The Classical Hollywood Cinema

Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960

David Bordwell,
Janet Staiger and
Kristin Thompson

ROUTLEDGE

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London

Dedicated to

Ralph Bellamy, Margaret Booth, Anita Loos,
Arthur C.Miller, and their many co-workers
in the Hollywood cinema

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Preface

Hollywood as the dream factory: ‘How can you tell if people would want drugs so much today, if we still gave them this dream-world on film?’ (Ruth Waterbury). Hollywood as an arm of the culture industry: ‘The tone adopted by every film is that of the witch handing food to the child she wants to enchant or devour, while mumbling horribly: “Lovely, lovely soup. How you’re going to enjoy it!”’ (T.W.Adorno). Hollywood as celluloid imperialism: ‘Hollywood may be physically situated in this country, but it is an international enterprise.’ (Will H.Hays). Hollywood as escape: ‘All the adventure, all the romance, all the excitement you lack in your daily life are in— Pictures.’ (Advertisement for a film). Hollywood as nostalgia: ‘Take a good look, because we’ll never see its like again.’ *(That’s Entertainment!)*. Hollywood as imaginary landscape: ‘Hollywood is a place you can’t geographically define. We don’t really know where it is.’ (John Ford).[1]

The number of books promulgating all these versions of Hollywood (and more) would fill the library of a small town in America. Hollywood has been celebrated by cultists and camp followers, castigated by reformers and social theorists, and boosted by an army of publicists. Anthropologists have treated it as a tribal village, economists as a company town. The films of Hollywood have been lumped together as indistinguishable vulgarity, and they have been splintered into a hundred categories: the films of Garbo, of Goldwyn, of Griffith; the Paramount pretties, automobiles in the cinema, the gangster film, the serial, music for the movies; direction by Alfred Hitchcock, costumes by Edith Head, cinematography by Gregg Toland, sets by Van Nest Polglase; silent films, sound films, color films, films noirs.

Yet another treatment of the subject requires some justification. This book is an examination of Hollywood cinema as a distinct artistic and economic phenomenon. We will look at American studio filmmaking much as an art historian would trace the stylistic traits and business transactions of Parisian academic painting in the nineteenth century, or as a historian of music would examine the aesthetic and economic forces involved in the development of Viennese classicism. We take Hollywood seriously, treating it as a distinct mode of film practice with its own cinematic style and industrial conditions of existence.

A mode of film practice is not reducible to an *oeuvre* (the films of Frank Capra), a genre (the Western), or an economic category (RKO films). It is an altogether different category, cutting across careers, genres, and studios. It is, most simply, a context. And we cannot arrive at this context simply by adding up all the histories of directors, genres, studios, producers, etc.; this would be, as George Kubler suggests, like trying to determine a country’s network of railroads by studying the itinerary of every traveler.[2] Just as the railroad system is of another logical order than your or my trip on it, so the Hollywood mode of film practice constitutes an integral system, including persons and groups but also rules, films, machinery, documents, institutions, work processes, and theoretical concepts. It is this totality that we shall study. And while we could justify this book as filling in the background for this or that individual’s achievement, our aims go

further. We hope to show that understanding this mode of film practice is indispensible to a full grasp of the art and industry of cinema as it has existed in history.

Recent academic film criticism has focused more and more exclusively upon the text. Sophisticated methodologies drawn from anthropology, semiotics, psychoanalysis, and literary criticism have dramatically broadened our sense of how a film works. But too often critical analysis has been unable to specify the historical conditions that have controlled and shaped textual processes.[3] On the other hand, the new generation of film historians, while an exciting development, has generally avoiding confronting the films themselves.[4] Detailed accounts of Hollywood financing, labor, distribution, exhibition, and technology have not usually sought to link economic factors to stylistic ones. In this book, we show how the concept of a mode of film practice can historicize textual analysis and connect the history of film style to the history of the motion picture industry.

The concept of a mode of film practice situates textual processes in their most pertinent and proximate collective context. This context includes both a historically defined group of films and the material practices that create and sustain that group. Raymond Williams has posed the problem:[5]

> We have to break from the common procedure of isolating an object and then discovering its components. On the contrary we have to discover the nature of a practice and then its conditions…. The recognition of the relation of a collective mode and an individual product— and these are the only categories we can initially presume—is a recognition of related practices. That is to say, the irreducibly individual projects that particular works are, may come in experience and analysis to show resemblances which allow us to group them into collective modes. These are by no means always genres. They may exist as resemblances within and across genres. They may be the practice of a group in a period, rather than the practice of a phase in a genre. But as we discover the nature of a particular practice, and the nature of the relation between an individual product and a collective mode, we find that we are analyzing, as two forms of the same process, both its active composition and its conditions of composition, and in either direction this is a complex of extending active relationships.

For the Hollywood cinema, the practices of film production constitute a major component of that process of which Williams speaks. Film production must be understood not simply as a background to individual achievement but as a crucial ‘condition of composition’ of resemblances among texts. The ways that films are conceived, planned, and produced leave their marks upon the films— not only directly, in telltale details, but structurally as well.[6] At the same time, stylistic aims have shaped the development of the mode of production. The relations between film style and mode of production are, we argue, reciprocal and mutually influencing.

A mode of film practice, then, consists of a set of widely held stylistic norms sustained by and sustaining an integral mode of film production. Those norms constitute a determinate set of assumptions about how a movie should behave, about what stories it properly tells and how it should tell them, about the range and functions of film technique, and about the activities of the spectator. These formal and stylistic norms will be created, shaped, and supported within a mode of film production—a characteristic ensemble of economic aims, a specific division of labor, and particular ways of conceiving and executing the work of filmmaking. Through time, both the norms and the mode of production will change, as will the technology they employ, but certain fundamental aspects will remain constant. Thus to see Hollywood filmmaking from 1917–60 as a unified mode of film practice is to argue for a coherent system whereby aesthetic norms and the mode of film production reinforced one another. This argument is the basis of this book.

If we have taken the realms of style and production as primary, it is not because we consider the concrete conditions of reception unimportant. Certainly conditions of consumption form a part of any mode of film practice. An adequate history of the reception of the classical Hollywood film would have to examine the changing theater situation, the history of publicity, and the role of social class, aesthetic tradition, and ideology in constituting the audience. This history, as yet unwritten, would require another book, probably one as long as this. While we have not treated reception fully, the present book does introduce certain issues —e.g., the activities which the Hollywood film solicits from the spectator, or the importance of early advertising in establishing classical canons— which we believe to be necessary to any future study of how the classical film has been consumed under specific circumstances.

As a historical account, our argument makes use of a great deal of empirical data about filmmaking, including much information not previously brought to light. But we should stress that the concept of a mode of film practice is not one that can be retrieved by 'simply looking' at films, documents, and machines. For rhetorical purposes, our argument is cast chronologically, but the idea of a 'classical Hollywood cinema' is ultimately a theoretical construct, and as such it must be judged by criteria of logical rigor and instrumental value. This book thus stands out not only as a history of the Hollywood cinema but also as an attempt to articulate a theoretical approach to film history.

There are many ways to organize a study such as this one. It would be possible to trace the history of the Hollywood cinema three times— once recounting changes in the mode of production, then treating changes in film style, then tracing technological developments. This we rejected, since the length of the three sections would be likely to break apart the parallels and causal connections we wished to bring out among the three realms. And placing one realm, such as the mode of production, first might imply that it had a monolithic determining status. But another alternative, that of simply limning a chronological account of American cinema and raising each argument *seriatim*, was clearly too atomistic. It would not allow us to treat broad institutional and stylistic patterns in a systematic way. We finally settled upon a format which permits us to delineate theoretically distinct realms while still weaving our arguments into a fundamentally chronological pattern. Our seven-part structure is a compromise between the need to analyze several 'levels' of historical change (style, economics, technology) and the need to cut 'vertically' across those levels at moments in which significant changes occurred. In this way, we balance localized accounts and generalized explanation. The book should then be seen as outlining the fundamental principles of historical stability and change at work in the Hollywood cinema and as displaying those principles in detail in particular instances.

The result can be sketched out in broad strokes. Part One establishes the stylistic norms fundamental to Hollywood filmmaking from 1917 to 1960. It is here that the concepts of norm, function, and style are defined and the ordinary Hollywood film is analyzed.

In Parts Two, Three, and Four, we consider three aspects of pre-1930 Hollywood filmmaking: the economic, the stylistic, and the technological. Part Two examines the economic aims and principles of the Hollywood mode of production and traces how that mode created a series of hierarchical, divided work systems. Part Three shows that while the Hollywood mode of production found its definitive form, the stylistic norms were also becoming consolidated. Part Four shows how the norms and the mode of production impell and respond to technological change.

Parts Five and Six deal with developments in the classical Hollywood cinema in the sound era. Part Five examines the effects of organized labor and large-scale financing upon the mode of production and traces further changes in production processes during the period. Part Six relates developments in technology to changes in film style during the same years.

Part Seven suggests the historical influences and the current state of this mode of film practice and concludes with some consideration of alternative modes.

This book has had its own stylistic norms and its own mode of production. Although parts and chapters are the work of single authors, we have conceived and executed the book as a unified argument, sharing common assumptions and terminology. We have not, however, striven for complete homogeneity. Differences of emphasis, value, argument, and style thus remain to remind the reader that the forms of the medium and the division of labor leave their marks, for better or worse, upon any cultural artifact.

Part One

The classical Hollywood style, 1917–60

DAVID BORDWELL

Neither normative criticisms nor morphological description alone will ever give us a theory of style. I do not know if such a theory is necessary; but if we want one we might do worse than approach artistic solutions in terms of those specifications which are taken for granted in a given period, and to list systematically, and even, if need be, pedantically, the priorities in the reconciliation of conflicting demands. Such a procedure will give us a new respect for the classical but will also open our minds to an appreciation of non-classical solutions representing entirely fresh discoveries.[1]

E.H.Gombrich

1
An excessively obvious cinema

We all have a notion of the typical Hollywood film. The very label carries a set of expectations, often apparently obvious, about cinematic form and style. We can define that idea, test and ground those expectations, by using the concept of *group* style.

Historians routinely speak of group style in other arts: classicism or the Baroque in music, Impressionism or Cubism in painting, Symbolism or Imagism in poetry.[1] Cinema has its own group styles; German Expressionism, Soviet montage cinema, and the French New Wave afford timehonored instances. But to suggest that Hollywood cinema constitutes a group style seems more risky. In other national schools, a handful of filmmakers worked within sharply contained historical circumstances for only a few years. But Hollywood, as an extensive commercial enterprise, included hundreds of filmmakers and thousands of films, and it has existed for over six decades. If it is a daunting challenge to define a German Expressionist cinema or a Neorealist one, it might seem impossible to circumscribe a distinctive Hollywood 'group style.'

The historical arguments for the existence of such style are examined later in this book. At this point, a *prima facie* case for a 'classical Hollywood style' depends upon critically examining a body of films. Suppose that between 1917 and 1960 a distinct and homogeneous style has dominated American studio filmmaking—a style whose principles remain quite constant across decades, genres, studios, and personnel. My goal here is to identify, at several levels of generality, to what extent Hollywood filmmaking adheres to integral and limited stylistic conventions.

We could start with a description of the Hollywood style derived from Hollywood's own discourse, that enormous body of statements and assumptions to be found in trade journals, technical manuals, memoirs, and publicity handouts. We would find that the Hollywood cinema sees itself as bound by rules that set stringent limits on individual innovation; that telling a story is the basic formal concern, which makes the film studio resemble the monastery's *scriptorium*, the site of the transcription and transmission of countless narratives; that unity is a basic attribute of film form; that the Hollywood film purports to be 'realistic' in both an Aristotelian sense (truth to the probable) and a naturalistic one (truth to historical fact); that the Hollywood film strives to conceal its artifice through techniques of continuity and 'invisible' storytelling; that the film should be comprehensible and unambiguous; and that it possesses a fundamental emotional appeal that transcends class and nation. Reiterated tirelessly for at least seventy years, such precepts suggest that Hollywood practitioners recognized themselves as creating a distinct approach to film form and technique that we can justly label 'classical.'

We are not used to calling products of American mass culture 'classical' in any sense; the word apparently comes easier to the French speaker. As early as 1925, a French reviewer described Chaplin's *Pay Day* (1922) as a representative of 'cinematic classicism,' and a year later Jean Renoir spoke of Chaplin, Lubitsch, and Clarence Brown as contributors to a 'classical cinema' of the future, one 'which owes nothing

to tricks, where nothing is left to chance, where the smallest detail takes its place of importance in the overall psychological scheme of the film.'[2] It was probably André Bazin who gave the adjective the most currency; by 1939, Bazin declared, Hollywood filmmaking had acquired 'all the characteristics of a classical art.'[3] It seems proper to retain the term in English, since the principles which Hollywood claims as its own rely on notions of decorum, proportion, formal harmony, respect for tradition, mimesis, self-effacing craftsmanship, and cool control of the perceiver's response—canons which critics in any medium usually call 'classical.'

To stress this collective and conserving aspect of Hollywood filmmaking also affords a useful counterweight to the individualist emphases of auteur criticism. Bazin criticized his protégés at *Cahiers du cinéma* by reminding them that the American cinema could not be reduced to an assembly of variegated creators, each armed with a personal vision:[4]

> What makes Hollywood so much better than anything else in the world is not only the quality of certain directors, but also the vitality and, in a certain sense, the excellence of a tradition…. The American cinema is a classical art, but why not then admire in it what is most admirable, i.e., not only the talent of this or that filmmaker, but the genius of the system, the richness of its ever-vigorous tradition, and its fertility when it comes into contact with new elements.

Bazin's point struck the *Cahiers* writers most forcefully only after his death, partly because the decline of the studio system faced them with mediocre works by such venerated filmmakers as Mann, Ray, and Cukor. 'We said,' remarked Truffaut bitterly, 'that the American cinema pleases us, and its filmmakers are slaves; what if they were freed? And from the moment that they were freed, they made shitty films.'[5] Pierre Kast agreed: 'Better a good *cinéma de salarie* than a bad *cinéma d'auteur*.'[6] It is the *cinéma de salarie,* at least in its enduring aspects, that represents Hollywood's classicism.

All of which is not to say that Hollywood's classicism does not have disparate, even 'nonclassical' sources. Certainly the Hollywood style seeks effects that owe a good deal to, say, romantic music or nineteenth-century melodrama. Nor do Hollywood's own assumptions exhaustively account for its practice; the institution's discourse should not set our agenda for analysis. The point is simply that Hollywood films constitute a fairly coherent aesthetic tradition which sustains individual creation. For the purposes of this book, the label 'classicism' serves well because it swiftly conveys distinct aesthetic qualities (elegance, unity, rule-governed craftsmanship) and historical functions (Hollywood's role as the world's mainstream film style). Before there are auteurs, there are constraints; before there are deviations, there are norms.

Norms, paradigms, and standards

> In the final analysis, we loved the American cinema because the films all resembled each other.
>
> François Truffaut[7]

The first, and crucial, step is to assume that classical filmmaking constitutes an aesthetic system that can characterize salient features of the individual work. The system cannot determine every minute detail of the work, but it isolates preferred practices and sets limits upon invention. The problem is, in other words, that of defining what Jan Mukařovský has called aesthetic *norms*.

When we think of a norm, especially in a legal sense, we tend to think of a codified and inflexible rule. While Mukařovský recognized that the aesthetic norms of a period are often felt by artists as constraints upon their freedom, he stressed the norms' comparative flexibility. He argued that the aesthetic norm is

characterized by its non-practical nature; the only goal of the aesthetic norm is to permit art works to come into existence. This has important consequences: disobeying the aesthetic norm is not necessarily a negative act (may, indeed, be quite productive); and aesthetic norms can change rapidly and considerably. Mukařovský goes on to inventory several different kinds of norms, all of which intertwine within the art work. There are norms deriving from the *materials* of the art work. Poetry, for instance, takes language as its material, but language does not come raw to the task; it brings alongs norms of everyday usage. Secondly, there are *technical* norms, basic craft practices such as metrical schemes and genre conventions. Thirdly, there are *practical*, or sociopolitical norms; e.g., a character's ethical values represented in the work. Finally, Mukařovský speaks of *aesthetic* norms as such, which seem to be the basic principles of artistic construction that form the work. These would include concepts of unity, decorum, novelty, and the like.[8]

Mukařovský's work helps us move toward denning the Hollywood cinema as an aesthetic system. Plainly, the Hollywood style has functioned historically as a set of norms. It might seem rash to claim that Hollywood's norms have not drastically changed since around 1920, but Mukařovský points out that periods of 'classicism' tend toward harmony and stability. Moreover, the idea of multiple norms impinging upon the same work helps us see that it is unlikely that any Hollywood film will perfectly embody all norms: 'The interrelations among all these norms, which function as instruments for artistic devices, are too complex, too differentiated, and too unstable for the positive value of the work to be able to appear as virtually identical with the perfect fulfillment of all norms obtaining within it.'[9] No Hollywood film *is* the classical system; each is an 'unstable equilibrium' of classical norms.

Mukařovský's work also enables us to anticipate the particular norms which we will encounter. Evidently, classical cinema draws upon practical or ethico-socio-political norms; I shall mention these only when the particular ways of appropriating such norms are characteristic of the classical style. For example, heterosexual romance is one value in American society, but that value takes on an aesthetic function in the classical cinema (as, say, the typical motivation for the principal line of action). Material norms are also present in the cinema; when we speak of the 'theatrical' space of early films or of the Renaissance representation of the body as important for classical cinema, we are assuming that cinema has absorbed certain material norms from other media. Similarly, I will spend considerable time examining the technical norms of classical filmmaking, since to a large extent these pervasive and persistent conventions of form, technique, and genre constitute the Hollywood tradition. But in order to understand the underlying logic of the classical mode, we must also study how that mode deploys fundamental aesthetic norms. How, specifically, does Hollywood use such principles as unity and aesthetic function? As all these points indicate, the chief virtue of Mukařovský's work is to enable us to think of a group film style not as a monolith but as a complex system of specific forces in dynamic interaction.

My emphasis on norms should not be taken to imply an iron-clad technical formula imposed upon filmmakers. Any group style offers a *range* of alternatives. Classical filmmaking is not, strictly speaking, formulaic; there is always another way to do something. You can light a scene high- or low-key, you can pan or track, you can cut rapidly or seldom. A group style thus establishes what semiologists call a paradigm, a set of elements which can, according to rules, substitute for one another. Thinking of the classical style as a paradigm helps us retain a sense of the choices open to filmmakers within the tradition. At the same time, the style remains a unified system because the paradigm offers *bounded* alternatives. If you are a classical filmmaker, you cannot light a scene in such a way as to obscure the locale entirely (cf. Godard in *Le gai savoir*); you cannot pan or track without some narrative or generic motivation; you cannot make every shot one second long (cf. avant-garde works). Both the alternatives and the limitations of the style remain clear if we think of the paradigm as creating *functional equivalents:* a cut-in may replace a

track-in, or color may replace lighting as a way to demarcate volumes, because each device fulfills the same role. Basic principles govern not only the elements in the paradigm but also the ways in which the elements may function.

Our account of this paradigm must also recognize how redundant it is. Not only are individual devices equivalent, but they often appear together. For instance, there are several cues for a flashback in a classical Hollywood film: pensive character attitude, close-up of face, slow dissolve, voice-over narration, sonic 'flashback,' music. In any given case, several of these will be used together. In another mode of film practice, such as that of the European 'art cinema' of the 1960s, the same general paradigm governs a movement into flashback, but the conventional cues are not so redundant (e.g., pensive close-up but with no music or dissolve). The classical paradigm thus often lets the filmmaker choose how to be redundant, but seldom how redundant to be.

One more conception of Hollywood cinema as a unified system plays a part in understanding the classical style. This book will also refer to a 'standardized' film style. In general, this suggests only adherence to norms. But the term also implies that Hollywood cinema has been made stringently uniform by its dependence upon a specific economic mode of film production and consumption. Calling the Hollywood style 'standardized' often implies that norms have become recipes, routinely repeating a stereotyped product.

Yet the avant-garde has no monopoly on quality, and violating a norm is not the only way to achieve aesthetic value. I assume that in any art, even those operating within a mass-production system, the art work can achieve value by modifying or skillfully obeying the premises of a dominant style.

Levels of generality

If the classical style is a set of norms, we need a way to distinguish greater and lesser degrees of abstraction in that set. A match-on-action cut is a classical convention; so is the principle of spatial continuity. But the first convention is a particular application of the second. Broadly speaking, we can analyze the classical Hollywood style at three levels.

1 Devices. Many isolated technical elements are characteristic of classical Hollywood cinema: three-point lighting, continuity editing, 'movie music,' centered framings, dissolves, etc. Such devices are often what we think of as the 'Hollywood style' itself. Yet we cannot stop with simply inventorying these devices.
2 Systems. As members of a paradigm, technical devices achieve significance only when we understand their functions. A dissolve between scenes can convey the passage of time; but so can a cut. To say that the classical Hollywood style ceased to exist when most scenes were linked by cuts is to presume that a style is only the sum of its devices. A style consists not only of recurrent elements but of a set of functions and relations defined for them. These functions and relations are established by a system. For example, one cinematic system involves the construction of represented space. In classical filmmaking, lighting, sound, image composition, and editing all take as one task the articulation of space according to specific principles. It is this systematic quality that makes it possible for one device to do duty for another, or to repeat information conveyed by another. Thus employing a cut to link scenes conforms to one function defined by classical premises; within this paradigm, there must be some cue for a time lapse between scenes, and a cut may do duty for a dissolve (or a swish-pan, or a shot of a clock's moving hands). The systematic quality of film style also sets limits upon the paradigm; in representing

space, for instance, ambiguous camera positions and discontinuous cutting are unlikely to occur because they violate certain principles of the system.

In this book, we shall assume that any fictional narrative film possesses three systems:

A system of narrative logic, which depends upon story events and causal relations and parallelisms among them;

A system of cinematic time; and

A system of cinematic space.

A given device may work within any or all of these systems, depending on the functions that the system assigns to the device.[10]

3 Relations of systems. If systems are relations among elements, the total style can be defined as the relation of those systems to each other. Narrative logic, time, and space interact with one another. Does one of them subordinate the others? Do all three operate independently? How are the principles of one justified or challenged by another? In the Hollywood style, the systems do not play equal roles: space and time are almost invariably made vehicles for narrative causality. Moreover, specific principles govern that process. At this level, even irregularities in the various systems can be seen as purposeful. For instance, if we do find a passage of discontinuous cutting, we can ask whether it is still serving a narrative function (e.g., to convey a sudden, shocking event). In such a case, the relation among systems would remain consistent even if the individual device or system varied from normal usage.

We can, then, characterize the classical Hollywood style by its stylistic elements, by its stylistic systems, and, most abstractly, by the relations it sets up among those systems. No single level of description will work. It is too narrow to define classical norms by devices, and it is unwarrantably broad to define them solely by relations among systems. (The domination of narrative logic over cinematic time and space is common to many styles.) Hence the importance of the second level, the stylistic systems. The categories of causality, time, and space enable us both to place individual devices within functional contexts and to see the classical style as a dynamic interplay of several principles. Finally, no categorical explanation of one level can wholly swallow up another. The systematic principle of depicting space unambiguously does not logically entail the use of three-point lighting. Those specific devices are the products of diverse historical processes; other elements might do as well. The specificity of the classical style depends upon all three levels of generality.

My account here will construct the classical stylistic paradigm across several decades, emphasizing the continuity at the second and third levels. But by stressing continuity of function I do not imply that the systems' paradigmatic range did not change somewhat. For example, before the mid-1920s, the use of high and low angles was severely codified: for long-shots (especially of landscapes), for optical point-of-view, or for shot/reverse-shot patterns when one person is higher than other. (In shot/ reverse-shot editing, an image of one element in the scene, typically a person talking, is followed by a shot of another element which is spatially opposite the first, typically, a person listening. Chapter 5 furnishes a more systematic explanation. See the examples in figs 16.65 and 16.66 in Chapter 16.) A medium-shot of an object or a human figure would seldom be framed from a sharp high- or low-angle. Yet in the late 1920s, Hollywood's spatial paradigm widened a bit, probably as a result of the influence of certain German films. Examples can be found in *Bulldog Drummond* (1929) and **The Show* (1927), which dramatically use high and low angles (see figs 1.1 and 1.2). With the coming of sound, an occasional odd angle could compensate for what was felt to be an excessively 'theatrical' scene (see fig 1.3). Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, steep angles took their place as common functional equivalents for normal framings in many situations. Across history, the

paradigm develops chiefly through changes in the first level of analysis—that of devices. This process will be examined in detail in Parts Three, Four, and Six.

Viewers, schemata, and mental sets

Considering the classical cinema as a system of norms operating at different levels of generality can seem to create a reified object, a colossal block of attributes that says little about how film viewers see films. The language of objectivism is hard to avoid, especially when we apply spatial metaphors like 'levels.' How, then, are we to characterize the viewer's work, or what E.H. Gombrich calls 'the beholder's share'?

