

A black and white photograph of Marilyn Monroe in a nightclub setting. She is the central figure, wearing a dark, low-cut, long-sleeved dress and high heels. She has her arms raised and a look of surprise or excitement on her face. To her left, a woman with blonde hair is playing a saxophone. To her right, another woman is playing a ukulele. In the background, a man is playing a double bass. The scene is lit with dramatic, low-key lighting, typical of classic Hollywood cinema.

A FOREIGN AFFAIR

Billy Wilder's American Films

GERD GEMÜNDEN

A Foreign Affair

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“I am a mélange”

—Billy Wilder

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INTRODUCTION

In a scene from *Hold Back the Dawn* (1941), the Romanian immigrant Georges Iscovescu (Charles Boyer) is lying on his hotel bed in a Mexican border town, unshaven and sloppy, and observing a cockroach. As the insect crawls on the wall toward the mirror, Georges impedes him with his cane and asks: “Where do you think you are going? You’re not a citizen, are you? Where’s *your* quota number?”¹ The scene reverses an earlier one in which Georges had been interrogated by US custom officials about his intentions to cross into the United States. Georges’ identification with the cockroach illustrates the abject nature of the immigrant who is constantly harassed while waiting for a visa to enter the United States—for Romanians, Georges had been told, the quota is so tight that the projected wait is five to eight years.

The cockroach scene was written by Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett but omitted from the film Mitchell Leisen directed because actor Charles Boyer felt it below him to speak to an insect. In interviews, Wilder has repeatedly voiced his dismay for Boyer and Leisen’s butchering of his script, and various biographers of Billy Wilder have given this anecdote special weight for Wilder’s subsequent decision to become a director in order to gain more control over his work.² Wilder’s anger was fueled by what he perceived to be Boyer and Leisen’s ignorance, but there are other reasons, both personal and political, that come into play. Although based on a novel by Ketti Frings, the script for *Hold Back the Dawn* was Wilder’s most autobiographical work to date. The story of how Iscovescu charms a naïve US schoolteacher named Emmy (Olivia de Havilland) into marrying him, so he can become a US citizen and resume his career dancing professionally with his ex-partner Anita, had much in common with Wilder’s own open-ended stay in Mexicali in 1934 when he had to leave the United States in order to renew his visa. It also recalls his subsequent struggles to make a living in Hollywood when poverty forced him to reside in the antechamber to the ladies’ room at the Chateau Marmont Hotel. Furthermore, Wilder, a Central European, shared the Romanian’s background as a gigolo: as a young man, Wilder had been an “Eintänzer,” a hired dancer for single women in an exclusive Berlin café. But more important than these autobiographical suggestions are the structural implications of the scene. By explicitly likening the immigrant to a helpless insect, the cock-

roach scene was to steer the audience toward seeing Iscovescu more as a victim of political circumstances and less as a manipulative con artist; its omission, therefore, casts the immigrant in a much less sympathetic light, while the ending of the film, with Georges's change of heart regarding his exploitation of Emmy's emotions, remains rather implausible. Thus, when Wilder objected to the tinkering with his and Brackett's script, it may not only have been a perceived disrespect for his professionalism, but the feeling of being censored from showing US immigration practices through a foreign, and more critical perspective.

This perspective of the exile, and of the outsider more generally, is indeed central to the films and scripts of Billy Wilder, as it is to his life. Often celebrated as a master of Hollywood entertainment, his fluency in the language of classic Hollywood film always retained a strong accent. His overwhelming commercial and critical success—which includes six Academy Awards—shows that he understood what the American public wanted, and yet his insights into their minds are clearly those of an outsider. Films such as *Double Indemnity*, *Sunset Boulevard*, or *The Apartment* belong in the pantheon of American film, but they also attest to the plurality of vision of the foreign-born artist. There is a decidedly transcultural dimension to Billy Wilder's work, a status of being in-between nations, and drawing on very distinct cultural sensibilities.

Although Billy Wilder had his eye on America from the very beginning of his career, the European baggage he carried with him would always be present; America was a completion of Wilder's character, but it also remained an alien culture. Throughout his career in the United States, Wilder would draw on his German and Austro-Hungarian background, frequently rewriting his own earlier work, adapting European plays, or simply infusing his American material with generous helpings of Jewish humor, Viennese fin-de-siècle decadence, or Weimar Germany modernism. If his early scripts at Ufa, Berlin's biggest and most commercial film studio, attest to his fascination with things American—including speed, gangsters, Hollywood stardom, and a general fascination with life in the modern metropolis—his American films revisit Germany and Europe from the perspective of a thoroughly Americanized artist and US citizen, confronting the traditions of the Old World with the achievements of the New.

It needs to be emphasized that Wilder's experience of displacement, with its implied sense *both* of nonbelonging and belonging to more than one culture, did not begin with his arrival in America. It is prefigured in his growing up in the province of Galicia, then part of the vast Austro-Hungarian Empire, where his father, Max, managed a chain of small cafés for the passengers on the train line that connected Vienna and Lemberg. A frequent traveler, Max later took his family to nearby Kraków where he purchased a railroad hotel, but when World War I broke out the family moved on to Vienna. Here the son apprenticed as reporter for some yellow

journalism papers. In 1926 he moved on to Berlin, continuing his work as a reporter but also ghost-writing scripts for the burgeoning German film industry. Hitler's rise to power cut short a promising career at Ufa and Wilder fled to Paris where he directed his first feature before boarding a ship to the United States with a contract for Columbia Pictures.

Wilder's sense of not being one of the natives thus goes as far back as his upbringing as a German-speaking Jew in a Polish peasant country, only to be reinforced time and again wherever he moved. For the Viennese, he was a Polack from the province; for the Berliners of the Weimar Republic, he was an Austrian; for the Nazis, he was a Jew; for the Parisians, he was a *mèteque*; and in Hollywood, he was a Central European refugee from a faraway continent. When he returned to Germany after the war, it was as an American citizen in US uniform, an *Emigrant* who had sided with the enemy. Even after having established himself as a major screenwriter and director in the US, Wilder would feel the sting of being considered an intruder; after a screening of *Sunset Boulevard*, Louis B. Mayer attacked the director as a foreigner who had bitten the hand that fed him and who "should be tarred and feathered and run out of town."³

The films of Billy Wilder register exile with all its complexities and contradictions. They often revolve around experiences of nonbelonging and loss, frequently told from the perspective of an outsider or underachiever—an insurance salesman turned criminal (*Double Indemnity*), a mediocre screenwriter prostituting himself to an aged star (*Sunset Boulevard*), a drunk betraying his friends and family (*The Lost Weekend*), a clerk advancing his career by renting his apartment to his superiors for their extramarital affairs (*The Apartment*). Because of Wilder's disenchanting views of sordid human frailty, his films have been called cynical, bitter, and misanthropic. I would argue that they simply tell the truth about unpleasant areas of human behavior. No one is comfortable coming out of a Wilder film; ideologically unpredictable, Wilder spares no one and nothing. This harshness and refusal to betray sympathy has been read as contempt for audiences. Yet this refusal of hypocrisy reflects the bitter lessons of exile. Chuck Tatum (Kirk Douglas) in *Ace in the Hole* and Sefton (William Holden) in *Stalag 17* may be cynics, but their cynicism shows off a society morally far inferior, attributing to these antiheroes a sense of courage and integrity. Many of Wilder's films celebrate the humanism of the survivor, no matter how scarred.

Unlike so many writers who found refuge from Hitler in Los Angeles, Billy Wilder was not silenced by the experience of being uprooted from one's home, nor did exile translate into longing portrayals of by-gone times and lost places. Nothing could be further from Wilder's acerbic wit than self-indulgence, self-pity, or an unchecked nostalgia (except for the extremely kitschy *The Emperor Waltz*). Though remarkably successful within the studio system, Wilder's experience of exile did not lead to over-assimilation but to an innate, bristling independence, which increased as

he moved from writing to directing and producing. Also, unlike other successful exile directors such as Fritz Lang, Douglas Sirk, Robert Siodmak, or William Dieterle, Wilder never made any attempts to find permanent employment in the German film industry after the war. He felt thoroughly at home in Hollywood, which had made him rich and famous. Yet he never forgot where he had come from and how he had gotten there.

Even though Wilder may attack the American way of life in his films, he remains aware that the possibility of such a critique attests to the existence of an open society. The very process of Americanization is ultimately one of enrichment and creativity, which he celebrates, even though he never tires of satirizing it. It must also be emphasized that this process began long before he left Europe. Americanized in Vienna and Berlin during the 1920s, once in Hollywood, Wilder had to square his imaginary America with lived experiences. This is one reason why a central theme in almost all of Wilder's film is a confrontation with the American way of life—its myths, its ideologies, and its double standards in the realm of sexuality, the family, and the culture industry.

To study Wilder's work, therefore, is to examine the reworking of several rich and varied cultural sensibilities. Rather than providing the last word on Wilder, I hope to underscore complexities, unpacking underlying contradictions where previous commentators routinely smoothed them out. In this portrait, Wilder emerges as an artist with roots in sensationalist journalism and the world of entertainment as well as an awareness of literary culture and the avantgarde, leading to productive and often highly original confrontations of high and low. His work in three national film industries exemplifies a wide generic spectrum, ranging from light romantic comedy to dark satire, and a sophisticated, unpredictable use of stars.

It is commonly assumed that in the process of translating one language or culture into another, something is lost. In her moving memoir, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, Eva Hoffmann chronicles her experience of life as an immigrant in Canada and the United States.⁴ Like Wilder, Hoffmann grew up in Kraków, where she spent the first thirteen years of her life before immigrating with her family to Vancouver, British Columbia in 1959. Having to leave her beloved home was a traumatic experience that, as the chapter titles of her book have it, disrupted a blissful childhood through a sudden expulsion from "paradise," casting her into a Canadian "exile." Edward Said has similarly described exile as the "unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home." Like Hoffmann, he understands exile as a "condition of terminal loss," but he also calls attention to the contrapuntal dimension of exile—the way in which the experience of abandonment forces exiles to be inventive, creative, mobile, and resourceful.⁵ Despite a deeply pessimistic assessment of exile, Said therefore celebrates the plurality of vision that comes through the negotiation of two cultures. For writer Salman Rushdie, the challenge of translating the self from one culture into another may

provide the very seed of creativity: “The word ‘translation’ comes, etymologically, from the Latin for ‘bearing across.’ Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained.”⁶

The central premise of this book is that the films of Billy Wilder tally with great accuracy the losses and gains of translating oneself into another culture. To better understand the mechanisms of this translation, the following chapter provides a commentary on a number of important aspects—the director’s cultural roots in Vienna and Berlin; the central role of writing and reporting in his work; his position in the various film industries in which he worked; the critical discourse surrounding his career; and the generic and stylistic quality of his films. This chapter develops the argument that informs the analyses of the six subsequent chapters devoted to individual films. It is my intention that these observations go beyond the films of Billy Wilder and tell us something about the relationship between classical Hollywood cinema and the experience of exile.

Notes

1. *Hold Back the Dawn*, unpublished script, Academy of Motion Pictures Library, 21. There is no evidence that Wilder actually ever read Frings’ novel.
2. Not prone to forget an insult, Wilder “got even” with Boyer in his first film as director, *The Major and The Minor*, where he inserts a newspaper headline, “Why I Hate Women—By Charles Boyer.”
3. Quoted in: Otto Friedrich, *City of Nets: A Portrait of Hollywood in the 1940s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986): 421.
4. Eva Hoffmann, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (New York: Penguin, 1990).
5. Edward Said, “Reflections on Exile,” *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990): 357–366; here 357.
6. Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (New York: Penguin, 1991): 9–21; here 17.

Chapter 1

AN ACCENTED CINEMA

“An accent is the tell-tale scar left by the unfinished struggle to acquire a new language.”

—André Aciman¹

“[When I came to the US], it was too late for me to lose my accent, but not to appreciate this country.”

—Billy Wilder²

Modernity and “Amerikanismus”: Two Tales of Mass Culture

In the mid-1940s, when Billy Wilder had established himself as a major director in Hollywood after the success of *Double Indemnity* and *The Lost Weekend*, only a few miles away, his fellow exiles Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer were setting forth their take on the US film industry in their now famous essay, “The Culture Industry.” In it, they described Hollywood as part of a system of mass entertainment that exemplified a modernity gone awry. They understood the culture industry to be a centrally controlled force that produces standardized and homogenizing cultural commodities, that negates individuality and style, and that turns its receivers into a mass of duped consumers. Even though Adorno stressed elsewhere that what he saw in Hollywood he had already seen prefigured at the Ufa studios in Berlin in the early 1930s, it is clear that his dark view about American popular culture was shaped in no small measure by his experience of dislocation during his southern California exile.

In many ways, Billy Wilder’s view about Hollywood could not have been further apart from that of Adorno and Horkheimer. A central player within the studio system and the beneficiary of its professionalism and proficiency, Wilder was an eloquent defender of its classic era and mourned its demise in the 1950s. Even if there were stabs at studio bosses or producers, Wilder took pride in the films he and others wrote, directed, and

produced, and he valued the intelligence of his audience. As Ed Sikov, the most thorough and astute of Wilder's many biographers, wrote: "At an early age he learned to work the system, in middle age he became it, and he hung on as long as he could, to his own enormous benefit."³

Drawing on the writings of Theodor W. Adorno may be an unusual way to introduce the films of Billy Wilder, as there is little common ground between the forbiddingly difficult philosopher and the creator of some of the most entertaining films of the 20th century. If I do bring up Adorno, then it is not only because his inability and unwillingness to adapt to the American way of life provides a contrasting experience of exile to Wilder's achievement in Hollywood, but more importantly because his thoughts on the culture industry permit us to better understand the contested role of mass culture in 1920s Vienna and Berlin, which shaped both Adorno's and Wilder's career. In fact, Adorno and Wilder's very different success stories in southern California were prefigured in the aesthetic views and professional skills they developed during the 1920s. In important ways, Adorno's writings and Wilder's scripts and films can be seen to articulate different responses to the *same* historical experience, namely the belated and furious modernization of Germany and Austria after 1900 and the rise of fascism. They offer opposite, but not unrelated assessments of the role of mass culture for the process of modernization, and what role modernism, understood as a discourse articulating and responding to modernity, should play vis-à-vis the increasing commodification of culture. To understand these different assessments, a historical digression is in order.

Germany and Austria's military defeat in World War I brought about the end both of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as well as the rule of the German Kaiser. The demise of the Austrian monarchy was in fact foreshadowed by the death of the Emperor Franz Josef in 1916, whose ostentatious funeral the ten-year-old Wilder witnessed in Vienna. After 1918, in both Germany and Austria all traditional and aristocratic notions of culture became subject to heated public debate, and a central issue in these debates was the influence of American culture. While the postwar economic and political presence of the United States in Germany and Austria was more or less accepted, culture, many people thought, had survived without casualties. Thus discussions about Americanization were mapped onto discussions of German culture per se, and about the relationship between high culture and popular or mass culture.

Germany and Austria, as well as other European countries and Russia, experienced after the war an unprecedented onslaught of what was dubbed 'Amerikanismus,' a buzzword that implied both peril and promise. This onslaught was felt on the level of both economics and culture. American loans provided the backbone for postwar recovery. The Model T became a symbol of middle-class prosperity, the autobiography of Henry Ford became a German bestseller, and Fordism and Taylorism became widely discussed and influential modes of production and consumption.

The Austrian writer Karl Kraus, a dominating figure in the Vienna publishing world into which Wilder would enter in 1925, invented the term “Fordschritt,” a pun that underscored that Fordism had become synonymous with “Fortschritt,” the German word for progress. American dance, whether in the form of the Charleston or the performances of Josephine Baker, as well as boxing and other spectator sports became widely popular among Germans and Austrians. While for some American mass culture foreshadowed a homogenization of the world, for others it became a force that could subvert the pretentiousness of traditional elite culture. The import of jazz, for example, provoked a heated debate that showed that more than a mere form of entertainment was at stake here. For the critic Hans Siemsen, jazz became an agent for democracy: “Had only the Emperor danced jazz. All that happened would never have occurred. But oh! He would have never learned it. To be the Emperor of Germany is easier than to dance jazz.”⁴ In a similar vein, young Billie Wilder saw jazz as an agent for a cultural rebirth, concluding a review of a performance of Paul Whiteman’s jazz orchestra in Berlin with the words: “For jazz? Against jazz? The most modern music? Kitsch? Art? Necessity! The exigent rejuvenation of a fossilized Europe!”⁵

For the broad mass of Europeans, the main agent of Americanization was the moving picture. Parallel with America’s rise to global importance, it emerged as the dominant form of entertainment. As a vehicle for exporting the American way of life and stimulating demand for American products it proved unrivaled. Combining leisure with commercialism, Hollywood became the strongest promoter of the American dream and the primary instrument for selling American culture in Europe. Cinema thus assumed a central position for the Americanization of Weimar Germany, and particularly Berlin, a city so close in spirit to the American metropolis that Mark Twain dubbed it “Spree-Chicago.” At the intersection of commerce and art, of industry and craft, Hollywood cinema became representative of the erosion of traditional distinctions between culture and commodity, art and artifice, personal creativity and assembly-line production, the fusion of high and low culture, and a catalyst for the formation of a homogenized mass culture. Cheaply produced and easily exported, film became a truly international medium and art form, which easily transcended geographic, cultural, and, until the introduction of sound, linguistic barriers. For the German film industry that emerged after World War I, Hollywood became the role model for its own rise to international significance as well as its strongest competitor in its domestic market. As I will show in more detail below, it was precisely the competitiveness between the world’s two biggest film industries at that time that would also guarantee their compatibility, making it possible for many German film directors, stars, cameramen, set designers, technicians, and writers (including Wilder) to enjoy a successful transition from Berlin to Hollywood (and sometimes back).

