensiger (seated foreground left, turned away fro
us) to Sanders (seated middle-ground right). Bensiger rise

in disgust, and this motivates the camera's reframing to leave a bit of vacant space in the right middle ground (fig. 9.59). Sanders continues his comments, ending: "Now I give that marriage three months, and I'm laying three to one.

Any takers?" Hildy's voice rings sharply from offscreen— "I'll take that bet"—and the men look right.

2. Viewed from a new angle, the space reserved for Hildy is filled as she strides in (figs. 9.60–9.61). Hildy chides the

ly from offscreen—
right.
e reserved for Hildy
1). Hildy chides the

men and dials Walter at the *Morning Post*, using a phone that has been established long in advance.

3. A *plan-américain* of Bensiger, Sanders, and McCue (fig. 9.62). Sanders says she can't quit so easily. There is an

evident "cheating" at this and the next cut: Sanders is so close to McCue here that he should be visible in shots 2 and 4. But the disparities pass unperceived because (*a*) in shots 2 and 4 he is on the left margin of the frame, and our attention is concentrated on the right center, where Hildy is moving and speaking; and (*b*) Sanders's *relation* to McCue is consistent even if the distances are not, and as we saw in Chapter 7, the spectator's spatial schemata are, within limits, tolerant of variations in distance, especially if the camera angle changes.

4. As (2). Hildy insists that she is quitting and phones Walter. She tells him off. Her fixed posture throws any other movement into relief, so the reporters' small grins and raised eyebrows emerge as a silent accompaniment to her jeremiad (fig. 9.63). A series of rapid reframings left and right makes Hildy the central carrier of narrative meaning. She grabs her story, carries it to the phone, rips the article up, returns to get her coat (fig. 9.64), dives for her purse, swings back to her desk, and, when the phone rings offscreen, strides back right to yank it out (fig. 9.65) and dump it in the very depth of the frame (fig. 9.66)—virtually the only zone of the shot not

9.64
9.65

9.66

occupied by narrative information! The growing momentum of the shot depends on an accelerating number of spatial assumptions guided and reinforced by physical movement and dialogue.

One point should be clear. It is not that *His Girl Friday*
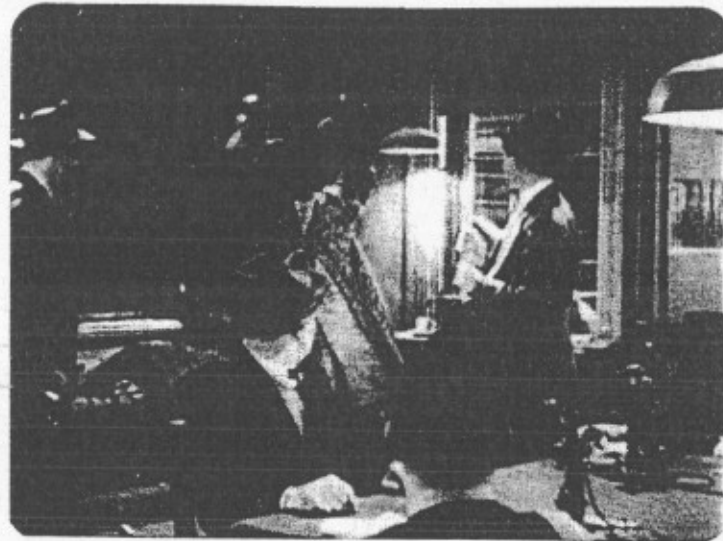
"looks forward" to Orson Welles's use of deep-space compositions or sonic cues. Rather, we should say that these practices were somewhat uncommon but still permissible options within the extrinsic norms of the late 1930s, and Welles's work (like Wyler's) exploited and amplified them in ways that would become influential later. It is a matter not of a drastic change in style but of the promotion of particular stylistic options to a more prominent position.