An intricate and comprehensive theory of film viewing has yet to be constructed, and it is not within the scope of this book to do it. Yet if we want to consider how the Hollywood film solicits a specific way of being understood, we need to recognize at least how passive an 'illusionist' theory makes the spectator. Illusionist theorists usually insist that only avant-garde texts make the viewer perform an 'active' reading, or force the viewer to 'work to produce meaning.'[11] The Hollywood spectator, it is claimed, is little more than a receptacle; few skills of attention, memory, discrimination, inference-drawing, or hypothesistesting are required. Now this is clearly too simple. Classical films call forth activities on the part of the spectator. These activities may be highly standardized and comparatively easy to learn, but we cannot assume that they are simple.

Consider, as one problem, the spectator as perceiver. Illusionist theory emphasizes the deceptive quality of projected movement or of shot space: the spectator is duped into taking image for reality. As Noël Burch puts it, 'spectators experience the diegetic world as environment.'[12] But recent explorations in aesthetic perception and cognition have shown that 'illusion' is not simply a matter of fooling the eye. The spectator *participates* in creating the illusion. R.L.Gregory, for instance, speaks of perception as inferential, which makes 'illusion' dependent upon errors of inference: either biological 'mechanism' errors (e.g., the *phi* phenomenon as creating the illusion of movement) or cognitive 'strategy' errors (e.g., assuming that the whole is consistent with displayed parts). Gombrich has also shown that visual illusion demands that the spectator propose, test, and discard perceptual hypotheses based on expectation and probability.[13] For illusion to work, the spectator must meet the art work at least half way.

If perceptual illusion requires some spectatorial activity, even more is required for that imaginative involvement solicited by narrative. No story tells all. Meir Sternberg characterizes following a tale as 'gap-filling,' and just as we project motion on to a succession of frames, so we form hypotheses, make inferences, erect expectations, and draw conclusions about the film's characters and actions.[14] Again, the spectator must cooperate in fulfilling the film's form. It is clear that the protocols which control this activity derive from the system of norms operating in the classical style. For example, an insistence upon the primacy of narrative causality is a general feature of the classical system; the viewer translates this norm into a tacit strategy for spotting the work's unifying features, distinguishing significant information from 'noise,' sorting the film's stimuli into the most comprehensive pattern.

Gombrich describes this process in terms of 'schemata' and 'mental sets.' Schemata are traditional formal patterns for rendering subject matter. Gombrich points out that the artist cannot simply copy reality; the artist can only render the model in terms of one schema or another. Thus even new shapes will be assimilated to categories which the artist has learned to handle. As Gombrich puts it, 'making precedes matching'—the creation of a schema precedes copying the model.[15] After the making, the schema can be modified in each particular case by the artist's purpose (usually, the sort of information the artist wants to convey). So far, much of this is congruent with Mukařovský's argument: we might think of the artist's schemata as technical norms and the artist's purpose as involving specific aesthetic norms. But Gombrich

goes on to show that the schemata and the purpose function for the viewer as well. The artist's training is paralleled by the spectator's prior experience of the visual world and, especially, of other art works. The painter's traditional schemata constitute the basis of the viewer's expectations or *mental set:* 'A style, like a culture or climate of opinion, sets up a horizon of expectation, a mental set, which registers deviations and modifications with exaggerated sensitivity.'[16] For Gombrich, this mental set is defined in terms of probabilities: certain schemata are more likely to fit the data than others.

By pairing concepts like schemata and mental set, we can spell out the ways in which the classical film solicits the spectator. For instance, one well-known schema of Hollywood film editing is the shot/reverse-shot pattern. The filmmaker has this ready to hand for representing any two figures, groups, or objects within the same place. This schema can be fitted to many situations, whatever the differences of figure placement, camera height, lighting, or focus; whether the image is in widescreen ratio or not; whether the figures are facing one another or not; etc. Because of the tradition behind the schema, the viewer in turn expects to see the shot/reverse-shot figure, especially if the first shot of the combination appears. If the next shot does not obey the schema, the spectator then applies another, less probable, schema to the second shot. The spectator of the classical film thus riffles through the alternatives normalized by the style, from most to least likely. Through schemata, the style's norms not only impose their logic upon the material but also elicit particular activities from the viewer. The result is that in describing the classical system we are describing a set of operations that the viewer is expected to perform.

To stress the tasks which the film allots to the spectator allows us to abandon certain illusions of our own. We no longer need subscribe to copytheories of cinema, whereby a certain style simply replicates the real world or normal acts of perception; schemata, tied to historically defined purposes, always intervene to guide us in grasping the film. Nor need we imagine a Svengali cinema holding its audience in thrall. The classical schemata have created a mental set that still must be activated by and tested against any given film. Of course, the classical style defines certain spectatorial activities as salient, and the historical dominance of that style has so accustomed us to those activities that audiences may find other schemata more burdensome. Yet this dynamic concept of the viewer's role allows us to explain the very processes that seem so excessively obvious; as we shall see, even the spectator's rapt absorption results from a hypothesis-checking that requires the viewer to meet the film halfway. We can also envision alternative viewing practices, other activities that the spectator might be asked to perform. The chapters that follow, then, suggest at several points how the norms of the classical Hollywood style encourage specific activities on the part of the spectator.

Style in history

> If you're not working for Brezhnev Studio-Mosfilm, you are working for Nixon-Paramount. …
> You forget that this same master has been ordering the same film for fifty years.
>
> *Wind from the East*

To construct the classical Hollywood style as a coherent system, we also need to account for the style's historical dimension. In one sense, this entire book tries to do that, by examining the Hollywood mode of production, the consolidation of the style in a specific period, and the changes that the style undergoes in subsequent years. At this point, I must indicate that my overall description of the classical style applies to a set of films across an extensive period. What historical assumptions underlie such a broadly based analysis? The three levels of generality indicate some of those assumptions. My enterprise assumes a historical continuity at the two most abstract levels of style (systems and relations among systems); it assumes that the

most distinct changes take place at the level of stylistic devices. For example, through its history Hollywood cinema seeks to represent events in a temporally continuous fashion; moreover, narrative logic has generally worked to motivate this temporal continuity. What changes through history are the various devices for representing temporal continuity such as inter-titles, cuts, irises, dissolves, whip-pans, and wipes.

By stressing the enduring principles of the classical style, we lose some specific detail. In this part, I shall not reconstruct the choices available to filmmakers at any given moment. If I say that a scene can begin by drawing back from a significant figure or object, that suggests that an iris, a cut, and a camera movement are all paradigmatic alternatives. But in 1917, the most probable choice would have been the iris; in 1925, the cut; in 1935, the camera movement. In discussing the general principles of classical style, I shall often project the historically variable devices on to the same plane to show their functional equivalence. This bird's-eye view enables us to map the basic and persistent features of the style in history. The more minute history of the devices themselves forms the bulk of Parts Three, Four, and Six.

Historical analysis demands a concept of periodization. Since we are concerned here with a stylistic history, we cannot presuppose that the periods used to write political or social history will demarcate the history of an art. That is, there is no immediate compulsion to define a 'cinema of the 1930s' as drastically different from that of 'the 1940s,' or to distinguish pre-World War II Hollywood style from postwar Hollywood style. What, then, will constitute our grounds for periodization? Norms, yes; but also the film industry, the most proximate and pertinent institution for creating, regulating, and maintaining those norms. This is not to say that film style and mode of production march across decades in perfect synchronization. Parts Two and Five will provide a periodization for the Hollywood mode of production that while congruent in some respects, cannot be simply superimposed upon stylistic history. Nevertheless, we have chosen to frame our study within the years 1917– 60.

The earlier date is easier to justify. Stylistically, from 1917 on, the classical model became dominant, in the sense that most American fiction films since that moment employed fundamentally similar narrative, temporal, and spatial systems. At the same time, the studio mode of production had become organized: detailed division of labor, the continuity script, and a hierarchical managerial system became the principal filmmaking procedures. Parts Two and Three detail how style and industry came to be so closely synchronized by 1917. But why halt an analysis of the classical Hollywood cinema in 1960?

The date triggers suspicion. Stylistically, there is no question that 'classical' films are still being made, as Part Seven will show. Variants of the Hollywood mode of production continue as well. There are thus compelling reasons to claim that 1960 is a premature cutoff point. On the other hand, some critics may assert that this 'classical' period is far too roomy; one can see any period after 1929 as the 'breakdown' of the Hollywood cinema (the tensions of the Depression, the anguish of war and Cold War, and the competitive challenge of television).

The year 1960 was chosen for reasons of history and of convenience. In the film industry, it was widely believed that at the end of the decade Hollywood had reached the end of its mature existence. *This Was Hollywood*, the title of a 1960 book by publicist Beth Day, summarizes many reasons for considering the year as a turning point. Most production firms had converted their energies to television, the dominant massentertainment form since the mid-1950s; many had reduced their holdings in studio real estate; stars had become free agents; most producers had become independent; the B-film was virtually dead.[17] To Day's account we can add other signs of change. By 1960, a certain technological state of the art had been reached: high-definition color films, wide formats, and high-fidelity magnetic sound had set the standard of quality that continues today. Moreover, other styles began to challenge the dominance of classicism. The international art cinema, spearheaded by Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa, certain Italian directors, and the French New Wave, offered a more influential and widely disseminated alternative to Hollywood than

had ever existed before. Not that Hollywood was significantly shaken (Part Seven tries to show why), but the force of the classical norm was reduced somewhat. Despite these reasons, it remains somewhat arbitrary to see 1960 as closing the classical period. We have chosen it partly because it makes our research somewhat manageable while still conveying the powerful spread of the classical cinema's authority.

The ordinary film

Film historians have not generally acknowledged the place of the *typical* work. In most film histories, masterworks and innovations rise monumentally out of a hazy terrain whose contours remain unknown. In other arts, however, the ordinary work is granted considerable importance. Academicism, mainstream works, the canon, tradition—the history of music, painting, and literature could not do without such conceptions. 'I believe,' remarks Roman Jakobson, 'that a very important thing in analyzing trends in the cinema or the structure of a film, is the necessity of considering the base, the *background* of the spectator's habits. What films is the spectator used to seeing? To what forms is he accustomed?'[18] My analysis of the norms of the classical style thus gives privileged place not to the aberrant film that breaks or tests the rules but to the quietly conformist film that tries simply to follow them.

Between 1915 and 1960, at least fifteen thousand feature films were produced in America. It is impossible to analyze such a corpus. To construct a model of the ordinary film, we have selected in an unbiased fashion, 100 films from this period. (Appendix A explains the sampling procedures and lists the films.) We studied each film on a horizontal viewing machine, recording stylistic details of each shot and summarizing the film's action scene by scene. This body of data constitutes our unbiased sample (abbreviated UnS), and when we cite such a film, an asterisk signals it.

In the stylistic analysis of the cinema, the practice of unbiased sampling is unprecedented, but we believe it to be a sound way to determine historical norms. When the sample turned up what might be regarded as auteur films, we accepted this as inevitable in an unbiased sample and treated these films exactly as we did others. At least four-fifths of the sample, however, constitute a body of fairly obscure productions ranging across decades, studios, and genres. Furthermore, we have sought to test the conclusions about the UnS films by closely analyzing almost two hundred other Hollywood films of the 1915–60 period. We chose many of these films for their quality or historical influence, but many were as undistinguished as our UnS items. We shall refer to this second set of films as the Extended Sample (ES). My analysis of the classical style takes the UnS films as the central source of evidence and examples, drawing upon ES films occasionally. This means that many of the films mentioned will be unfamiliar to readers, but since I argue for their typicality, the reader will recognize qualities present in many other films.

In one sense, the concept of group style simply makes manifest what we and Hollywood itself 'already know.' Concepts like norm, paradigm, stylistic alternatives, levels of systemic function, periodization, and schemata are, from this perspective, simply tools in making our habitual intuitions explicit. But these concepts also enable us to reveal the patterned and stable quality of our assumptions. The concepts can show that the classical cinema has an underlying logic which is not apparent from our common-sense reflection upon the films or from Hollywood's own discourse about them. The theoretical concepts introduced in this chapter are indispensible to grasping the classical style's systematic quality. Armed with them, we can go on to examine how that style characteristically organizes causality, time, and space. The next five chapters, then, should trigger a certain *déja vu;* the reader will recognize some familiar filmmaking practices. But these chapters also seek to explain in a systematic way how these practices work together to create a distinct film style which, like Poe's purloined letter, 'escapes observation by dint of being excessively obvious.'[19]

2
Story causality and motivation

There are several ways of analyzing fictional narrative cinema; the approach taken here can be broadly called formalist. As Chapter 1 proposed, a narrative film consists of three systems: narrative logic (definition of events, causal relations and parallelisms between events), the representation of time (order, duration, repetition), and the representation of space (composition, orientation, etc.). Any given technical parameter (e.g., sound, editing) can function within any or all of these systems. Lighting or camera movements can emphasize a causally significant object while endowing the represented space with depth and volume. Offscreen sound can operate as a narrative cause, can work to specify duration, or can define an unseen space. In short, while this account stresses what Mukařovský calls technical norms, the techniques are not simply isolated devices but rather functional components in the three basic formal systems.

A narrative film seldom treats its systems as equals. The Russian Formalist critics suggested that in any text or tradition, a certain component —the *dominant*—subordinates others. 'The dominant,' writes Jakobson, 'may be defined as the focussing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure.'[1] This integrity deserves to be seen as a dynamic one, with the subordinated factors constantly pulling against the sway of the dominant. In Hollywood cinema, a specific sort of narrative causality operates as the dominant, making temporal and spatial systems vehicles for it. These systems do not always rest quietly under the sway of narrative logic, but in general the causal dominant creates a marked hierarchy of systems in the classical film.

Another distinction cuts across these three systems. Most film theorists recognize a difference between the narrative material of a film (the events or actions, the basic story) and the manner in which that material is represented in the film. The Russian Formalist literary critics distinguished between *fabula* ('story') and *syuzhet* ('plot'), and throughout this book, we will use the story/plot distinction in a sense akin to that of the Formalists.[2] 'Story' will refer to the events of the narrative in their presumed spatial, temporal, and causal relations. 'Plot' will refer to the totality of formal and stylistic materials in the film. The plot thus includes all the systems of time, space, and causality actually manifested in the film; everything from a flashback structure and subjective point-of-view to minutiae of lighting, cutting, and camera movement. The plot is, in effect, the film before us. The story is thus our mental construct, a structure of inferences we make on the basis of selected aspects of the plot. For example, the plot might present certain events out of chronological order; to understand the film, we must be able to reconstruct that chronological, or story, order. One virtue of this scheme is its acknowledgment of the viewer's activity; if the viewer knows how a certain tradition of filmmaking habitually presents a story, the viewer approaches the film with what Gombrich calls a mental set. In the next chapter, we shall be able to specify certain tasks which the classical film assigns to the spectator. The work at hand is to bring to light basic principles of story causality in the classical Hollywood

film. Once we have done this, we will be in a position to understand how the classical story creates its particular unity.

Causes and effects

> This extra is called an actor. This actor is called a character. The adventures of these characters are called a film.
>
> *Wind from the East*

'Plot,' writes Francis Patterson in a 1920 manual for aspiring screenwriters, 'is a careful and logical working out of the laws of cause and effect. The mere sequence of events will not make a plot. Emphasis must be laid upon causality and the action and reaction of the human will.'[3] Here in brief is the premise of Hollywood story construction: causality, consequence, psychological motivations, the drive toward overcoming obstacles and achieving goals. Character-centered —i.e., personal or psychological—causality is the armature of the classical story.

This sounds so obvious that we need to remember that narrative causality could be impersonal as well. Natural causes (floods, genetic inheritance) could form the basis for story action, and in cinema we might think of the work of Yasujiro Ozu, which installs a 'natural' rhythm or cycle of life at the center of the action. Causality could also be conceived as social—a causality of institutions and group processes. Soviet films of the 1920s remain the central model of cinematic attempts to represent just such supraindividual historical causality. Or one could conceive of narrative causality as a kind of impersonal determinism, in which coincidence and chance leave the individual little freedom of personal action. The postwar European art cinema often relies upon this sort of narrative causality, as Bazin indicates in relation to Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* (1950): 'Events do indeed follow one another according to a necessary order, yet within a framework of accidental happenings.'[4]

Hollywood films of course include causes of these impersonal types, but they are almost invariably subordinated to psychological causality. This is most evident in the classical film's use of historical causality. Pierre Sorlin points out that classical films typically present historical events as uncaused; a war simply breaks out, disrupting characters' lives very much as a natural disaster might.[5] When history is seen as caused, that cause is traceable to a psychologically defined individual. (A chief instance here is *The Birth of a Nation* [1915], which links Reconstruction abuses to the ambitions of Austin Stoneman.) Thus the classical film makes history unknowable apart from its effects upon individual characters. As an old Russian émigré says at the end of **Balalaika* (1939): 'And to think that it took the Revolution to bring us together.'

Impersonal causes may initiate or abruptly alter a line of story action which then proceeds by personal causes. A storm may maroon a group of characters, but then psychological causality takes over. A war may separate lovers, but then they must react to that condition. Coincidence is especially dangerous in this context, and Hollywood rule-books insist upon confining coincidence to the initial situation. Boy and girl may meet by accident, but they cannot rely upon chance to keep their acquaintance alive. The later in the film a coincidence occurs, the weaker it is; and it is very unlikely that the story will be resolved by coincidence. We see here the influence of the well-made play (e.g., the mischance that triggers the intrigue in Scribe or Sardou) and the appeal to Aristotelian notions of plausibility and probability. Unmotivated coincidences do occasionally crop up in Hollywood films. **The Courage of Commonplace* (1917) deals with a miners' strike, and the film's protagonist, the mine supervisor, will not yield to the strikers. He declares: 'Something's got to happen.' The next day, a mine collapses by natural causes. (A more careful scenarist would have made a disgruntled foreman sabotage the mine.) Or, in **Parachute Jumper* (1933), it

is not unmotivated to have the romantic couple first meet by accident, but in the last scene they meet again by sheer chance. Most often, though, coincidence is motivated by genre (chance encounters are conventions of comedy and melodrama). And 'coincidental' encounters may be prepared causally. In **Parole Fixer* (1940), the crooked Craydon must encounter the government agents at a cafe, so the script motivates the encounter as probable. His secretary asks why Craydon eats at the cafe so often, and he answers: 'Our friends of the FBI eat here.'

If the character must act as the prime causal agent, he or she must be defined as a bundle of qualities, or traits. Screenplay manuals demand that a character's traits be clearly identified and consistent with one another. Sources for this practice, of course, go back very far, but the most pertinent ones are the models for characterization present in literature and theater. From the nineteenth-century melodrama's stock character izations, Hollywood has borrowed the need for sharply delineated and unambiguous traits.[6] (Some of melodrama's types, such as certain ethnic types, the old maid, and the villainous lawyer, get reincarnated in the Hollywood cinema.) From the novel comes what Ian Watt calls a 'formal realism': characters are individualized with particular traits, tics, or tags.[7] Watt highlights, for instance, the importance of the unique proper name (Micawber, Moll Flanders) which creates a greater singularity of personality than the stereotyped names of the melodrama (Paddy the Irishman, Jonathan the Yankee). The popular short story acted as a model for narrowing such individualized characterization to fixed limits. The novel can explore many character traits and trace extensive character change, but the dominant aesthetic of the short story in the years 1900–1920 required that the writer create characters with few traits and then focus those upon a few key actions. The short story in a sense struck an average between the fixed character types of the melodrama and the dense complexity of the realist novel, and this average appealed to the classical Hollywood cinema during its formative years. (Chapter 14 will trace how the popular short story became a model for Hollywood dramaturgy.) It was thus possible for Frank Borzage to claim in 1922 that 'Today in the pictures we have the old melodramatic situations fitted out decently with true characterizations.'[8]

The classical film's presentation of character traits likewise follows conventions established in earlier theoretical and literary forms. Characters will be typed by occupation (cops are burly), age, gender, and ethnic identity. To these types, individualized traits are added. Most important, a character is made a consistent bundle of a few salient traits, which usually depend upon the character's narrative function. It is the business of the film's exposition to acquaint us with these traits and to establish their consistency. At the beginning of **Saratoga* (1937), a garrulous grandfather tells another character (and us) how his daughter has become 'high and mighty' since she went to Europe. We see her almost immediately, and her snooty behavior is consistent with his description. At the start of **Casbah* (1948), police officers discuss Pepe's susceptibility to women; the next scene introduces Pepe, singing about women and fate to an audience of admiring women. Sometimes, as in **Lorna Doone* (1923) and **Wuthering Heights* (1939), the film borrows the novelistic device of introducing us to the characters in childhood; the already-formed principal traits we observe will carry over into the adult lives. More commonly, the character's salient traits are indicated—by an expository title, by other characters' description—and the initial appearance of the character confirms these traits as salient. In such ways, the spectator forms clear first impressions about the characters as homogeneous identities.

The importance of character consistency can be seen in the star system, which was a crucial factor in Hollywood film production. Although in the United States, the theatrical star system goes back to the early 1800s, it was not until the period 1912–1917 that film companies began consistently to differentiate their products by means of stars.[9] On the whole, the star reinforced the tendency toward strongly profiled and unified characterization. Max Ophuls praised Hollywood's ability to give the actor an already-existing personality with which to work in the film.[10] The star, like the fictional character, already had a set of

salient traits which could be matched to the demands of the story. In describing the filming of *I Was a Male War Bride* (1949), Hawks suggested that one scene did not coalesce until he discovered the scene's 'attitude': 'A man like Cary Grant would be amused'—that is, the star's traits and the character's traits became isomorphic.[11]

In his book *Stars*, Richard Dyer has shown how the 'roundness' of the novelistic character is lacking in Hollywood film characterization and traces this lack to the need for 'perfect fit' between star and role.[12] It is also the case that the classical film both trades upon the prior connotations of the star and masks these connotations, presenting the star as character as if 'for the first time.'[13] For example, the star may portray a character who *grows into* the star's persona. In *Meet John Doe* (1941) the selfish pitcher John Willoughby becomes the rustic idealist John Doe because Willoughby was, in latent form, Cary Cooper to begin with. We discover the Gary Cooper persona afresh, even while knowing that it was there before the start. This is perhaps the most common way to represent character change in the classical cinema, since it affirms a basic consistency of character traits.

'Guys like you end up in the stockade sooner or later.' A single line in **From Here to Eternity* (1953) shows how strongly classical character traits are tied to action. Fatso's remark follows his fight with Maggio, and so sums up Maggie's act of defiance. But the 'guys like you' assumes Maggio to be a fixed identity, a permanent type (the hotheaded bucker of authority). Moreover, that type is defined not only by traits but by deeds. Maggio will continue to act according to type. That he does indeed wind up in the stockade does not make Fatso a prophet; his remark simply acknowledges the close causal relation between a character's traits and actions; traits are only latent causes, actions the effects of traits. We reason, as screenwriting manuals remind us, from cause to effect and vice-versa; the writer's procedure of 'foreshadowing' is nothing more than preparing a cause for an eventual effect.

If characters are to become agents of causality, their traits must be affirmed in speech and physical behavior, the observable projections of personality. While films can entirely do without people, Hollywood cinema relies upon a distinction between movement and action. Movement, writes Frederick Palmer,[14]

> is merely motion. Action is usually the outward expression of inner feelings…. For instance, one might write: 'The whirring blades of the electric fan caused the window curtains to flutter. The man seated at the massive desk finished his momentous letter, sealed it, and hastened out to post it.' The whirring fan and the fluttering curtain give motion only—the man's writing the letter and taking it out to post provides action.
>
> It is of action that photoplays are wrought.

Palmer's scene provides a precise hypothetical alternative to the classical style (one that Ozu will actualize in his shots of objects interrupting passages of character 'action'). Hollywood cinema, however, emphasizes action, 'the outward expression of inner feeling,' the litmus test of character consistency. Even a simple physical reaction—a gesture, an expression, a widening of the eyes—constructs character psychology in accordance with other information. Most actions in the classical film proceed, as Bazin put it, 'from the commonsense supposition that a necessary and unambiguous causal relationship exists between feelings and their outward manifestations.'[15]

Hollywood cinema reinforces the individuality and consistency of each character by means of recurrent motifs. A character will be tagged with a detail of speech or behavior that defines a major trait. For example, the *nouveau riche* Upshaw in **Going Highbrow* (1935) is associated with his craving for tomato juice and eggs, a sign of his ordinary tastes. The 'fallen woman' in **Woman of the World* (1925) is defined by her exotic tattoo, executed at a lover's request. In **Mr. Skeffington* (1944), Fanny's flightiness is conveyed by her

habit of mentioning a luncheon engagement with another woman but then always standing her up. The motif may associate the character with an object or locale. The heroine of **The Tiger's Coat* (1920) is associated with a painting that compares her to a 'tawny tiger skin.' In **His Double Life* (1933), Farrell meets a woman who talks of her garden while the soundtrack plays 'Country Gardens'; once he has married her, they are seen sitting in her garden. Consistency of character is conveyed by repeating the motif through the film. With a minor character, the motif may be a running gag that aids easy identification, as when one soldier in **The Hasty Heart* (1949) has been curious about what a Scotsman wears under his kilts and at the end peers under the kilts to find out.