For Billy Wilder, as for so many of his contemporaries, the cinema was the institution, medium, and art form that became the very engine of modernization. Even more than other forms of American-influenced mass culture it promised a break from stifling traditions, an alternative to 18th and 19th century notions of *Kultur*, which often excluded the less educated and the less wealthy. Having grown up in the outer provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the American-influenced metropolis of Berlin gave Wilder the opportunity to reinvent himself. Only a few years later, the experience of exile would force Wilder to square an imaginary America with the real thing, but even though that process entailed personal hardship and disillusionment, it did not change his belief in the cinema as a vehicle for modernization and the democratization of society.

For Theodor W. Adorno, however, mass culture was not an agent of democratization but of repression. His exile in Hollywood amplified his already existing skepticism toward mass culture into a dark and pessimistic account of the overall project of modernity. Writing from an immediate postwar perspective, Adorno saw a close relationship between the Nazi's use of mass culture in the service of mass deception and the role of the culture industry in capitalist America, a triangulation, in fact, of mass production, mass consumption, and mass murder. Adorno concluded that what had begun in the Enlightenment as a process of liberation had turned on itself; the glorification of reason had itself become the myth it had set out to shatter, leading to an instrumentalization of reason that served to dominate the self, and that eventually led to Auschwitz.

Adorno and Wilder's very different assessment of mass culture led also to their contrary understandings of modernism. For Adorno, the value of modernist literature lay precisely in its resistance to the increasing commodification of culture. The prose Adorno favored (Beckett, Proust, Kafka) eschewed mimetic forms of representation, thereby insisting on the autonomy of the work of art. Art for him was the negation of the negativity of reality, a negation through which the work of art preserved its claim to truth. He therefore relegated to an inferior realm of art all that which compromised this autonomy—realism, naturalism, reportage literature, and political art. If Adorno is *the* critic of the Great Divide, Wilder, in contrast, is indebted to a version of modernism that tries to overcome or undo that divide. Wilder's cinema follows an aesthetic that challenges that divide by blending high and popular culture, art and artifact. His films strive to articulate and mediate the experience of modernity as it manifested itself in journalism, fashion, advertising, architecture, photography, radio, and of course the cinema itself. Miriam Hansen has called this a vernacular modernism, "because the term vernacular combines the dimension of the quotidian, of everyday usage, with connotations of discourse, idiom, and dialect, with circulation, promiscuity, and translatability."⁶ Wilder's scripts and films can indeed be seen as an extended commentary on the multiple and rivaling forces of modernism, depicting with nuance and wit

its ambivalent and often paradoxical repercussions. Thus next to celebrating its innovations, its challenge to tradition, and its rejuvenating power, Wilder's films also tally its negative impact—the alienation and isolation of the individual, and the cynicism and hypocrisy of society.

From the Shtetl to the Studio

The preceding discussion of 1920s modernity puts us in a better position to understand Wilder's early career, which is shaped by the influx of American popular culture in Vienna and Berlin, as well as a good dose of self-styled Americanization. Born as Samuel Wilder in 1906 in Sucha, a small town in the province of Galicia in the eastern part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Poland), he was the son of assimilated Jewish parents who had little in common with the more orthodox communities in which they lived. His father, Max Wilder, owned a chain of train station restaurants and later a hotel in Kraków. His mother, Eugenia Baldinger, came from a Polish family of hotel owners; as a young girl she had spent some time with relatives in New York, and her enthusiasm for all things American led her to change the names of her sons Samuel and the two-years older Wilhelm into Billie and Willie. The latter would eventually also go on to work in Hollywood, producing and sometimes directing B-pictures under the name W. Lee Wilder.

If Billie's name was inspired by the Wild West show of Buffalo Bill which his mother saw at Madison Square Garden, his and his brother's imaginations were shaped by their mother's tales of cowboys and Indians, New York skyscrapers, the wealth and wholesomeness of the American people, and the speed and excitement of the lifestyle in the United States. It is not surprising, therefore, that Billy Wilder's professional interests would be nurtured by a heavy dose of Americanization. After his family moved to Vienna in 1916, Wilder got interested in the world of theater and entertainment. Upon graduating from high school in 1924, he enrolled at



Figure 1.1. Billie as Racing Reporter

the university to study law, but quickly abandoned that pursuit to take a job as a reporter for *Die Stunde*, a sensationalist daily newspaper. His role model and later mentor was the star journalist Egon Erwin Kisch who was known for his fast and furious investigation style, calling himself a 'rasender Reporter' (racing reporter) in a widely-read 1924 collection of his writings. Kisch himself consciously

imitated the American newspapermen he had observed during a stay in the US a few years earlier.

In 1926, Wilder's enthusiasm for American jazz led him to quit his Viennese reporting job in order to accompany the band leader Paul Whiteman to Berlin, and Wilder fell in love with the capital of the Weimar Republic—theater, film, the arts, architecture, cafés, night clubs, sports, speed, decadence, it was all happening here. Berlin in the 1920s was the most Americanized of German cities, and Billie Wilder was one of its most Americanized inhabitants. The journalist Hans Sahl described Wilder's appearance as "a slender young man who wore his hat slanted, buried his hands in his pockets, and played the American long before we had even discovered America."⁷⁷ At the Romanisches Café and other venues, high and low culture mingled. Here Wilder made the acquaintance of writers such as Paul Erich Marcus—known as Pem—Hans Lustig, Max Kolpe, Oskar Maria Graf, Kurt Pinthus, Erich Maria Remarque, Klabund, and Kisch, but also of show business people such as Peter Lorre, Felix Joachimson, Friedrich Hollaender, Carola Neher, and Marlene Dietrich, with many of whom he would work again as part of the community of exiles that flocked to Hollywood after Hitler's rise to power.

In the mid 1920s, when Wilder arrived in Berlin, the Weimar Republic had finally emerged from the severe political and financial crises that had marred the first years of the nascent German democracy, entering into a phase of relative economic and political stability that would last until the stock market crash on Wall Street in October 1929. The vibrancy and vitality of this recovery was perhaps nowhere more visible than in the expansion of Germany's press, which at that time could boast over four thousand titles, including daily newspapers, weeklies, tabloids, special interest magazines, many of them part of the increasingly popular illustrated press. In Berlin alone, there were forty-five morning papers, two lunchtime papers, and fourteen evening papers. A significant number of them were owned by the immensely influential Ullstein Press, which had become the largest publishing house in Europe and probably the most diversified in the world. Through the help of Kisch, Wilder found work as a freelance writer with the popular *B.Z.*, *B.Z. am Mittag*, *Berliner Nachtausgabe*, and most notably *Tempo*, writing short tabloid pieces on film and entertainment, celebrities, and all aspects of daily life in the metropolis. He continued writing more feuilletonistic pieces for the Viennese *Die Stunde* and *Die Bühne*, but eventually succeeded in also placing longer articles in the upscale *Berliner Börsen Courier* and *Der Querschnitt*. The latter was a literary and artistic review that can be best described as Ullstein's answer to *The New Yorker*, featuring a broad mix of celebrated contemporary writers, photography, and popular culture, and promoting a new cosmopolitan outlook and sophisticated lifestyle.

Not only *Der Querschnitt*, but also the development of the Berlin press in general has to be seen as a creative reaction to what was happening in

the newspaper metropolises of New York and Chicago. The figure of the “racing reporter,” which Kisch emulated so successfully, stands for a form of journalism driven by the hectic beat of the big, multifaceted American city and its endless stream of events and news. In the jungle of the city, the reporter becomes the figure who detects, captures, unearths, and gives shape to the many stories the masses generate, multitasking by revealing secrets, indicting or defending certain causes or developments, lending a face to the individual in the crowd for a reading public with a subscription for a daily dose of sensationalism. A central figure of the modern metropolis, the reporter supercedes the *flâneur* of the turn of the century who strolled through the city, drawing portraits rather than taking snapshots, registering ripples rather than eruptions, looking to preserve the traces of a rapidly disappearing present. Driven by curiosity, the reporter in contrast chases events in a round-the-clock effort, turning them into bite-sized stories that a restless reading public can devour on the run.

Wilder’s own freelance writings from his Vienna and Berlin years are typical of this new professional profile. They consist of an eclectic mix of film and theater reviews, interviews with famous and would-be famous people, and short glosses on the life of the metropolis, but his tasks also included covering the crime beat and concocting crossword puzzles. Most celebrated is his “Aus dem Leben eines Eintänzers,” an undercover report of sorts in which he describes his experience as a hired dancer at an elegant Berlin café, dancing with single women or women whose husbands are not up to the task. For *Tempo*, Wilder even posed as a woman—sometimes as “Billie,” (of course a woman’s name in the Anglo-American world), sometimes as the Parisian “Raymonde Latour”—to answer in a Dear Abby-like column the letters of predominantly female readers.

Wilder’s multifaceted experience as a reporter had a lasting influence on his writing style. This profession trained his attention to details; his ability to sketch a situation, a chain of events, or a character; to capture in the everyday a sense of rhythm, urgency, and drama; to register a diverse repertoire of figures, with their own dialect and physiognomy; and for the formative power of dialogue and language. It was Wilder’s background as a newspaperman that would guide his career from ghostwriter, and then credited screenwriter for Ufa, to his Hollywood career as writer and then writer-director. Wilder’s first credited script, *Der Teufelsreporter*, celebrates speedy American reporting practices, and in fact stars Eddie Polo, a minor American film star, as the racing reporter working for the newspaper *Rapid*. The reporter is a figure central to Wilder’s work, and recurs most strongly in *Arise, My Love*, *Ace in the Hole*, and *The Front Page*. In a broader sense, investigative journalism provides the framework or plot dynamics of many of the major films, including *Double Indemnity*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Hold Back the Dawn*, *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, and *Fedora*. Hallmarks of journalism often dominate his films—an ability to quickly size up a person or a situation, a sense for the strongly paced narrative and the

key dramatic moments, a love for gritty realism and a frankness about the baser motives for action, often combined with the urge for a strong finish and a concluding punchline.

The transition from reporter to screenwriter was facilitated by the coffeehouse connections, which Wilder carefully cultivated. Ironically, it was his work on the avantgarde, noncommercial *Menschen am Sonntag* that opened the doors to the highly commercial Ufa studios. Made on a shoestring, the film brought together a number of then largely unknown film professionals who would go on to have remarkable careers in Weimar Germany and Hollywood: Robert and Kurt Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer, Fred Zinnemann, and Eugen Schüfftan, who had gained recognition in the industry for his special effects for Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*.⁸ Focusing on a day of rest in the life of four young Berliners, the film shows the flipside of the fast and furious life in the big city—the Sunday escape of the city dwellers to a nearby lake for swimming and picnicking. Wilder's script, based on an exposé by Kurt Siodmak, takes an ironic look at the dialectics of leisure. On their one day off, all of Berlin treks to the sites of relaxation, leaving the city virtually empty. The escape from the masses proves to be impossible because the desire for that escape is the effect of post-Wilhelminian modernity. Modernization creates both the time and the need for leisure, which in turn leads to a rapid commercialization and expanding of the leisure industry. The four protagonists have to find out that there is no outside of modernity.

Menschen am Sonntag is also the first of many Wilder films that makes reference to the cinema, the film industry, and its stars. When a planned evening at the movies falls through, a couple gets into a fight that culminates with each partner taking a turn in tearing up a photo of the other's favorite film star. Filmed with lay actors and on location, and presenting many documentary-style shots of the metropolis and its bucolic surroundings, the film embraces a cinema vérité style that stands in distinct contrast to the high production values and carefully scripted storylines of the contemporary studio production. In two newspaper articles, Wilder cleverly promoted the film by turning its monetary limitations into a virtue, presenting the filmmakers as the "Group from the Film Studio 29"—alluding to the year of the film's making—whose unique artistic vision is to convey "truth" in representation (a PR strategy successfully imitated by the Danish Dogma filmmakers of the late 1990s). Yet neither the Siodmak brothers nor Wilder had any problems switching to mainstream cinema once the popular success of *Menschen am Sonntag* made such a move possible.

Wilder's ability to make a seamless transition from an artistically ambitious and innovative film to working in an industry that produced highly commercial, genre- and star-driven films is emblematic of his approach to modernism.⁹ High and low are for Wilder not two mutually exclusive concepts but opposite poles between which he moved effortlessly throughout his career. Of all Wilder's subsequent films as writer or director, only



Figure 1.2. Lover's quarrel over film stars in *Menschen am Sonntag*

Mauvaise Graine would entertain certain aesthetic similarities with *Menschen am Sonntag*, most certainly because it was made under equally difficult professional circumstances. While many other subsequent works would also stake a claim as serious, thought-provoking entertainment, innovative on both a formal and narrative level, the many credited and uncredited film scripts and exposés Wilder would write in Germany between 1929 and 1933 can hardly be counted among those.

When Wilder signed on with Ufa in 1929, the German film industry was undergoing radical transformations. The transition to sound, which took until 1931 to be completed, posed a tremendous challenge to the industry and permanently changed its face. Coming on the heels of the world economic crisis, this costly revamping of film production and exhibition forced the industry to streamline its operations, to redefine its artistic profile along more commercial lines, and to seek closer contact with the German state in order to avoid domination by the American majors. These dramatic changes played into the hands of Alfred Hugenberg, a rightwing media mogul and early supporter of Hitler, who was seeking increased political influence through expansion of his media empire. A partowner of Ufa since his 1927 bailout of the company after Lang's *Metropolis* nearly

bankrupted it, Hugenberg promoted escapist fare with wide popular appeal—most notably spectacular musical comedies but also nationalistic Prussian films—which were symptomatic of his distinct conservatism in artistic matters. The increased influence of nationalist groups in the film industry led to a rise of anti-Semitism, which became glaringly obvious with the dismissal of influential producer Erich Pommer in 1933. Thus, in many ways the end of silent film also proved to be the end of the golden era of German filmmaking, leading to a demise of its international reputation and reach, its artistic stature, and its economic competitiveness. It also led to a second wave of emigration, with stars like Marlene Dietrich, directors such as Wilhelm (later William) Dieterle and Edgar G. Ulmer, screenwriters such as Vicki Baum, and cameramen like Karl Freund seeking career opportunities in Hollywood, following in the path of such accomplished professionals as Ernst Lubitsch, F.W. Murnau, E.A. Dupont, Emil Jannings, and Conrad Veidt.¹⁰ The third wave of talent drain, only three years later, would be a tidal wave, caused by Joseph Goebbels' "Aryanization" of the German film industry.

The timing of Wilder's entry into the German film industry would prove doubly ironic. Even though the classic era of German cinema was now over, in Hollywood Wilder would be associated with German expressionism and Weimar art cinema, cleverly cashing in on a cultural capital to the accumulation of which he had contributed absolutely nothing. Just as every actor in exile would claim to have been trained by Max Reinhardt, every film professional would be eager to be seen as an active player during an era when the German film industry had been commercially and artistically a close second to the Hollywood studios. The second irony lay in the fact that even though Wilder's breakthrough as a screenwriter was with a silent film, the advent of sound was tremendously important for his career. Here he could use his talent for witty, fast-paced dialogue and double entendres, and for sketching characters and situations that in their complexity could not have been conveyed by intertitles or purely visual means.

The scripts Wilder wrote for the next three years at Ufa would squarely fit in Hugenberg's aesthetic agenda. His main genres would become film operetta or comedy with strong musical elements, and their stories would often revolve around couples that have real or imagined adulterous affairs, or where cases of mistaken identity occur. Paired with Walter Reisch or Max Kolpe, Wilder also wrote Vienna-inspired fantasies, which would prove to be just as profitable, and just as little inflected with contemporary reality, when recreated only a few years later on the Hollywood lots. A notable exception is Wilder's adaptation of Erich Kästner's famous children's novel, *Emil und die Detektive* for Gerhard Lamprecht's 1931 film of that title, which turned out to be one of the most popular films of the late Weimar Republic. Throughout his Hollywood career, Wilder would follow this example, repeatedly adapting sources that had proven popu-

lar with audiences and readers. The thirteen credits Wilder garnered for either script or original idea during these short years have to be seen as an impressive statement about his work ethic, creativity, versatility, and adaptability within the Berlin film industry. The stories and ideas Wilder wrote or collected during this period contain a remarkable reservoir of plot elements, situations, characters, and themes that would be tapped time and again, in ever-changing variations, in his American work.