The scene is of interest from another angle. From the outset of *His Girl Friday*, Earl Williams's killing of the policeman functions as a founding cause, triggering Walter's campaign to win Hildy back. But throughout the early scenes, there is a gap in the account of Williams's crime: what made him do it? Most of the "positive" characters assume that Earl went temporarily insane. Walter says that the "poor little guy" went berserk as a result of losing his job. One of the reporters tells Hildy that they do not believe that Williams knew what he was doing. Even Earl says he did not mean to kill the cop. To win payment from Walter, Hildy must write a story that supplies a plausible causal link. The reporters tell her that after Earl lost his job he began hanging

about the park, listening to rabble-rousers. Interviewing Earl, she asks him if he remembers anything the speakers said. Earl recalls a phrase: "Production for use." Hildy pounces on this. "Now, look, Earl. When you found yourself with that gun in your hand and that policeman coming at you, what did you think about? . . . Could it have been 'production for use'? . . . What's a gun for, Earl?. . . Maybe that's why you used it. . . . Seems reasonable." Earl gratefully accepts this as what he had in mind. "Why, it's simple, isn't it?" "Very simple," Hildy answers softly. She now has a smooth account, at one end Earl's unemployment, at the other a dead policeman, with a series of causal links: jobless man hangs around park, hears a phrase, remembers the phrase, and acts upon his memory.

It is this account that Sanders reads from Hildy's typescript:

And so into this little tortured mind came the idea that that gun had been produced for use, and use it he did. But the state has a production-for-use plan, too. It has a gallows. And at 7 A.M., unless a miracle occurs, that gallows will be used to separate the soul of Earl Williams from his body. And out of Molly Malloy's life will go the one kindly soul she ever knew.

Like a good classical storyteller, Hildy has filled the gap. She has also hooked one causal chain to another, a future-oriented one. She has satisfied curiosity but will not minimize suspense: Will Earl be executed? She stresses the deadline, 7 A.M. She introduces a romance subplot involving Molly. And she holds out the possibility of a miracle that may yet furnish a happy ending. In sum, Hildy's article is indeed what she calls it, a "story," a "yarn," and it duplicates, structurally and microcosmically, the conventions of classical syuzhet construction.

The film, of course, insists that Hildy's yarn is only a pretext, like Earl himself. Walter uses Earl's plight to chivvy a corrupt administration and to lure Hildy back. Hildy uses Earl and the story to extract a nest egg from Walter. Hildy's disclosed cause, "production for use," is frankly displayed as her invention. Any other phrase which Earl supplied could

have been twisted into an explanation of his case. And Hildy's story is never in fact printed; she tears it up. Earl's psychological impulse is only something to motivate her story realistically and compositionally, and by flaunting this the film's own narration lays bare, in a manner typical of "artistic" motivation, the arbitrariness of classical causality generally. Such devices, as Earl would say, are produced to be used.

The Killers (Universal, 1946)

In Brentwood, Ole the Swede is murdered by two unknown gunmen. This triggers an inquiry by insurance investigator Riordan. Interviewing Ole's acquaintances and tracing his career, Riordan discloses that Ole took part in a $250,000 robbery and then cheated the gang by running off with the loot and with the boss's girlfriend, Kitty Collins. But Kitty soon left Ole, and Ole settled down in Brentwood, apparently penniless. In Philadelphia, Riordan meets Kitty Collins and asks her to fill in the gaps. Who planned the robbery? Was Ole in love with her? What impelled him to double-cross the gang? What happened to the money? And who ordered Ole killed?

A character in Michel Butor's *Passing Time* notes that every detective story "superimposes two temporal sequences, the days of the inquiry which start at the crime and the days of the drama which lead up to it."[46] This remark is especially appropriate to *The Killers*. The murder of Ole is the hinge between the crime fabula and the investigation fabula; Riordan must search Ole's past for causes of the killing. In *The Big Sleep* and *Murder My Sweet*, the syuzhet uses the detective's investigation to expose prior fabula information through characters' recountings. But *The Killers* goes a step further: many past events are *enacted*, in flashbacks. This leads to a true "superimposition" of two dramatized sequences, Ole's past (1935–1946) and Riordan's investigation (eight successive days in 1946). Or rather, because of the flashbacks' complex insertion within Riordan's inquiry, the syuzhet interweaves one temporal sequence with