For major characters, the motif serves to mark significant stages of story action. In **A Lost Lady* (1934), the older man tells Marion that she must face life 'with banners flying,' and the motif defines his pride and sets a goal for her. Once they are married, the phrase becomes a bond between them. At the film's close, after having decided not to leave him, Marion says: 'Nothing to be afraid of, no more ghosts—banners flying!' A similar use of another line, 'I can take it on the chin,' runs through **Show People* (1928) tracing the heroine's career as a movie actress. In **Prince of Players* (1954), Junius Booth drunkenly orders an audience to wait ten minutes and he'll give them 'the damnedest King Lear you ever saw. The name is Booth!' After his son Ned becomes an actor, he calms an unruly crowd by promising 'the damnedest Richard you ever saw. The name is Booth!' When, at the film's end, Ned decides to perform despite his wife's death, he explains, 'The name is still Booth!' The tiny word 'still' confirms that the father's defiant attitude persists in the son, and Ned has not changed a bit.

Once defined as an individual through traits and motifs, the character assumes a causal role because of his or her desires. Hollywood characters, especially protagonists, are goaloriented. The hero desires something new to his/her situation, or the hero seeks to restore an original state of affairs. This owes something to late nineteenth-century theatre, as seen in Ferdinand Brunetière's dictum that the central law of the drama is that of conflict arising from obstacles to the character's desire: 'That is what may be called *will*, to set up a goal, and to direct everything toward it.'[16] Plainly the star system also supported this tendency by insisting upon a strongly characterized protagonist. The goaloriented hero, incarnated in Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, and William S.Hart, was quickly identified as a distinguishing trait of the American cinema. In 1924, a German critic wrote of the Hollywood character as 'the man of deeds. In the first act his goal is set; in the last act he reaches it. Everything that intervenes between these two acts is a test of strength.'[17] Through thirty years, the claim generally held good. In **The Michigan Kid* (1928), the hero resolves in his childhood to flee to Alaska, make a fortune, and come back to marry his sweetheart. One of the policemen in **Sh! The Octopus* (1937) vows: 'We're gonna catch that Octopus and get that fifty thousand dollar reward.' The immigrant protagonist of **An American Romance* (1944) has a burning desire to manufacture steel. In **My Favorite Brunette* (1947), the hero declares: 'All my life I wanted to be a hard-boiled detective.' The teenage heroine of **Gidget* (1959) states her aim of attracting a handsome boy on the beach. It is easy to see in the goal-oriented protagonist a reflection of an ideology of American individualism and enterprise, but it is the peculiar accomplishment of the classical cinema to translate this ideology into a rigorous chain of cause and effect.

Other characters get defined by goals. Melodrama's formula of hero versus villain, never too hoary for Hollywood, depends upon the clash of opposed purposes. Even when the oppositions are not absolute, characters' goals produce causal chains. Characters may have complementary or independent goals. In **Sweepstakes Winner* (1939), when Jenny comes into a betting parlor and announces her goal (to buy a race horse), two touts see how that can serve their own aims (to fix races and make money). In **Indianapolis Speedway* (1939), a racedriver's girlfriend wants only a home and family; he tells her that she'll get both

after he has put his brother through college. Goals become latent effects in the causal series: they shape our expectations by narrowing the range of alternative outcomes of the action.

Making personal character traits and goals the causes of actions has led to a dramatic form fairly specific to Hollywood. The classical film has at least two lines of action, both causally linking the same group of characters. Almost invariably, one of these lines of action involves heterosexual romantic love. This is, of course, not startling news. Of the one hundred films in the UnS, ninety-five involved romance in at least one line of action, while eighty-five made that the principal line of action. Screenplay manuals stress love as the theme with greatest human appeal. Character traits are often assigned along gender lines, giving male and female characters those qualities deemed 'appropriate' to their roles in romance. To win the love of a man or woman becomes the goal of many characters in classical films. In this emphasis upon heterosexual love, Hollywood continues traditions stemming from the chivalric romance, the bourgeois novel, and the American melodrama.

We sometimes think of a play's second line of action as an independent subplot, such as a comic love affair between servants. Classical Hollywood cinema, however, makes the second line of action causally related to the romantic action. Instead of putting many characters through parallel lines of action, the Hollywood film involves few characters in several interdependent actions. For example, in **Penthouse* (1933), the protagonist tries to solve a murder while wooing one of the suspects. Sometimes, as in the love-triangle story, the second line of action also involves romance. More commonly, the second line of action involves another sort of activity—business, spying, sports, politics, crime, show business—any activity, in short, which can provide a goal for the character. In **Saratoga* (1937), the protagonist Duke must win Carol from her fiancé Hartley and he must help her grandfather to obtain a successful racehorse. In **Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1928), the son falls in love with the daughter of the town entrepreneur while trying to show his father that he can save their steamboat line. **High Time* (1960) presents a middle-aged businessman setting out to prove that he can graduate from college and falling in love in the process: in his valedictory speech, he looks out at the woman and says: 'If there's anything a man can't achieve by himself he shouldn't hesitate to join with someone else.' The tight binding of the second line of action to the love interest is one of the most unusual qualities of the classical cinema, giving the film a variety of actions and a sense of comprehensive social 'realism' that earlier drama achieved through the use of parallel, loosely related subplots. This specific form of unity is well described by Allan Dwan: 'If I constructed a story and I had four characters in it, I'd put them down as dots and if they didn't hook up into triangles, if any of them were left dangling out there without a significant relationship to any of the rest, I knew I had to discard them because they're a distraction.'[18]

Psychological causality, presented through defined characters acting to achieve announced goals, gives the classical film its characteristic progression. The two lines of action advance as chains of cause and effect. The tradition of the well-made play, as reformulated at the end of the nineteenth century, survives in Hollywood scenarists' academic insistence upon formulas for Exposition, Conflict, Complication, Crisis, and Denouement. The more pedantic rulebooks cite Ibsen, William Archer, Brander Matthews, and Gustav Freytag. The more homely advice is to create problems that the characters must solve, show them trying to solve them, and end with a definite resolution. The conventions of the well-made play—strong opening exposition, battles of wits, thrusts and counter-thrusts, extreme reversals of fortunes, and rapid denouement—all reappear in Hollywood dramaturgy, and all are defined in relation to cause and effect. The film progresses like a staircase: 'Each scene should make a definite impression, accomplish one thing, and advance the narrative a step nearer the climax.'[19] Action triggers reaction: each step has an effect which in turn becomes a new cause.[20*] Chapter 6 will show how the construction of each scene advances each line of action, but for now a single film will stand as an instance of the overall dynamics of cause and effect.

**The Black Hand* (1949) begins in New York's Little Italy in 1900. The Mafia murder a lawyer, and his young son Gio vows to find the murderers. This becomes the overarching goal of the film. Eight years later, Gio returns from Italy and begins to investigate. He goes to the hotel where his father was killed and is told that he can find the night clerk with the help of the banker Serpi. When Gio visits Serpi's bank, he meets Isabella, and in a prolonged scene several goals get articulated: Gio declares that he wants to be a lawyer, she suggests forming a Citizen's League to fight the Black Hand, and a romantic attachment is defined between the couple. Gio continues to investigate the night clerk, but he finds that the Mafia have killed him. The romance is here a subsidiary line of action; the two principal causal lines are Gio's drive for revenge and the civic aim of driving out the Mafia. Both lines are advanced when Gio and Isabella form a Citizen's League. As Gio puts it: 'If I haven't got any leads, I'll make some.' This initiative sparks an immediate reaction: the Mafia capture and beat Gio, and the League dissolves. The next Mafia outrage, the bombing of a shop, plunges Gio into an alliance with the policeman Borelli. They bring the bomber to trial and Gio's legal training turns up evidence that leads to the bomber's being deported. Since he is also one of the men who killed Gio's father, Gio is brought a step closer to his initial goal.

The bomber's trial causes Gio to hit upon a new, legal way to achieve his goal. He suggests that Borelli go to Italy to check on illegal immigration; the information will enable the city to deport many Mafiosi. In Italy, Borelli finds that the banker Serpi has a criminal record. In another counterthrust, the Mafia kill Borelli— but not before he mails Gio the incriminating evidence. From now on, cause and effect, action and reaction, alternate swiftly. The New York gang kidnaps Isabella's brother Rudy in order to silence Gio; recovering Rudy thus becomes a new short-range goal. Gio discovers where Rudy is imprisoned, but he is himself captured. He now realizes that Serpi arranged the murder of his father. Serpi's gang acquire Borelli's documents, but before they can destroy them, Gio manages to touch off a bomb in their hideout. In the melee, Gio fights with Serpi and recovers the evidence. At the film's end, Gio has achieved both his personal goal and the community's goal. This was accomplished through a series of causally linked short-term goals (law studies, Citizen's League, immigration investigation, kidnapping) that grew out of several mutually dependent lines of action. This process is at work in virtually every classical narrative film.

**The Black Hand* exemplifies how the classical story constitutes a segment of a larger cause-effect chain. The beginning, as Chapter 3 will show, introduces us to an already-moving action which has a first cause, a distant but specified source. (Gio's father is killed because he wants to divulge his knowledge of the Mafia to the police.) What of the end? The ending is, most simply, the last effect. It too should be justified causally. One screenplay manual asks about the characters: 'What is their mental attitude in the beginning of the story? Just what traits are responsible for their struggle and conflict? How do these traits of character lead to the solving of the plot problem?'[21] Just as the *scene à faire* of the well-made play shows the hero triumphing over obstacles, the classical Hollywood film has a 'big scene where matters are settled definitely once and for all.'[22] In **The Black Hand*, the romance line of action is hardly in doubt; the last moments simply celebrate the couple's union. The same thing happens in the last two shots of **At Sword's Point* (1952): (1) The musketeers, having restored the monarchy, shout, 'Long live the King!'; (2) Clare and D'Artagnan embrace. In other films, such as *His Girl Friday* (1939), the romance line of action is unresolved until the film's last moments. In either case, the ending need not be 'happy'; it need only be a definite conclusion to the chain of cause and effect.

This movement from cause to effect, in the service of overarching goals, partly explains why Hollywood so prizes continuity. Coincidence and haphazardly linked events are believed to flaw the film's unity and disturb the spectator. Tight causality yields not only consequence but continuity, making the film progress 'smoothly, easily, with no jars, no waits, no delays.'[23] A growing absorption also issues from the steadily intensifying character causality, as the spectator recalls salient causes and anticipates more or less likely

effects. The ending becomes the culmination of the spectator's absorption, as all the causal gaps get filled. The fundamental plenitude and linearity of Hollywood narrative culminate in metaphors of knitting, linking, and filling. Lewis Herman eloquently sums up this aesthetic:[24]

> Care must be taken that every hole is plugged; that every loose string is tied together; that every entrance and exit is fully motivated, and that they are not made for some obviously contrived reason; that every coincidence is sufficiently motivated to make it credible; that there is no conflict between what has gone on before, what is going on currently, and what will happen in the future; that there is complete consistency between present dialogue and past action—that no baffling question marks are left over at the end of the picture to detract from the audience's appreciation of it.

What would narrative cinema without personalized causation be like? We have some examples (in Miklós Jancsó, Ozu, Robert Bresson, Soviet films of the 1920s), but we can find others. Erich Von Stroheim's *Greed* (1924) shows that a Naturalist causal scheme is incompatible with the classical model: the characters cannot achieve their goals, and causality is in the hands of nature and not people. From another angle, Brecht's ruminations upon Aristotelian dramaturgy suggest that causality could be taken out of the power of the individual character. 'The attention and interest that the spectator brings to causality must be directed toward the law governing the movements of the masses.'[25] It is also possible to view Brecht's theories as leading toward a narrative which interrupts the action to represent actions that might have happened, thus revealing the determinism that underlies psychologically motivated causality in the classical narrative.[26] Even when personal causation remains central to a film, however, there is still the possibility of making it more ambiguous and less linear; characters may lack clear-cut traits and definite goals, and the film's events may be loosely linked or left open-ended. Chapter 30 will examine how these qualities become significant in the postwar European 'art cinema.'

Motivation

Understanding classical story causality takes us toward grasping how a classical film unifies itself. Generally speaking, this unity is a matter of *motivation*. Motivation is the process by which a narrative justifies its story material and the plot's presentation of that story material. If the film depicts a flashback, the jump back in time can be attributed to a character's memory; the act of remembering thus motivates the flashback.

Motivation may be of several sorts.[27] One is *compositional:* certain elements must be present if the story is to proceed. A story involving a theft requires a cause for the theft and an object to be stolen. The classical causal factors we have reviewed constitute compositional motivation. A second sort of motivation is *realistic* motivation. Many narrative elements are justified on grounds of verisimilitude. In a film set in nineteenth-century London, the sets, props, costumes, etc. will typically be motivated realistically. Realistic motivation extends to what we will consider plausible about the narrative action: in **The Black Hand,* Gio's quest for revenge is presented as 'realistic,' given his personality and circumstances. Thirdly, we can identify *intertextual* motivation. Here the story (or the plot's representation of it) is justified on the grounds of the conventions of certain classes of art works. For example, we often assume that a Hollywood film will end happily simply because it *is* a Hollywood film. The star can also supply intertextual motivation: if Marlene Dietrich is in the film, we can expect that at some point she will sing a cabaret song. The most common sort of intertextual motivation is *generic.* Spontaneous singing in a film musical may have little

compositional or realistic motivation, but it is justified by the conventions of the genre.[28] There is, finally, a rather special sort of motivation, *artistic motivation*, which I shall discuss later.

It should be evident that several types of motivation may cooperate to justify any given item in the narrative. The flashback could be motivated compositionally (giving us essential story information), realistically (proceeding from a character's memory), and intertextually (occurring in a certain kind of film, say a 1940s 'woman's melodrama'). Gio's search for revenge is likewise justified as compositionally necessary, psychologically plausible, and generically conventional. Multiple motivation is one of the most characteristic ways that the classical film unifies itself.

The Hollywood film uses compositional motivation to secure a basic coherence. Compositional motivation is furnished by all the principles of causality I have already mentioned—psychological traits, goal orientation, romance, and so on. Realistic motivation typically cooperates with the compositional sort. When Fatso alludes to Maggio as 'Guys like you,' the film appeals to the audience's sense of a culturally codified type. At certain moments, realistic motivation can override causal motivation. In *T-Men* (1948), a Treasury agent passing counterfeit money is trapped because one counterfeiter recognizes the bill as the work of a man in jail. This is coincidental, but the film's semidocumentary prologue motivates this as realistic: it 'really happened' in the case upon which the film was modeled.

More commonly, compositional motivation outweighs realistic motivation. Gérard Genette has explained that in poetics the classical theory of the *vraisemblable* depends upon a distinction between things as they are and things as they should ideally be; only the latter are fit for artistic imitation.[29] In Hollywood cinema, verisimilitude usually supports compositional motivation by making the chain of causality seem plausible. Realism, writes one scenarists' manual, 'exists in the photoplay merely as an auxiliary to significance—not as an object in itself.'[30] Frances Marion claims that the strongest illusion of reality comes from tight causal motivation: 'In order that the motion picture may convey the illusion of reality that audiences demand, the scenario writer stresses motivation—that is, he makes clear a character's reason for doing whatever he does that is important.'[31] Classical Hollywood narrative thus often uses realism as an alibi, a supplementary justification for material already motivated causally. When the photographer-hero of *Rear Window* (1954) is attacked, he uses flashbulbs to dazzle the intruder: the realistic motivation (a photographer would 'naturally' think of flashbulbs) reinforces the causal one (he must delay the attacker somehow). Or, as Hitchcock put it: 'It's really a matter of utilizing your material to the fullest dramatic extent.'[32]

Intertextual, particularly generic, motivation can also occasionally run afoul of compositional motivation. If Marlene Dietrich is expected to sing, her song can be more or less causally motivated. In Busby Berkeley's musicals, the story action grinds to a halt when a lavish musical number takes over. The melodrama genre often flouts causal logic and relies shamelessly upon coincidence. In **Mr. Skeffington* (1944), for instance, Fanny and George watch a war newsreel and just happen to see her lost brother in it. Comedy justifies even a non-diegetic commentary, such as the drawing of an egg used to symbolize the failed show in *The Band Wagon* (1953). Yet obviously such operations do not radically disunify the films, since each genre creates its own rules, and the spectator judges any given element in the light of its appropriateness to generic conventions.

On the whole, generic motivation cooperates with causal, or compositional, unity. Genres are in one respect certain kinds of stories, endowed with their own particular logic that does not contest psychological causality or goal-orientation. (The Westerner seeks revenge, the gangster hero seeks power and success, the chorus girl works for the big break.) Multiple motivation— causal logic reinforced by generic convention—is again normal operating procedure.

A simple example from the history of Hollywood lighting shows how complicated the interplay of various kinds of motivation can be. Lighting was of course strongly motivated compositionally: salient

causal factors—the characters—had to be clearly visible, while minor elements (e.g., the rear walls of a set) had to be less prominent. As usual, this compositional need overrode 'realism,' so that light sources were often not justified realistically. (Examples of such unrealistic lighting would be the edge lighting of figures or day-for-night shooting.) But after the mid-1920s, lighting was coded generically as well. Comedy was lit 'high-key' (that is, with a high ratio of key plus fill light to fill light alone), while horror and crime films were lit 'low-key.'[33] The latter practice was considered more 'realistic,' since one could justify harsh low-key lighting as coming from visible sources in the scene (e.g., a lamp or candle). By means of this generic association with 'realism,' filmmakers began to apply low-key lighting to other genres. Sirk's melodramas of the 1950s are sometimes lit in a sombre low key, while Billy Wilder's *Love in the Afternoon* (1957) elicited comment for using low-key lighting for a comedy.[34] Thus the appeal to 'realism' changed some generic conventions.

Specifying these three types of motivation can clarify some murky narrative issues in the classical cinema. For example, overtly psychotherapeutic films of the 1940s might seem 'unclassical' in that they present inconsistent character action. The neurotic and psychotic characters of *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *The Lodger* (1944), *Spellbound* (1945), *The Locket* (1946), *et al.*, would seem evidence for a less linear, more complex relation between mind and behavior than that operating in earlier classical films. In his analysis of 'Freudian' films of the period, the French critic Marc Vernet has shown that such films none the less respected classical dramaturgy.[35] We can subsume his explanations to the types of motivation we have already considered. First, psychoanalytic explanations of character behavior were motivated as a new 'realism,' a scientifically justified psychology. (That such a 'realism' was itself a vulgarization of Freudian concepts does not affect its status as verisimilitude for the period.) Secondly, certain aspects of psychoanalysis fitted generic models. Hollywood films stressed the cathartic method of psychoanalysis (not important for Freud after 1890) because of its analogy to conventions of the mystery film. The doctor's questioning recalls police interrogations (the patient as witness or crook who won't talk). Like the detective, the doctor must reveal the secret (the trauma) and extract the confession. One could add to Vernet's account that the subjective points of view and expressionistic distortions in many of these films also hark back to generically codified treatments of madness in the cinema of the 1920s. Most important, the vulgarized psychoanalytic concepts in the films of the 1940s respected the causal unity required by compositional motivation. In *The Locket*, *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Guest in the House* (1944), *Spellbound*, *Citizen Kane* (1941), and others, the childhood trauma functions as the first cause in what Vernet calls 'a linear determinism of childhood history.'[36] This is not to say that such films do not pose important narrative problems, but we need to recognize that Hollywood's use of Freudian psychology was highly selective and distorting, trimming and thinning psychoanalytic concepts to fit an existing model of clear characterization and causality. This can be seen in *Kings Row* (1942), which overtly thematizes psychoanalysis as a science (the protagonist goes to Vienna to study this new discipline) and yet ends with a chorus singing, 'I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.'

I have already suggested that compositional, generic, and realistic motivation do not always work in perfect unison, and I shall examine some typical dissonances in Chapter 7. But these are exceptional. Normally, any element of a classical film is justified in one or more of these ways. When it is not, it may be subsumable to yet another sort of motivation, one usually (if awkwardly) called 'artistic' motivation. By this term, Russian Formalist critics meant to point out that a component may be justified by its power to call attention to the system within which it operates. This in turn presupposes that calling attention to a work's own artfulness is one aim of many artistic traditions—a presupposition that challenges the notion that Hollywood creates an 'invisible' or 'transparent' representational regime. Within specific limits, Hollywood

films do indeed employ artistic motivation in order, as the Formalists would put it, to make palpable the conventionality of art.[37]

Hollywood has eagerly employed spectacle and technical virtuosity as means of artistic motivation. 'Showmanship' consists to a considerable extent of making the audience appreciate the artificiality of what is seen. Early talkies were especially prone to slip in a song for the slightest reasons. A distant historical period often serves as a pretext for pageantry, crowd scenes, and lascivious dancing. Hollywood producers allotted time and money to create responses such as that triggered by the costumes in *The Great Ziegfeld* (1936): 'The designer and the producer of the picture felt that the expenditure was more than justified when the first appearance of the costumes brought exclamations of delight from the audience.'[38]

Flagrant technical virtuosity can also contribute to spectacle. What Parker Tyler called Hollywood's 'narcissism of energy' applies as much to cameramen as to Fred Astaire, Buster Keaton, or Sonja Henje.[39] In the silent cinema, complex and daring lighting effects; in the sound cinema, depth of field and byzantine camera movements; in all periods, exploitation of special effects—all testify to a pursuit of virtuosity for its own sake, even if only a discerning minority of viewers might take notice. During the 1940s, for example, there was something of a competition to see how complicated and lengthy the cinematographer could make his tracking shots.[40] This impulse can be seen not only in famous films like *Rope* (1948) but also in very minor films with one striking shot, such as **Casbah* (1948), at the climax of which the camera smoothly follows the hero, moves down an airport crowd, picks up the heroine (fig 2.1), follows her into the plane (figs 2.2 to 2.4), and settles down beside her seat, while the hero gets arrested outside (fig 2.5). It is probable that such casual splendors offered by the Hollywood film owe a great deal to its mixed parentage in vaudeville, melodrama, and other spectacle-centered entertainments. Nevertheless, digressions and flashes of virtuosity remain for the most part motivated by narrative causality (the *Casbah* example) or genre (pageantry in the historical film, costume in the musical). If spectacle is not so motivated, its function as artistic motivation will be isolated and intermittent.

Artistic motivation can emphasize the artificiality of other art works; this is usually accomplished through the venerable practice of parody. Hollywood has, of course, never shrunk from parody. In *Animal Crackers* (1930), Groucho Marx shows up the soliloquys in *Strange Interlude,* while in *Hellzapoppin* (1941), Olson and Johnson mock *Kane's* Rosebud sled. In **My Favorite Brunette* (1947), Ronnie Johnson tells Sam McCloud he wants to be a tough detective like Alan Ladd; McCloud is played by Alan Ladd. Parody need not always be so clearly comic. At the climax of *The Studio Murder Mystery* (1929), the Hollywood montage sequence is parodied when the director explains at gunpoint what will happen after he kills Tony: 'Quick fade out. Next, headlines in the morning papers.' The following exchange from *The Locket* (1946) parodies the already mannered conventions of the psychoanalytic film of the 1940s. The doctor's wife has just returned from a movie.

Nancy:	I had a wonderful time. I'm all goose pimples.
Dr Blair:	A melodrama?
Nancy:	Yes, it was ghastly. You ought to see it, Henry. It's about a schizophrenic who kills his wife and doesn't know it.
Dr Blair (laughing):	I'm afraid that wouldn't be much of a treat for me.
Nancy:	That's where you're wrong. You'd never guess how it turns out. Now it may not be sound psychologically, but the wife's father is one of the…
Dr Blair:	Darling, do you mind? You can tell me later.

When an art work uses artistic motivation to call attention to its own particular principles of construction, the process is called 'laying bare the device.'[41*] Hollywood films often flaunt aspects of their own working in

this way.[42] In *Angels Over Broadway* (1940), a drunken playwright agrees to help a suicidally inclined man get money and thus to 'rewrite' the man's 'last act.' The playwright then looks out at the audience and says musingly: 'Our present plot problem is money.' In von Stroheim's *Foolish Wives* (1922), the susceptible Mrs Hughes reads a book, *Foolish Wives*, by one Erich von Stroheim. In *His Girl Friday* (1939), as Walter starts fast-talking Hildy into staying with the newspaper, she begins to mimic an auctioneer's patter; this not only mocks Walter but foregrounds speech rhythm as a central device in the film. The show-business milieux of the musical film make it especially likely to bare its devices. The 'You were meant for me' number in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) shows Don Lockwood staging his own spontaneous song; the way he sets up romantic lighting, mist, and backdrops calls attention to the conventional staging of such songs. An even more flagrant baring of this device occurs in 'Somewhere there's a someone' in *A Star Is Born* (1954).