Even though writers at Ufa did not work at the studio compound, the position of the writer within the studio system, the demand the system made on being fluent in a variety of genres, and for creating roles and dialogue with certain stars in mind, the ability to work in a team, and the acceptance of the overall low status of the writer within the studio hierarchy proved to be a training that guaranteed Wilder's swift adaptation to the Hollywood system, once he had overcome the initial language barrier. The Ufa at which Wilder worked was a highly commercialized production system in which the star and the starvehicle assumed a pivotal role. As Wilder told an interviewer, he saw no difference between the American and the German use of the star system: "Just think of the Willy Forst, Willy Fritsch, and Lilian Harvey films. Pommer's Ufa differed in no way from Hollywood. As Ufa boss, he had exactly the same goals as Samuel Goldwyn—let the audience escape their everyday worries for a few hours and lead them to a beautiful dream world."¹¹

Interestingly, Wilder's only film to feature these three leading stars of the Weimar sound film provides a most interesting commentary on precisely this issue—the significance of Hollywood for the contemporary German imagination and the rivalry of the two national film industries. *Ein blonder Traum* is a typical Ufa "Tonfilmoperette" that revolves around the attraction of two window cleaners—Willy I (Fritsch) and Willy II (Forst)—to the small-time circus performer Jou-Jou (Harvey), who has come to Berlin because she thinks the city will be a springboard to stardom in Hollywood. The first of Wilder's many buddy movies, the lighthearted story follows the rivalry, nearbetrayal and reconciliation between the two men as they vie for Jou-Jou's attention, concluding with the inevitable happy ending when Willy II retreats so that Willy I can marry Jou-Jou. Peppered with upbeat songs, constant diegetic and nondiegetic music, and Jou-Jou's dance numbers, the film's most startling element is a seven-minute dream sequence in which Jou-Jou travels to America by train, traversing mountain tops and the bottom of the ocean, to be greeted by the Statue of Liberty, and welcomed enthusiastically by waiting fans in Hollywood. Yet the dream turns to nightmare when she has to audition in front of an imposing studio boss and his many underlings. During a dance number, Chaplin-style shoes appear on her feet and immobilize her, and her voice deepens to a bass in the midst of a song, much to the *schadenfreude* of the onlookers. When she abruptly awakes from her nightmare, she has (for now) been cured of her desire to become an American star. This debunk-



Figure 1.3. Jou-Jou's Home Sweet Hollywood in Berlin

ing of Hollywood is reinforced during the resolution of the film when Willy II pleads with Mr. Merryman, Hollywood's representative in Berlin, not to take Jou-Jou with him, saying: "Film! That's no profession for adults." Instead, Jou-Jou is to become a good housewife and supportive partner for her working husband.

Clearly, the message is that it is dangerous for the little shop girls who go to the movies to confuse illusion and reality. Rather than striving for stardom or independence, they are to assume traditional domestic roles. Hollywood, the film suggests, is a place where dangerous illusions are created, which when not recognized as such can have detrimental effects on the viewing public, especially young women. The irony of this stern warning lies in the fact that it was conveyed in a genre that borrowed heavily from contemporary Hollywood sights and American sounds. Even though the musical comedy drew on the traditions of the European operetta, its combination of hit songs and elaborate dance numbers was inspired by Hollywood. The high production value, first-rate cast and staff, extraordinary cinematography, and the simultaneous release of French and English language versions indicated that *Ein blonder Traum*, as so many other films in this genre, was meant to rival American competitors in various international markets by beating them at their own game. Despite the anti-Hollywood message, the film celebrated the same virtues that American films in this genre would often do, especially when set in the depression

era—an upbeat, optimistic outlook on life, a healthy pragmatism, self-confidence, good looks, and the proverbial bit of luck. References to current political or social problems are kept at a minimum and never provide insurmountable obstacles. Thus, *Ein blonder Traum*, which premiered in 1932 at the height of the economic crisis in Germany, is devoid of even the most remote allusions to a contemporary reality—no unemployment, no political battles in the streets of Berlin, no dirt. As the Republic became more and more politically divided, Ufa churned out evermore harmonious fare. With Hugenberg at the helm, Ufa had become a studio largely at the service of diversion and distraction. No wonder, then, that when Theodor W. Adorno wrote about the US culture industry he was reminded of the last years of Weimar cinema.

Writer, Director, Producer, but no Auteur

Billy Wilder is one of the most admired and successful directors of the classical period, with a fifty-plus-year career that has garnered him six Academy Awards, four films on the American Film Institute's list of 100 greatest American films, and more films on the National Historic Register of classic films deemed worthy of preservation than any other director. His life and career have attracted the attention of numerous critics, interviewers, and biographers, not to mention that of fellow directors and writers. His life has been scrutinized, and his films have been celebrated in monographs by Hellmuth Karasek, Kevin Lally, Maurice Zolotow, Axel Madsen, Bernard Dick, Claudius Seidl, and Tom Wood, to mention only the most important ones. What is surprising, however, is that critical work on Wilder has lagged behind considerably, with virtually no booklength contribution since the late 1970s. Steven Seidman's 1977 *The Film Career of Billy Wilder* was the first—and still sole—overall assessment of critical writings about Wilder, while the most comprehensive analytic study to date remains Neil Sinyard and Adrian Turner's 1979 *Journey Down Sunset Boulevard*, which appeared a year later in Germany in an extended version in conjunction with a retrospective of Wilder's films for the 30th Berlin Film Festival. While certain individual films have enjoyed significant critical attention in essays and book chapters, there exists no current comprehensive analytic study of Wilder's films. Compared with the "industry" that has sprung up around Hitchcock or Lang, scholarly work on Wilder has been truly negligible. Whatever the reasons for this may be—chief among them, I suspect, is the still lasting influence of auteurist criticism I address below—the time is ripe for a critical reassessment of Wilder.¹²

Among the existing works on Wilder, two types of books predominate—the interview book and the biography (with the latter often relying heavily on the former). The reasons for this are Wilder's fascinating life in politically tumultuous times in four countries and his central and

long-lasting status in the US film industry, as well as his unmatched talent as an interview partner, who could always be counted on to say something witty, learned, or naughty. Given this publication record, it becomes particularly important to stress the limitations of using what he or others had to say about his life as an interpretive framework for his films. While Wilder's prolific and eloquent responses to interviewers are certainly too important a resource to be ignored, we must be careful not to attribute to them an explanatory function that would exceed that of his films. Instead, we must realize that the sharp-tongued interview partner Billy Wilder is as much a creation as the characters of his screenplays and in fact often adheres to the same demands of entertaining an audience—to be witty, original, and unpredictable. His credo never to be boring has also led him never to tell the same tale twice, thereby modifying or embellishing his life story in rather startling dimensions and giving rise to all kinds of myths and misperceptions.

Closely related to the question of biographic criticism and of even greater relevance for understanding the films of Billy Wilder is the question of auteurism. Before turning to Wilder proper, it will be helpful to briefly rehearse the main tenets of auteurist criticism. The term itself was coined by Andrew Sarris in the 1960s as an attempt to render into English the notion of *politiques des auteurs*, propagated by the 1950s French critics associated with the journal *Cahiers du cinéma*, which encouraged viewers to look at films in terms of authors.¹³ Given the division of labor within the Fordist American studio system, as well as the strict studio hierarchy, which puts control over original story, script, editing, casting, and final cut in the hands of the producer, a director's creativity is usually limited to controlling the actual filming of scenes. Given these restrictions, critics such as Eric Rohmer, Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, and Jacques Rivette (who would all soon go on to make their own films) argued that the preoccupation of a Hollywood auteur was revealed most clearly in his use of *mise-en-scène*. By that term they meant the attitude of the director towards his subject as conveyed in all formal means at his disposal—cutting, camera movement, pacing, blocking of players, and profilmic events. Since within the conventions of the studio system a personal and distinctive style would be discernible only in privileged moments, it became important, these young French critics believed, to watch the entire output (or *oeuvre*) of a certain director (something which in France was possible only because of the extensive archive amassed at the *Cinématèque* under its proprietor Henri Langlois).¹⁴

Going beyond the canon of already famed directors such as Charlie Chaplin, John Ford, or Orson Welles, the French critics went on to discover auteurs where previously there had been none, most notably Douglas Sirk, Sam Fuller, Nicholas Ray, Anthony Mann, and Howard Hawks. On these they lavished praise in extensive reviews that tended toward the ocular and iconoclastic, with the overall goal to treat these filmmakers as seri-

ous and legitimate artists whose films are centrally concerned with truth and beauty and therefore transcend the escapist and purely entertaining fare of most Hollywood directors. The strongest American advocate of this neo-Romantic celebration of the artist was the above-mentioned Andrew Sarris whose influential book, *The American Cinema* (1968), ranked 200 directors (most of them from Hollywood) in one-page assessments of their predominant thematic and stylistic concerns. In this comprehensive taking stock of forty years of filmmaking, Wilder was discussed under the rubric "Less Than Meets the Eye," and taken to task for films that are "cynical," "tasteless," and "irresponsible," and for having "a penchant for gross caricature," as well as "visual and structural deficiencies."¹⁵ A decade later, Sarris began revising his take, and in a self-important 1991 essay belatedly elevated Wilder into the Pantheon previously reserved for the likes of Ford, Griffith, Lubitsch, and Renoir, calling his indictment from 1968 premature and blaming it on his overdependence on the famous French critics who had also ignored Wilder, most likely, Sarris surmised, because their lack of mastery of (American) English had not allowed them to fully appreciate the fast, witty, and pun-ridden dialogue of Wilder's screenplays.¹⁶

Strictly speaking, only Sarris's critique of Wilder's alleged visual deficiencies can be blamed on the influence of French critics as they cared very little about questions of morality or taste. (One of them, Fereydown Hoveyda, famously began a review by stating: "The subject of *Party Girl* is idiotic. So what?") Wilder cared little either about Sarris's 1968 indictment or his about-face, but he has certainly been outspoken throughout his career about his dislike both for auteurist filmmaking and film criticism.¹⁷ Ridiculing the subjectivism of the *Nouvelle vague* and their "Santa Claus aesthetic,"¹⁸ Wilder has derided not only the films of Godard but any kind of filmmaking that indulges in the use of what he calls gimmicks—a self-referential style of filmmaking that sacrifices classic plot structure and psychological motivation of characters for a formalism that draws attention to its own virtuosity. Thus elaborate camerawork, for example, that stuns the viewer yet fails to be motivated by the plot or a character's point of view is not commensurable with Wilder's notion of realism. A firm believer in the star system, Wilder is equally critical of making the auteur the true star of the film, which was so central for the self-understanding and self-promotion of the *Nouvelle vague* and also the New German Cinema. Yet in a more concrete sense, Wilder can indeed be called the author of his films: He never filmed a script he had not written himself, a rare achievement among Hollywood directors, and unmatched by any other émigré of the period. As he has underscored time and again, the script is for him the most important building block for creating a successful film, and the completion of a shooting script is the most time-consuming part of preproduction, with few changes to the script allowed under his direction. If Wilder's own account can be believed, his desire to direct films was based less on altercations with the producer (the most common cause for

confrontation in the studio system), nor for seeking to climb up the studio hierarchy, but primarily to protect his script from a director's improvisations and alterations.¹⁹

At the same time it must be emphasized—again against any auteurist notion—that Wilder does not see himself as the sole creator of the script. From his days at Ufa, he always collaborated with at least one other writer, insisting that the quality of the finished script stemmed from the fusion of creative forces, and reluctant later to attribute certain scenes or lines to the effort of an individual. I have already stressed how his journalistic background had profoundly shaped his writing style and plots (not just the films that revolve around journalists). It is important to add here that this training also conditioned him to better accept the role of the writer within the studio system. Even more than at Ufa, where writers wrote at home without access to the film studio, in Hollywood a strict set of studio rules governed the attendance and output of writers. It was the story department, not the screenwriters, which bore the responsibility of supplying producers with properties that could be filmed. The job of the writers was primarily to prepare and adapt the properties acquired. That also implied having as little ego as possible invested in one's script, and accepting that one's copy would be changed by other writers and editors (often several). Not surprisingly, therefore, it was not the famed East Coast novelists and playwrights who were most successful in Hollywood, but journalists like Ben Hecht and Robert Benchley. They "were accustomed to deadlines and copy editors and writing for an anonymous public that liked its information meted out in economical and dramatic doses. (...) [Journalists] shared with veteran screenwriters a tendency to think of their work more as a craft than as an art. They rarely considered what they wrote their own, and put little stock in creative control and individual autonomy. Like any other writer, journalists bitched about having their copy mutilated and having to write down to the masses, but they understood the movie business—and that it was a business."²⁰

As was common at Paramount, Ufa and elsewhere, as the basis of their scripts, screenwriters would usually use successful novels, stories, plays, musicals, even Broadway shows, and Wilder was no exception. Notions of fidelity were secondary to adapting the basic structure of the text for the medium of film. Because of Hollywood's emphasis on the three act structure, the play became Wilder's favorite genre for adaptation and was the source for such notable films as *Scampolo*; *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*; *What a Life*; *Five Graves to Cairo*; *Stalag 17*; *Sabrina*; *The Seven Year Itch*; *One, Two, Three*; *Irma La Douce*; *Kiss Me, Stupid*; *Witness for the Prosecution*; *Avanti!*; and *The Front Page*.²¹

While Wilder repeatedly had confrontations with moguls such as Adolph Zukor or Louis B. Mayer, he never saw himself in opposition to the studio system, as auteurist criticism likes to claim about certain directors. On the contrary, he was a studio player who excelled within the system,

working at Paramount from 1937 to 1954 and with United Artists/Mirisch Company from 1957 onwards. There and elsewhere he worked with a steady ensemble of professionals who shaped his films in decisive ways. Most important, of course, was his teaming up with Charles Brackett with whom he wrote thirteen screenplays, debuting on Ernst Lubitsch's *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* (1938) and splitting up after *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), as well as his second long-time cowriter, I. A. L. Diamond, with whom he completed eleven scripts. Other long-time collaborators at Paramount and elsewhere include editor (and later producer) Doane Harrison, cinematographer John Seitz, art directors Hans Dreier and Alexander Trauner, composers Miklós Rózsa, Franz Waxman, and Friedrich Hollaender, and costume designer Edith Head. As Wilder worked his way up from writer to director and then producer, he greatly enlarged his artistic control and became one of the first directors to have right of final cut, but most critics agree that he produced his best work within the confines and support of the classic studio system, when the Production Code and censorship laws, as well as negotiations with producers, forced him to be at his most creative and inventive.

The "Wilder Touch"

While it would certainly be a misnomer to label Billy Wilder an auteur—especially in the sense of the 1950s French writers—critics have often invoked a "Wilder Touch" to describe the uniqueness of his films. The phrase alludes, of course, to the famed Lubitsch touch, and Ernst Lubitsch was, besides Erich von Stroheim, a chief source of Wilder's cinema. An unlikely pairing, as Wilder himself called it, both von Stroheim and Lubitsch belong to a generation of earlier European émigrés. The opportunity to become a major screenwriter came through Lubitsch who hired him and Brackett to cowrite *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* and *Ninotchka*. Lubitsch's Hollywood fame rested on a series of highly sophisticated and formally inventive comedies, most often about adultery. These comedies are celebrated for the Lubitsch touch, a special form of visual or verbal cleverness that implied more than it showed, and that encapsulated the essence of a situation in a gesture, an object, or a funny line. What Wilder admired in these films was their wit, their formal elegance, and their respect for the viewers' intelligence. Lubitsch pointed the way, showing how to maintain a unique style within the Hollywood system and be professionally successful. (Apparently, Wilder was not familiar with Lubitsch's early German films, mostly comedies about Jewish social climbers in which Lubitsch often starred in the main role such as *Der Stolz der Firma* [1914], *Schuhpalast Pinkus* [1916], or *Meyer aus Berlin* [1918]).²² Von Stroheim, in contrast, was marked by darker, satiric impulses, often aimed at the decadence of Old Europe in films that violated both sexual taboos of Hollywood as well as

requirements of length and budget. In his emphasis on the grotesque, his harsher social criticism, and portrayals of sexual deviation, von Stroheim wrote himself out of the Hollywood system. Yet it is these very features which remained a major influence on Wilder, who, as a young reporter, was captivated by von Stroheim's films before he began writing scripts himself. Von Stroheim's excesses are tempered in Wilder by Lubitsch's respect for classical form, his humanity, and his optimism, which allowed Wilder a similar commercial success. The romantic comic form modeled on Lubitsch provided Wilder with a solid generic and institutional base from which he could foray into more realistic, von Stroheim-like territories.

Unlike Lubitsch, who had little interest in addressing contemporary American society in his films, Wilder's keen awareness of America's latest obsessions, fads and fashions, sports, of the coverage in local and international news, and of events in the film industry itself frequently entered his films. His personal take on what surrounded him was shaped in no small measure by a rarely mentioned source—the modernist writings of Upton Sinclair (a favorite of Kisch's) and Sinclair Lewis. Lewis' 1922 novel *Babbitt*, in particular, a classic commentary on middle-class society, can be seen as a central influence on many Wilder films, which focus on the average American male trying to get ahead of the game at the price of moral integrity (for example *The Apartment*). Wilder's critical eye on society was thus cast from a unique perspective—that of a (self-) Americanized Austrian Jew whose actual immigration to the US was facilitated by an encounter with the writings of American insiders with pronounced outsider perspectives. This perspective makes Wilder stand out among the many European émigrés who associated high culture with the Old World and lamented the shallowness of American culture. Both in Europe and in America, Wilder was committed to straddling the divide between high and low, and his penchant for Viennese schmaltz, which formed the ingredient of many of his Ufa scripts, did not contradict his interest in the Bauhaus or the writings of Arthur Schnitzler.