Classical films are especially likely to bare the central principle of causal linearity. In **One Touch of Nature* (1917), when the hero succeeds as a baseball player, an expository title dryly remarks: 'In the course of human events, we come logically to the deciding game of a World's Series.' In **The Miracle Woman* (1931), a despairing writer is about to commit suicide because, having received a rejection slip from Ziegler Company, he exclaims: 'I've tried them all from A to Z. What comes after Z?' He hears an evangelist's radio broadcast and resolves to try again: 'What comes after Z? A!' **A Woman of the World* (1925), contains an amusing image of the story's own unwinding. Near the beginning of the film, two old women sit on porch rockers gossiping and knitting, with their balls of yarn smaller each time we see them. At the film's end, the camera shows the chairs rocking, now empty, and the yarn all gone.

Hollywood's use of artistic motivation imputes a considerable alertness to the viewer: in order to appreciate certain moments, one must know and remember another film's story, or a star's habitual role, or a standard technique. To some extent, artistic motivation develops a connoisseurship in the classical spectator. Yet most artistic traditions show off their formal specificity in some way. We must ask what limits classical cinema imposes on artistic motivation. Generally, moments of pure artistic motivation are rare and brief in classical films. Compositional motivation leaves little room for it, while generic motivation tends to account for many flagrant instances. Indeed, baring the device has become almost conventional in certain genres. Comedies are more likely to contain such *outré* scenes as that in *The Road to Utopia* (1945), in which Bing Crosby and Bob Hope, mushing across the Alaskan wilds, see the Paramount logo in the distance. Likewise, the melodrama is likely to contain a shot like that in *The Fountainhead* (1949), in which two characters stand at opposite edges of the frame (fig 2.6) while the woman asserts: 'This is not a tie but a gulf between us.' In *His Girl Friday*, Walter can describe Bruce (Ralph Bellamy) as looking like Ralph Bellamy, but in *Sunrise at Campobello* (1960), no one notices FDR's resemblance to the same actor.

Preston Sturges's **Sin of Harold Diddlebock* (1947) permits us to watch compositional motivation take artistic motivation firmly in hand. The opening scene of the film is silent and is announced to be from Harold Lloyd's *The Freshman*. But this fairly overt reminder of the work's conventionality is undermined by the covert insertion of shots not from the original film. These interposed shots, filmed by Sturges, show a businessman watching the football game. The businessman is compositionally necessary, since he will offer Harold a job in the next scene, but remotivating *The Freshman*'s opening to create a smooth causal link between the two films tones down the silent segment's distinct, palpably conventional qualities.

The classical cinema, then, does not use artistic motivation constantly through the film, as Ozu does in *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962) or as Sergei Eisenstein does in *Ivan the Terrible* (1945). It does not bare its devices repeatedly and systematically, as Michael Snow does in *La région centrale* (1967) or Jean-Luc Godard does in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1980). Compositional motivation for the sake of story causality remains dominant.

3
Classical narration

A film's story does not simply shine forth; as viewers, we construct it on the basis of the plot, the material actually before us. The classical guidelines for this construction are those principles of causality and motivation already sketched out in Chapter 2. A film's plot usually makes those guidelines applicable by transmitting story information. This aspect of plot I shall call *narration*.

Hollywood's own discourse has sought to limit narration to the manipulation of the camera, as in John Cromwell's remark that, 'The most effective way of telling a story on the screen is to use the camera as the story-teller.'[1] And the classical film's narration itself encourages us to see it as presenting an apparently solid fictional world which has simply been filmed for our benefit. André Bazin describes the classical film as being like a photographed play; the story events seem to exist objectively, while the camera seems to do no more than give us the best view and emphasize the right things.[2] But narration can in fact draw upon any film technique as long as the technique can transmit story information. Conversations, figure position, facial expressions, and well-timed encounters between characters all function just as narrationally as do camera movements, cuts, or bursts of music.

From this standpoint, classical narration falls under the jurisdiction of all the types of motivation already surveyed. In a classical film, narration is motivated compositionally; it works to construct the story in specific ways. Narration may also be motivated generically, as when performers in a musical sing directly to the spectator or when a mystery film withholds some crucial story information. Narration is less often motivated 'realistically,' although the voice-over commentary in semidocumentary fiction films might insist that the story action is based on fact. Artistically motivated narration is very rare in classical films and never occurs in a pure state. A non-classical director like Jean-Luc Godard can 'lay bare' a film's narrational principles, as does the beginning of *Tout va bien* (1972), in which anonymous voices play with alternative ways of opening the film, hiring cast and crew, and financing the film. But when a classical film wants to call attention to the 'palpability' of its narration, it must create a context that motivates baring the device by other means as well. For instance, in scene after scene of **The Man Who Laughs* (1928), the narration conceals Gwynplaine's deformed mouth from us (by veils, strategically placed furniture, etc.). But in one scene, the narration lays bare this very pattern. During his stage act, Gwynplaine looks out at us and deliberately reveals his deformity; then a clown in his act slowly covers it again. The shot thus stages the act of revelation and concealment that has been central to the narration throughout. However, this baring of the device is partly motivated by realism (Gwynplaine is on stage, revealing his deformity to an audience in the fiction) and by causal necessity (for the story to proceed, a woman in the audience must see his mouth and take pity upon him). We encounter again the familiar multiple motivation of the classical text.

We could follow Hollywood's lead and simply label such carefully motivated narration 'invisible.' Hollywood's pride in concealed artistry implies that narration is imperceptible and unobtrusive. Editing must be seamless, camerawork 'subordinated to the fluid thought of the dramatic action.'[3] Some theorists

have called the classical style transparent and illusionist, what Noël Burch has called 'the zero-degree style of filming.'[4] This is to say that classical technique is usually motivated compositionally. The chain of cause and effect demands that we see a close-up of an important object or that we follow a character into a room.

'Invisible' may suffice as a rough description of how little most viewers notice technique, but it does not get us very far if we want to analyze how classical films work. Such concepts play down the constructed nature of the style; a transparent effect does not encourage us to probe beneath its smooth surface. The term is also imprecise. 'Invisibility' can refer to how much the narration tells us, upon what authority it knows or tells, or in what way it tells. A tangle of different problems of narration is packed into this 'invisibility.'

How then to characterize classical narration? Meir Sternberg has put forth a clear theory that will prove useful.[5] Sternberg suggests that narration (or the narrator) can be characterized along three spectra.[6] A narration is more or less *self-conscious:* that is, to a greater or lesser degree it displays its recognition that it is presenting information to an audience. 'Call me Ishmael' marks the narrator as quite self-conscious, as does a character's aside to the audience in an Elizabethan play. A novel which employs a diarist as narrator is far less self-conscious. Secondly, a narration is more or less *knowledgeable*. The omniscient speaker of *Vanity Fair* revels in his immense knowledge, while the correspondents in an epistolary novel know much less. As these examples suggest, the most common way of limiting a narrator's knowledge is by making a particular character the narrator. Thus the issue of knowledge involves point-of-view. Thirdly, a narration is more or less *communicative*. This term refers to how willing the narration is to share its knowledge. A diarist might know little but tell all, while an omniscient narrator like Henry Fielding's in *Tom Jones* may suppress a great deal of information. Some of Brecht's plays use projected titles which predict the outcome of a scene's action: this is less suppressive than a normal play's narration, which tends to minimize its own omniscience.[7]

Sternberg's three scales can be summarized in a series of questions. How aware is the narration of addressing the audience? How much does the narration know? How willing is the narration to tell us what it knows?

Sternberg's categories help us analyze classical narration quite precisely. In the classical film, the narration is omniscient, but it lets that omniscience come forward more at some points than at others. These fluctuations are systematic. In the opening passages of the film, the narration is moderately self-conscious and overtly suppressive. As the film proceeds, the narration becomes less self-conscious and more communicative. The exceptions to these tendencies are also strictly codified. The end of the film may quickly reassert the narration's omniscience and self-consciousness.

The modest narration

Classical narration usually begins before the action does. True, the credits sequence can be seen as a realm of graphic play, an opening which is relatively 'open' to non-narrational elements. (Certainly it is in credits sequences that abstract cinema has had its most significant influence upon the classical style.) Yet the classical Hollywood film typically uses the credits sequence to initiate the film's narration. Even these forty to ninety seconds cannot be wasted. Furthermore, in these moments the narration is self-conscious to a high degree. Musical accompaniment already signals the presence of this narration, and often musical motifs in this overture will recur in the film proper. The title will most probably name or describe the main character (**Mickey* [1918], **Gidget* [1959], **King of the Rodeo* [1928]) or indicate the nature of the action (**Going Highbrow* [1935], **Impact* [1949]). If not, the title can suggest the locale of the action (**Adventure Island* [1947], **Wuthering Heights* [1939]), a motif in the film (**Applause* [1929], **Balalaika* [1939]), or the time of the action (**The Night Holds Terror* [1955]). The credits that list the cast may reinforce the title (e.g.,

**The King and the Chorus Girl* [1937], starring Fernand Gravet and Joan Blondell), but they will certainly introduce the film's narrative hierarchy. Protagonist, secondary protagonist, opponents, and other major characters will be denoted by the order, size, and time onscreen of various actors' names. Some films strengthen this linkage by adding shots of the characters to the credits, in which the amount of the screen surface a character is allotted indicates the character's importance (fig 3.1). (Compare the flattening effect of credits which make no distinction among major actors and walk-on parts, such as the 'democratic' credits of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's *Not Reconciled* [1964].) Even the studio logo, the MGM lion or the Paramount mountain, has been analyzed as a narrational transition.[8] The credits are thus highly self-conscious, explicitly addressed to the audience.

In the silent period, many films went no further than these cues, laying the credit sequence against black backgrounds or a standardized design (e.g., curtains, pillars, or picture frames). Some credits sequences, however, used 'art titles' whose designs depicted significant narrative elements. William S.Hart's **The Narrow Trail* (1917), for instance, displays its credits against a painting of a stagecoach holdup. By the 1920s, such art titles were commonly used for exposition (see fig 3.2). Lettering could also indicate the period or setting of the story, a practice probably influenced by playbills and illustrated books: narration rendered as typography. In the 1920s, a credits sequence might appear over moving images (e.g., **Merry-Go-Round* [1923]) or might be animated (e.g., **The Speed Spook* [1924]). The sound cinema canonized this stylized 'narrativization' of the credits sequence, assigning it a range of functions.

The credits can anticipate a motif to appear in the story proper. In **Woman of the World* (1925), the protagonist's scandalous tattoo is presented as an abstract design under the credits; in **The Black Hand* (1950), a stiletto forms the background for the titles. Credits' imagery can also establish the space of the upcoming action, as do the snowy fir trees in **The Michigan Kid* (1928) or the city view in **Casbah* (1948). Credits often flaunt the narration's omniscience and tantalize us with glimpses of action to come. As early as **The Royal Pauper* (1917), we find the credits summarizing the rags-to-riches story action by dissolving from a shot of the star, dressed as a poor girl, to a shot of her wearing expensive clothes. Thierry Kuntzel has shown how the opening credit sequence of *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932), a shot of a hand knocking at a door, stages an important gesture of the ensuing film and anticipates several motifs in the setting and action. The credits sequence of *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) presents stick-figure man, woman, and leopard engaged in actions that will reappear in the film; **Sweepstakes Winner* (1939) employs the same strategy (see fig 3.3). As Kuntzel points out, such sequences are explicitly narrational: the unknown hand knocking at the door can only be the viewer's, giving an idealized representation of the viewer's entry into the film.[9] Such overt address to the spectator can also be seen in those still-life compositions of book pages or album leaves turned by unknown hands (e.g., **Penthouse* [1933], **Easy to Look At* [1945], **Play Girl* [1941]). In the postwar period, direct address in credits sequences could also be accomplished through a voice-over narrator. In such ways, the credits sequence flaunts both the narration's omniscience and its ability to suppress whatever it likes.

Like credits, the early scenes of the action can reveal the narration quite boldly. Before 1925, the film might open with a symbolic prologue, mocked by Loos and Emerson as 'visionary scenes of Heaven or Hell, of the Fates weaving human lives in their web.'[10] (See, for example, fig 3.4, from *The Devil's Bait* [1917].) More often, silent films simply used expository titles to announce the salient features of the narration. In the sound era, other film techniques take on this role of foregrounding the narration. After the credits, **Partners in Crime* (1928) reveals a city landscape and an inter-title, 'Gangsters and Gun War—A City Steeped in Crime' (see fig 3.5). Suddenly the title shatters as hands holding guns break through to fire directly at the audience (see figs 3.6 and 3.7). At the start of **Housewife* (1934), the camera tracks with a milkman up to the front door and lingers on the front door as he leaves. There is a cut to the welcome mat,

and the camera tracks in and tilts up to the doorbell and name card. The shots have treated the camera as if it were a guest strolling up to the house. **Easy to Look At* (1945) opens with a voice-over narrator describing the heroine's arrival in the city: 'And thus New York's population is increased by one— and quite a number…' as a man on the street gawks at her. Such passages reveal the narration to be widely knowledgeable and highly aware of addressing an audience.

The narration can also exploit the opening moments to stress its ability to be more or less communicative. **The Case of the Lucky Legs* (1935) opens with a flurry of women's legs striding up a flight of steps (see fig 3.8) and then dissolves to a sign (see fig 3.9). Several pairs of legs are revealed (see fig 3.10). At the end of the scene, as a former contest winner tries to claim her prize, the swindler pushes her away (see fig 3.11) and the camera pans to an advertisement for the Lucky Legs contest (see fig 3.12). The image dissolves to a pair of legs stretched out (see fig 3.13) and pans to their owner, the latest bilked woman, sobbing. The gratuitous camera movement to the sign and the opening of the next scene provide overtly ironic commentary on the contest.

The explicit presence of the narration in these heavily expository beginnings is confirmed by the eventual emergence of the 'pre-credits sequence.' Here the film opens truly *in medias res*, with the credits presented only after an initial scene or two of story action. This practice began in the 1950s, possibly as a borrowing from television's technique of the 'teaser.' The effect of pre-credits action was to eliminate the credits as a distinct unit, sprinkling them through a short action sequence that conveyed minimal story information (e.g., the establishment of a locale or the connecting of two scenes by a trip). The postponement of the credits tacitly grants the narrational significance of whatever scenes open the film.

Yet once present in these opening passages, the narration quickly fades to the background. In the course of the opening scenes, the narration becomes less self-conscious, less omniscient, and more communicative. Very flagrant examples allow us to trace this fading process at work.

**The Caddy* (1953) has a highly stylized credits sequence that signals the genre (comedy), repeats the principal motif (golf clubs, tees, tartan), and anticipates story events (the cartoon figures). (See fig 3.14.) The film's first shot reveals a theatre marquee which carries caricatures similar to those in the credits (see fig 3.15). The bandstand's design repeats the caricatures, linking the figures to the live protagonists we finally see (fig 3.16). In a sliding movement, the narration's cartoon images of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis have become gradually replaced by the story's images of the characters themselves. A more complex example occurs in **The Canterville Ghost* (1944). While a voice-over commentator tells of the Ghost's history, the image shows the relevant passage in a book, *Famous Ghosts of England*. There follows a flashback to 1634, which shows how the cowardly Simon was bricked up in a wall of the mansion. The camera tracks into a close-up of a birthmark on Simon's neck (see fig 3.17), which freezes into an illustration in the book as the voice-over commentary resumes (see fig 3.18). The page is turned as the narrator describes the castle today; the illustration of the castle (see fig 3.19) dissolves to the same image on film, into which the heroine Jessica rides (see fig 3.20). Action has replaced the non-diegetic voice, and we never see or hear the narration so evidently again.

The phasing out of the narrator is also visible in historical changes in the silent cinema's expository tactics. Before 1917, films commonly introduced characters in ways that called attention to the act of narration. An expository title would name and describe the character and attach the actor's name; then a shot might show the character striking a pose in a non-diegetic setting (e.g., a theater stage). After several characters were introduced this way, the fictional action would begin. After 1917, such signs of narration diminished. Characters would be introduced upon their first appearance in the action. Overt commentary in the titles ('Max, a Bully') would be replaced by images of the character enacting typical behavior (e.g., Max kicking a dog).[11]

The role of expository inter-titles changed as well. Silent scenarists were aware that the expository title foregrounded narration. One writer compared the expository title to a Greek chorus, 'someone who is behind the scenes. They are in the secret of the play.'[12] Another critic was even more aware of the intrusion: 'The title may say no more than "Dawn" or "Night" or "Home"; but it clearly is the injected comment of an outsider who is assumed, by the author's own terms, to be absent.'[13] (This, he claimed, 'breaks the spell of complete absorption.') The presence of an unseen fictional narrator was also marked in expository titles by the use of the past tense, which became standard after 1916. After 1917, Hollywood film became less and less reliant upon expository inter-titles and more dependent upon dialogue titles. Between 1917 and 1921, one-fifth to one-third of a film's inter-titles would be expository; after 1921, expository titles con stituted less than a fifth of the total. In the later silent years, we find films with no expository titles at all. Placement and length changed too: after 1921, the early scenes of the film contain more and longer expository titles than do later scenes. The cultivation of the art title, the expository title enhanced by a pictorial design, further substituted image for language. Expositional tasks were shifted to character dialogue and action, not only across the period but within the individual film.

The judicious combination of expository titles, dialogue titles, and exemplary character action created a fairly knowledgeable and communicative narrator. Consider the opening scene of **Miss Lulu Bett* (1921). The family assembles for dinner, and an expository title introduces each family member. The title is then followed by a character performing a typical action which confirms the title's description. After the narration identifies the youngest daughter, the images show her swiping food playfully. After the father is identified, he goes to the clock to check his watch. Once most of the family are introduced, another expository title introduces the elder daughter but adds the information that she wants to leave the family. This title is followed by a shot of her at the front gate, holding a boy's hand. Because the narration has already accurately characterized the other family members, we trust its information about the daughter's purely private desires—information which is in turn immediately confirmed by her action. The narration is omniscient and reliable. The smoothness of such narration was recognized in Europe in the silent era; a Parisian critic noted that the Hollywood film always begins with a long expository title explaining the film's theme, followed by the rapid introduction to and delineation of characters by means of titles and actions. The critic emphasized that Hollywood films avoided the gradual psychological revelation characteristic of Swedish and German films of the period.[14]

What enables the narration to fade itself out so quickly? Any narrative film must inform the viewer of events that occured before the action which we see. The classical film confines itself almost completely to a sort of exposition described by Sternberg as *concentrated* and *preliminary*.[15] This means that the exposition is confined principally to the opening of the plot. In explaining how to write a screenplay, Emerson and Loos claim that the opening should 'explain briefly but clearly the essential facts which the audience must know in order to understand the story,' preferably in one scene.[16] Such advice may seem commonplace, but we need to remember that this choice commits the Hollywood film to a slim range of narrational options. Scattered or delayed exposition has the power to alter the viewer's understanding of events; making the spectator wait to fill gaps of causality, character relations, and temporal events can increase curiosity and even create artistic motivation, baring the device of narration itself. But concentrated and preliminary narration helps the classical film to make the narration seem less omniscient and self-conscious.

Classical narration also steps to the background by starting *in medias res*. The exposition plunges us into an already-moving flow of cause and effect. As Loos and Emerson put it, the action must begin 'with the story itself and not with the history of the case which leads up to the story.'[17] When the characters thus assume the burden of exposition, the narration can seem to vanish.

**The Mad Martindales* (1942) offers a simple case. After an expository title ('San Francisco 1900'), the film opens with a close-up of a cake, inscribed 'Happy Birthday Father.' The camera tracks back, and while a maid and butler decorate the cake they discuss household affairs. The camera follows the butler to the piano, where Evelyn, the elder daughter, sits. Evelyn and the butler converse. We then follow the butler to the study, past the younger daughter Cathy, who is sitting at the desk writing. The camera holds on her while the butler leaves. Bob, Cathy's friend, thrusts his head in the window, which gives her a chance to explain what she's writing (a feminist tract, surprisingly enough). The phone rings and Evelyn answers it. The caller is her boyfriend Peter, who proposes marriage to her. At this juncture, the girls' father arrives, having just bought a Poussin painting. While workmen uncrate the painting, the family discuss Cathy's graduation, Martindale's birthday, the news about Peter, etc. When the butler brings birthday champagne, Cathy raises the issue of unpaid bills; at this point, the lights go out, cut off by the utility company. As the scene ends, the family discovers that it is penniless and Cathy sorrow fully reveals her gift to her father—a wallet. You are right to think that this scene is overstuffed with information, but it is typical of Hollywood cinema's almost Scribean loading of exposition into a film's first scenes. By plunging *in medias res* with the first shot of 'Happy Birthday Father,' the film lets the characters tell each other what we need to know.

Classical narration may reemerge more overtly in later portions of the film, but such reappearance will be intermittent and codified. In the silent cinema, the expository art title may include imagery that comments overtly on the action. Occasionally, the narration will reassert its omniscience by camera movement: the cliché example is the pan from the long shot of the stagecoach to the watching Indians on the ridge. In the sound film, an overlapping line of dialogue can link scenes in ways that call attention to the narration. Many of the examples of artistic motivation and 'baring the device' that I considered in the last chapter can now be seen as examples of self-conscious and flagrantly suppressive narration. Narrational intrusions may also be generically motivated: in a mystery film, framing only a portion of the criminal's body as the crime is committed, or in a historical film, making the narrator 'the voice of history.'[18] Whatever the genre, however, there is yet another moment that narration comes strongly forward in the classical film—during montage sequences.

Typically, the montage sequence compresses a considerable length of time or space, traces a large-scale event, or selects representative moments from a process.[19] Cliché instances are fluttering calendar leaves, brief images of a detective's search for witnesses, the rise of a singer given as bits of different performances, the accumulation of travel stickers on a trunk, or a flurry of newspaper headlines. Rudimentary montage sequences can be found in Hollywood films of the teens and early twenties. By 1927, montage sequences were very common, and they continue to be used in a variant form today.

From a historical perspective, the montage sequence is part of Hollywood's gradual reduction of overt narrational presence. Instead of a title saying 'They lowered the lifeboats,' or 'While the jury was out, McGee waited in a cold sweat,' the film can reveal glimpses of pertinent action. The montage sequence thus transposes conventions of prose narration into the cinema; Sartre cites *Citizen Kane*'s montages as examples of the 'frequentative' tense (equivalent to writing 'He made his wife sing in every theater in America').[20] Moreover, the montage sequence aims at continuity, linking the shots through non-diegetic music and smooth optical transitions (dissolves, wipes, superimpositions, occasionally cuts). Yet the montage sequence still makes narration come forward to a great degree. Extreme close-ups, canted angles, silhouettes, whip pans, and other obtrusive techniques differentiate this sort of segment from the orthodox scene. When newspapers swirl out of nowhere to flatten themselves obligingly for our inspection, or when hourglasses and calendar leaves whisk across the screen, we are addressed by a power that is free of normal narrative space and time. What keeps the montage sequence under control is its strict codification: it is, simply, the sequence which advances the story action in just this overt way. Flagrant as the montage

sequence is, its rarity, its narrative function, and its narrowly conventional format assure its status as classical narration's most acceptable rhetorical flourish.

Causality, character, and point-of-view

After the concentrated, preliminary exposition and except for intrusions like montage sequences, the classical film reduces narration's prominence. Chapters 4 and 5 will show how this process shapes cinematic space and time. For now, I want only to indicate the general ways that classical Hollywood narration reveals self-consciousness, omniscience, and communicativeness.

After the opening portions of the classical film, the narration's self-consciousness is generally kept low, chiefly because character action and reaction convey the ongoing causal chain to us. It is here that the effect of an enclosed story world, Bazin's objectively existing play simply transmitted by the camera, is at its strongest. Many devices of nineteenth-century realist theater—exposition by character conversation, speeches and actions which motivate psychological developments, well-timed entrances and exits—all assure the homogeneity of the fictional world. This homogeneity has induced many theorists and most viewers to see the classical film as composed of a solid and integral diegetic world occasionally inflected by a narrational touch from the outside, as if our companion at a play were to tug our sleeve and point out a detail. We must, however, make the effort to see the film's diegetic world as itself constructed and, hence, ultimately just as narrational as the most obtrusive cut or voiceover commentary. Yet we need to recognize how important this apparently natural, actually *covert* narration is to the classical cinema. In what follows, I shall assume that this narration-through-character-interaction constitutes the most normal and least noticeable ploy of Hollywood narration.

The narration reinforces the homogeneity of the fictional world by means of a non-theatrical device: the use of public and impersonal sources of information that can be realistically or generically motivated within the film. The most common instrument is the newspaper. ROSEN FOUND GUILTY: the headline or article becomes an unquestioned surrogate for the narrator's presence. In many films of the 1930s, newspaper reporters become an expository chorus, initiating us into the action. Other public transmitters of information include radio, television, bulletin boards, posters, ticker tape, tour guides, and reference books (e.g., the *Ghosts of England* volume in **The Canterville Ghost*). These impersonal sources of story information also prove invaluable in toning down the self-consciousness of montage sequences.

Classical narration is potentially omniscient, as credits and openings show and as Hollywood's own discourse generally acknowledges. A.Lindsley Lane, for example, refers to 'omniscient perception' as the basic law of film. In the bulk of the Hollywood film, this omniscience becomes overt occasionally but briefly, as when a camera angle or movement links characters who are unaware of each other.[21] The same omniscience becomes overt in the *anticipatory* qualities of narration—the character who enters a scene just before she or he is needed, the camera movement that accommodates a character's gesture just before it occurs, the unexpected cut to a doorbell just before a thumb presses it, the music that leads us to expect a prowler to jump out of the shrubbery. 'There is only one way to shoot a scene,' Raoul Walsh claimed, 'and that's the way which shows the audience what's happening next.'[22]

The most evident trace of the narration's omniscience is its *omnipresence*. The narration is unwilling to tell all, but it is willing to go anywhere. This is surely the basis of the tendency to collapse narration into camerawork: the camera can roam freely, crosscutting between locales or changing its position within a single room. 'The camera,' writes Lane, 'stimulates, through correct choice of subject matter and setup, 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.'[23] Sometimes this ubiquity becomes only artistically motivated,

as in those 'impossible' camera angles that view the action from within a fireplace or refrigerator.[24] Spatial omnipresence is, of course, justified by what story action occurs in any given place, and it is limited still further by specific schemata, as we shall see in Chapter 5. To avoid treating the camera as narrator, however, we should remember that what the camera does *not* show implies omnipresence negatively—the site of an action we will learn of only later, the whole figure of the mysterious intruder. The narration could show us all, but it refuses.

Classical narration admits itself to be spatially omnipresent, but it claims no comparable fluency in time. The narration will not move on its own into the past or the future. Once the action starts and marks a definite present, movements into the past are motivated through characters' memory. The flashback is not presented as an overt explanation on the narration's part; the narration simply presents what the character is recalling. Even more restrictive is classical narration's suppression of future events. No narration in any text can spill all the beans at once, but after the credits sequence, classical narration seldom overtly divulges anything about what will ensue. It is up to the characters to foreshadow events through dialogue and physical action. If this is the last job the crooks will pull, they must tell us, for the narration will not become more self-conscious in order to do so. If the love affair is to fail, the characters must intuit it: 'These things never happen twice' (**Interlude* [1957]). At most, the narration can drop self-conscious hints, such as pointing out a significant detail that the characters have overlooked; e.g., the camera movement up to the 'Forgotten Anything?' sign on the hotel-room door in *Touch of Evil* (1957). More commonly, anticipatory motifs can be included if the shot is already motivated for another purpose. Near the end of **From Here to Eternity* (1953), the attack on Pearl Harbor is anticipated when the camera pans to follow a character and reveals a calendar giving the date as December 6.

Classical narration thus delegates to character causality and genre conventions the bulk of the film's flow of information. When information must be suppressed, it is done through the characters. Characters can keep secrets from one another (and us). Confinement to a single point-of-view can also suppress story information. Genre conventions can cooperate, as the editors of *Cahiers du cinéma* point out in their analysis of *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939). Here the narration must juggle three points of view so as to keep certain information from the spectator. Two brothers accused of murder each believe the other is guilty, while their mother also believes that one is guilty. When all three meet, it would be plausible for them to talk to one another and thus reveal each one's beliefs. But if this happened, the plot twist—that neither is guilty—would be given away prematurely. So the family's reunion is staged as a silent vigil the night before the trial's last day. This convention of courtroom dramas motivates withholding information from the audience.[25]

Any narrative text must repeat important story information, and in the cinema, repetition takes on a special necessity; since the conditions of presentation mean that one cannot stop and go back, most films reiterate information again and again. The nature of that reiteration can, however, vary from film to film.[26] In a film by Godard or Eisenstein, the narration overtly repeats information that may not be repeated within the story. Sequences late in *October* (1928) and *Weekend* (1967) replay events that we have seen earlier in the film, and this repetition is not motivated by character memory. But a classical film assigns repetition to the characters. That is, the story action itself contains repetitions which the narration simply passes along. For example, after the credits for the film **Housewife* (1934) have concluded, the opening scene shows the heroine harassed by her domestic duties. At the scene's close, a polltaker calls on her and asks her job; 'Oh…,' she says,'…just a housewife.' 'Housewife,' the polltaker repeats at the fade-out. In one scene of **The Whole Town's Talking* (1935), we learn a man's profession the moment he enters the room; a group of police officials greet him in a chorus:

'Warden!'
'Warden, Chief!'
'Hello, Warden.'
'Hiya, Warden.'

Such repetition is not extensive—that would be as transgressive as no repetition at all. Optimally, a significant motif or informational bit should be shown or mentioned at three or four distinct moments, as in the warden chorus. Three is in fact a mystical number for Hollywood dramaturgy; an event becomes important if it is mentioned three times. The Hollywood slogan is to state every fact three times, once for the smart viewer, once for the average viewer, and once for slow Joe in the back row.[27] Leo McCarey recalls: 'Most gags were based on "the rule of three." It became almost an unwritten rule.'[28] Irving Thalberg is reported to have said, 'I don't mean tell 'em three times in the same way. Maybe you tell 'em once in comedy, maybe you tell 'em once directly, maybe you tell 'em next time with a twist.'[29] For a rare instance of audacious repetition in the narration rather than the story, see fig 3.21.

Since classical narration communicates what it 'knows' by making characters haul the causal chain through the film, it might seem logical to assume that the classical film commonly restricts its knowledge to a single character's point-of-view. Logical, but wrong. If we take point-of-view to be an *optical* subjectivity, no classical film, not even the vaunted but misdescribed *Lady in the Lake* (1947), completely confines itself to what a character sees. If we regard a character's point-of-view as comprising what the character knows, we still find very few classical films that restrict themselves to this degree. The overwhelmingly common practice is to use the omnipresence of classical narration to move fluidly from one character to another.

The classical film typically contains a few subjective point-of-view shots (usually of printed matter read by a character), but these are firmly anchored in an 'objective' frame of reference. Moreover, Hollywood's optical point-of-view cutting is seldom rigorously consistent. While in one shot a camera position will be marked as subjective, a few shots later the same viewpoint may be objective—often resulting in anomalies such as a character walking into his or her own field of vision (see figs 3.22 through 3.25). In a similar fashion, classical narration will confine itself to one character's limited knowledge, but this will then be played off against what other characters know. Clever narrational twists often depend upon restricting us to one character's point-of-view before revealing the total situation. Even flashbacks, which are initially motivated as limited, subjective point-of-view, seldom restrict themselves solely to what the character could have known. For such reasons, it is accurate to describe classical narration as fundamentally omniscient, even when particular spatial or temporal shifts are motivated by character subjectivity.

The Hollywood cinema quickly mastered shifts in point-of-view. As early as **Love and the Law* (1919), one can find extensive sequences of optical point-of-view cutting (see figs 16.44 and 16.45). **The Michigan Kid* (1928) begins with a montage of gold prospecting in Alaska and then moves our attention to a gambling hall. At one table sits Jim Rowen, identified by an inter-title as the owner of the hall. In talking to two customers, Jim reveals that he is selling out to go back to the States and rejoin the girl he left behind. As Jim packs to leave, he stares at his tattered picture of Rose. This triggers a flashback introducing Jim as a boy, playing with Rose and fighting off the delinquent Frank. The flashback ends and dissolves into Jim's optical viewpoint of Rose's picture. At this point, however, the film widens its narrational view. There is a cut to a customer in the gambling den. He looks at his watch before offering it as a stake. Thanks to another point-of-view shot, we see Rose's picture in his watch. Thus we know before Jim does that Frank has reentered his life. A bartender takes the watch to Jim, who appraises it; we are in suspense as to whether he will notice the picture. At first he does not, which increases the tension, but then he does. As he looks at the picture, the shot superimposes his memory image of Rose as a girl, then his newspaper picture of her. He

asks the barkeep to bring Frank in. Using only two expository titles, the narration has presented the essential background of the story action and has fluently moved among various degrees of subjectivity. Beginning *in medias res* and letting the characters reveal exposition, the classical Hollywood film thus moves to subjectivity only occasionally— something possible for a narration endowed with omniscience.

The example from **The Michigan Kid* shows that classical narration can exploit omnipresence to conceal information that individual characters possess. Occasionally the classical film flaunts such suppressive operations, opening up a gap between the narration's omniscient range of knowledge and its moderate communicativeness. Consider the opening of **Manhandled* (1949), which shows a man sitting in a study. The framing carefully conceals his face. His wife and her lover return, but we see only their feet. After the lover leaves, the husband follows her upstairs, his face still offscreen. He approaches his wife and starts to strangle her. The sequence seems transgressive because the narration has overtly suppressed the faces of the killer and the lover. Yet at the end of the sequence, there is a dissolve and a voice says: 'At that point the dream always ends, doctor.' The overtness of the narration is justified retroactively as subjective. The greater emphasis placed upon 'psychoanalytic' explanations of causality in the 1940s created a trend toward such occasionally explicit narration. Similarly, play with point-of-view is a minor convention of the mystery film. *Through Different Eyes* (1929) and *The Grand Central Mystery* (1942) both use flashbacks to recount the same events from inconsistent points of view. The subjective film and the mystery film can thus make narration self-conscious and overtly suppressive, but only thanks to compositional and generic motivation. Consistently suppressive narration, such as that of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's *Not Reconciled* (1964) or Alain Resnais's *Providence* (1977), is unknown in the Hollywood paradigm.

Classical narration, then, plunges us *in medias res* and proceeds to reduce signs of its self-consciousness and omniscience. The narration accomplishes this reduction by means of spatial omnipresence, repetition of story information, minimal changes in temporal order, and plays between restricted and relatively unrestricted points of view. It is in the light of these aims that we must assess the power of that celebrated Hollywood 'continuity.' Because we see no gaps, we never question the narration, hence never question its source. When, in **Penthouse* (1933), the scene shifts from a nightclub to a luxury yacht and the voice of the club's bandleader continues uninterrupted, now broadcast from a radio on board the yacht, we can recognize the narration's omnipresence but we are assured that no significant story action has been suppressed. At the end of a scene, a 'dialogue hook' anticipates the beginning of the next (e.g., 'Shall we go to lunch?'/long-shot of a cafe); such a tactic implies that the narration perfectly transmits the action. Crosscutting signals omnipresence and unrestricted point-of-view, while editing within the scene delegates to the characters the job of forwarding the story action. Chapters 4 and 5 will assess how narrational concerns have shaped classical patterns of space and time. At this point, it is worth looking briefly at one technique that is seldom considered a part of narration at all.

Music as destiny

From the start, musical accompaniment has provided the cinema's most overt continuity factor. In the silent cinema, piano or orchestral music ran along with the images, pointing them up and marking out how the audience should respond. Non-diegetic music was less pervasive in the early 1930s, but the rise of symphonic scoring in the work of Max Steiner, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Ernest Newman, *et al.* reasserted classical cinema's interest in using music to flow continuously along with the action. Stravinsky's comparison of film music to wallpaper is apt, not only because it is so strongly decorative but because it fills in cracks and smoothes down rough textures.[30] Filmmakers have long recognized these functions. As early as 1911, a theater musician advised players not to stop a number abruptly when the scene changed.[31] Hollywood

composers claimed that sudden stops and starts were avoidable by the process of imperceptibly fading the music up and down, the practice known in the trade as 'sneaking in and out.'[32]

This continuous musical accompaniment functions as narration. It would be easy to show that film music strives to become as 'transparent' as any other technique—viz., not only the sneak-in but the neutrality of the compositional styles and the standardized uses to which they are put ('La Marseillaise' for shots of France, throbbing rhythms for chase scenes). Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler have heaped scorn upon Hollywood music as pleonastic and self-effacing; Brecht compared film music's 'invisibility' to the hypnotist's need to control the conditions of the trance.[33] Yet calling the music 'transparent' is as true but uninformative as calling the entire Hollywood style invisible. If music functions narrationally, how does it accomplish those tasks characteristic of classical narration?

The sources of Hollywood film music show its narrational bent very clearly. In eighteenth-century melodrama, background music was played to underscore dramatic points, sometimes even in alternation with lines of dialogue. American melodrama of the 1800s used sporadic vamping, but spectacle plays and pantomimes relied upon continuous musical accompaniment.[34] The most important influence upon Hollywood film scoring, however, was that of late nineteenth-century operatic and symphonic music, and Wagner was the crest of that influence. Wagner was a perfect model, since he exploited the narrational possibilities of music. Harmony, rhythm, and 'continuous melody' could correspond to the play's dramatic action, and leitmotifs could convey a character's thoughts, point up parallels between situations, even anticipate action or create irony. Adorno's monograph on Wagner even argues that the dream of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* anticipated the thoroughly rationalized artifact of the culture industry, as exemplified in the Hollywood film.[35]

In the early teens, film trade journals solemnly supplied theater pianists with oversimplified accounts of Wagner's practice. One pianist explained: 'I attach a certain theme to each person in the picture and work them out, in whatever form the occasion may call for, not forgetting to use popular strains if necessary.'[36] When Carl Joseph Breil proudly claimed to be the first composer to write a score for a film, he said he used leitmotifs for the characters.[37] Silent film scores, usually pasted together out of standardized snatches of operas, orchestral music, and popular tunes, adhered to the crude leitmotif idea (see fig 12.16). Early synchronized-sound films with musical tracks continued the practice: when we see the Danube, we hear 'The Blue Danube' (*The Wedding March* 119281). With the post-1935 resurgence in film scoring, Wagner remained the model. Most of the major studio composers were trained in Europe and influenced by the sumptuous orchestration and long melodic lines characteristic of Viennese opera.[38] Max Steiner and Miklós Rózsa explicitly acknowledged Wagner's influence, as did Erich Wolfgang Korngold, who called a film 'a textless opera.'[39] Characters, places, situations—all were relentlessly assigned motifs, either original or borrowed. When motifs were not employed, certain passages functioned as a recitative to cue specific attitudes to the scene (e.g., comic music, suspense music).[40] Brecht complained that with such constantly present music, 'our actors are transformed into silent opera singers.'[41] But Sam Goldwyn gave the most terse advice: 'Write music like Wagner, only louder.'[42]

Like the opera score, the classical film score enters into a system of narration, endowed with some degree of self-consciousness, a range of knowledge, and a degree of communicativeness. The use of non-diegetic music itself signals the narration's awareness of facing an audience, for the music exists solely for the spectator's benefit. The scale of the orchestral forces employed and the symphonic tradition itself create an impersonal wash of sound befitting the unspecific narrator of the classical film.[43] The score can also be said to be omniscient, what Parker Tyler has called 'a vocal apparatus of destiny.'[44] In the credits sequence, the music can lay out motifs to come, even tagging them to actors' names. During the film, music adheres to classical narration's rule of only allowing glimpses of its omniscience, as when the score anticipates the

action by a few moments. In **Deep Valley* (1947), for instance, just before the convict approaches the lovers, the music swiftly turns from pleasant to sinister. As George Antheil puts it, 'The characters in a film drama never know what is going to happen to them, but the music always knows.'[45]

Most important, musical accompaniment is communicative only within the boundaries laid down by classical narration. Like the camera, music can be anywhere, and it can intuit the dramatic essence of the action. It remains, however, motivated by the story. When dialogue is present, the music must drop out or confine itself to a subdued coloristic background. 'If a scene is interspersed with silent spots, the orchestration is timed so closely that it is thicker during the silent shots. It must then be thinned down in a split second when dialogue comes in.'[46] Just as classical camerawork or editing becomes more overt when there is little dialogue, so the music comes into its own as an accompaniment for physical action. Here music becomes expressive according to certain conventions (static harmony for suspense or the macabre, chromaticism for tension, marked rhythm for chase scenes).[47] A 'sting' in the music can underline a significant line of dialogue very much in the manner of eighteenth-century melodrama.

Music can also reinforce point-of-view. It establishes time and place as easily as does an inter-title or a sign: 'Rule Britannia' over shots of London, eighteenth-century pastiche for the credits of **Monsieur Beaucaire* (1946). In scoring *Lust for Life* (1956), Rózsa modeled his score upon Debussy in order to suggest Van Gogh's period.[48] To this 'unrestrictive' use of musical narration, Hollywood counterposes the possibility of subjective musical point-of-view. The music often expresses characters' mental states—agitated music for inner turmoil, ominous chords for tension, and the like. In *The Jazz Singer* (1927), we know Jakie is thinking of his mother when, as he sees her picture, we hear the 'Mammy' tune in the score. During the spate of subjective films of the 1940s, musical experiments increased (the theremin in *Spellbound* [1945], a playback reverberation in *Murder, My Sweet* [1944]). As one critic noted at the time, weird coloristic effects became more common because of 'the vogue for films dealing with amnesia, shock, suspense, neurosis, and kindred psychological and psychiatric themes. The music counterpart of the troubled mental states depicted in these films is a musical style which emphasizes vagueness and strangeness, especially in the realms of harmony and orchestration.'[49] By the mid-1930s, music could shift easily from unrestrictive to restrictive viewpoints, as when a character hums a tune to himself and then, as he steps outdoors, the orchestra takes it up.[50] Hollywood music could even create misleading narration, as in **Uncertain Glory* (1944): when the prisoner Jean tells Bonet he wants to go to church to confess, the music is sentimental, but once Bonet lets him go, Jean flees and the music becomes flippant. The first musical passage is now revealed as having presented only Bonet's misconception about Jean's sincerity. Such practices, even such deceptions, are the logical consequence of making music-as-narration dependent upon character causality.

Since classical narration turns nearly all anticipations and recollections of story action over to the characters, music must not operate as a completely free-roaming narration. Here is one difference from Wagner's method, which did allow the music to flaunt its omniscience by ironic or prophetic uses of motifs. The Hollywood score, like the classical visual style, seldom includes overt recollections or far-flung anticipations of the action. The music confines itself to a moment-by-moment heightening of the story. Slight anticipations are permitted, but recollections of previous musical material must be motivated by a repetition of situation or by character memory. At the close of **Sunday Dinner for a Soldier* (1944), Tessa's wave to Eric is accompanied by the ballroom music to which they had danced in an earlier scene. The classical text thus relies upon our forming strong associations upon a motifs first entry.

The narrational limits which the classical film puts upon music are dramatically illustrated in *Hangover Square* (1945). During the credits, a romantic piano concerto plays non-diegetically but does not conclude. Early in the film, when the composer George Bone goes to his apartment, his friend Barbara is playing the

opening of his concerto, the same music we had heard over the credits. But Bone's version is also unfinished, and Barbara's father advises him to complete it. In the course of the action, Bone is plagued by murderous amnesiac spells triggered by discordant noises, which are rendered as subjective by means of chromatic and dissonant harmonies. Completing the concerto drives these from Bone's head, but in the film's climactic scene, when he plays the concerto at a soiree, he suffers another breakdown. Yet the performance continues, and the action of the last scene is accompanied throughout by Bone's concerto. Bone's romantic score wins out over the psychotic discordances, but only by becoming identical with the score of the film, the score that had been 'rehearsed' under the credits. The narration's power lies in the fact that Bone is allowed to score the last scene only by writing the score that the narration 'had in mind' all along. The narration's limits are revealed by its *almost* complete anticipation of Bone's concerto: the film cannot complete the piece before he does. Only the conclusion of the action—Bone finishing the performance alone in a burning building—brings the concerto and the film itself to a close. As 'The End' appears on the screen, the (non-diegetic) orchestra swallows the solo piano; now the narration can have the last word, and chord.

The reappearing narration

The finale of *Hangover Square* also illustrates the way in which the narration can reappear overtly but briefly at the film's very close. This close would minimally consist of a 'The End' title, usually against a background identical to that of the opening credits, and a non-diegetic musical flourish. Such devices buckle the film shut, making the 'narrator' simply a discreet curtailer, like the curtain that closes a play or 'The End' that concludes a novel. This narrational movement toward finality is laid bare in the credits *of King Kong* (1933). The opening credits are set against a triangular shape which steadily narrows as they proceed (see figs 3.26 and 3.27). Not until the end credit does the triangle diagram a complete closure (see fig 3.28).[51] After about 1970, it seems, films seldom exploited these narrational possibilities and instead dropped the 'The End' credit, shifted most of the opening credits to the final spot (as a signal of the end), and expanded the credits sequence to a Talmudic intricacy.

The narration can afford to be so modest at this point because the film has already informed the audience when it will end. Chapter 4 shows how deadlines work in this fashion. Characters also constantly look forward to closure. In **The Arkansas Traveler* (1938), Traveler tells John: 'When this is all over, I want you to remember just one thing.' In the final moment of **Play Girl* (1941), the heroine calls her maid to fetch the perfume she has worn for every flirtation: 'The last time, Josie, the last time.' **Uncertain Glory* (1944) ends with Jean about to sacrifice his life. Bonet: 'It's been a long road.' Jean: 'But it's come to the right ending.' The conditions for closure have also been non-diegetically anticipated by the narration. **The Shock Punch* (1925) begins with expository titles that describe Dan Savage as a man who believes that life is a battle and the winner is one who 'can command the last reserve of physical power.' The next title continues: 'And as he wanted his son Ranny to be like that—to carry a final, deciding punch into every conflict —.' Needless to say, the film's action is resolved when Ranny flattens the man he is fighting. At the start of **The Black Hand* (1950), a crawl title tells of Italian immigrants living in New York at the turn of the century. Most were good citizens, the narration explains, who fought the Black Hand and eventually purged their community of its influence. The title thus anticipates Gio's success in overthrowing the Mafia. At the film's close, a fireman mutters, 'Ah, these dagoes!' and the captain turns. 'I wonder where you think Americans come from.' His retort confirms the narration's initial estimate of the immigrants' civic virtues. In contrast, it is no trivial description of an avant-garde or modernist film to say that such films often do not let us know when they will stop. Films in these traditions deliberately exploit a sense of uncertainty about

their boundaries, as when, in *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), the narrator announces that The whole story has come to its end,' but neglects to add that the film is only half over.

The work of classical narration may also peep out from the film's epilogue—a part of the final scene, or even a complete final scene, that shows the return of a stable narrative state. The screenwriter Frances Marion suggests ending the film as soon as possible after the action is resolved, but 'not before the expected rewards and penalties are meted out…. The final sequence should show the reaction of the protagonist when he has achieved his desires. Let the audience be satisfied that the future of the principals is settled.'[52] Emerson and Loos call this a short 'human interest' scene, an equivalent of 'And so they lived happily ever after.'[53] All the films in the UnS did include an epilogue, however brief; in two-thirds of them, the epilogue was a distinctly demarcated scene. A 1919 film **Love and the Law* (1919), signalled its epilogue by a very self-conscious title: 'Patience, gentle audience, just one thing more.' Soon, however, no such cues were necessary and an epilogue could be included as a matter of course.

Epilogues will often tacitly refer back to the opening scene, proving the aptness of Raymond Bellour's remark that in the classical film the conclusion acknowledges itself as a result of the beginning.[54] **You for Me* (1952) begins with Tony being peppered in the buttocks by a shotgun blast; a freeze frame catches him in a comic posture. The film ends with him sitting down on a knitting needle, accompanied by a freeze frame. **Sunday Dinner for a Soldier* (1944) frames its story by the habitual action of the family waving to planes overhead; at the start, the planes are anonymous, but by the close, Tessa is in love with one pilot. The familiar here-we-go-again, or cyclical, epilogue is a variant of the same principle. The epilogue can even be quite self-conscious about its symmetry, as is the framing narration of **Impact* (1944). The opening of the film corresponds to the opening of a dictionary by an anonymous hand, and the word 'impact' is enlarged. A voice-over commentary reads the somewhat improbable definition: 'Impact: The force with which two lives come together, sometimes for good, sometimes for evil.' At the end, the epilogue returns to the dictionary, but the definition has changed: 'Impact: The force with which two lives come together, sometimes for evil, sometimes for good.' The restoration of 'good' as the stable state creates an explicit balancing effect, as does shutting the book to announce the close of the film.

Most classical films use the story action to confirm our expectations of closure without further nudgings from the narration. But **Impact* does show that during the last few seconds of the film, the narration can risk some self-consciousness. The familiar running gag, a motif repeated throughout the film to be capped in the final moments, reminds the audience to some degree of the arbitrariness of closure. Another self-conscious marking of the narration's perspective upon the story world is the camera that cranes back to a high angle upon a final tableau. Most overt is a finale like that of **Appointment for Love* (1941), in which an elevator man turns from the couple and winks at the audience. As we would expect, such direct address is usually motivated by genre (e.g., comedy) or realism (as in a frame story stressing the factual basis of the fiction).