The tension between insider and outsider is indeed central for Wilder's work, not only in the biographical terms outlined in the previous section, but in his professional selfunderstanding. The outsider Wilder gained insider status only because he had the training and work ethic to contribute to the American film industry. As stated above, Wilder is unique among Hollywood directors for never filming a script he had not written himself, which gave him unusual artistic control, but that control was only bestowed on him because his scripts were in compliance with the studio conventions of the time. That is why the process of narration in his films is usually consonant with the norms of classical Hollywood cinema regarding plot development, character motivation, and closure. If there is, then, a certain trademark quality to Wilder's films, it lies less in their innovative formal aspects—even though *Double Indemnity* or *Sunset Boulevard* certainly broke new ground in their use of voice-over—than in how

Wilder's scripts and films are invariably marked by a sarcastic humor, a biting cynicism, and a clever wit. The typical Wilder script will feature crisp dialogue, careful balance of ribaldry and compassion, perfect timing, and uncluttered plots. Also typical for Wilder's films is their rich canvas of American types ranging from low-life conmen and prostitutes, to the average working guy and gal, to upper-class sophisticates. Unlike a celebrated auteur like Hitchcock, Wilder's films cover a wide range of genres, and many famous titles stand next to rather forgettable features. Apart from the Western and science fiction, there is hardly a genre in which he did not dabble. Like other first-rate studio directors, Wilder was able to work with many of the major stars of the classic Hollywood era, including Marilyn Monroe, Marlene Dietrich, Audrey Hepburn, Shirley MacLaine, Ginger Rogers, Barbara Stanwyck, William Holden, Ray Milland, Humphrey Bogart, Gary Cooper, Fred MacMurray, James Cagney, Tony Curtis, Walter Matthau, and Jack Lemmon, many of whom gave their most memorable performances in a Billy Wilder film. Since Wilder relied less on startling devices of editing and camerawork, the vitality and suggestiveness of his actors' performances gained greater significance. What is especially unique is how Wilder often cast them against the grain—Stanwyck, for example, was a Frank Capra heroine before Wilder turned her into a femme fatale in *Double Indemnity*, and her co-conspirator MacMurray had been a likable light comedian in a string of Paramount pictures. It is also striking that Wilder liked to work at least twice with so many of his stars, building not only on the existing star persona but the unique articulation of that persona in a previous Wilder film. Even though Monroe, Hepburn, MacLaine, Dietrich, or MacMurray may have had very different roles in their respective second Wilder films, their new characters often played off against their previous incarnation. Holden and Lemmon are the only two long-time Wilder stars and therefore occupy a crucial role in his overall work. The subsequent chapters will explore in more detail Wilder's use of stars and their relevance for specific genres.

While Wilder's films are always positioned in the mainstream of Hollywood entertainment cinema, what makes them special and audacious is a form of social criticism that works within, and yet pressures against, the studio system, always threatening to become darker, more disturbing, more sexual, and more political than the system allows. From his very beginnings as a Paramount writer, his scripts with Brackett begin breaking the mold. Working in the comedy tradition of Lubitsch, Frank Capra, Howard Hawks, and Preston Sturges (the latter showing Wilder the way by also making the successful switch from writer to writer-director), Brackett and Wilder ridiculed Hollywood's views on love, sex, and success. Going beyond these famous predecessors, Brackett and Wilder's 1930s scripts infuse romance and screwball with themes of imminent World War II, the Spanish Civil War, and Communism. As soon as Wilder directs, he breaks sexual taboos in *The Major and the Minor* and *Double Indemnity*, where he

almost finds the *film noir*. He also tackles taboo themes of alcoholism and the seedy underbelly of Hollywood in *The Lost Weekend* and *Sunset Boulevard*. *A Foreign Affair* mocks not only Nazi Germany but also American occupation and Puritan morals, while *One, Two, Three* lashes out against all types of Cold War warriors—the American Coca-Colonizers, the Russian apparatchiks, the unreformed West German Hitlerites, and the East German salon socialists. The sexual element is further intensified in the comedies with I.A.L. Diamond—gender-bending in *Some Like It Hot*, wife-swapping in *Kiss Me, Stupid*, prostitution in *Irma La Douce*, and adultery in *Avanti!* A central pleasure of all these films is the highly controlled audacity that has accounted for their longevity; they still excite and irritate today.

Reading for Exile

Billy Wilder has been regarded primarily an American director, and not without justification. He gained his international reputation as a screenwriter and director in Hollywood, and with the single exception of *Mauvaise Graine*, he wrote and directed all his films in English, primarily as Hollywood productions. Like many exiles who arrived after 1933, he was eager to make it in the US film industry, which meant mastering English quickly and assimilating fully to the new culture. In interviews he has remembered his life in Vienna and Berlin with little nostalgia, describing it as a different world that has disappeared. Yet the European traditions which shaped Wilder's formative years—*fin-de-siècle* and post-World War I Austria, Weimar Germany, as well as his particular brand of Jewishness—have clearly left a mark on his work, as well as on his views on sexuality, politics, morals, and art. The past has traveled with him as an invisible baggage of beliefs, convictions, tastes, and concerns.²³ The films of Wilder are therefore much more complex than often claimed—especially by himself. Indebted to, and articulating, different and rivaling cultural sensibilities and traditions, his is a “cinema of in-between,” which highlights the dialectics of insider and outsider, of the liminal, fluid, and temporary, of upward and downward mobility, of high brow and low brow. This particular trait has its origins both in Wilder's biographical background and in the historical constellation of European modernity in the decades leading up to German fascism and the Second World War. Wilder's repeated geographical displacement—from Galicia to Vienna, to Berlin, to Paris, to Los Angeles—is both an individual fate and a common experience for European Jews of his generation. That Wilder's interest in the avantgarde of his time—writers, musicians, composers, painters—did not deter him from reveling in the vernacular is equally typical for how the relation between *Kultur* and popular culture was revolutionized in the 1920s.

Wilder's films reveal their in-between status in complex and layered ways. Their precarious position between Europe and the New World is a

major creative tension shaping the themes, style, and form of his films. It is dramatized in the films' story lines and characters, and often informs the circumstances of their respective production and very different reception at home and abroad. As noted earlier, a fascination with the economic and cultural exchange between the US and Europe preceded Wilder's arrival in the US, while his postwar films return to Europe with increasing urgency. But even his truly American films—set in the US and featuring clearly identifiable American characters such as the insurance salesman or the aggressive journalist—have the perspective of an outsider.

The tension between insider and outsider is also crucial for Wilder's notion of Jewishness. To be Jewish had vastly different meanings in the respective cultures in which Wilder lived, making the experience of anti-Semitism anything from a daily nuisance one could ridicule or ignore, to a major stumbling block for a professional career, to a life-threatening situation. Having escaped the Nazis, Hollywood provided a haven for German-Jewish exiles, where they formed a community with the many American and international Jewish and non-Jewish professionals. At the same time, Wilder took issue with Hollywood's practices of self-censorship, largely enforced by Jewish moguls, which curtailed the depiction of Jews onscreen and impeded the effort to articulate the urgency to fight Hitler. The questions of Jewishness and the Holocaust are indeed central to the films of Billy Wilder, but they enter in circuitous and contradictory fashion. While there are few characters in Wilder's films clearly marked as Jewish, there are many who possess attributes often associated specifically with Jewishness, especially the many Schlemiel figures embodied by Jack Lemmon as the habitual bungler and dolt. In others, particularly those embodied by Walter Matthau, we see Wilder's own restlessness and power of gab.

While Wilder has been reluctant to talk about the Holocaust, in which his mother, stepfather, and grandmother perished, his films as a director are haunted by the specter of Auschwitz, even if mostly in very roundabout ways. While *Witness for the Prosecution*, *A Foreign Affair*, and *One, Two, Three* deal with the legacy of Nazi Germany in complex and unprecedented ways (the latter two actually offending audiences at their time of release), references to Hitler pepper even his most romantic films. Consider, for example, the scene in *Love in the Afternoon* when millionaire Frank Flannagan unsuccessfully tries to guess Ariane's name, of which he only knows the first letter, and finally surmises: "Is it Adolf?" His first film as director, *The Major and the Minor*, opens with the title card: "The Dutch bought New York from the Indians in 1626 and by May 1941 there wasn't an Indian left who regretted it." A typical Wilder joke, the line works on more than one level. It implies that the Native Americans cut a good deal by getting rid of an island that would turn out to be the cesspool of civilization; this reading is suggested by subsequent plot development, which revolves around the efforts of the Ginger Rogers character, Susan Apple-

gate, to escape the hell-hole of New York and return to her native Iowa. The darker ramifications of this line stem from that the fact that there is not only “not an Indian left” to regret this sale, but that there is no “Indian left,” period. By 1942, the American Holocaust, as historian David Stannard has called it, had led to the almost complete annihilation of native tribes in the United States, a historical tragedy of then-unprecedented proportions about to be repeated in Central and Eastern Europe. The only film Wilder ever set in his native Austria, the fluffy Bing Crosby musical *The Emperor Waltz*, alludes to the same phenomenon from a postwar perspective and is even more clear in its indictment. Revolving around the verboten mixing of breeds among dogs and humans, it is an only thinly disguised and stinging satire on the Nuremberg Laws and the Holocaust.²⁴ In a 1950 interview, Wilder summed up his life as “from Adolph [sic] Hitler to Adolph Zukor,” ironically underscoring the dictatorial style of the then-chairman of the Paramount board.²⁵ The strategy that underlies these implicit and explicit comparisons between the US and Nazi Germany is a refusal to paint the latter regime in such pitch-black colors that the former can easily feel morally superior. There is the temptation, Wilder’s films claim, that the fervor that drove Hitler may surface also at any moment in an open society like the US. The one film Wilder most regretted not being able to make was *Schindler’s List*; presumably, it would have given him the chance to reckon in a more personal way with the fate of his family.²⁶ Late in life, Wilder began emphasizing the exilic dimension of his life in the US. Reversing earlier statements from interviews in which he had underscored that he would have come to this country with or without Nazism, in 1999 he told director Cameron Crowe that he came here “because I did not want to be in an oven.”²⁷

Wilder’s statement encapsulates both the assertiveness and the guilt of the survivor, a tale both of victory and defeat, and so do his films. They attest to a transformation of the experience of exile, commonly associated with victimhood and anguish, into a subtle and productive interrogation of the American host country. Sensitized by the rise of fascism in Europe, Wilder’s films present the American way of life in a new and often critical light; startled by uncanny similarities, they slyly comment on Nazi Germany while ostensibly dealing with American issues. Yet the point bears repetition that none of Wilder’s films is exclusively the result of an individual “creativity;” instead, they are constituted objects arising out of concrete circumstances, serving particular functions, involving often complicated relationships to institutions, especially the studio system. The European film professionals of the 1930s had very limited possibilities to create films that could draw attention to the political cause of their displacement—both *from* Germany and *within* the US—and articulate strategies for overcoming it. The highly regulated system of film production in the Hollywood studio system of the 1930s and 1940s, as well as the Production Code Administration (PCA) guidelines and restrictions regarding the repre-

sentation of sexuality, religion, and politics (including the politics of foreign countries), posed major hurdles for filmmakers engaged in political filmmaking. Any direct cinematic representation of the plight of refugees is rare (and *Hold Back the Dawn* is the exception that confirms the rule). Wilder himself quipped that in the 1930s exile had simply lost its attractiveness as dramatic plot device: “The tale of a refugee was a sensation when Alexandre Dumas and Victor Hugo told it, but now, when I tell my tale, everybody just yawns.”²⁸ The above concerns have clearly shaped the selection of the seven films I will discuss in more detail. Subsequent chapters will address how the exile’s inherently double perspective informs and structures a film, and how the exile’s experience of not belonging translates into a film’s narrative and visual language.

Notes

1. André Aciman, *Letters of Transit* (New York: New Press, 1999), 11.
2. Wilder quoted in *Billy Wilder Interviews*, ed. Robert Horton (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 167.
3. Ed Sikov, *On Sunset Boulevard: The Life and Times of Billy Wilder* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), ix.
4. Hans Siemsen, “Jazz-band,” *Die Weltbühne* 10 (March 1921): 287–288; here 288. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
5. Quoted in *Billie Wilder: Eine europäische Karriere*, Andreas Hutter and Klaus Kamolz (Vienna: Böhlau, 1998), 93.
6. Miriam Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism,” in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2000), 332–350; here 333.
7. Hans Sahl, *Memoiren eines Moralisten* (Munich: Dtv, 1990), 100.
8. *Menschen am Sonntag* is best considered a collaborative effort. It has been difficult to decide who contributed what to the film; the people involved have made contradictory statements in their respective memoirs and interviews. The credits given in the filmography follow the 1997/98 restoration of the film by the Filmmuseum Berlin under the leadership of Martin Koerber.
9. It should be added here that the avantgarde *Menschen am Sonntag* followed Wilder’s eminently forgettable debut as credited screenwriter for the aforementioned farce *Der Teufelsreporter* (1929).
10. The advent of sound actually brought Veidt and Jannings back to Berlin, with Veidt leaving for good in 1933, while Jannings continued his career under the Nazis.
11. Hellmuth Karasek, *Billy Wilder: Eine Nahaufnahme* (Munich: Heine, revised edition 1995) 77.
12. The only recent longer scholarly assessment of Wilder, Richard Armstrong’s *Billy Wilder, American Film Realist*, provides few new insights. Wilder’s death in 2002 has occasioned the publication of several new books, along the same lines. Charlotte Chandler’s “personal biography” *Nobody’s Perfect* recounts some new and many previously known Wilder anecdotes, while Glenn Hopp’s glossy *Billy Wilder: The Complete Films* provides a richly illustrated coffee table overview of Wilder. The recent slew of Wilder books is rounded out by Robert Horton’s collection of Wilder interviews. Only three volumes of the last decade can claim to have advanced new insights into Wilder: Andreas Hutter and Klaus Kamolz’s analysis of Wilder’s European career, largely based on original archival research; Ed Sikov’s meticulous and definitive Wilder biography *On Sunset Bou-*

- levard, and film director Cameron Crowe's interview book *Conversations with Wilder*, who probes much deeper than any of his many predecessors. For complete references please consult the bibliography.
13. See François Truffaut, "Politique des auteurs," *Cahiers du cinéma* 31 (1954).
 14. Two American critics who consider Wilder an auteur in the above sense are Axel Madsen and Gene Phillips.
 15. *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929–1968* (New York: Dutton, 1968), 166.
 16. See Andrew Sarris, "Why Billy Wilder Belongs in the Pantheon," *Film Comment* (July/August): 1991: 9–14. Yet already in the 1970s, Sarris had reversed his opinion of Wilder somewhat in a very favorable review of *Fedora*.
 17. Wilder carefully noted what critics wrote about him, but rarely ever responded to them publicly or in interviews. On his opinion about Sarris, see his 1979 interview with Joseph McBride and Todd McCarthy, "Going for Extra Innings," reprinted in *Billy Wilder Interviews*. About Godard, he stated: "I'm looking back with great nostalgia to the well-made picture—not the Godard-type pictures which bore me totally, no matter how many *Village Voice* Andrew Sarris tell me that this is indeed the new art form. I think it's baloney." Quoted in Noël Berggren, "Arsenic and Old Directors," *Esquire* 77.4 (1972): 132–35; here 135.
 18. As he told Cameron Crowe in an interview: "I am not arty. I never make a setup that is obviously wrong. I never shoot through the flames of the fireplace in the foreground, because that is from the point of Santa Claus." In: Cameron Crowe, *Conversations with Wilder*, 119.
 19. The lack of status accorded to writers in the studio system can be gleaned from Jack Warner's infamous *bon mot* in which he called them "schmucks with typewriters." Quoted in Thomas Doherty, "Billy Wilder: Ready for a Close-Up," *Chronicle of Higher Education* November 3, 2000, B18.
 20. Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 104–5.
 21. Wilder's films have been turned into musicals—*Sunset Boulevard*, *Promises, Promises* (based on *The Apartment*), *Sugar* (based on *Some Like It Hot*), and *Silk Stockings* (based on *Ninotchka*).
 22. This becomes apparent in Wilder's conversation with Crowe, where he claims: "Lubitsch didn't do any comedies in Germany." (*Conversations with Wilder*, 18.)
 23. I take the term "invisible baggage" from historian Leo Spitzer's study of Jewish refugees from Hitler in Bolivia, *Hotel Bolivia: The Culture of Memory in a Refuge From Nazism* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).
 24. See my essay "Gained in Translation: Exile Cinema and the Case of Billy Wilder" in *The Cosmopolitan Screen: German Cinema and the Global Imaginary, 1945 to the Present*, ed. Stephan K. Schindler and Lutz Koepnick (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007): 25–38.
 25. Philip K. Scheurer, "Wilder Seeks Films 'With Bite' to Satisfy 'Nation of Hecklers'"; reprinted in *Billy Wilder Interviews*, ed. Robert Horton, 17.
 26. See Billy Wilder, "Man sah überall nur Taschentücher," (*Magazin*) 18 February 1994.
 27. Cameron Crowe, *Conversations with Wilder* 19.
 28. Quoted in: Volker Kühn, "Nachwort," in *Menschliches Treibgut*, Friedrich Hollaender, , trans. Stefan Weidle (Bonn: Weidle, 1995), 348.

Chapter 2

THE INSURANCE MAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE: *DOUBLE INDEMNITY* (1944)

“We who had our roots in the European past, I think, brought with us a fresh attitude towards America, a new eye with which to examine this country on film, as opposed to the eye of native-born movie makers who were accustomed to everything around them.”

—Billy Wilder¹

Insurance salesman Walter Neff's (Fred MacMurray) second visit to the Dietrichson home in Los Feliz ends abruptly when Neff catches on to Phyllis Dietrichson's (Barbara Stanwyck) plan to take out accident insurance unbeknownst to her husband and then arrange for his “accidental” death. Rebuffing her advances, he quickly leaves the scene, but is unsure where to go. Deciding against a return to his office, he drives around the city, stopping for a quick beer at a drive-in restaurant (“to get rid of the sour taste of her ice tea”) and rolling a few lines at a bowling alley on La Cienega Boulevard. Dismissing the option of going out for a dinner or seeing a show, he eventually drives home, arriving at his apartment at dusk. The sequence between Neff's departure from the Dietrichson home and his arrival at his apartment building uses only a few seconds of screen time, and at most represents a couple of hours of Neff's afternoon, thus leaving much of the time between his brief 3:30 pm visit with Phyllis and a sunset in May unaccounted for. This omission by the narrator stands in contrast to his otherwise meticulous efforts toward situating his story within precise temporal and spatial coordinates; it suggests that Neff either no longer remembers his precise whereabouts this afternoon, or that he may even have been unaware of the passage of time. The image of displacement and alienation which the anonymous locales visited by Neff evoke is thus reinforced by the unhinging of the subjectivity of the narrating voice which so far has been anchoring the tale unfolding in front of us.