The winding corridor

The belief that classical narration is invisible often accompanies an assumption that the spectator is passive. If the Hollywood film is a clear pane of glass, the audience can be visualized as a rapt onlooker. Again, Hollywood's own discourse has encouraged this. Concealment of artifice, technicians claim, makes watching the film like viewing reality. The camera becomes not only the storyteller but the viewer as well; the absent narrator is replaced by the 'ideal observer.'[55] Few theorists today would agree with Hollywood's equation of its style with natural perception, but contemporary accounts have still considered the spectator to be quite inactive. Most commonly, film theorists have employed concepts taken from perspective

painting to explain the spectator's role. Yet terms like 'spectator placement,' 'subject position,' and other spatial metaphors break the film into a series of views targeted toward an inert perceiver.[56] In Chapter 5, I will consider 'perspective' as an account of the representation of classical space. For now, a metaphor involving both space and time will be useful. The spectator passes through the classical film as if moving through an architectural volume, remembering what she or he has already encountered, hazarding guesses about upcoming events, assembling images and sounds into a total shape. What, then, is the spectator's itinerary? Is it string-straight, or is it more like the baffling, 'crooked corridors' that Henry James prided himself upon designing?[57]

The film begins. Concentrated, preliminary exposition that plunges us *in medias res* triggers strong first impressions, and these become the basis for our expectations across the entire film. Meir Sternberg calls this the 'primacy effect.'[58] He points out that in any narrative, the information provided first about a character or situation creates a fixed baseline against which later information is judged. As our earlier examples indicate, the classical cinema trades upon the primacy effect. Once the exposition has outlined a character's traits, the character should remain consistent. This means that actions must be unequivocal and significant.[59] The star system also encourages the creation of first impressions. 'The people who act in pictures are selected for their roles because of the precise character impressions that they convey to audiences. For instance, the moment you see Walter Pidgeon in a film you know immediately that he could not do a mean or petty thing.'[60] All of these factors cooperate to reinforce the primacy effect.

Many films open with dialogue that builds up an impression of the yet-to-be-introduced protagonist; when the character appears (played by an appropriate star, caught in a typical action), the impression is confirmed. In the first scene of **Speedy* (1928), the young woman says that Speedy (Harold Lloyd) has a new job; her father comments that Speedy cannot keep any job because he is obsessed by baseball. Scene two begins with an expository title identifying the crucial game being played in Yankee Stadium, and shots of the game follow. Another expository title informs us that Speedy now works where he can phone the stadium. We then see a soda fountain, with Speedy as the soda jerk, going to the phone to learn the game's score. The rest of the scene confirms Pop's judgment of Speedy's character through gags showing Speedy carrying his baseball mania into his work. Dialogue title, expository title, character action, and star persona (Harold called himself 'Speedy' in *The Freshman* [1925]) all reinforce a single first impression.

The primacy effect is not confined to characterization, although first impressions are probably most firm in that realm. In some silent films, an unusually emphatic narration previews the essential theme and establishes the most coherent reading of what will follow. By extension, all the devices of 'planting' and foreshadowing motifs— objects, conditions, deadlines—gain their saliency from the primacy effect.

Once first impressions get erected, they are hard to knock down. Sternberg shows that we tend to take the first appearance of a motif as the 'true' one, which can withstand severe testing by contrary information. When, for instance, a character first presented as amiable later behaves grumpily, we are inclined to justify the grumpiness as a temporary deviation.[61] This tactic (again, reinforced by the star system) is a common way in which the classical film presents character change or development. In the opening of **The Miracle Woman* (1931), Florence Fallon is so distraught by her father's death that she denounces his congregation as hypocrites and launches into a sermon on the need for kindness. An opportunistic promoter takes advantage of her fervor and talks her into getting revenge on people by becoming a phony faith healer. When we next see her, she behaves cynically. Because of first impressions, we see her cynical selfishness as a momentary aberration, caused by exceptional circumstances, and so we are not surprised when love recalls her to her father's ideals. The primacy effect helps explain why character change in the Hollywood film is not a drastic shift but a return to the path from which one has strayed.

First impressions in place, the spectator proceeds through the film. How does this process work? The narration creates gaps, holding back information and compelling the spectator to form hypotheses. Most minimally and generally, these hypotheses will pertain to what can happen next, but many other hypotheses might be elicited. The spectator may infer how much a character knows, or why a character acts this way, or what in the past the protagonist is trying to conceal. The viewer may also hypothesize about the narration itself: why am I being told this now? why is the key information being withheld? Sternberg sees every viewing hypothesis as having three properties. A hypothesis can be more or less *probable*. Some hypotheses are virtual certainties (e.g., that Bill will survive the flood in **Steamboat Bill Jr.* [1928]). Other hypotheses are highly improbable (e.g., that Bill will not get the girl he loves). Most hypotheses fall somewhere in between. Hypotheses can also be more or less *simultaneous;* that is, sometimes we hold two or more hypotheses in balance at once, while at other moments one hypothesis simply gets replaced by another. If a man announces that he will get married, we hold simultaneous hypotheses (he will go through with it or he won't). But if a sworn bachelor suddenly shows up with a bride on his arm, the bachelor-hypothesis is simply replaced; the bachelor-hypothesis never competed with another possibility. Evidently, simultaneous hypotheses promote suspense and curiosity, while successive hypotheses promote surprise. Finally, a set of hypotheses can be more or less *exclusive*. Narration may force us to frame a few sharply distinguished hypotheses (in a chess game, there can only be win, lose, or draw), or the film may supply a range of overlapping and indistinct possibilities (setting out on a trip, one may undergo a wide variety of experiences).[62]

The three scales of probability, simultaneity, and exclusivity take us a considerable way toward characterizing the activities of the classical spectator. Broadly speaking, Hollywood narration asks us to form hypotheses that are highly probable and sharply exclusive. Consider, as a naive example, **Roaring Timber* (1937). In the first scene, a lumber-mill owner comes into a saloon looking for a new foreman. He tells the bartender he needs a tough guy for the job. Since we have already seen our protagonist, Jim, enter the bar, we form the hypothesis that the owner will ask him. The expectation is fairly probable, and there is no information to the contrary (no other man in the room is identified as a candidate). There is also a narrow range of alternatives (either the owner will ask Jim or he will not). Few hypotheses are as probable as this, but one of the indices of classical narration's reliability is that it seldom equivocates about the likeliest few hypotheses at any given moment. Similarly, the classical film sharply delimits the range of our expectations. The character's question is not 'What will I do with my life?' but 'Will I choose marriage or a career?' Even subtle cases operate by the same principles. **Beggars of Life* (1928) begins with a wandering young man coming up to a farmhouse and finding a dead man inside. He then encounters a young woman who tells, in flashback, how the farmer tried to rape her and how she killed him. The alternative explanations (suicide, accident, homicide, etc.) narrow to a single one (self-defense), and this becomes steadily more probable as the woman's tale accounts for the details the young man had noticed. True, farcical forms of comedy permit almost anything to happen next, but there the improbability and open-endedness of permissable hypotheses are motivated as generic conventions, and we adjust our expectations accordingly. On the whole, classical narration creates probable and distinct hypotheses. Characters' goal orientation often reinforces and guides the direction these hypotheses will take. Incidentally, in **Roaring Timber*, Jim accepts the foreman's job.

By threading together several probable and quite exclusive hypotheses, we participate in a game of controlled expectation and likely confirmation. There is, however, more to the spectator's activity. Any fictional narration can call our attention to a gap or it can distract us from it. In a mystery film, for instance, the crucial clue may be indicated quite casually; the detective may notice it but we do not. If the narration thus distracts us, we do not form an appropriate hypothesis and the narration can then introduce new

information. These successive hypotheses, as Sternberg calls them, create surprise.[63] Now it is characteristic of classical narration to use surprise very sparingly. Too many jolts would lead us to doubt the reliability of the narration, and the advantages of concentrated, preliminary, *in medias res* exposition would be lost. In our itinerary through the classical film, the banister cannot constantly collapse under our touch.

For this reason, classical narration usually calls our attention to gaps and allows us to set up simultaneous, competing hypotheses. The scenes from **Roaring Timber* and **Beggars of Life* afford clear instances, as does a sequence in **Interlude* (1957). The heroine calls on the conductor Tonio Fischer; our knowledge of him has been identical with hers. While she waits for him, the narration takes us to another room, where Tonio is playing the piano for another woman. The scene raises questions about the woman's identity and Tonio's character traits, and these gaps encourage us to construct simultaneous alternatives to be tested in subsequent scenes.

Our hypothesis-forming activity can be thought of as a series of questions which the text impells us to ask. The questions can be posed literally, from one character to another, as in the beginning of **Monsieur Beaucaire* (1946): 'Will there be war?' Or the questions can be more implicit. Roland Barthes speaks of this question-posing process as the 'hermeneutic code' and he shows how narratives have ways of delaying or recasting the question or equivocating about the answer.[64] The classical cinema always delays and may recast, but it seldom equivocates. At the start of **Play Girl* (1941), we are uncertain whether Grace is a gold-digger or whether the title is ironic. But when the father of her current beau denounces her, not only does she not deny her scandalous past but she accepts a bribe to let the son go. The answer to our question, somewhat delayed, is unequivocal.

All of the foregoing instances illustrate another feature of the gaps that classical narration creates: they are filled. Sternberg distinguishes between *permanent* gaps, which the text never authoritatively lets us fill (e.g., Iago's motives), and *temporary* gaps, which sooner or later we are able to fill.[65] It is a basic feature of classical narration to avoid permanent gaps. 'The perfect photoplay leaves no doubts, offers no explanations, starts nothing it cannot finish.'[66] The questions about Tonio in **Interlude* are eventually answered. Concentrated preliminary exposition, causal motivation, the use of denouement and epilogue—all seek to assure that no holes remain in the film. This process of gap-filling helps create the continuity of impression upon which Hollywood prides itself. Each sequence, every line of dialogue, becomes a way of creating or developing or confirming a hypothesis; shot by shot, questions are posed and answered. Our progress through the film, as our first impressions are confirmed and our hypotheses focus toward certainty, resembles the graphic design in the titles of *King Kong* (figs 3.26–3.28): a pyramid narrowing to a point of intelligibility. One screenplay manual puts it well: 'In the beginning of the motion picture we don't know anything. During the course of the story, information is accumulated, until at the end we know everything.'[67]

Again, one should not conclude that classical narration is naive or shallow, for subtle effects can be achieved within the admittedly constrained bounds of such narration. **Wine of Youth* (1924) begins with three expository titles:

> When our grandmothers were young, nice girls pretended to know nothing at all.
> When our mothers were young, they admitted they knew a thing or two.
> The girls of today pretend to know all there is to know.

There follow two parallel scenes. At a ball in 1870, a suitor proposes to a woman, and she accepts: 'There has never been a love as great as ours!' At another dance in 1897, a suitor proposes to the couple's daughter, and she too accepts, repeating the line her mother had uttered years before. The symmetry is quite

exact: similar situations, same setting (a sofa in an alcove), even the identical number of shots in each scene. At this point, the narration has established itself as highly reliable: the scenes have confirmed the titles' knowledge of women, and we have already formed strong first impressions about what the 'girls of today' will be like. (The word 'pretends' strongly suggests omniscience.) When the scene moves to the present, our impressions are confirmed. Jazz babies and lounge lizards are engaged in a wild party. Mary, the granddaughter and daughter of the other two women, refuses to marry her suitor. We form a hypothesis that this will not in the long run violate the pattern established in the first two scenes. Over the whole film we wait for Mary to reconcile herself to the decent young man who loves her. A harrowing family crisis demonstrates both the strains and the possibilities of marriage. Mary and her suitor are sitting on the sofa (the site of both previous courtships) and he proposes. She accepts: 'There has never been a love as great as ours!' It has been a long wait, but the narrational gap has finally been closed, and by an ironic repetition at that. The narration can even afford a twist— embracing, the couple tumble off the sofa—that lends a small surprise to the finale. Our hypotheses about the conclusion, established as very narrow and highly probable, are tested but finally validated, and in a way that also illustrates the recurrence of the Rule of Three.

There is one genre that may seem to run counter to all these claims about spectator activity in classical narration. The mystery film sometimes makes its narration quite overt: a shot of a shadowy figure or an anonymous hand makes the viewer quite aware of a self-conscious, omniscient, and suppressive narration. Similarly, the mystery film encourages the spectator to erect erroneous first impressions, confounds the viewer's most probable hypotheses, and stresses curiosity as much as suspense. (The mystery tale always depends upon highly retarded exposition, the true account coming to light only at the end.) The narration may even be revealed as retrospectively unreliable. Thus *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) offers an interesting contrast with **Wine of Youth*. Not only does the narration abandon its initial adherence to Sam Spade's point-of-view by showing the killing of his partner Archer, but the narration also declines to show the killer (we see only a gloved hand). More important, the narration misleads us in an expository title at the very outset. Over a still-life of the Maltese falcon, the title recounts the statuette's origin and ends by remarking that its whereabouts remain a mystery 'to this day' (fig 3.29). When the characters find only a lead replica of the falcon, the opening title stands revealed as doubly misleading. The falcon in the still-life may be the phony, and the phrase 'to this day' which we might take as meaning 'until this story started,' actually means 'even after the story concluded.' The opening title's equivocation is apparent only in retrospect. The same kind of misleading narration is at work in the beginning of * *Manhandled*, as I've already suggested (p. 32). A more drastic example, probably a limit-case, is Hitchcock's duplicitous flashback in the beginning of *Stage Fright* (1950).

The unreliable and overt narration of the mystery film remains, however, finally bound by classical precepts. First, the narration still depends chiefly upon suspense and forward momentum: the story is primarily that of an investigation, even if the goal happens to be the elucidation of a past event. Secondly, the mystery film relies completely upon cause and effect, since the mystery always revolves around missing links in the causal chain. Third, those links are always found, so even the gaps of the mystery film are temporary, not permanent. Most important, the mystery film's overt play of narration and hypothesis-forming is generically motivated. Since Poe and Doyle, the classical detective story has stressed the game of wits that the narrator proposes to the reader. In this genre, we want uncertainty, we expect both characters and narration to try to deceive us, and we therefore erect specific sorts of first impressions, cautious, provisional ones, based as much upon generic conventions as upon what we actually learn. We do not feel betrayed by the *Falcon's* opening title, since it is equivalent to the deceptive but 'fair' narrational manipulations in certain novels by Agatha Christie, John Dickson Carr, or Ellery Queen. The classical film thus can generically motivate an unreliable and overt narration.

The spectator moves through, or with, classical Hollywood narration by casting expectations in the form of hypotheses which the text shapes. Narration is fundamentally reliable, allowing hypotheses to be ranked in order of probability and narrowed to a few distinct alternatives. Surprise and disorientation are secondary to suspense as to which alternatives will be confirmed. Curiosity about the past takes a minor role in relation to anticipation of future events. Gaps are continually and systematically opened and filled in, and no gap is permanent. Lest this process seem obvious or natural, recall such a film as *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), which creates a fundamentally unreliable narration, a lack of redundancy, an open and relatively improbable set of hypotheses, a dependence upon surprise rather than suspense, a pervasive ambiguity about the past that makes the future impossible to anticipate, and many gaps left yawning at the film's close. This is of course an extreme example, but other narrative films contain non-classical narrative strategies. A film's narration could make the initial exposition less clear-cut, as does Godard's *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1980), or the narration could establish a firm primacy effect but then qualify or demolish it, as do films as different as Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Day of Wrath* (1943) and Resnais's *Providence* (1977). The Hollywood film does not lead us to invalid conclusions, as these films can; in the classical narrative, the corridor may be winding, but it is never crooked.

4
Time in the classical film

Our examination of exposition has shown that the narrational aspect of plot manipulates story time in specific ways. More generally, classical narration employs characteristic strategies for manipulating story *order* and story *duration*. These strategies activate the spectator in ways congruent with the overall aims of the classical cinema. We shall also have to pay some attention to how narration uses one device that is commonly associated with the Hollywood style's handling of time: crosscutting.

Temporal order: the search for meaning

> After dramas supposedly without endings, here is a drama which would be without exposition or opening, and which would end clearly. Events would not follow one another and especially would not correspond exactly. The fragments of many pasts come to bury themselves in a single now. The future mixed among memories. This chronology is that of the human mind.[1]

Jean Epstein, writing in 1927, thus describes his film *La Glace à trois faces*. Hollywood cinema, however, refuses the radical play with chronology that Epstein proposes; the classical film normally shows story events in a 1–2–3 order. Unlike Epstein, the classical filmmaker needs an opening, a threshold—that concentrated, preliminary exposition that plunges us *in medias res*. Events unfold successively from that. Advance notice of the future is especially forbidden, since a *ftashforward* would make the narration's omniscience and suppressiveness overt (see Chapter 30 on alternative cinemas' use of the flashforward). The only permissible manipulation of story order is the flashback.

Flashbacks are rarer in the classical Hollywood film than we normally think. Throughout the period 1917–60, screenwriters' manuals usually recommended not using them; as one manual put it, 'Protracted or frequent flashbacks tend to slow the dramatic progression'—a remark that reflects Hollywood's general reluctance to exploit curiosity about past story events.[2] Of the one hundred UnS films, only twenty use any flashbacks at all, and fifteen of those occur in silent films. Most of these are brief, expository flashbacks filling in information about a character's background; this device was obviously replaced by expository dialogue in the sound cinema. In the early years of .sound, when plays about trials were common film sources, flashbacks offered a way to 'open up' stagy trial scenes (e.g., *The Bellamy Trial*, *Through Different Eyes*, *The Trial of Mary Dugan*, *Madame X*, all 1929). Another vogue for flashbacks ran from the late 1930s into the 1950s. Between 1939 and 1953, four UnS films begin with a frame story and flash back to recount the bulk of the main action before returning to the frame. Yet those four flashback films still comprise less than 10 per cent of the UnS films of the period. What probably makes the period seem dominated by flashbacks is not the numerical frequency of the device but the intricate ways it was used: contradictory flashbacks in *Crossfire* (1947), parallel flashbacks in *Letter to Three Wives* (1948), open-ended flashbacks

in *How Green Was My Valley* (1941) and *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943), flashbacks within flashbacks within flashbacks in *Passage to Marseille* (1944) and *The Locket* (1946), and a flashback narrated by a dead man in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950).

It is possible, of course, to present a shift in story order simply as such, with the film's narration overtly intervening to reveal the past. In *The Ghost ofRosie Taylor* (1918), an expository inter-title announces that it will explain how the situation became what it is; the title motivates the flashback. *The Killing* (1956) uses voice-over, documentary-sty le narration to motivate 'realistically' its jumps back in time. The rarity of these overt intrusions shows that classical narration almost always motivates flashbacks by means of character memory. Several cues cooperate here: images of the character thinking, the character's voice heard 'over' the images, optical effects (dissolve, blurring focus), music, and specific references to the time period we are about to enter. If we see flashbacks as motivated by subjectivity, then the extraordinary fashion for temporal manipulations in the 1940s can be explained by the changing conception of psychological causality in the period. Flashbacks, especially convoluted or contradictory ones, can be justified by that increasing interest in vulgarized Freudian psychology which Chapter 2 has already discussed.

Classical flashbacks are motivated by character memory, but they do not function primarily to reveal character traits. Nor were Hollywood practitioners particularly interested in using the flashback to restrict point-of-view; one screenwriters' manual suggests that 'unmotivated jumping of time is likely to rattle the audience, thereby breaking their illusion that they participate in the lives of the characters.'[3] Even the contradictory flashbacks in *Through Different Eyes* or *Crossfire* serve not to reveal the teller's personality so much as they operate, within the conventions of the mystery film, as visual representations of lies. Jean Epstein's aim in *La Glace à trois faces*—to reflect the mixed temporality of consciousness, fragments of the past in a single now—is far removed from Hollywood's use of flashbacks as rhetorical 'dispositions' of the narrative for the sake of suspense or surprise. Nor need the classical flashback respect the literary conventions of firstperson narration. Extended flashback sequences usually include material that the remembering character could not have witnessed or known. Character memory is simply a convenient immediate motivation for a shift in chronology; once the shift is accomplished, there are no constant cues to remind us that we are supposedly in someone's mind. In flashbacks, then, the narrating character executes the same fading movement that the narrator of the entire film does: overt and self-conscious at first, then covert and intermittently apparent. Beginning with one narrator and ending with another (e.g., *I Walked With a Zombie*), or compelling a character to 'remember' things she never knew or will know (e.g., *Ten North Frederick* [1958]), or creating a deceased narrator (e.g., *Sunset Boulevard*)—all these tactics show that subjectivity is an arbitrary pretext for flashbacks.

Classical manipulations of story order imply specific activities for the spectator. These involve what psychologists call 'temporal integration,' the process of fusing the perception of the present, the memory of the past, and expectations about the future. E.H.Gombrich points out that temporal integration depends upon the search for meaning, the drive to make coherent sense of the material represented.[4] The film which challenges this coherence, a film like *Not Reconciled* (1964), *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), or *India Song* (1975), must make temporal integration difficult to achieve. In the classical film, however, character causality provides the basis for temporal coherence. The manipulations of story order in *Not Reconciled* or *Marienbad* are puzzling partly because we cannot determine any relevant character identities, traits, or actions which could motivate the breaks in chronology. On the other hand, one reason that classical flashbacks do not adhere to a character's viewpoint is that they must never distract from the ongoing causal chain. The causes and effects may be presented out of story order, but our search for their connections must be rewarded.

Psychological causality thus permits the classical viewer to integrate the present with the past and to form clear-cut hypotheses about future story events. To participate in the process of casting ever more narrow and exclusive hypotheses, we must have solid ground under our feet. Therefore, through repetition within the story action and a covertly narrated, 'objective' diegetic world, the film gives us clear memories of causal material; on this basis we can form expectations. At the same time, the search for meaning of which Gombrich speaks guides us toward the motifs and actions already marked as potentially meaningful. For example, motifs revealed in the credits sequence or in the early scenes accumulate significance as our memory is amplified by the ongoing story. Kuntzel suggests that these reinscribed motifs create a vague *déjà-vu* that becomes gradually more meaningful: 'The entire itinerary of *The Most Dangerous Game* is to make its initial figure *readable*, to progressively reassure the subject plunged *ex abrupto* into the uncertainty of the figure.'[5] The classical aesthetic of 'planting' and foreshadowing, of tagging traits and objects for future use, can be seen as laying out elements to be recalled later in the cause-effect logic of the film. If temporality and causality did not cooperate in this way, the spectator could not construct a coherent story out of the narration.

Our survey of narration has shown that the viewer's successive hypotheses can be thought of as a series of questions. Hollywood cinema's reliance upon chronology triggers the fundamental query: What will happen next in the story? Each shot, wrote Loos and Emerson, 'is planned to lead the audience on to the next. At any point, the spectator is wondering how things will come out in the next scene.'[6] The forward flow of these hypotheses may be related to the irreversibility of the film-viewing experience; Thomas Elsaesser has speculated that the channeling of chronology into causality helps the viewer 'manage' the potentially disturbing nature of the film-viewing situation.[7] The relatively close correspondence between story order and narrational order in the classical film helps the spectator create an organized succession of hypotheses and a secure rhythm of question and answer.

Duration, deadlines, and dissolves

Like order, classical Hollywood duration respects very old conventions. The narration shows the important events and skips the intervals between them. The omitted intervals become codified as a set of punctuation marks: expository inter-titles ('The Next Day') and optical effects. From 1917 to 1921, fade-ins and -outs and iris-ins and -outs were the most common optical transitions between scenes. Between 1921 and 1928, the iris fell into disuse, replaced by the fade as the most common transition. In the sound era, fades and dissolves were the most common signs of temporal ellipsis. Wipes enjoyed a vogue between 1932 and 1941 and appeared occasionally thereafter. Such optical punctuation marks were often compared with theatrical or literary conventions (curtain, end of chapter). Within a scene, of course, some of the same ellipses could be used. After the late 1920s and until the early 1950s, scenes often began with a shot of a building or a sign and then dissolved to the action proper. In the same period, a wipe, either hard- or soft-edged, might follow a character moving from one sub-scene to another. (Not until the late 1950s did a few films begin to eliminate such internal punctuation and simply use the straight cut to link scenes and subscenes.[8]) Such a clear set of cues creates an orderly flow of action; compare the disruptive effect, in the films of Eisenstein and Godard, of beginning a scene's action and then, part of the way through, interrupting the action with a title that tells us when the action is occurring.

Punctuation marks enable the narration to skip unimportant intervals by simple omission. The montage sequence lets the narration represent, however briefly, those intervals. The montage sequence does not omit time but compresses it. A war, a prison sentence, or a career can be summed up in a few shots. Films which cover a great length of time may make heavy weather of montage sequences, as does **High Time* (1960),

which employs montages of seasons and semesters to cover four years on a college campus. The montage sequence was especially important in literary adaptations, since the plots of novels tended to cover extensive periods.[9] So critical were montages to temporal construction that they were also called 'time-lapse' sequences.

The classical film creates a patterned duration not only by what it leaves out but by a specific, powerful device. The story action sets a limit to how long it must last. Sometimes this means simply a strictly confined duration, as in the familiar convention of one-night-in-a-mysterioushouse films (*The Cat and the Canary* [1927], *Seven Footprints to Satan* [1929], **One Frightened Night* [1935], **Sh! The Octopus* [1937]). More commonly, the story action sets stipulated *deadlines* for the characters.

The mildest and most frequent form of the deadline is the appointment. This is most evident in the romance line of action, wherein a suitor will invite a woman out for dinner, to a dance, etc. If the film makes romance primary, the acceptance, rejection, or deferral of such invitations forms a significant part of the drama (e.g., **Interlude* [1957], **The King and the Chorus Girl* [1937]). The very title of **Appointment for Love* (1941) conveys the same idea. Even if the film does not rely completely upon the romance line of action, many scenes include the making of appointments for later encounters. Just as motifs anticipate future actions, so appointments gear our expectations toward later scenes.

The deadline proper is the strongest way in which story duration cooperates with narrative causality. In effect, the characters set a limit to the time span necessary to the chain of cause and effect. Over three-quarters of the UnS films contained one or more clearly articulated deadlines. The deadline may be stipulated in a line of dialogue, a shot (e.g., a clock), or crosscutting; whatever device is used, it must specify the durational limit within which cause and effect can operate. Most frequently, the deadline is localized, binding together a few scenes or patterning only a single one. Scenes in **Miss Lulu Bett* (1921) are structured around the repeated deadline of the family's dinner hour. A series of short episodes in **High Time* (1960) are governed by the fact that the freshmen must build a bonfire by seven o'clock. The localized deadline is of course most common at the film's climax. In **Fire Down Below* (1957), one of the protagonists is trapped in the hold of a ship; it is on fire and sinking, and the suspense is predicated upon the slow drainage of time until the situation becomes hopeless. **The Canterville Ghost* (1944) presents the climactic scene of the ghost and young William proving their courage by towing a ticking bomb across the landscape. When William says, If it'll hold for twenty seconds more!' the Ghost starts to count the seconds off. The conventional last-minute rescue is the most evident instance of how the classical film's climax often turns upon a deadline.

A deadline may also determine the entire structure of a classical film. The protagonist's goal can be straightforwardly dependent upon a deadline, as when in **Roaring Timber* (1937), Jim agrees to deliver eighty million feet of lumber in sixty days. **The Shock Punch* (1925) gives the protagonist the task of finishing construction of a building by a certain date; the film's last scene occurs on the deadline day. In 1940s films, the use of the flashback can also limit the duration of the story action. For example, **No Leave, No Love* (1946) begins with the protagonist rushing to a maternity ward; while he waits for news of his child's birth, he tells another husband the story of how he met his wife. By halting the action at a point of crisis and flashing back to early events, the film makes those events seem to operate under the pressure of a deadline. (See also *The Big Clock* [1948] and *Raw Deal* [1948].)

**Uncertain Glory* (1944) offers a clear example of how appointments mix with deadlines to unify the duration of the classical Hollywood film. The film's action takes place in France under the Nazi Occupation. The first six scenes present the escape of the convict Jean and his capture by the police detective Bonet; in these portions, alternating point-of-view creates suspense. When Bonet has captured Jean, we learn that the Gestapo will shoot one hundred hostages if a partisan saboteur does not surrender in five days. This long-

term deadline structures the bulk of the film, as Bonet tries to convince Jean to pose as the saboteur, help the Resistance, and save the hostages. While the deadline hovers over the action, the two men quarrel, villagers conspire against them, Jean falls in love with a village woman (entailing small-scale appointments), and Jean tries several times to escape from Bonet. Finally, in the penultimate scene, at five o'clock Jean decides to surrender himself: 'Deadline's six o'clock, isn't it?' He turns himself in.

It should be evident that deadlines function narrationally. Issuing from the diegetic world, they motivate the film's durational limits: the story action, not the narrator, seems to decide how long the action will take. Planning appointments makes it 'natural' for the narration to show the meeting itself; setting up deadlines makes it 'natural' for the narration to devote screen time to showing whether or not the deadline is met. Moreover, appointments and deadlines stress the forward flow of story action: the arrows of the spectator's expectations are turned toward the encounter to come, the race to the goal. When, in * *Applause* (1929), the sailor from Wisconsin asks April for a date, we expect to see the date; when he says he has only four days of leave, we are not surprised that he should ask her to marry him before his leave is up. Deadlines and appoint ments thus perfectly suit classical narration's emphasis upon eliciting hypotheses about the future.

As a formal principle, the deadline is one of the most characteristic marks of Hollywood dramaturgy. Alternative styles of filmmaking can often be recognized by their refusal to set such explicit limits on the duration of story action. The alternatives vary. Ozu structures his films by repeated routines and cycles of family behavior. Jacques Tati uses a fixed duration (a week, a day or two) simply as a block of time without a deadline. Eisenstein often composes a film of separate, durationally distinct episodes (e.g., *Ivan the Terrible* [1945]). The 'art cinema' of Federico Fellini, Ingmar Bergman, or Michelangelo Antonioni is characterized partly by its refusal of deadlines, its replacement of appointments by chance encounters, and its 'open' endings that do not allow the audience to anticipate when the chain of cause and effect will be completed. A Hollywood version of *L'avventura* (1960) would be sure to include a scene in which someone says: 'If we don't find Sandra in three days, her supply of food will run out.'

Within the classical scene, the viewer assumes durational continuity unless signals say otherwise. The individual shot is assumed to convey a continuous time span which only editing can disrupt. Yet the classical cinema is a cinema of cutting; the single-shot sequence is very rare. Thus classical editing strategies have to signal temporal continuity. *Match-on-action* cutting is the most explicit cue for moment-to-moment continuity. If a character starts to stand up in one shot and continues the movement in the next shot, the classical presumption is that no time has been omitted (see figs 4.1 and 4.2). Editors are warned that if they mismatch action, audiences will be confused about temporal progression.[10] But the match-on-action cut, expensive and timeconsuming, is relatively rare; of all the shot-changes in a classical film, no more than 12 per cent are likely to be matches on action. In the absence of information to the contrary, spatial editing cues, such as eyeline-match cutting, imply durational continuity.

The adoption of synchronized sound-on-film had a very powerful effect on how the classical cinema represented story time, as Chapter 23 will show in detail. Diegetic sound created a concrete perceptual duration that could aid editing in creating a seamless temporal continuity. If two characters are talking, the sound editor could make the continuous sound conceal the cut. A British editor summarized American practice:[11]

> This flowing of sound over a cut is one of the most important features of the editing of sound films—in particular, of dialogue films. The completely parallel cut of sound and action should be the exception rather than the rule. … Most editors today make a practice of lapping the last one or two frames of modulation on the soundtrack of the shot they are leaving over onto the oncoming shot.

That is, the shot change precedes the dialogue change by a syllable or a word. This 'dialogue cutting point' (Barry Salt's term) became standard by 1930.[12] On other occasions, of course, the sound can lead the image; very commonly a classical film will motivate a cut by an offscreen sound. The noise of a door opening, a character starting to speak, the music of a radio from another room—these can all help sound flow over a cut.

Another way of using sound to secure durational continuity is to employ diegetic music. Of course non-diegetic music, as accompaniment, had been present in the silent cinema, but there its quality as narration made it temporally abstract. In the sound film, diegetic music could cover certain gaps at the level of the image while still projecting a sense of continuous time. For example, in *Flying Fortress* (1942), a couple sit down to dinner in a restaurant while a band is playing. The meal is abbreviated by means of dissolves, creating ellipses on the visual track; but the band's music continues uninterrupted. The bleeding of music over large ellipses suggests how easily the temporal vagueness of music can make sound fulfill narrative functions.

The dissolve, the most common indication of duration, affords us an instructive example of how classical narration does its temporal work. Visually, the dissolve is simply a variant of the fade—a fade-out overlapped with a fade-in—but it is a fade during which the screen is never blank. 'To the layman or the average theatregoer, a lap dissolve passes unobtrusively by on the screen without his being aware that it had happened. A lap dissolve serves the purpose of smoothly advancing the story.'[13] The dissolve was quickly restricted to indicating a short, often indefinite interval, if only a few seconds (e.g., a dissolve from a detail to a full shot). This makes the dissolve a superb way to soften spatial, graphic, and even temporal discontinuities. The dissolve could blend newsreel footage with studio shots, cover mismatched figure positions or screen direction, or blend an extreme-long shot with a close-up (see figs 4.3 through 4.5). Filmmakers of the 1920s in Europe and Russia showed that the dissolve opens up a realm of sheerly graphic possibilities, but Hollywood severely curtailed these: apart from a few exceptions (such as Josef Von Sternberg's work), the Hollywood dissolve became, as Tamar Lane puts it, 'a link…. It bridges over from one situation to another without a jarring break of action and without need for explanatory matter.'[14]

After 1928, the dissolve on the image track was accompanied by a sound transition as well. At first, the procedures of sound editing and the uncertainties of sound perspective made technicians puzzled. Imagine switching abruptly from the blast of a jazz orchestra to a flash of a whispered conversation, then to the rush of a train and back to the silken vampire sleeping peacefully in her boudoir. Such a rush of conflicting sound ought to leave an audience as nervous as a doe at a waterhole.'[15] Sound dissolves were declared distracting; while a closeup of a face could dissolve to a long shot of a crowd, to mix even briefly the character's speech with the crowd's babble would result in cacophony. Instead, the character would complete the dialogue and pause; the crowd noise would then be sneaked in over the dissolve. Like the offscreen sound that motivates the cut to a new space, the sound bridge here may sometimes very slightly anticipate the next image. Both image and sound dissolving procedures show how, once a transition became codified, it could provide a continuous and unself-conscious narration.

Like our experience of story order, the viewer's experience of story duration depends upon a search for meaning. Gombrich writes: 'We cannot judge the distance of an object in space before we have identified it and estimated its size. We cannot estimate the passage of time in a picture without interpreting the event represented.'[16] In the classical cinema, the narration's emphasis upon the future gears our expectations toward the resolution of suspense. It is this that determines what periods the narration will eliminate or compress. When this does not happen, when the narration dwells upon 'dramatically meaningless intervals,' duration comes forward as a system in the film and vies with causality for prominence. (See the various critiques[17] of Hitchcock's use of the long take in *Rope* [1948].) Time in the classical film is a vehicle for causality, not a process to be investigated on its own. Hence the stricture that a walk without dialogue is 'dead' or wasted

time. (Compare the durational importance of the silent walk in Dreyer, in Antonioni, and, from a different culture, in the Navajo films described by Sol Worth and John Adair.[18])

More generally, classical narration's insistence upon closure rewards the search for meaning and makes the time span we experience seem a complete unit. Even from shot to shot, our expectation of causally significant completion controls how we respond. 'We hardly realize that we look at two different shots if the first one shows the beginning of an action and the next one its continuation.'[19] The match-on-action cut, the bleeding of sound over a cut, the use of dissolves and diegetic music all confirm our expectation of completion. The viewer's ability to test hypotheses against a film's unfolding cause and effect means that duration again becomes secondary to a search for narrative meaning.

Hollywood has also exploited our search for temporal meaning by shaping the felt duration of our experience. Narrative 'rhythm' can be thought of as a way in which narration focuses and controls successive hypotheses. Camera movement, especially if it is independent of the figures and closely timed to music, can create a moment-by-moment arc of expectation.[20] Editing was the earliest rhythmic realm which the classical cinema systematically exploited; by 1920, scenarists were recommending using short shots to increase excitement.[21] Rhythmic editing is still far from clearly understood theoretically, but certainly the time needed to grasp a new shot depends partly upon expectation. It appears that if the viewer is prepared and if the shot is graphically comprehensible, the viewer requires between half a second and three seconds to adjust to the cut.[22] Slowly paced editing leaves a comfortable margin, so that the new shot is on the screen quite long enough for the viewer to assimilate it. But in Hollywood's use of accelerated editing, the viewer is primed to expect a very narrow range of alternative outcomes and the shots then flash on the screen so quickly that the viewer can 'read' them only in gross terms: do they confirm or disconfirm the immediate hypothesis? This process is evident in the last-minute rescue, when all the viewer wants to know is whether the rescuers will arrive in time, so the accelerating editing builds excitement by confining each shot to posing, retarding, and eventually answering this question. The ability of rapid editing to funnel the spectator's hypotheses into very narrow channels is confirmed by Robert Parrish's claim that fast pace can cover story problems. Asserting that *The Roaring Twenties* (1939) works like 'one big ninety-minute montage,' Parrish notes: 'The audience never gets a chance to relax and think about the story holes. They're into the next scene before they have time to think about the last one.'[23]

Crosscutting

Strictly speaking, crosscutting can be considered a category of alternating editing, the intercalation of two or more different series of images. If temporal simultaneity is not pertinent to the series, the cutting may be called *parallel* editing; if the series are to be taken as temporally simultaneous, then we have *crosscutting*. For example, if the film alternates images of wealth and poverty with no temporal relation to one another, we have parallel editing; but if the rich man is sitting down to dinner while the beggar stands outside, we have crosscutting. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) uses both types: parallel editing makes abstract analogies among the four epochs, while crosscutting within each epoch depicts simultaneous actions. In the classical Hollywood cinema, parallel editing is a distinctly unlikely alternative, since it emphasizes logical relations rather than causality and chronology.

Crosscutting is a narrational process: two or more lines of action in different locales are woven together. Our hero gets up in the morning; cut to the boss looking at the clock; cut to our hero eating breakfast; cut to the boss pacing. Christian Metz has pointed out that such a sequence manipulates both order and duration.[24] Within each line of action, the events are consecutive; but between the lines of action taken as wholes, the temporal relations are simultaneous. The hero gets up somewhat *before* the boss looks at the clock, but

across the whole sequence, we understand that *while* the hero gets up and comes to work the boss waits for him. There is yet another factor involved, which Metz does not mention: usually, crosscutting creates ellipses. If we cut from hero waking up to boss to hero leaving, the shot of the boss covers all the time it takes our hero to dress, wash, etc. Crosscutting almost always skips over intervals in exactly this way. Crosscutting, then, creates a unique set of temporal relations—order, ellipsis, simultaneity —which function for specific narrational ends.

Alternation of narrational point-of-view has a long history in literature and other arts, but crosscutting is often linked to specifically nineteenth-century theatrical and literary sources. Nicholas Vardac found 'cross-cut' scenes in nineteenth-century drama, which used dual box sets and area lighting to switch between lines of action.[25] Eisenstein traced Griffith's parallel montage through theatrical melodrama back to Dickens's novels.[26] The analogies with other arts emphasize the brevity of the scenes alternated and the simultaneity of the actions represented. Chapter 16 will show that both these aspects of crosscutting were common in American filmmaking long before 1917. But such analogies with other arts do not specify all the features of classical crosscutting.

Classical crosscutting traces out personal cause and effect, creates deadlines, and frees narration from restricting itself to a single character's point-of-view. We most commonly think of crosscutting as supporting a deadline—supremely, the last-minute rescue situation. But a silent film might employ crosscutting in a great many scenes—as exposition, as a reminder of characters' whereabouts, and especially as a way in which narration could control the viewer's hypothesis-framing. Crosscutting thus reveals narration to be omniscient (the narration knows that something important is happening in another line of action), but this omniscience, true to classical precept, is rendered as omnipresence.

In 1920, Loos and Emerson advised the screen-writer that two crosscut lines of action would help keep the audience interested.[27] Of the UnS silent films, 84 per cent use extensive passages of crosscutting. With the coming of sound, however, crosscutting became far less frequent. Of the UnS sound films, only 49 per cent use any crosscutting at all, and only 16 per cent use it as extensively as did silent films. The reasons are evident. Dialogue would not be cut as quickly as silent action, and crosscutting lines of dialogue (done in Europe by René Clair and Fritz Lang) probably seemed too narrationally intrusive for Hollywood film-making.[28] The abandonment of crosscutting thus became consonant with a greater reticence on the part of sound-film narration.

None the less, the principle behind crosscutting remained important for the sound film. As Chapter 23 will show, the rhythm of silent film editing found a functional equivalent in the sound film's rapid shifts from scene to scene. In **The Whole Town's Talking* (1935), our hero's boss notices that he is late and begins to interrogate other employees. The scene switches to Jones at home, asleep; he wakes up, notices the time, and rushes off. We then see Jones arrive at work. Such shifts in locale could be motivated by sound links as well (music, radio or television broadcasts, phone conversations, etc.). In such ways, a rapid alternation of distinct scenes could stimulate crosscutting's characteristic play with time— consecutive order, ellipsis, and an overall sense of simultaneity. A discreet narration oversees time, making it subordinate to causality, while the spectator follows the causal thread.

5
Space in the classical film

> The motion picture industry for many years has been trying to remove the one dimension of the screen. By lighting, with lenses of inexplicable complexity, through movement, camera angles, and a variety of other techniques, the flatness of the screen has largely been overcome.[1]
>
> Ranald MacDougall, 1945

In making narrative causality the dominant system in the film's total form, the classical Hollywood cinema chooses to subordinate space. Most obviously, the classical style makes the sheerly graphic space of the film image a vehicle for narrative. We can see this principle at work negatively in the prohibitions against 'bad' cuts. 'The important subjects should be in the same general area of the frame for each of the two shots which are to be cut together,' but 'as long as the important subject is not shifted from one side of the screen to the other, no real harm is done.'[2] In describing the classical cinema's use of space we are most inclined to use the term 'transparent,' so much does that cinema strive to efface the picture plane. 'The screen might be likened to a plate-glass window through which the observer looks with one eye at the actual scene.'[3] We need, however, a fuller account of how classical narration uses image composition and editing to create a powerful representation of three-dimensional space.

The image: composition

While recognizing that Hollywood cinema subordinates space to narrative causality, we ought also to acknowledge that the classical spatial system is, in a strictly logical sense, arbitrary. We could imagine other systems that privileged different devices (e.g., decentered framings, discontinuity editing) but which were equally coherent and equally supportive of causality. Historically, however, the classical construction of space appears far from arbitrary, since it synthesizes many traditions which have dominated various Western arts.

Post-Renaissance painting provided one powerful model. Cinematographers and directors constantly invoked famous paintings as sources. Cecil B.De Mille claimed to have borrowed from Doré, Van Dyck, Corot and one 'Reubens.'[4] Robert Surtees cited the Impressionists, Leon Shamroy imitated Van Gogh. Discussions of lighting invariably invoke Rembrandt.[5] To a point, such assertions are simply hyperbole. Allan Dwan remarked: 'Once in a while we would undertake the imitation or reproduction of something artistic—a famous painting, let's say.'[6] (Staged replicas of famous pictures were also a convention of theatrical melodrama.) But in a more significant sense, Hollywood did perpetuate many precepts of post-Renaissance painting. The very name 'film studio' derives from the term for the workroom of the painter or sculptor. While no major cinematographers were professional painters, many (Charles Rosher, Karl Struss,

Stanley Cortez, James Wong Howe) had been portrait photographers, a field in which academic rules of composition and lighting prevailed. And occasionally a cinematographer would articulate principles of filmmaking that directly echo those of academic painting.[7] We ought not to be surprised, then, that Hollywood's practices of composition continue some very old traditions in the visual arts.

An outstanding example is the Hollywood cinema's interest in centered compositions. In post-Renaissance painting, the erect human body provides one major standard of framing, with the face usually occupying the upper portion of the picture format. The same impulse can be seen in the principle of horizon-line isocephaly, which guarantees that figures' heads run along a more or less horizontal line.[8] Classical cinema employs these precepts. While extreme long shots tend to weight the lower half of the image (this derives from landscape painting traditions), most shots work with a privileged zone of screen space resembling a T: the upper one-third and the central vertical third of the screen constitute the 'center' of the shot. This center determines the composition of long shots, medium shots, and close-ups, as well as the grouping of figures (see figs 5.1 through 5.8). In widescreen films, the center area is proportionately stretched, so even slightly off-center compositions are not transgressive (especially in a balanced shot/reverse-shot cutting pattern). Classical filmmaking thus considers edge-framing taboo; frontally positioned figures or objects, however unimportant, are seldom sliced off by either vertical edge. And, as the illustrations indicate, horizon-line isocephaly is common in classical filmmaking. Thus the human body is made the center of narrative and graphic interest: the closer the shot, the greater the demand for centering.

But how to center moving figures? The classical style quickly discovered the virtues of panning and tilting the camera. The subtlest refinement of this practice was the custom of *reframing*. A refraining is a slight pan or tilt to accommodate figure movement. Every film in the UnS contained some reframings; after 1929, one out of every six shots used at least one reframing. The chief alternative to reframing is what Edward Branigan has called the *frame cut*.[9] Within a defined locale, a figure leaves the shot, and, as *the body crosses the frame line*, the cut reveals the figure entering a new shot, with the body still crossing the (opposite) frame line (see figs 5.9 through 5.14). Frame-cutting is extraordinarily common in classical cinema, partly because it is the least troublesome match-on-action cut to make but also because it confirms the importance of the center zone of the screen. In a frame cut, the image's edge becomes only a bridge over which figures or objects pass on their way to center stage.

With centering comes balance, but the complex and dynamic equilibrium of great Western painting is usually lacking in Hollywood compositions. Overall balance and an avoidance of distractingly perfect symmetry generally suffice. Once centered, the human body provides enough slight asymmetries to yield a generally stable image, and camera viewfinders, engraved with cross-hatchings, enabled cameramen to balance the shot. When balance is lost, the results leap to the eye. In figures 5.15 and 5.16, from *The Bedroom Window* (1924), William C.deMille's practice of multiple-camera shooting has pushed the shots off-center and off-balance. Of course, such imbalance can be causally motivated, as in *Harvey* (1950), for which cinematographer William Daniels had to frame the shots asymmetrically to include the invisible rabbit.[10] The value of balance in the classical cinema can be seen in the way that a vacancy in the frame space will be reserved for the entry of a character; that figure will complete the balanced composition (see figs 5.17 through 5.19).

Both centering and balancing function as narration in that these film techniques shape the story action for the spectator. The narrational qualities of shot composition are also evident in the classical use of frontality. Renaissance painting derived many principles of scenography from Greek and Roman theater, so that the idea of a narrative action addressed to the spectator became explicit in Western painting. The classical film image relies upon such a conception of frontality. The face is positioned in full, three-quarter, or profile view; the body typically in full or threequarter view. The result is an odd rubbernecking characteristic of

Hollywood character position; people's heads may face one another in profile but their bodies do not (see figs 5.20 and 5.21). Standing groups are arranged along horizontal or diagonal lines or in half-circles; people seldom close ranks as they would in real life (see figs 5.22 and 5.23). The dyspeptic Welford Beaton was one of the few critics who noticed this practice:[11]

> In most of our pictures the directors make their characters face the camera by the simple expedient of turning them around until they face it, no matter how unnatural the scene is made thereby. In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* [1928], there is an exhibition of flagrant disregard of common sense in grouping characters. Ruth Taylor, Alice White, and Ford Sterling are shown seated at a round table in a restaurant. Instead of forming a triangle, they are squeezed together so closely that Sterling, in the center, scarcely can move.

Yet complete frontality—e.g., direct address to the camera—is rare; a modified frontality requires that a wedge be driven into the space, opening up the best sightlines.

Frontality constitutes a very important cue for the viewer. When characters have their backs to us, it is usually an index of their relative unimportance at the moment. George Cukor points out a scene from *Adam's Rib* (1949) in which Katharine Hepburn was turned from the camera: 'That had a meaning: she indicated to the audience that they should look at Judy Holliday.'[12] Groupings around tables often sacrifice a good view of the least significant character in the scene. One UnS film, * *Saratoga* (1937) vividly illustrates how troubled the film's space becomes when frontality is disrupted. Jean Harlow died in the course of the film's production, before several scenes were shot. In those scenes, Harlow was replaced by a double who never faces the camera, resulting in the odd phenomenon of having no portrayal of the heroine's expressions during climactic moments of the action.

Most important, frontality can be lost if it is then regained. Over-the-shoulder shot/reverseshot cutting decenters a figure and puts his or her back to us, but the reverse shot reinstates that character front and center. Once the figures are arranged for us in the image, editing can introduce new angles, but then closer shots will typically be centered, balanced, and frontal in their turn. Even if one minimizes editing, as Orson Welles and William Wyler are often thought to do, the deep-focus composition cannot forfeit frontality—indeed, in films like *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) and *The Little Foxes* (1941), classical frontality is in fact exaggerated (see figs 5.24 and 5.25).

The most obvious way that the classical cinema works to treat the screen as a plate-glass window is in the representation of depth. Probably the most important depth cue in cinema is movement. When a figure moves and creates a continuous stream of overlapping planes and receding shapes, when the camera glides through or across a space —under these circumstances it becomes very difficult to see the screen as a flat surface. This is perhaps one of the reasons that modernist and avant-garde films have often suppressed the kinetic depth effect by such devices as flicker, still images, and graininess.