At first sight, Neff's disorientation seems caused by the events which he experiences on his routine follow-up visit at the Dietrichson home. As the story progresses, though, we learn that Neff is no stranger to such



Figure 2.1. Neff at the door with Phyllis hiding

scheming, having himself thought before “how you could crook the house,” and thus the shock at the Dietrichson house must be more one of recognition than revelation.² Indeed, it is Neff’s very sense of alienation and nonbelonging within southern California consumer society that makes him susceptible to thinking up such schemes in the first place and to becoming ensnared in Phyllis’s web. When he returns to his apartment, he is caught, and he knows it. The impersonality of the drive-through restaurant, where diners eat outside removed from others, and will stay only briefly, as well as the anonymity of the bowling alley, where solitary clients repeat the same motions in one row after another, are only the mirror image of Neff’s apartment and its mass-produced furnishings. The script describes them as “square-cut overstuffed borax furniture,” including an “imitation fireplace,” while the camera pans along three prints of boxers lining the living room wall, even taking the time to record how Neff kicks a rug back into place as his only sign of emotion to his lover’s departure. It is in this dark and dingy apartment where Neff succumbs to Phyllis’s seduction, the consummation of their adulterous affair suggested merely by the editing—we first see Phyllis and Neff sitting next to each other on the sofa, then cut to his voice-over narration at the office, and then cut back to Walter lying on the couch and smoking what appears to be a postcoitus cigarette, while Phyllis, now at the opposite end of the sofa, is adjusting



Figure 2.2. The cigarette after

her lipstick. The Production Code forbade the representation of adulterous sex, but even without such censorship it would be difficult to imagine Neff's hotel-like apartment as a place for the exchange of true passion.

Double Identity: Exile and *Noir*

The sense of being an outsider marginalized by society and precariously held down by roots that run finger deep describes not only Neff but also virtually all the main characters in the film. Neff's only friend is his colleague Barton Keyes (Edward G. Robinson), and theirs is a typical work-related friendship determined by the mutual admiration of each other's professional skills, but not by any shared interests or hobbies. Ironically, in the end this relationship turns out to be built on truer feelings than Neff's fling with Phyllis. Like Neff, Keyes is a bachelor without any family, relatives, or friends, and consumed by his job duties, which keep him awake at night. His professionalism even leads him to conduct a background check on a woman he dates, uncovering evidence that has him terminate the relationship and all thoughts of future romance. Phyllis has a family but loathes them. Her (pretelevision) evenings are spent playing Chinese checkers with her stepdaughter Lola, who despises Phyllis,

and with her dull, monosyllabic husband, who allegedly slaps her when he is drunk. Although Phyllis is the only character in the film identified as native Angeleno (a fact Neff comments on by quipping, “they say native Californians all come from Iowa”), she seems less at home in this city than everyone else, making her of course its perfect embodiment—the least rooted Californians are the ones who were actually born there. With a husband at work all day and a maid who takes care of domestic duties, Phyllis’s life is comfortable but empty. The cast of minor characters in the film even enhances this pronounced detachment from society and civic community. Gorlopis tries to collect insurance money by setting fire to his truck; Mr. Jackson attempts to stretch the insurance company’s expense account; Nino Zchetti is an edgy youth and college dropout; and even Lola, the good girl to the evil stepmother’s black widow, lies about her nightly rendezvous with a boyfriend her father does not approve of.

This image of southern California as a sterile and culturally shallow place populated by disenfranchised, disconnected, and dishonest people is what must have appealed to Wilder when he first read James Mallehan Cain’s short novel *Double Indemnity* at producer Joseph Siström’s suggestion, because it resonated with his own sense of being an outsider in Hollywood, no matter how professionally successful he had become by the early 1940s. Indeed, the sensibility of the films which would later be labeled *noir* certainly entertains close affinities to the sense of loss and cultural despair which many German language exile filmmakers experienced in 1930s and 40s America. These films frequently revolve around questions of (war) trauma, psychosis, memory, and amnesia, split or doubled identity, featuring men driven from their home, outsiders who cannot comprehend the political and social forces that determine their existence.

The connection between *film noir* and émigré directors is, of course, a complex and contested terrain of US film history that has been given considerable critical attention. I want to rehearse here briefly the main arguments in order to mark my own position on *noir* and exile. It is perhaps best to remind us first that *film noir* is, of course, an ex post facto category invented by French critics in 1946, who discovered stylistic affinities between the *Série noire*, a series of paperback crime novels issued by Gallimard, certain 1930s French films such as *Pépé le moko* (1937) and *Quai des brumes* (1938), and Hollywood films such as *Murder, My Sweet; Laura*; and *Double Indemnity*, all released in the US in 1944 and then being screened for the first time in France. The first comprehensive treatment on the subject, later to become a foundational text, was also by French authors—Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton’s 1955 *Panorama du film noir américain 1941–1953*—but it was not until the 1970s that *noir* gained international currency as a critical category through the work of British and American film historians.³ It was then that German expressionism and Weimar cinema became widely accepted as one of the main stylistic and thematic influences on *noir*, together with the hard-boiled fiction of Dashiell Ham-

mett, James M. Cain, Cornell Woolrich, and Raymond Chandler, and the Poetic Realism of Marcel Carné, Jean Renoir, and Julien Duvivier.

According to Paul Schrader's hugely influential "Notes on Noir" (1972), directors such as Fritz Lang, Robert Siodmak, Otto Preminger, Fred Zinnemann, William Dieterle, Anatole Litvak, Edgar Ulmer, Rudolph Maté, Curtis Bernhardt, Max Ophuls, and Billy Wilder had recourse to the cinema of Weimar Germany so as to articulate a personal sense of loss and cultural malaise that befell them in Hollywood. Important predecessors to *noir* thus include the distorted angles, chiaroscuro lighting, and elongated shadows of expressionism; the urban realism, moral decay, and sexual temptation of the so-called *Strassenfilme* (street films); and the German femme fatales of the 1920s such as Lya de Putti, Louise Brooks and Marlene Dietrich.⁴ Following this line of argument, film *noir* was seen not only as allowing German directors to reclaim a cultural heritage long believed to be lost, but also to regain an auteurist vision and personal creativity unheard of within the studio system. *Noir* thus became an art cinema in disguise that 'subverted' both dominant classic film language and the deindividualizing division of labor, secretly reinstalling the director as *artiste* who enunciates his personal vision in films that are marked by his handwriting.⁵



Figure 2.3. Scene from a *Strassenfilm* with femme fatale

There are good reasons to question the above line of argument.⁶ Not only does it romanticize the role of the directors in the US studio, but it also overestimates their ability to leave a personal imprint on films (and it is certainly no coincidence that the terms *noir* and *auteur* entered the English language at the same time). Rather than individual creativity, it was the crisis in the 1940s studio system that allowed émigré directors to assume such a prominent role in *noir*, when the need for product diversification allowed for greater artistic freedom and wartime restrictions on studio set design forced filmmakers to use real locations. Even more problematic in Schrader's argument is the still widely accepted historiography that draws a direct line of cross-cultural influence between two (or more) national film industries at different points in time without giving much thought to what historical circumstances motivated such appropriations.⁷

Even if German expressionism did serve as a model or inspiration for lighting practices and tales of *Doppelgänger*, it must be stressed that among the German-language émigrés listed above, with the single exception of Lang, very few had any firsthand role in the creation of German expressionism, which had basically run its course by the mid 1920s.⁸ The ability to invoke the specters of Cesare and the Golem became important strategies for cultural impersonation that helped German film exiles to secure work in a US film industry eager to exploit the popularity of the ghosts of Weimar cinema. Employment so gained thus had little to do with articulating a cultural heritage, but a lot with cultural mimicry and ethnic drag, performed to meet the demand for otherness and foreignness within the Hollywood studios.

In an essay that radically questions the very existence of film *noir*, Marc Vernet has rejected any claims about foreign influences on *noir*, arguing that the cycle's stylistic components can be accounted for entirely within US film history.⁹ Thomas Elsaesser goes even further in his critique of the influence model than do Koepnick and Vernet. For him, the case of expressionism into *noir* is an example of the history of falsity in cinema that points to endless doubling of the imaginaries of two national cinemas, an example, in fact, of how *not* to write film history because never have so many causes explained so few effects. His answer to the problems of the influence model is to dismiss it altogether: "The prosaic answer, then, to the question about the prominence of German directors in the film *noir* cycle is that the Germans were film professionals, they came from a mature, developed film industry, which is why they would adapt themselves so well to Hollywood, and could leave their mark on so many different genres, cycles and modes."¹⁰

While I agree with many of the objections Elsaesser and others make to how film history has commonly, and superficially, linked Weimar cinema and Hollywood, I would argue that the experience of exile has left its mark in ways that go beyond histories of the imaginary. It profoundly shaped the way in which European film professionals experienced pre-

war and wartime America, and the “median state” of their existence, as Edward Said has called it, certainly impacted their representations of US modernity, even if often in circuitous or subconscious ways.¹¹

Shifting away from a writing of film history as a linear movement that leads from Weimar Berlin via Paris to Weimar on the Pacific, as Los Angeles was called by the émigré community, I want to focus in what follows on the concrete historical circumstances under which the experience of modernity gets rearticulated in *Double Indemnity*. Precisely because the film has been considered a classic of *noir* style—it contains a story that focuses on crime and violence; an iconic femme fatale; a fatalistic narrative replete with sudden plot turns and bad endings; a cinematography that relies on strong use of shadows, low key lighting, day-for-night or night-for-night shooting; urban settings and real locations; a modernist, even minimalist score; and hard-boiled dialogue—it has too often been dehistoricized as a prototype. In order to recharge it with the social and symbolic energy it once possessed, its formal inventions need to be contextualized rather than admired as timeless achievements.

Historicizing the film thus means invoking both the modernity of Berlin and Paris of the late 1920s through early 1930s and that of the United States/California/Los Angeles of the late 1930s. The double perspective of the exile brings into proximity dissimilar times and spaces, creating an uncanny scenario of history repeating itself, even if with a difference. The duplicity of that perspective consists both of the sense of displacement of the exile and the disillusion of the insider. For it is important to remember that by the beginning of World War II, Wilder, Lang, Dieterle, Preminger, Ulmer, and others had more or less successfully assimilated to US society (Wilder became a citizen in 1939). Many in the émigré community had taken an active stand in the country’s fight against Nazi Germany, and several were members of the Hollywood anti-Nazi league. Wilder would even join the US military after the war and travel to Germany in the service of the Office of War Information (OWI). Thus the bleak outlook manifested in *noir* is *also* the result of disappointment about the unfulfilled promises of the New Deal-era, and the general failure of liberalism in which these immigrants had a vested interest, given the fact that it had provided them with a refuge from fascism. It is precisely by viewing *Double Indemnity* as registering the lingering shadows of the Depression, as well as looking forward to postwar America, that the “parallel modernity” between *noir* and Weimar cinema becomes evident.¹²

***Noir* and Modernism**

The emergence of *noir* and its celebrated modernism becomes possible only because of drastic changes in the film industry during the war years. Wartime rationing severely curtailed the availability of film stock and building

materials for studio sets, thereby increasing the use of real locations which would become a hallmark of *noir* realism. With the entry of the United States into the War, Hollywood became an active supporter of the war effort, promoting films that advocated patriotism, commitment to the home front, and national unity. The OWI even had a bureau in Hollywood and conveyed to the studios its official home front ideology in an advisory booklet for film production. It also demanded that studios submit scripts for review (a practice Paramount rarely followed). By the end of 1943, however, when the immense military efforts of the Allies were beginning to show positive results and the end of the war became a realistic possibility, Congress gutted the domestic operations of the OWI, a clear sign that the film industry's instrumental role for the war effort was over. As a consequence, the wartime ideology of commitment and community that had been central to films after Pearl Harbor gave way to a more critical outlook on US society. The studios were eager for an opportunity to tell different stories as viewers had largely gotten bored with the gung-ho patriotism of many war stories. *Variety* headlined in July 1943 that "studios shelve war stories as they show 40 per cent office decline."¹³

For Wilder, the loosening of wartime restrictions in the film industry was a welcome development. To be sure, his previous film, *Five Graves to Cairo* (1943), had done its share of promoting the fight against Nazi Germany, even if his portrayal of Rommel, memorably played by Erich von Stroheim, rendered the enemy more human than most contemporary war pictures. But the emergence of a new version of "crime melodrama," as contemporary reviewers called the films later to be dubbed *noir*, allowed him to return to his journalistic roots of covering crime, his belief in vernacular modernism, and his overall dark outlook on life. These films are shaped by creative tensions that are central to Wilder's aesthetic credo and personal experience—the tension between what is a quintessential American genre and its strong German and French connection; between high literature and pulp fiction, which Cain, Dashiell Hammett, and Raymond Chandler straddled so successfully; and between low budget crime movies and art cinema. *Double Indemnity*, a Paramount production with a sizable budget and stellar cast, would prove that modernism and commercialism are not mutually exclusive.¹⁴ The first *noir* to receive an Academy Award nomination, it would launch Chandler's profitable career in the studios and elevate Wilder into the first rank of Hollywood directors.

By the late 1930s, Los Angeles had in fact become a center of modernism, with many writers trying to cross over into the film industry. Not only did the city provide a temporary home for Western and Central European exiles such as writers Bertolt Brecht and Alfred Döblin and composers Arnold Schoenberg and Hanns Eisler (all of whom made at least some attempt to find work in the film industry) but also English novelists Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood, as well as major American writers including William Faulkner, Horace McCoy, John Dos Passos, Theodore

Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Nathanael West, whose *The Day of the Locust* (1939) belongs with Fitzgerald's unfinished *The Last Tycoon* (1941) among the best novels ever written about Hollywood.

Apart from the strong literary associations, *noir* and modernism share a number of significant traits, ranging from formal and moral complexity to a disdain for classical narrative, a resistance to sentiment and censorship, and a frankness about sexual relationships.¹⁵ Focussing on the depiction of an urban environment, *film noir* employs a mode of representation that while realist emphasizes abstraction and formal experiment, and it is informed by a critical or at least ambivalent stance about progress and modernity. Its somewhat "anti-American" look at US society attracted the exile Wilder to Cain's crime melodramas, a sentiment that is also central to the novels of the British-educated Chandler, and it is this shared perspective of the outsider that secured the success of their collaboration, despite their strong differences in personality and style.¹⁶ Not only for *Double Indemnity*, but for all of *noir* the debunking of the American Dream became an important subtext. As an immigrant, this subtext had a special significance for Wilder. His fascination with America, as I argue in the preceding chapter, was first shaped in the 1920s. The Weimar Republic produced a highly sophisticated and ambivalent discourse on what was called Americanization, with Wilder assuming the posture of a self-fashioned American in love with jazz, the foxtrot, and American automobiles, while at the same time devouring Mencken and Sinclair Lewis, two writers particularly eloquent in taking the American Dream to task from an insider perspective. It was then that Wilder must have first come across Egon Erwin Kisch's features about his travels through the US which emphasized the dark underbelly of the alleged Paradise (Wilder and the much-admired Kisch became good friends in Berlin and lived in the same apartment building). Kisch's critical reports about Fordism and the Ford factory in Michigan, for example, certainly resonate with the deterministic metaphors—of gears that have meshed, of a machinery that has started—that structure *Double Indemnity*.

The story of *Double Indemnity*, furthermore, allowed Wilder to return to his roots as a yellow press reporter covering the crime beat. He allegedly was familiar with the cases of many of the serial killers of the Weimar Republic (which included Peter Kürten, Georg Karl Grossmann, Karl Denke, and most notably Fritz Haarmann) and had closely followed the case that inspired Cain's novel. In 1927, Ruth Snyder and her lover Judd Gray were convicted of murdering her husband with a window sash. The case became highly publicized because of an infamous tabloid picture surreptitiously taken by Thomas Howard as Ruth Snyder was executed (which may in fact have prompted Wilder to write and film a scene of Neff's execution in a gas chamber, later to be dropped). Scott Fitzgerald wrote: "In prison Ruth Snyder had to be hoisted into [the Jazz Age] by the tabloids—she was, as *The Daily News* hinted deliciously to gourmets, about to 'cook, and sizzle,

AND FRY!' in the electric chair."¹⁷ Cain's novel alludes to the Snyder case only at the beginning, when the narrator describes "this House of Death that you've been reading about in the paper." Wilder's film introduces the theme of journalism more obliquely by having Neff almost collide with a truck bearing the sign, "Read the Los Angeles Times," when he hastens to his office after being shot by Phyllis. Neff's confession has the ring of sensationalist headlines ("Man Murders for Money and Woman, But Gets Neither"), while Keyes plays the role of an investigative journalist.

It was another murder case, namely the highly publicized psychiatric and forensic examination and subsequent trial of Kürten that found expression in Fritz Lang's famous *M* (1931), the only film Wilder ever specifically (and repeatedly) cited as a model for his film.¹⁸ However, it is not the theme of serial murder that interested Wilder in Lang's film but its quasi-documentary quality and high topicality. Even though it is a studio film, *M* conveys a strong sense of urban realism that would become so important for *noir*. While certain locales such as the Alexanderplatz and the dialect of the people identify the city as Berlin, the film gains its sense of realism precisely through the abstraction of its sets—the street intersection where Beckert (Peter Lorre) is cornered by his hunters, the cellar where he stands trial in front of the kangaroo court—suggesting that the experience of the modern metropolis *in general* is one of menace and uncertainty. At the same time, the film specifically addresses the political and social crisis



Figure 2.4. Fritz Lang's exemplary urban realism

of Berlin, 1931—not just the sensationalism of the serial killer on the loose, but the deeper volatility of urban modernity, two years after Black Friday and two years before Hitler’s rise to power. This careful registering of a place in time when radical change is about to happen also informs *Double Indemnity*’s vicarious position between Depression-ridden 1930s and the (false) promise of postwar recovery and prosperity.

I will have more to say below about the topicality of *Double Indemnity*. It suffices to observe for now that even a superficial comparison of the two films clearly shows that the sense of community that still exists in the Berlin of 1931 is a long way from the alienation and atomism of wartime Los Angeles. One only has to consider how the shared efforts of the police and underworld (which in one memorable scene the camera even sutures into one coherent body) compare to the division and segregation along lines of race, class, and gender that characterize Los Angeles to understand that the relationship between capitalism and modernity had clearly reached a different stage by 1938/44. (Another, more circuitous route connects the two films. Only one year after *M*’s release, actor Edward G. Robinson—who plays Keyes in Wilder’s film—pleaded with a jury in the final trial scene of Mervyn LeRoy’s *Two Seconds* (1932) by grimacing and claiming insanity very much like Peter Lorre had done in Lang’s film.¹⁹)

While *M* is Wilder’s sole point of comparison within film history, he could have cited several of his own films as models for the urban realism of *Double Indemnity*—the location-driven *Emil und die Detektive*, for example, which like *M* spends much of its screentime on the role technology and communication play in the hunt for a fugitive. Furthermore, both films emphasize tools and strategies of surveillance, identification, and communication that can be seen as the equivalent to Neff’s efforts to outsmart Keyes and the police by rigging door bells and phones, and by planting fake alibis for a murder scheme that is supposed to operate like “clockwork.” *Menschen am Sonntag*, Wilder’s breakthrough film, gains its strong sense of realism through the use of lay actors and real locations, conveying a firm sense of place that also informs *Double Indemnity*. The film is today often cited as a precursor to Neo-Realism, which like *noir* is a product of a particular late-war or postwar condition. (It is astounding that four of the collaborators on *Menschen am Sonntag*—Wilder, Fred Zinnemann, Robert Siodmak, and Edgar G. Ulmer—went on to distinguish themselves as directors of *noir*, while Curt Siodmak would write a number of important horror films and cinematographer Eugen Schüfftan would work on numerous *noirs*, often uncredited.)

If Neo-Realism is sometimes invoked to describe the sensibility of *Menschen am Sonntag*, the French *Nouvelle vague* has been cited to entertain certain affinities with Wilder’s first film as director, *Mauvaise Graine* (1934) (a comparison not without irony given Wilder’s ridicule for the French movement). Set in Paris and revolving around a band of car thieves, the film shares certain plot elements with *Double Indemnity*, namely a man who

turns criminal in order to escape a deadening bourgeois routine and who finds himself and his girlfriend on the run from the police. Its use of locations, particularly Vincennes and the Bois de Boulogne, is similar to Wilder's two German films cited above as well as *Double Indemnity* and clearly shows that he has more than just a superficial understanding of the topography in which he sets his films, no matter how foreign the culture. The makeshift garage where the thieves work expresses a similar sense of marginalization and of the temporary as Neff's apartment. *Mauvaise Graine* also displays Wilder's fascination with things considered typically American—fast cars and jazz—and thus functions as a bridge between his Weimar self-Americanization and a more critical stance toward the American dream that he developed in Los Angeles. Significantly, the last shot of the film has the lovers on the run board a ship to America, anticipating Wilder's own departure for New York by only a few months. (By the time the film premiered in the summer of 1934, Wilder had already been in Los Angeles for several months.)

Despite its use of real locations and its careful attention to the concrete geography of the city, it must be stressed that *Double Indemnity* creates a fictional space, with exteriors and interiors that are both "real" and deeply symbolic. The cinematographer, John F. Seitz—who had also shot *Five Graves to Cairo*, and whom Wilder would describe in the 1970s as the most "realistic" of all cameramen he worked with (Seitz would also film *The Lost Weekend* and *Sunset Boulevard*)—explained that "the film was shot in newsreel style . . . we attempted to keep it extremely realistic."²⁰ But his photography is highly stylized, creating a series of images that stress the individual's isolation in the city and the dark menace of the urban environment. Equally suggestive are the interiors of set designer Hal Pereira, which place the characters in locales that trap them, subjecting them to fate-like determinism.

Seitz's moody cinematography sets up the hypnotic rhythmical flow of the story, which is told in flashback voice-over narration by the dying Neff, its duration determined by how long it takes a man to bleed to death. (Wilder would take this narrative strategy even one step further in *Sunset Boulevard*, where events are told by a narrator already dead.) In sharp contrast to the "we" narratives of the war effort, Neff's is a narrative of isolation, dictated into a machine by a lonely man who labels his confession an Office Memorandum, using the impersonal language of an insurance questionnaire, intended "to set the record straight." Voice-over narration, together with the narrative device of the flashback, was comparatively rare prior to the 1940s in American film, gaining preeminence with Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941). The first *noirs* to use it, apart from *Double Indemnity*, were *Laura*; *The Mask of Dimitrios*; and *Murder, My Sweet* (all 1944). As J. P. Telotte has argued, "[t]he voice-over/flashback formula . . . shapes a consciousness that, albeit too late, seeks some perspective on the actions it almost compulsively replays on its dark 'mindscreen,' and in

the process reaches for a new sense of self."²¹ In his narration, Neff tries to find a certain mastery that he has failed to impose on his life. He is where he is precisely because he could not control his desire and greed. When he records his voice onto the grooves of the rotating cylinders, the circling of the machine becomes an image of his entrapment.

Apart from several significant plot changes following the murder of Dietrichson, the introduction of the voice-over/flashback structure was the most important change Wilder and Chandler made to the novel, garnering in fact the praise of Cain: "It's the only picture I ever saw made from my books that had things in it I wish I had thought of ... [Wilder's] device for letting the guy tell the story by taking out the office dictating machine—I would have done it if I had thought of it."²² Similarly, producer Jerry Wald, who would go on to adapt Cain's *Mildred Pierce* for the screen, remarked after seeing *Double Indemnity*: "From now on every picture I make will be done in flashback."²³

The voice-over introduces perspective and subjectivity, central aspects of the modernist text. Wilder further enhanced the unreliability of the narrator by having his story contradicted or called into question by the images. Neff is dishonest in his confession to Keyes when he claims that when Phyllis visits him in his apartment, nothing happens between them, "we just sat there"—the camera tells a different story. As mentioned earlier, Neff also leaves significant stretches of time unaccounted for.

The image track also repeatedly deviates from Neff's perspective, thus giving viewers access to information Neff could not possibly have had, such as Phyllis hiding the gun under a pillow prior to his visit to the Dietrichson home, a scene that is prefaced by her descending the staircase with her anklet shining, but no one present this time to be captured by it. Even more significant is the scene when Neff kills Dietrichson. All we see while we hear his neck snap is a closeup of Phyllis's face that succinctly registers the murder. "[W]hen she hears the fatal snap, there is a thin tensing of her whole body, a slight, eager, forward reflex, her lips parting, then a perceptible settling down, head and neck sinking lightly into the shoulders, a muzziness glazing over the face, the lips closing and shaping a satisfaction that is all but a smile, as the eyes dilate and glisten almost to a tear—rarely has homicidal ice evolved so quietly, succinctly, and completely into such a moist, contented shining."²⁴ We learn from the hardly visible smile how callous and cold she is, gaining an understanding of her character that Neff will only reach much later, at which point the shock of the revelation will hit him harder than the viewers.

The subjectivity of the *noir* narrative shows that *noir* participates in the production of an era's knowledge rather than simply reflecting it. The realism of *noir* is not that of a Balzac. Indebted to modernist techniques of storytelling and character development, and to a visual language that stands in sharp contrast to Hollywood films of recent years, the *noir* text is replete with ambiguity, subjectivity, unreliability, producing tales that

border on the illegible, thereby reflecting its characters' sense of a world out of joint. The social and political forces that determine the lives of the *noir* protagonists often remain incomprehensible to them, one reason why the notion of fate is so central in these films. It appears that Neff's chance encounter with Phyllis has been willed by forces larger than both of them, and that once fate has put its finger on them, there is no escaping from their destinies. Yet while *Double Indemnity* powerfully conveys the feeling of impotence and helplessness, the film is in fact quite eloquent about the particular time and place that produced this tale. Underneath this now classic *noir* resides a topicality that renders the existence of its protagonists in very precise historical terms.

"I don't see why they always have to put what I want on the top shelf"

When Neff meets Phyllis at Jerry's supermarket on Melrose in order to plot the murder of her husband, the clandestine deliberations of the couple are disrupted by a shopper who asks Neff to hand her something she cannot reach. She goes on to comment: "I don't see why they always have to put what I want on the top shelf?" The line about the difficult access to certain goods stands in clear contrast to the fully stocked aisles at Jerry's supermarket, suggesting that no matter how hard one tries one will never attain certain things. The desire to get what is out of reach is of course what propels the murderous schemes of Neff and Phyllis. In fact, they can be seen to take the store advertisement "More for Less" just a little too literally.

For contemporary viewers, the throwaway line by a bit player never again seen in the film must also have had a very concrete resonance. The scenes at Jerry's—the only location to be seen during daytime, and the only set that actually looks like a set—are both a reminder of the abundance of consumer goods during prewar times as well as a promise for a speedy postwar recovery. Although it is a somewhat improbable location in terms of plot (why not sneak into the same restaurant Neff considers safe for his rendezvous with Lola?) Jerry's provides the perfect setback for the film's overall point about consumer culture. The images of the stocked supermarket echoed the heavy advertising that began in 1943/44 of plentiful and universally affordable consumer goods, promised to be available as soon as the war would be over. (A production still actually shows police guarding the shelves because of wartime rationing of foods.) The woman's comment about things out of reach thus casts a specific doubt about the optimism of postwar recovery then promoted (while also creating some sympathy for the crime of cheating the insurance company). It expresses, in fact, the widespread fear among Americans that the decade-long Depression that had marred prewar America will return to haunt them.



Figure 2.5. Production still with L.A. police

The lingering shadow of the Depression is indeed, I believe, the historical master narrative that informs *Double Indemnity* and much of *roman* and *film noir*. A long line of critics, from Borde and Chaumeton, through Schrader, Sylvia Harvey, Dana Polan, and Frank Krutnik, have read *noir* as registering the effects of World War II and postwar disillusion.²⁵ But as David Reid and Jayne L. Walker have shown, many of the social determinants to be played out in *noir* existed already during the Depression, including prejudice against women in the workforce, the crisis of masculinity, and social unrest. They write, “[r]ather than struggling with a depression, the post-war era lived in fear of one, wrestling with a shadow all the more minatory because it obstinately remained a shadow, a phantasm, not a state of affairs.”²⁶

Double Indemnity registers with great accuracy the complex mood of apprehension of US society ca. 1944, when, with the end of war in sight, the return of the repressed/Depressed becomes an imminent threat. While Cain’s novel is set in 1936, the time of its serialized publication in *Liberty* magazine, Neff’s voice-over situates events between May and July of 1938, but throughout the film there are repeated references that the film actually addresses an America preoccupied with what postwar society will look like. (Neff’s quip to Phyllis about the spelling of his name—“with two f’s,

like *The Philadelphia Story*”—is a hint toward the contemporariness of the film, for it is actually an anachronism that references George Cukor’s 1940 film of that title. It is also, of course, a typical Wilder in-joke about the US film industry.)²⁷ The supermarket and the drive-through, two locales that distinctively characterize Neff, did not become prominent until the 1940s.

Mike Davis has argued that the “Depression-crazed middle classes of Southern California became, in one mode or another, the original protagonists of that great anti-myth known as *noir*.”²⁸ The way in which the Depression affected the distribution of wealth, family structures, and gender relations, as well as race relations, is indeed central for understanding the film. The Dietrichsons are prominent members of the Depression-crazed middle class Davis describes. Dietrichson is downwardly mobile, as he has lost his money in the floundering oil business (a plot change from the novel that may be based on Chandler’s career as oil company executive which ended abruptly in 1932). As his wealth has diminished, he has become less attractive for Phyllis who married him precisely for that reason. A former nurse, her anklet and her preference for sweet perfume bought cheaply in Mexico identify her as lower middle class, someone for whom marriage meant a meal ticket. Neff, a professionally successful but under-challenged white-collar worker, slightly mocks the suburbia into which an upwardly mobile middleclass has moved, just before the Depression caught them out. He labels the Dietrichson home a type of house “everyone was nuts about 10 or 15 years ago. This one must have cost someone 30,000 bucks—that is, if he ever finished paying for it” (11). Cain’s protagonist is even more condescending about the pretentiousness of middle-class taste, describing the furniture in the Nirdlinger home (as they are called in the novel) as “Spanish, the kind that looks pretty and sits stiff . . . a rug . . . that would have been Mexican, except it was made in Oakland, California,” with drapes and wall tapestries “right out of the same can.”²⁹

No wonder that the family who resides in such a place is dysfunctional, breeding relationships that will result in violence—the husband allegedly slaps his wife—and murder. Phyllis considers herself a kept woman, an impression underscored by the gold fish in the dark living room, and the anklet she wears, reminiscent of a slave bracelet. All the women in this film are subject to male investigation and moral censure. Keyes shadows Phyllis, just as he scrutinized a woman he was dating. Lola is reprimanded by her father for keeping the wrong company while he also chides his wife for her spendthrift ways. Nino can hardly contain his jealousy when Lola gets a ride with Neff and easily falls for Phyllis’s ruse that Lola deceives him. Gender relations are deeply fraught, and the one true passion that develops in this film—between Neff and Phyllis—is, despite the alliteration between the beginning of her name and the ending of his, a permanent banter of words that eventually turns into an outright war that kills them both. The women in the film resist traditional gender roles. Both Lola

and Phyllis want to control their own destinies, both are ambitious and sexually independent and are fighting to escape from family constraints. Phyllis's femme fatale is certainly a misogynist stereotype propelled by patriarchal fears that women would not accept male-dependent roles after the war, but she (and to a lesser degree Lola too) is also a symbol of rebellion. As Paul Young has observed, the femme fatale "links female identity directly to self-determination, desire and power, giving public expression to women's needs long repressed by the discourse of domesticity."³⁰

For contemporary viewers, Barbara Stanwyck's Phyllis and Fred MacMurray's Walter must have driven home the point about changed gender relations and the crisis of the bourgeois family with even greater force, for both were cast against character (a common and effective practice of Wilder's). MacMurray's scheming murderer was a far cry from the family-oriented, saxophone-playing good guys he had previously embodied. (He would again be cast against character in *The Apartment*, where he plays an exploitative, wife-cheating boss of an insurance company ironically called Consolidated Life.) Stanwyck's femme fatale can be seen as the 1940s answer to the prewar golddiggers she played in many screwball comedies. This genre shares with *noir* an emphasis on the negotiation of female desire and the places available for women in patriarchal society, yet with the important difference that it usually resolves these tensions through containment, as the desire for wealth and independence are given up for true love and marriage. In *The Lady Eve* (Preston Sturges, 1940), for example, Stanwyck plays a scheming woman who uses disguise to swindle a millionaire out of his money, but falls for him in the process. Stanwyck's sharp-tongued Phyllis Dietrichson is anticipated in her Sugarpudding O'Shea in *Ball of Fire* (1941, directed by Howard Hawks and written by Brackett and Wilder), where she is reformed from singer and gangster moll into the wife of a linguistics professor. The only time the two actors were paired before *Double Indemnity* was in *Remember the Night* (1940, directed by Mitchell Leisen and written by Sturges), where MacMurray plays a District Attorney prosecuting Stanwyck for jewelry theft, but falls in love with her. Read against these narratives of reforming and containing the woman, the femme fatale has a dimension of liberation, and even though in most *noirs* she ends up punished or dead, it is clear that male fear of female freedom is what is at issue. Alluding to Weimar cinema's most famous—and unpunished—femme fatale, Marlene Dietrich, Phyllis Dietrichson has to be read as a complex symbol of female sexuality in wartime US society whose story, we must not forget, gets told by Walter Neff.