Classical Hollywood space is created in planes through various depth cues. To the usual cues of visual overlap (the object that overlaps must be closer) and familiar size, the classical image adds pattern, color, texture, lighting, and focus to specify depth. Geometrical patterns and colors, especially of costumes, stand out from plainer backgrounds (see figs 5.26 and 5.27). Even in black-and-white filming, set designers painted sets in different colors to create planes in depth.[13] More dense and concentrated textures were reserved for the figures in the foreground, and cinematographers would diffuse the light on backgrounds to make them more granular. Lighting is particularly important in establishing depth. Cinematographers were careful to alternate planes in contrasting keys and half-tones (a silhouetted foreground, a bright middle ground, a darker background).[14] Hollywood's standardized three-point lighting system (key, fill, and

backlighting), supplemented by background lighting, eye lights, and other techniques, had as its effect the careful articulation of each narratively relevant plane. The importance of backlighting cannot be overestimated here. Commonly thought of as a Griffith cliché or a sudden lyrical effect, backlighting is in fact one of the most common ways the Hollywood filmmaker distinguishes figure from background: A pencil-line of light around the body's contour pulls the figure forward (see figs 5.28 and 5.29).[15] Edge lighting of figures remained common even after fast film stocks and color films enhanced figure separation (see fig 5.30). Low-key lighting could be very effective in picking out planes if edge-lighting supplemented it (see fig 5.31). Finally, the planes of the classical image also usually get defined by selective focus, an equivalent of aerial perspective in painting. In framings closer than medium shot, the characters are in focus while other planes are not.[16] Variations are possible—in deep-space compositions, a figure in the foreground might be out of focus while another in the background is in focus—but the principle generally holds good. No classical films throw figures out of focus to favor insignificant objects (kegs, stoves) in the manner of Ozu's films or of certain avant-garde works.[17]

Stacked planes are not enough; the classical style stresses volumes as well. Cinematographers valued 'roundness' as much as depth, using highlights to accentuate curves of face and body or to pick out folds in drapery.[18] As early as 1926, the cinematographer was compared to the sculptor:[19]

> It is chiefly by the use of such lighting equipment that the sculptor-director seeks his worshipped 'plasticity.' Failing a true stereoscopic effect in film, he models his figures to a roundness with lights behind and above and on either side, softening here and sharpening up for accent elsewhere with a patience and skill inevitably lost on the layman.

Make-up was designed to enhance the roundness of faces. Likewise, a set had to be represented as a volume, a container for action, not a row of sliced planes. Designers often built three-dimensional models of sets in order to try out various camera positions. Even the ceiling, which usually could not be shown, had to be implied through shadow.[20] Camera movement could endow the set with a sculptural quality too, as Dwan observed: 'In dollying as a rule we find it's a good idea to pass things in order to get the effect of movement. We always noticed that if we dollied past a tree, it became solid and round, instead of flat.'[21]

The importance of planes and volumes in defining classical scenographie depth makes academic perspective rather rare. Developed during the Renaissance as a revision of ancient Greek perspective, central linear perspective organizes planes around the presumed vantage point of a stationary monocular observer. The impression of depth results from the assumption that parallel lines receding from the picture surface seem to meet at a single point on the horizon, the vanishing point.[22] Now it is indisputable that certain aspects of Hollywood film production, such as set design and special-effects work, frequently draw upon principles of linear perspective.[23] But images in the Hollywood cinema seldom exhibit the central vanishing point, raked and checkered floorplans, and regular recession of planes characteristic of what Pierre Francastel calls the 'Quattrocento cube.'[24] (Such conventions are far more common in pre-classical films; see fig 5.32.) The classical shot is more usually built out of a few planes placed against a distant background plane—in a long shot, the horizon; in a closer view, the rear wall of a room (see figs 5.33 and 5.34). A limited linear perspective view can be supplied by the corner of a room or ceiling or the view out of a window. Sometimes, especially in 1940s films, a more explicit sense of perspective emerges; an occasional establishing shot exhibits a deep recessional interior (see fig 5.35) or a skewed vanishing point (see fig 5.36). But in medium-long and medium shots (the majority of the shots in a film), linear perspective remains of little importance, and pronounced depth is achieved by interposing figures and objects on various planes.

Such art-historical traditions would not seem easily applicable to the scenographie space constructed by the soundtrack. But the classical cinema modeled its use of sound upon its use of images. (Chapter 23 examines how this occurred historically.) As one technician wrote:[25]

> With the two-dimensional camera, which bears the same psychological relation to the eye as monaural sound does to the ear, the illusion of depth can be achieved by the proper use of lighting and contrast, just as by the manipulations of loudness and reverberation with the microphone. And just as the eye can be drawn to particular persons or objects by the adjustment of focal length, so can the ear be arrested by the intensification of important sounds and the rejection of unimportant ones.

What Hollywood technicians called 'sound perspective' was the belief that the acoustic qualities of dialogue and noise had to match the scale of the image. Engineers debated how to convey 'natural' sound while granting that strictly realistic sound recording was unsuitable. Microphones had to be rotated in the course of conversations; musical numbers had to be prerecorded; some dialogue had to be post-synchronized; and, most importantly, sounds had to be segregated onto separate tracks for later mixing. In the theater, the speakers were placed behind the screen, as centered as were the figures in the frame. The same conceptions of balance, centrality, and spatial definition were applied to stereophonic sound in the early 1950s.[26]

Thus in the Hollywood cinema the space constructed by the soundtrack is no less artificial than that of the image. Alan Williams points out that like visual perspective, sonic perspective is narrational, yielding not 'the full, material context of everyday vision or hearing, but *the signs of* such a physical situation.'[27] He shows how selective the sonic space of a Hollywood locale is in comparison with that of the racketfilled café in Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1966). Similar effects occur in the dense, layered montage of offscreen sound in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Third Generation* (1980) and *In a Year of Thirteen Moons* (1980), during which radios, television sets, and several conversations compete for our attention. In this sense, classical sound technique articulates foreground (principal voice) and background (silence, 'background' noise, music 'under' the action) with the same precision that camera and staging distinguish visual planes.

Centering, balancing, frontality, and depth— all these narrational strategies—encourage us to read filmic space as story space. Since the classical narrative depends upon psychological causality, we can think of these strategies as aiming to *personalize* space. Surroundings become significant partly for their ability to dramatize individuality. Hence the importance of doors: the doorway becomes a privileged zone of human action, promising movement, encounters, confrontations, and conclusions. The classical film also charges objects with personal meanings. Props (guns, rings, etc.), and especially representational props (photographs, dolls, portrait paintings) all bear an ineluctable psychological import. (How many classical films convey a lover's disgust by violence against the picture of the beloved.) Shot scale is also geared to expressivity, with the *plan américain* (the knees-up shot) and the medium shot the most common ones because they 'retain facial expressions and physical gestures—partially lost in the long shot—and relate these, dramatically, to the action involved'[28] A close-up, which can theoretically show anything, becomes virtually synonymous with the facial close-up, the portrait that reveals character. It is significant, however, that *extreme* facial close-ups—framings closer than full facial shots—are almost absent from the classical cinema, as if cutting the face completely free of the background made the close-up too fragmentary. (Compare the frequency of enlarged portions of faces in the Soviet cinema of the 1920s.) Lighting brings out the personality of the character, while diffusion distinguishes women by spiritualizing them.[29] In the sound cinema, the voice parallels the face as a vehicle of personalization. In all these ways, the classical

cinema declares its anthropocentric commitment: Space will signify chiefly in relation to psychological causality.

Classical narration of space thus aims at orientation: The scenography is addressed to the viewer. Can we then say that a larger principle of 'perspective' operates here—not the adherence to a particular spatial composition but a general 'placing' of the spectator in an ideal position of intelligibility?[30] Certainly Hollywood's own description of its work emphasizes the camera as an invisible witness, just as the soundtrack constitutes an ideal hearing of the scene. This aesthetic of effaced present is anthropocentric (camera and sound as eye and ear) and idealist (the witness is immaterial, an omniscient subject), hence also ideological. Yet the viewer is not wholly a passive subject tyrannized by a rigid address. Analogies with perspective, being spatial, tend to neglect the spectator's activities. Just as the viewer must meet causal and temporal systems halfway, the viewer must contribute something in order to make classical space work. That contribution includes the sort of hypothesisforming and -testing that I have emphasized in earlier chapters. That we tend to anticipate data, that we frame our hunches as more or less likely alternatives (or paradigmatic choices), that we retroactively check our hypotheses—all these activities operate in our construction of classical space.

So, for instance, centering procedures quickly lead the viewer to perform certain operations. Confining significant narrative action to any constant zone of screen space effectively insures that attention paid to other areas will not be rewarded. Moreover, psychologists have long known that it is hard to read a configuration as three-dimensional if we are markedly aware of the edges of the image: our eye tests for consistency, and the depth of the represented space conflicts with the boundary of the picture.[31] Centered film compositions, either static or moving, draw our attention away from the frame edge. Even the viewing situation encourages this, since black masking on the theater screen conceals the aperture line. Cinematographers often darkened the edges of the image to avoid a glaring contrast between the picture and the theater masking.[32] Distracting our attention from the edge thus discourages us from testing the image as a flat space. Compare, however, the flattening effect of edge-framed compositions in non-Hollywood traditions (see fig 5.37).

Similarly, frontality functions as a strong cue for the spectator. Since the classical Hollywood cinema is predominantly anthropocentric, the representation of the expressive body arouses in us an interest nourished not only by art but by everyday life. Our principal information about people's mental states is derived in large part from posture, gesture, facial expression, and eye movement (as well as voice), so that if classical cinema is to represent psychological causation in its characters, narrational space must privilege these behavioral cues. Moreover, as Gombrich points out, some objects give a more exact feeling of frontality than do others. We are remarkably sensitive to anglings of body, face, and especially eyes, and we tend to orient ourselves to postures and gazes with a precision that we do not apply to walls or trees.[33] In addition, of course, 'normal' camera height, standardized at between 5 and 6 feet, corresponds to a gaze from an erect human body, a position canonized not only in art but also in culture generally.[34] Imagine a classical film with only one difference: it is entirely shot from straight above the characters. The consistent bird's-eye view would destroy the expressive basis of the narrative because the classical filmmaker lacks schemata for rendering such an orientation and the film viewer has no appropriate repertoire of expectations.

And what of the spectator's construction of depth? The various depth cues, most prominently movement, require an act of spatial integration on the viewer's part. If classical space does not pose the visual paradoxes of images in some German Expressionistic cinema or in abstract film, that is partly because we scale our expectations to a limited set of possibilities. But consider the baffling space of figure 5.38, from Griffith's *Trying to Get Arrested* (1909). A tiny man runs in at the lower left corner. The cue of familiar size dictates that he looks small because he is far away, but the receding planes of the shot seem to deny this. Is

the man then a leprechaun? No, he is indeed in the distance, as a later frame (fig 5.39) makes clear. The peculiarity of this primitive shot arises from the way the image foils those expectations about planes and volumes that the classical cinema would have confirmed by composition and framing. Certainly seeing an image as deep is 'easier' in cinema than in other arts, but even film depth must be *achieved* to some degree, relying upon what Gombrich has called 'the beholder's share.'[35]

Continuity editing

Theorists are still a long way from fully understanding how the viewer contributes to the creation of classical space, but some consideration of the process of editing may help. Certainly editing can work against the orientation achieved within the image, as it does in the films of Eisenstein, Ozu, Nagisa Oshima, Godard, and other filmmakers.[36] Classical continuity editing, however, reinforces spatial orientation. Continuity of graphic qualities can invite us to look through the 'plate-glass window' of the screen. From shot to shot, tonality, movement, and the center of compositional interest shift enough to be distinguishable but not enough to be disturbing. Editors seldom discussed graphic continuity, but the procedure was explained as early as 1928 by two visitors to the Hollywood studios, who claimed that either the point of interest in shot B should be on the screen 'almost' where the point of interest of shot A ended, or B should continue A's movement:[37]

> This has no reference to the story itself, but merely to the making of the pictures considered only as spots of colour and centres of pictorial interest. The eye should be led a gentle dance, swaying easily and comfortably from side to side of the picture, now fast, now slow, as the emotional needs of the story demand.

Compare the graphically gentle cut of the typical shot/re verse-shot series, which only slightly shifts the center of interest (see figs 5.40 through 5.43) with the graphically jarring cut which alters that center of interest quite drastically (see figs 5.44 and 5.45).

Once graphic continuity is achieved, the editing can concentrate upon orienting us to scenographie space. Crosscutting creates a fictive space built out of several locales. As Chapter 4 points out, classical crosscutting presupposes that shifts in the locale are motivated by the story action. More often, editing fulfills the narrational function of orienting us to a single locale (a room, a stretch of sidewalk, the cab of a truck) or to physically adjacent locales (a room and a hallway, the rear of the truck). Thus the principles and devices of continuity editing function to represent space for the sake of the story.

André Bazin has summarized the basic premises of classical continuity editing:[38]

1 The verisimilitude of the space in which the position of the actor is always determined, even when a close-up eliminates the decor.
2 The purpose and the effects of the cut are exclusively dramatic or psychological.

> In other words, if the scene were played on a stage and seen from a seat in the orchestra, it would have the same meaning, the episode would continue to exist objectively. The changes of point of view provided by the camera would add nothing. They would present the reality a little more forcefully, first by allowing a better view and then by putting the emphasis where it belongs.

Besides spelling out the classical assumptions about consistent spatial relations and the determining role of character psychology, Bazin reveals the extent to which classical editing continues and elaborates the scenography of nineteenth-century bourgeois theater. Bazin's mobile-yet-stationary spectator in the orchestra personifies the viewpoint created by the classical '180°' or 'axis-of-action' system of spatial editing. The assumption is that shots will be filmed and cut together so as to position the spectator always on the same side of the story action. Bazin suggests that the 'objective' reality of the action independent of the act of filming is analogous to that stable space of proscenium theatrical representation, in which the spectator is always positioned beyond the fourth wall. The axis of action (or center line) becomes the imaginary vector of movements, character positions, and glances in the scene, and ideally the camera should not stray over the axis. In any scene, explains Robert Aldrich, 'You have to draw the center line…. You must never cross the line.'[39] If we assume that two conversing characters are angled somewhat frontally (as is usual), the classic 180° system will be as laid out in diagram 5.1. Camera positions A, B, C, and D (and indeed any position within the lower half-circle) will cut together so as to orient the viewer, while camera position X (or any position on the other side of the center line) is thought to disorient the spectator.

The 180° principle governs all the more specific devices of continuity editing. *Analytical* editing moves the spectator into or back from a part of a total space. A cut from position A to position B (or vice versa) would be an analytical cut, respecting the axis of action. *Shot/reverse-shot* cutting assumes that the series of shots alternates a view of one end-point of the line with a view of the other. Thus cutting from camera position C to that of D would be a shot/reverse-shot pattern. Typically, shot/reverse-shot editing joins shots of characters facing one another, but it need not. The same principle applies to vehicles, buildings, or any entities posited as being at opposite ends of the axis of action. *Eyeline-match* cutting uses character glance as a cue to link shots. The assumption is that the eyeline runs parallel to the axis, so the camera positions will remain on one side of the line. Shots C and D when cut together will yield correct eyeline matches in a way that, say, shots X and D would not. A comparatively uncommon case of eyeline-match cutting, *point-of-view* cutting, reveals the limits of permissibility in the 180° system. The first shot shows the character looking at something offscreen; the second shot shows what the character is seeing, but more or less from the character's optical vantage point. Remarkably, critics continue to reduce shot/reverse-shot cutting to point-of-view cutting. A recent monograph defines shot/reverse shot in a conversation scene as taking the second shot 'from the first character's point-of-view.'[40] Hollywood shot/reverse- shot cutting is more properly what Jean Mitry calls semi-subjective: we are often literally looking over a character's shoulder.[41] (Edward Branigan has shown that camera angle is the critical variable here: camera distance is often inexact in classical point-of-view cutting.[42]) But even the point-of-view shot remains within the 180° convention because it represents a camera position *on the axis itself* (e.g., position E on the diagram). The power of the 180° system may also be seen in what we may call the *'earline-match'* cut, in which a character listens from outside the space of the scene. The assumption is that the sound travels in a straight line, which constitutes the axis of action. If a listener at a door cocks his ear to screen left, a cut to someone inside the room walking to that door must show the character moving screen right.

Obviously, across a series of shots all these editing devices work smoothly to reinforce each other, so that an establishing shot will be linked by an analytical cut to a closer view, and then a series of shot/reverse shots will follow. But the system, being part of a stylistic paradigm, has a certain latitude as well, so that one can use the shot/reverse-shot schema if one character has turned his back to the other, if there are five or six characters present, and so on.

One more device of the 180° system deserves mention, not least because it dramatizes the extent to which the system defines a coherent but limited field for the spectator. Editing for *directional* continuity translates

the imaginary line into a vector of movement. If a character or vehicle is moving left to right in shot 1, it should continue to do so in shot 2. Directional continuity cutting is like eyeline cutting: just as two shots of figures looking in opposite directions imply that the figures are looking at each other, so two shots of figures moving in opposite directions lead us to expect the figures to meet. Directional continuity also resembles point-of-view cutting in that one can show the movement from a position *on* the axis of action—i.e., either a heads-on or a tails-on shot of the action. (A shot from this position can function as a transition if one wants to cross the line.) Directional continuity is often used within a circumscribed space, as when a character goes from the window (exit frame left) and comes to the desk (enter frame right). In these cases, Hollywood directional continuity depends upon the frame cut. What is more revealing, though, is that directional continuity can be maintained across separate spaces, for in that case the 180° system presupposes that the ideal spectator is situated on one side of an axis perhaps miles long! The closed chamber-space of the theater has been left behind, but Bazin's spectator-in-the-orchestra and his or her relation to proscenium space remain intact.

The devices of continuity editing are best seen as traditional schemata which the classical filmmaker can impose upon any subject. As King Vidor wrote: 'The filmmaker should be consciously aware of this 180° rule throughout the whole field of film action. It is not only beneficial in sports, but in chase sequences, with cowboys, Indians and cavalry, animal pursuits, moon landings, dinnertable conversations, and a thousand other movie subjects.'[43] Most film critics are aware of these schemata but consider them simply a neutral vehicle for the filmmaker's idiosyncratic themes or 'personal vision.' What makes the continuity devices so powerful is exactly their apparent neutrality; compositional motivation has codified them to a degree of rigidity that is still hard to realize. In each UnS film, less than 2 per cent of the shot-changes violated spatial continuity, and one-fifth of the films contained not a single violation. No wonder that, of all Hollywood stylistic practices, continuity editing has been considered a set of firm rules.

As with other classical techniques, continuity editing cues form a redundant paradigm. Conventional 180° editing assumes that the establishing shot *and* the eyeline match cut *and* directional continuity of movement *and* the shot/reverse-shot schema will all be present to 'overdetermine' the scenographie space. The redundancy of the paradigm becomes evident when we watch a non-classical filmmaker simply remove one or two cues. In Dreyer's *Day of Wrath* (1943), the characters' eyelines in medium shot often violate the 180° axis, but there are frequent establishing shots to orient us. Conversely, in Bresson's *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* (1961), the eyelines respect the axis of action, but scenes frequently lack establishing shots.[44] In neither film do we lose our bearings (although, since each filmmaker exploits his devices systematically, the result is significantly different from the space of the classical scene).

What are the narrational consequences of spatial continuity editing? One answer might be based on a broad conception of perspective. In perpetuating the playing space of post-Renaissance bourgeois theater, classical editing makes the spectator an ideally placed onlooker. To paraphrase Bazin, the action and the viewer are separate ('the episode would continue to exist objectively'), yet the narration acknowledges the onlooker by implicitly addressing her or him ('by allowing a better view'). In sum, the intelligible orientation created within the single shot is kept consistent across shots by positing a spectator that can be moved only within the limits of a theatrical space of vision.

This account is certainly correct as far as it goes. Its drawbacks are the passivity it imputes to the spectator and its neglect of certain significant irregularities in the continuity system. For one thing, the space constructed by continuity editing is rarely a total one, even on the favored side of the axis of action. Not only do we seldom see the fourth wall of the typical interior, but areas immediately in front of the camera remain relatively undefined. Films of the late teens and the 1920s sometimes have holes in their scenographie space; the establishing shot may not show all adjacent areas from which characters may emerge. And

Hollywood practitioners have long employed the aptly named 'cheat cut,' in which the shift of camera distance and angle during a cut covers a distinct change in character position (see figs 5.46 through 5.49). The cheat cut works to enhance balance, centering, or frontality:[45]

> 'Cheating' is the great game between the camera operator and the Continuity girl. To compose a foreground or a background the operator will sometimes move or substitute objects, or have the artiste raised or lowered in relation to his surroundings. Actually, after a long while in pictures, I realised that such 'cheating' is seldom noticeable to an audience, but in the studio it often seems fantastic.

The viewer's willingness to ignore unshown areas of space and to overlook cheat cuts suggests that the viewer actively forms and tests specific hypotheses about the space revealed by the narration. The always-present pockets of non-established space are, in the absence of cues to the contrary, assumed to be consistent with what we see. (We assume that there is more wall, a door, etc.) If a technician or a lighting unit peeped into the shot, that would provoke us to revise such assumptions. The cheat cut suggests that a process of hierarchical selection is at work. Since we are to attend to story causality, the fact that a character is first three feet and then suddenly two feet from another character becomes unimportant if our expectations about the action are confirmed from shot to shot. Of course, there are limits to how much the cut can cheat before the operation distracts us from story causality, and these warrant psychophysical study.[46]

Our hierarchical selection of what to watch is evident from the very schemata of classical cutting. For example, the repetition of camera position becomes very important. Typically, any classical series of shots will include several identical camera set-ups. The reestablishing shot will usually be from the same angle and distance as the establishing shot; shot and reverse-shot framings may be repeated several times. Such repetitions encourage us to ignore the cutting itself and notice only those narrative factors that change from shot to shot. In a similar way, the first occurrence of a set-up often 'primes' us for a later action. In **The Caddy* (1953), Harvey hides from dogs in a locker room. A *plan américain* reveals him leaning on the door; on the right of the frame are clothes lying on a coat rack. Cut: the dogs outside the door wander off. The next shot repeats the *plan américain* of Harvey, but now Harvey notices the clothes. The first set-up unobtrusively asked us to hypothesize that Harvey would disguise himself, and the guess is confirmed by keeping set-ups constant. A similar process occurs in figures 5.50 through 5.53. This priming of later actions does not occur in films by Eisenstein and Godard, for instance, who seldom exactly repeat set-ups and who thus demand that we reorient ourselves after every cut.

The phenomenon of priming illustrates Gombrich's point that schemata set the horizon of the viewer's expectations. Classical editing is organized paradigmatically, since any shot leads the viewer to infer a limited set of more or less probable successors. For example, an establishing shot can cut away to another space or cut in to a closer shot; the latter alternative is more likely. An angled medium shot of a character or object is usually followed by a corresponding reverse shot. Cutting around within a locale is most likely to be based upon eyeline matches and upon shot/ reverse-shot patterns, less likely to be based upon figure movement, and least likely to be based upon optical point-of-view. (In this respect, Hitchcock relies upon point-of-view cutting to an almost unique degree.) The classical construction of space thus participates in the process of hypothesis-forming that we saw at work in narration generally. Julian Hochberg compares the viewer's construction of edited space to 'cognitive mapping': 'The task of the filmmaker therefore is to make the viewer pose a visual question, and then answer it for him.'[47]

The process of viewer expectation is particularly apparent in the flow of onscreen and offscreen space. Consider again the shot/reverse-shot schema. The first image, say a medium shot of Marilyn, implies an offscreen field, foreshadowing (by its angle, scale, and character glance) what could most probably succeed

it. The next shot in the series, a reverse-angled view of Douglas, reveals the narratively significant material which occupies that offscreen zone. Shot two makes sense as an answer to its predecessor. This backing-and-filling movement, opening a spatial gap and then plugging it, accords well with the aims of classical narration. Furthermore, shot/reverse-shot editing helps make narration covert by creating the sense that no important scenographie space remains unaccounted for. If shot two shows the important material outside shot one, there is no spatial point we can assign to the narration; the narration is always elsewhere, outside this shot but never visible in the next. This process, which evidently is at work in camera movement and analytical cutting as well, is consistent with that unself-conscious but omnipresent narration described in Chapter 3.[48*]

Classical offscreen space thus functions as what Gombrich calls a 'screen,' a blank area which invites the spectator to project hypothetical elements on to it.[49] Given classical viewing priorities, we are more concerned with the distinct persons and things visible within space than with the spaces between and around them. If a shot shows a person or object that was implicit in the previous shot, we check the new material against our projection rather than measuring the amount of space left out. Since Hollywood scenography seldom represents a locale in its entirety, we must construct a spatial whole out of bits. And if those bits not only overlap in what they show but agree with the fields we have inferred to be lying offscreen, we will not notice the fuzzy areas that have never been strictly accounted for. Classical editing supports orientation according to Gombrich's negative principle of perspective: A convincing image need not show everything in the space as long as nothing we see actually contradicts what we expect.[50] If classical cinema makes the screen a plate-glass window, it is partly because it turns a remarkably coherent spatial system into the vehicle of narrative causality; but it is also because the viewer, having learned distinct perceptual and cognitive activities, meets the film halfway and completes the illusion of seeing an integral fictional space.