The relation between genders is certainly the most recurrent barrier that *noir* characters have to confront. But equally important is how the transformation of the urban setting affects societal structures. That the Dietrichsons buy a home in the Los Feliz hills is not only a sign of their (shortlived) upward mobility but also an early example of white flight from the inner city that would become widespread after the war. The Depression, as the

hitherto most profound crisis of modern capitalism, not only led to a radical redistribution of wealth and the impoverishment of large sections of society, but also dramatically changed the look of the big cities. By the 1940s, hundreds of thousands of southern African Americans were leaving rural areas in the hope of finding work in the weapon and ammunition industries of New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles. Their arrival was not matched by an integrationist housing policy, and more and more people were crammed into core urban spaces. *Double Indemnity*, as most other films of this period, does not focus on how the influx of blacks and other minorities dramatically changed the social formation of the city, despite the film's claim to urban realism. As Julian Murphet has argued, race relations are indeed the political unconscious of *noir*, and their exclusion from representation forms an act of repression that wants "out."³¹ While I do not claim that *Double Indemnity* openly challenges Hollywood's practice of marginalizing race issues, I would argue that Wilder's status as outsider and refugee from anti-Semitism left him with an increased sensitivity to conscious or unconscious racism. Thus *Double Indemnity* not only highlights the presence of minorities in Los Angeles, but also aligns their marginalization with the outsider status and alienation of Neff. Neff's only contact in his anonymous apartment building is "a colored woman [who] comes in twice a week" (rather than a Filipino man as in Cain's novel) and the African-American garage attendant Charlie. Charlie in fact becomes instrumental in establishing Neff's alibi—for which Neff takes the same



Figure 2.6. Neff and Charlie: Being Black is a form of exile

service stairway that Charlie presumably uses—with the other witness for his alleged presence being Neff’s office mate, Lou Schwartz, a Westwood Jew.³² That a Black and a Jew (whose name means ‘black’ in German) are Neff’s most important allies in his efforts to crook the system speaks volumes about their shared status as outsiders and underdogs. (Around this time, Langston Hughes commented on the racism in the film industry by saying, “so far as Negroes are concerned, [Hollywood] might just as well be controlled by Hitler.”³³)

The tenuous alliance between Neff, Schwartz, and Charlie is a rare exception within a city the film shows to be racially segregated. Downtown black janitors clean the Pacific All-Risk offices at Sixth and Olive at night. They are central for labor, but marginalized in the social formation. Significantly, we do not know where they live. The Greek American, Garlopis, lives in Inglewood, a cheap suburb. He tries to cheat the insurance but only gets a mock-naturalization lesson from Keyes, who instructs him how to open a door on his way out. When Neff tries to get away from it all, he drives to the hills above the Hollywood Bowl, the Santa Monica beach, and most significantly, Olvera Street, the historic Mexican part of town. A figurative border crossing in contrast to the literal one he later attempts in vain, Olvera Street provides Neff with the right locale to seduce Lola into silence.

As a period film, *Double Indemnity* cannot make references to current political events, but it portrays the denigration of the public sphere and the opening of rifts in society that were starting to be felt in 1943/44. Even though Zachetti is of Italian descent, contemporary viewers may have seen in him someone who potentially participated in the famous Zoot-Suit riots of June 1943, three months before Wilder began shooting, a nationwide insurrection that turned especially violent in Los Angeles. They were so called because of the attire of the black and Mexican youths, intended to defy the War Production Board’s rationing of cloth. If one bears in mind the racial tension and increasing segregation of Los Angeles at this time, one may get a deeper understanding of what Raymond Chandler meant when he wrote in 1944 the oft-quoted phrase: “The streets were dark with something more than night.”³⁴

Finally, beyond this topicality concerning the radical changes affecting the social fabric of Los Angeles, the film can also be read as a reflection of the changes within the film industry at the time. As has been pointed out, the set of the Pacific All-Risk Insurance Company is an exact replica of the Paramount office in New York. Naremore claims that the barter between Keyes and Neff resembles story conferences in the writers’ annex at Paramount more than exchanges in real-life insurance business. Furthermore, legend has it that Neff’s apartment resembles Wilder’s rooms at the Chateau Marmont, the building in which both he and Peter Lorre lived in 1934/35. One could also surmise that Neff’s past as peddler of vacuum

cleaners must bear some resemblance to a freelance writer trying to sell a film script, as Wilder had to do when he first came to Hollywood.³⁵

No matter how much weight one gives such biographical information, *Double Indemnity* is a film that suggests strong similarities between the film and the insurance industry. Both types of business turn human beings into commodities, where the value of a human life—be it his or her stardom or health and occupational hazard—can be calculated in dollars. The film's dialogue and voice-over is littered with mention of premiums, sales strategies, agents' commissions, actuarial tables (graphs decorate the office of Keyes, who can recite statistics by heart), insurance policies, and their arcane language and myriad clauses, including the double indemnity clause that gives the film its title.³⁶ We can hear insurance lingo in Neff's *double entendre* to Ms. Dietrichson that she is "not fully covered," referring to her being draped in nothing but a towel and the expiring car insurance. And the language of commerce also informs his parting words to Phyllis, when after she has explained why she could not fire the second shot, he expresses his disbelief by saying "I am not buying." (Significantly, throughout the film he calls her 'baby,' as if she is a brand, not a woman.) The insurance business, again like the film industry, is a state within the state, creating its own rules and striving for autarchy. Pacific All-Risk takes the persecution of criminals into its own hands, as the police do not seem interested in the Dietrichson case. In fact, any form of law enforcement is completely absent from the film, its place being filled by Keyes who explains the police's ineffectiveness strictly in monetary terms: "It's not their dough." The laws of capitalism also rule the insurance company's ethical standards, as is exemplified in their unwillingness to offer coverage to one of its own employees, the elevator operator, because he has a bad heart.

If one reads *Double Indemnity's* portrayal of capitalism and the insurance business as an allegory of the increasing commercialization of Hollywood, then Wilder's view on the film industry is in fact not that far from what his fellow-exile Theodor W. Adorno was putting on paper at about the same time. Living within walking distance of Wilder—except that no one ever walks in Los Angeles—Adorno wrote in his memoir *Minima Moralia* and the coauthored *Dialectics of Enlightenment* (with Max Horkheimer) about the commodification of the culture industry in Los Angeles. Adorno was suggesting that American mass culture and mass society were the most blatant signs of a modernity gone awry, a perversion of enlightened ideals of reason and progress that had actually led to a "verwaltete Welt" (administered world) that produced murder in industrial proportions at Auschwitz. Wilder never made such an explicit connection between mass murder and mass culture. But news about the Nazis' use of gas in their extermination camps may in fact have been the unspoken reason why Wilder shied away from showing MacMurray being executed with gas at Folsom prison, after having already filmed what is purportedly an eighteen-minute sequence. This sequence would certainly



Figure 2.7. Neff in the gas chamber with Keyes watching

have driven home *Double Indemnity's* point about the end-of-the-line kind of rationalism that informs industrial culture in California, as Naremore persuasively argues.³⁷ It remains unclear why Wilder decided to scratch the scene. In interviews, he has repeatedly stated that it was redundant—a change of mind that is unusual with a cost-conscious director who rarely double guessed himself. It is more likely that the news about the use of gas in Nazi concentration camps made Wilder change his mind. In contrast to Adorno, Wilder would have shied away from any implicit comparison between Hitler's Third Reich and an American democracy that was sparing no resources—including sixteen million men in arms in 1944—to end the reign of terror in Western and Central Europe. And despite his attacks on the film industry, he still considered film an effective medium to confront political grievances, no matter what compromises were necessary.

Notes

1. Billy Wilder quoted in Louis Giannetti, *Masters of the American Cinema* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1981), 315.

2. Quotations are taken from Billy Wilder and Raymond Chandler, *Double Indemnity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) which is a reprint of the script housed at the Academy of Motion Pictures Archive. It should be pointed out that the filmed version differs from the script in numerous ways. Hereafter cited parenthetically.
3. First published in Paris by *Les Editions du Minuit* in 1955, the book was not translated into English in its entirety until 2002. The foundational critical texts on *noir* are gathered in *The Film Noir Reader*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight, 1996).
4. Paul Schrader, "Notes on *Film Noir*," in *The Film Noir Reader*, 53–63. The most sustained analysis of the visuals of *noir* are found in "Some Visual Motifs of *Film Noir*," by Janey Place and Lowell Peterson, in *The Film Noir Reader*, 65–76.
5. Even though Schrader would become an influential proponent of the significance of German expressionism, many subsequent critics overlooked the fact that he also warned of the danger "of over-emphasizing the German influence in Hollywood." ("Notes on *Film Noir*," 55.)
6. A comprehensive critique of the sources of *noir* is found in Lutz Koepnick's, *The Dark Mirror: German Cinema Between Hitler and Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). The following observations are indebted to Koepnick's perceptive analysis.
7. A prominent example of this conflation of temporal and spatial difference is Barbara Steinbauer-Grötsch's richly illustrated *Die lange Nacht der Schatten: Film Noir und Filmexil* (Berlin: Bertz, 1997), which reads *noir* as an expression of the "nightmare" of exile that draws on the shared roots of Weimar cinema and hardboiled fiction in European Romanticism and gothic horror. For a critical review of this book see: Thomas Koebner, "Caligaris Wiederkehr in Hollywood? Stummfilm-Expressionismus, 'Filmemigranten' und Film noir," in *Innen-Leben: Ansichten aus dem Exil*, ed. Hermann Haarmann (Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1995), 107–119.
8. To claim that Wilder can "trace his roots" to German Expressionism, as Richard Schickel and many other critics have claimed, is certainly off the mark (see Schickel, *Double Indemnity*, London: BFI, 1992, 16). When preparing to shoot *The Major and the Minor*, Wilder quipped that the studios were expecting him to do some "Caligari-thing," but he surprised them by making a quintessential Hollywood genre film.
9. Marc Vernet, "Film Noir on the Edge of Doom," in *Shades of Noir*, ed. Joan Copjec (New York: Verso, 1993), 1–31. Similarly, James Naremore writes: "All the stylistic features ... can be found in features that have never been classified as *noir*. By the same token, relatively few can be found in a certifiable hard-boiled classic such as *The Big Sleep*," in *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, 167. For a critique of Vernet's deconstruction of *noir*, see Alain Silver's "Introduction" to the *Film Noir Reader*, 3–15.
10. Thomas Elsaesser, "A German Ancestry to *Film Noir*? Film History and Its Imaginary," *Iris* 21 (1996): 129–143; here 138. A revised version of this article is included in Elsaesser's *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2000).
11. Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 49.
12. On the notion of parallel modernities see Edward Dimendberg, "Down these Seen Streets a Man Must Go: Siegfried Kracauer's 'Hollywood Terror Films,' and the Spatiality of *Film Noir*," *New German Critique* 89 (2003): 113–143; especially 126–133.
13. Quoted in David Reid and Jayne L. Walker, "Strange Pursuit: Cornell Woolrich and the Abandoned City of the Forties," in *Shades of Noir* 56–96; here 61.
14. *Double Indemnity* received Academy Award nominations for: Best Picture, Best Actress (Barbara Stanwyck), Best Director (Billy Wilder), Best Sound Recording (Loren Ryder), Best B/W Cinematography (John Seitz), Best Score (Miklós Rózsa), and Best Screenplay (Billy Wilder and Raymond Chandler). However, it failed to win any awards.
15. The connection between *noir* and modernism is the subject of James Naremore's excellent study *More Than Night*, to which my subsequent remarks are indebted.
16. The anecdote-ridden story of Wilder's collaboration with Chandler is rendered in William Lühr, *Raymond Chandler and Film* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1991).

17. Fitzgerald, "Echoes of the Jazz Age," quoted in Jeffrey Meyers, "Introduction," *Double Indemnity* vii–xv; here viii.
18. See Crowe 53. In an interview with John Allyn, Wilder explained that what interested him in Lang's film was "off-screen murder." (See John Allyn, "Double Indemnity: A Policy that Paid Off," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 6 [1978]: 116–124; here 122.)
19. See Vernet, "Film Noir on the Edge of Doom," 8.
20. Quoted in Michel Ciment, "Entretien avec Billy Wilder," *Positif* 120 (Oct 1970): 4–17; here 16.
21. J. P. Telotte, *Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir* (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 54.
22. "Tough Guy: James M. Cain Interviewed by Peter Brunette and Gerald Peary," *Film Comment* May–June (1976): 50–57; here 55.
23. Quoted in *Mildred Pierce: Script and Commentary*, ed. Albert J. LaValley, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 29.
24. Alan Spiegel, "Seeing Triple: Cain, Chandler and Wilder on *Double Indemnity*," *Mosaic* 16.1–2 (1983): 83–101; here 95.
25. See Sylvia Harvey, "Women's Place: The Absent Family of *Film Noir*," in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: BFI, 1978), 22–34; and Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).
26. Reid and Walker, "Strange Pursuit," 65.
27. It is hardly a coincidence that many contemporary reviews overlooked the fact that the film is set in prewar Los Angeles. Much of the film takes place at night, or in locales such as the Dietrichson home which are dark even during daytime, evoking the blacked-out city during wartime. Since neither fashion nor car models changed much during the war because of rationing of resources, the typical period indicators are missing, and thus it was thus easy to set a film in 1938 and have it look like a contemporary film.
28. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London and New York: Verso, 1990), 37.
29. James M. Cain, *Double Indemnity* (New York: Random House, 1964), 4.
30. Paul Young, "(Not) The Last Noir Essay: *Film Noir* and the Crisis of Postwar Interpretation," *The Minnesota Review* 55–57 (2002): 203–221; here 210. For a detailed discussion of the dialectic of the femme fatale see the essays in *Women in Film Noir*, as well as Elisabeth Cowie's "Film Noir and Women" in *Shades of Noir* 121–165.
31. Julian Murphet, "Film Noir and the Racial Unconscious," *Screen* 39.1 (1998): 22–35. Murphet's is only one of several important recent interventions into the connection of race and *noir*. Eric Lott argues that "the troping of white darkness has a racial source that is all the more insistent for seeming off to the side. Film noir is replete with characters of color who populate and signify the shadows of white American life in the 1940s. *Noir* may have pioneered Hollywood's merciless exposure of white pathology, but by relying on race to convey that pathology, it in effect erected a cordon sanitaire around the circle of corruption it sought to penetrate." Eric Lott, "The Whiteness of Film Noir," in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill, New York: New York, University Press, 1997: 81–101; here 85. While some of my observations below are indebted to Lott's very original analysis, I disagree with his overall reading of *Double Indemnity* as a racialized drama of interiority. While the film cannot escape Hollywood's practices of othering and marginalization, it is successful in highlighting race as a structuring absence of *noir*. I agree with Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo who take Lott to task for "oversimplif[ying] the anxiety over blackness in *noir*." *Noir Anxiety*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 5.
32. As Anton Kaes has argued in regard to Fritz Lang's *Fury*, the film suggests that "blacks are exiles in American society." In this film set in 1935, the political instability and racial tension caused by the Depression are articulated through an implicit comparison of mob violence in prefascist and Nazi Germany and the contemporary United States. See Anton

- Kaes, "A Stranger in the House: Fritz Lang's *Fury* and the Cinema of Exile," *New German Critique* 89 (2003): 33–58; here 48.
33. Quoted in Davis, *City of Quartz*, 42.
 34. Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder."
 35. See Naremore, *More Than Night*, 86; and Sikov, *On Sunset Boulevard*, 207.
 36. On the use of insurance language in *Double Indemnity* see Nicholas Christopher, *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 112ff.
 37. Naremore, 81–95.

Chapter 3

IN THE RUINS OF BERLIN: A FOREIGN AFFAIR (1948)

“We wondered where we should go now that the war was over. None of us—I mean the émigrés—really knew where we stood. Should we go home? Where was home?”

—Billy Wilder¹

Sightseeing in Berlin

Early into *A Foreign Affair*, the delegates of the US Congress in Berlin on a fact-finding mission are treated to a tour of the city by Colonel Plummer (Millard Mitchell). In an open sedan, the Colonel takes them by landmarks such as the Brandenburg Gate, the Reichstag, Pariser Platz, Unter den Linden, and the Tiergarten. While documentary footage of heavily damaged buildings rolls by in rear-projection, the Colonel explains to the visitors—and the viewers—what they are seeing, combining brief factual accounts with his own ironic commentary about the ruins. Thus, a pile of rubble is identified as the Adlon Hotel, “just after the 8th Air Force checked in for the weekend,” while the Reich’s Chancellery is labeled Hitler’s “duplex.” “As it turned out,” Plummer explains, “one part got to be a great big padded cell, and the other a mortuary. Underneath it is a concrete basement. That’s where he married Eva Braun and that’s where they killed themselves. A lot of people say it was the perfect honeymoon. And there’s the balcony where he promised that his Reich would last a thousand years—that’s the one that broke the bookies’ hearts.”

On a narrative level, the sequence is marked by factual snippets infused with the snide remarks of victorious Army personnel, making the film waver between an educational program, an overwrought history lesson, and a comedy of very dark humor. This generic ambiguity is underscored on the visual level: documentary footage is spliced into the studio photography of the Congress delegation in a limousine obviously kept in motion by the illusion of an outside passing by, and by invisible studio hands gently rocking the vehicle. To these contrasts in genre and tone, soon a

political tension is added. Just as Plummer is telling the group about the Zoo bunkers in the Tiergarten, the only female member of the delegation, Miss Frost (Jean Arthur), begins to detect signs of American fraternization with the German women, and non-diegetic, upbeat music sets in. Soon thereafter, while Plummer lectures the Congressmen about the SS, a flabbergasted Frost records in her little book the consequences of such rapprochement—a German woman pushing a baby carriage with two American flags attached to it while upbeat music flares up. If Frost is shocked by such miscegenation, for Plummer the close tie that has evolved between Germans and Americans is a positive sign for the future. Baseball, Plummer believes, will help the youth unlearn blind obedience and turn them into true democrats (“If they steal now, it’ll be second base”), and the fact that a German baby has been christened DiMaggio Schulz is for him a clear sign that reeducation is working.

The political and aesthetic tensions that mark this sequence are not only indicative of the overall structure of *A Foreign Affair* but are also reflective of the historical factors and discursive strategies that shaped the making and reception of the film. Conceived in 1945, set in the spring of 1946, filmed in 1947 (with some documentary footage from 1945), and released in 1948, *A Foreign Affair* is both a taking stock of, and an intervention into, the role of the United States in immediate postwar Germany. The film’s central concern is the future of Germany and what America has to do with it. This task includes assessing the legacy of the Third Reich and the question of collective guilt; searching for native traditions untainted by Nazi rule; and outlining the scope and purpose of the US occupation, de-Nazification, and reeducation. To make matters even more complicated, the film chooses to address these political concerns by way of a sexual comedy (which makes for the double entendre of the title). Made by an erstwhile refugee from Hitler at the precise point as he is contemplating a return to Germany, it is informed by multiple and contradictory perspectives that defy easy political categorization, its mixed messages a clear indication of the conflicted and overdetermined position of exile cinema.

In what follows, I want to explore the political questions the film raises and their translation on the visual and narrative level along three distinct axes of inquiry: the political function of film in postwar Germany and Wilder’s role in it; the film’s curious mix of styles and genres which shows an indebtedness to various Hollywood traditions as well as a search for German cinematic traditions appropriate for post-Nazi filmmaking; and Wilder’s use of stars as gendered allegories of nation.

Selling a Few Ideological Items

Commenting on the issue of remigration, Wilder’s fellow exile Theodor W. Adorno wrote: “It is an ancient tradition that those who are arbitrarily

and blindly driven out of their homeland by tyranny return after its down-fall."² For the anti-assimilationist Adorno it was a foregone conclusion that he would return to Germany as soon as possible, but the defeat of Nazi Germany also occasioned many successful film professionals to consider a return to Europe. Thus Fritz Lang, Robert Siodmak, Douglas Sirk, William Dieterle, and Peter Lorre would return to Germany for shorter or extended stays where they met with very mixed professional success. Among the very few emigrants to actually set foot in Berlin in 1945 were the German-Jewish writer Curt Riess, who arrived in the capital in July; the actress Marlene Dietrich, who was reunited with her mother in Tempelhof airfield in September; and Billy Wilder, who arrived there in August, after already having flown over the city with a cameraman earlier that summer. All three were naturalized Americans returning to Germany in uniform and with various assignments. Riess was reporting for the American press, Dietrich was performing for the American troops at the Titania Palast, and Wilder had an appointment as colonel in the US Army's Division of Psychological Warfare. While Wilder and Dietrich would end up collaborating on *A Foreign Affair*, Riess's vignettes and portraits of the city, which he collected in *Berlin Berlin*, capture much of the immediate postwar reality that also informs the film.³

As a former employee in the pre-Nazi German film industry and now an acclaimed writer-director in Hollywood, Wilder was to assist the military in its task to reconstruct the film industry in occupied Germany. The US military government considered film instrumental for confronting Germans with the atrocities they had committed, but also for providing Germans relief from the horrible conditions in postwar Germany. Film was thus to serve an educational, democratizing, and an escapist purpose. As Wilder recalled, Germans would receive ration cards only if they were willing to sit through documentaries that detailed the atrocities of the Nazis and that challenged viewers to face moral and political responsibilities many were eager to forget.⁴ At the same time, American-produced feature films were to provide German viewers with a diversion from the wretched conditions under which they lived while subtly instilling them with the democratic virtues the heroes of these films embodied. As it turned out, Wilder became involved in both tasks.

Since cinema had been a central propagandistic tool in the Nazi State, the film industry was the last among the German media to reenter the public sphere after the Allies' occupation, and the most heavily scrutinized. Through his work at Ufa, Wilder knew the industry well before it was taken over by Goebbels, and he was therefore enlisted for many so-called de-Nazification interviews that were to establish who would be allowed to work again. Wilder also worked on editing *Die Todesmühlen/Death Mills*, a documentary about concentration camps directed by Hanuš Burger and using footage taken by the Allies when they liberated the camps.⁵ This was a particularly demanding task for Wilder since at that point he was



Figure 3.1. Poster of *Todesmühlen*

still searching for clues as to whether his mother and grandmother had survived the Holocaust. At any moment, the images in front of him could be of his family, but Wilder did not see them. Only later a letter from the Red Cross confirmed their deaths in Auschwitz.⁶

While Wilder was eager to have *Todesmühlen* screened in front of German audiences, he also realized that the long-lasting educational effect of atrocity films was limited.⁷ He was equally skeptical of the apolitical diversion provided by standard US entertainment films that were later to flood the American Zone. Wilder thus postponed his actual task in Germany, which was to write a report on the state of the production facilities and personnel available for use in the industry, and instead pitched his own idea about a film to the Office of Military Government in Germany/United States (OMGUS). The so-called “Wilder Memorandum” contains the director’s credo about the politics of feature films made for postwar German audiences:

Cover Girl [1944, starring Gene Kelly and Rita Hayworth] is a fine film... It has a love story, it has music and it is in Technicolor. However, it does not particularly help us in our program of re-educating the German people. Now if there was an entertainment film with Rita Hayworth or Ingrid Bergman or Gary Cooper, in Technicolor if you wish, and with a love story—only with a very special love story, cleverly devised to sell us a few ideological items—such a film would provide us with a superior piece of propaganda; they would stand in long lines to buy, and once they bought it, it would stick. Unfortunately, no such film exists yet. It must be made. I want to make it.⁸

Wilder then goes on to outline central elements of the plot, the characters, and the location of the film that would later become *A Foreign Affair*. Yet in this outline, the real protagonist is clearly the city of Berlin, “a mad, depraved, starving, fascinating” town, whose atmosphere Wilder had soaked up for two weeks, and of which he photographed “every corner.” He even boasts to have already secured the rights to the famous song “Berlin kommt wieder” (“Berlin Will Be Back”).⁹

What the “Memorandum” does not state is that Wilder’s original role as observer and consultant for OMGUS was actually in conflict with his professional interest as director and writer at Paramount. His evaluation in the memo that “no production of German pictures is possible in the near future” clearly served his argument that Americans needed to make movies for Germans, but it neglects to consider the feasibility of a German film industry. Thus Wilder made no mention of the fact that the film studios at Geiseltal near Munich had survived the war in good condition, or that in the Soviet sector the centralized DEFA film studios were already beginning to produce German films. In contrast to the Americans who favored an acceptance of history as told by the victors, the Soviets were promoting film as a tool of self discovery through which Germans were to reeducate themselves about their history. The Americans were also initially far more reluctant than the Soviets to issue licenses to professionals employed in the film industry of the Third Reich. Since many German directors, actors, cameramen, and technicians had been more or less active members of the NSDAP there were few who could boast moral integrity *and* professional

credentials. Strict measures of de-Nazification meant limiting the rebuilding of the German film industry and thus supporting Wilder's argument about producing film for Germans in the US. An oft-quoted anecdote underscores Wilder's tough stand on former Nazis. When approached by actor Anton Lang, a former member of the SS, who asked if he could play the role of Christ in the Oberammergau Passion Play, Wilder famously quipped: "Yes, provided they use real nails in the Crucifixion scene."¹⁰ But in reality, US de-Nazification procedures relaxed quickly with the onset of the Cold War and the blockade of Berlin in 1948, and rapid reconstruction of the film industry took precedence over thorough de-Nazification, ultimately leading to an uncanny continuity between the German film industry of the Third Reich and that of the 1950s.

Wilder's memorandum exudes the commercialism typical of the US film industry, which after 1945 was looking to be rewarded for its wartime support of Washington, even though that support had already spelled revenue at the home box office. With Germany no longer sealed off from the outside and its film industry in shambles, a substantial new foreign market was opening up, even if that market would not yet yield any significant revenue.¹¹ Wilder's pitch for a love story with high production values promotes a product for which there would not only be high demand but one which Germany's rudimentary film industry could not yet provide.¹²

A Foreign Affair would be Wilder's most daring attempt yet to use entertainment in order to "sell a few ideological items," yet what precisely



Figure 3.2. Wilder shooting on location in Berlin

those items were was far from predictable. If one compares Wilder's brief story outline from 1945 with the 1947 script and the actual film, one notices that in the latter the moral ambiguity of his characters has been dramatically increased, an indication that in the two-year span Wilder had become doubtful about the mission of the Allied occupation. Originally, the film was to focus on a German "Trümmerfrau" who sees no meaning in living in a defeated country and is ready to commit suicide as soon as the Americans have turned on the gas again. Through her encounter with Occupation forces, she will slowly regain a modicum of hope and a certain degree of self esteem. As for the GI, he was not to be "a flag waving hero," but a man not "too sure of what the hell this [i.e., the war and occupation] was all about." The character as played by John Lund, however, has no quarrel with enjoying the spoils of the victor, bartering on the black market, and even hiding the incriminating file of his German mistress for sexual favors. The Marlene Dietrich character is even further away from Wilder's original figure. While she may live in a bombed-out apartment, she is no brick-shoveling rubble woman, but a glamorous nightclub singer who knows how to survive in a starving city. She defies being a victim and defends her opportunism by pointing to the moral corruption of those empowered to judge her. Through the introduction of the delegation from Congress, the focus shifts from an assessment of the German state of mind around 1946 to one of America's position on Germany, ultimately questioning American hypocrisy more than the legacy of Nazism. Nevertheless, the film does defend the merits of reeducation through the pragmatic Colonel Plummer, who can be seen as a mouthpiece of the discourse of the Occupation force:

"There is still a lot of hunger—but there is a new will to live. We had to build schools and find teachers and then teach the teachers. We have helped them start a free press and institute a parliamentary government. They've just had their first free elections in fourteen years... It was like handing the village drunk a glass of water. What I want to point out is that it's a tough, thankless, lonely job. We're trying to lick it as well as we can."

Certainly, the film raises more questions than it answers, and the very different political perspectives are only seemingly reconciled in the hastily arranged happy ending that sees the American Congresswoman return to America with a converted Captain Pringle.

As in his prior work, Wilder's commitment to commercially viable filmmaking did not compromise his penchant for challenging both the industry and the audience. Indeed, this would be truer for *A Foreign Affair* than for any of his previous films. Made by an émigré who returns as ranking officer in the occupying army to the city that he loved and from which he had to flee, the film is saturated with ambiguity—with a nostalgia seeking to recover a better past so as to forge a better future, but also with the urge to take the Germans to task for the atrocities of Nazi rule,

thereby disallowing historical amnesia and a simple plea for innocence. Americans, in turn, are being confronted with a less than flattering image of their occupying force, and with a portrayal of Berlin that celebrates the city's resilience, wit, and irreverence. Planned as a glossy studio production suitable for export to Germany, the film's main predicament was that it needed to communicate certain "ideological items" to very different audiences. As it turned out, *A Foreign Affair* was a commercial success, but American critics had mixed reactions, Congress attacked it, and OMGUS considered the film inappropriate for the German public.¹³ Ironically, it was Wilder's successor as film officer, veteran producer Erich Pommer, who would eventually approve the film for distribution in Germany, but it would not be premiered until May 1977, when the state-run television station ARD showed it.

Screening the Rubble

The multiple perspectives of *A Foreign Affair* not only stem from the contradictory conception of the film. They also inform the way in which it consciously situates itself vis-à-vis two distinct though interrelated film histories, namely the styles and genres of 1930s and 1940s Hollywood as well as German film of the Weimar, Nazi, and postwar eras. *A Foreign Affair* could indeed be seen as a synthesis of Wilder's American sexual comedies such as *Ninotchka* (which actually premiered in Germany in December of 1948), *Midnight*, and *The Major and the Minor*, as well as 1930s classic Weimar cinema, stressing its affinities to the latter to such an extent that one reviewer wondered where the Ufa trademark was.¹⁴ At the same time, it alludes to 1920s expressionism and early 40s *noir* at the very moment when these styles get rearticulated by various American, German, and Italian films of the immediate postwar years.

To unravel the generic layering of *A Foreign Affair*, let us consider its stunning opening. If Billy Wilder's 1945 trip to Berlin provides the biographical seed for *A Foreign Affair*, a visit also sets its plot in motion. The first shot of the film, over which the opening credits roll, shows us a plane traversing the clouds while the soundtrack plays a medley of Erika von Schlütow's songs. Suddenly the music turns from upbeat to ominous as we glimpse the ruins of Berlin from high above. Inside the plane, a delegation from the US Congress is on its way to inspect the troops in Berlin, and the view of bombed-out Berlin prompts the various congressmen to debate what to do with the destroyed city and its inhabitants. While the representative from Texas suggests planting grass and "moving in the longhorns," echoing the Morgenthau plan to turn defeated Germany into an agrarian society, his colleague from the Midwest urges to "get the industry going" and "feed the people." "But let 'em know where it's coming from," the Texan adds, a clear indication of the importance to implant in

the Germans a sense of gratitude to their American liberators for future political developments. This approach is quickly criticized by the only Leftist in the group (presumably a New Deal democrat), representing the Bronx, who earlier lauded the Soviet efforts in the sacking of Berlin and now comments: "If you send a hungry man a loaf of bread it's democracy; if you leave the wrapper on it's imperialism."

The witty oneliners the congressmen shoot at each other quickly identify the film as a comedy, establishing from the outset a fundamental ambiguity about the appropriateness of humor in light of the seriousness of the topic, namely the laborious replacement of one regime by another. Even though Congresswoman Frost is quick to point out to her colleagues that the charge of the committee is merely to investigate the morale of American occupation troops, the opening exchange also indicates that an underlying concern of the film will be what to do with the Germans now that the war is over.

The shots of an airplane descending through the clouds recall the opening of another film intended to "sell a few ideological items," Leni Riefenstahl's famous 1935 documentary *Triumph of the Will*. In that film it was Adolf Hitler who, to Wagner's music, swooped down God-like from high above onto the medieval town of Nuremberg, to be greeted by its enthusiastic burghers and NSDAP party members gathering for the annual Reichsparteitag. Wilder's comic reworking of the scene replaces the Führer's dogmatic message with the pluralistic vision of the six quarreling US representatives, and the welcoming committee—comprised of a half-size military band and a weary Colonel Plummer reminding his troops to behave—is a far cry from the jubilant Nazi supporters of Nuremberg. For the Berliners, however, the power descending from the sky is just another version of political rule to which one needs to adapt, as is made poignantly clear when Erika von Schlütow salutes Captain John Pringle as her *new Führer*: "Heil Johnny."¹⁵

Spoofing Riefenstahl's film certainly indicates which traditions will *not* serve as a model for postwar German filmmaking (and by implication liberal democracy). *Triumph of the Will* was billed as a documentary but in fact was created for and through the camera. With the latest equipment and most skilled film professionals at her command, Riefenstahl's fluid cameras caught images from numerous angles, which she carefully edited into a stream of constant movement. Combined with a score of predominantly classical music, the film turned a monotonous political event comprised of endless speeches and parades into an awe-inspiring aesthetic experience, overwhelming viewers with its sights and sounds. Taken to task after the war for having invented a fascist aesthetics, Riefenstahl defended her film as a realist documentary in which she merely pointed the camera at what was in front of her. *A Foreign Affair* is clearly aware of the complexity of the notion of realism and addresses it in several ways. As stated above, the scene of Plummer's guided tour integrates documentary footage into



Figure 3.3. Dietrich and the Hitler salute

a fictional narrative. As images fade by in the background, Plummer gives his spiel about German history, suggesting a disconnect between documentary footage and the reality of Berlin. In the opening credits we are informed that “A large part of this picture was photographed in Berlin,” when actually 85 per cent of it was filmed in the studio, and none of the major stars came to Berlin for location shooting.¹⁶

The film thus exposes realism as a cinematic convention that creates veracity by adhering to certain codes and modes of representation, of which the self-reflexive use of documentary footage is one important aspect. Thus, in the opening scene and again later, the congressman from Illinois is shown to be filming the devastated Berlin. “Good stuff around election time. ‘The Incumbent Overseas,’” he explains, thereby revealing his true motives for recording life in the ruins of Berlin. Yet if this sequence shows documentary footage to be a somewhat dubious tool for public relation purposes, the newsreel footage that proves how deeply Erika von Schlütow (with a Dietrich made up to look like Riefenstahl) was involved with Nazi brass serves as reliable evidence for the Allies’ de-Nazification efforts, even though there is good reason to doubt the truthfulness of images captured by Nazi cameras.

While *Triumph of the Will* and Riefenstahl's aesthetics are certainly an important subtext of *A Foreign Affair*, there are other, more contemporaneous film styles that raise the question of realism with even more urgency. Notably all of them do so by combining studio sets and location photography of the devastated Germany. The American films of this period which use extensive location photography include Jacques Tourneur's *Berlin Express* (1948), a noirish espionage thriller written by Curt Siodmak and shot mostly in Frankfurt; Fred Zinnemann's neorealist influenced *The Search* (1948), about a young Czech boy, a survivor of Auschwitz, and his mother's search for him in refugee camps all over Germany; and George Seaton's *The Big Lift* (1950) about two Air Force soldiers during the 1948 Berlin airlift. These films share *A Foreign Affair's* ambition to ground and authenticate the narratives by situating them in a clearly defined historical and geographical space, but they differ significantly in how they employ the ruins for aesthetic and moral purposes.¹⁷

The first—and ultimately only—new film genre to emerge in Germany after the war was the rubble film (*Trümmerfilm*), for which the ruins became more than just a location. While they would often provide a dramatic backdrop for the storyline, they are more importantly a metaphor for the traumatized German psyche in the immediate aftermath of the war. The narratives of films in this genre usually revolve around building a new country or community amid the physical destruction and the shadows of the past. They also often portray the hardship of Germans who returned from the front trying to recover—often without success—a sense of home amid the debris. Focusing on German suffering, these films often evade the question to what degree Germans themselves were responsible for the destruction of their cities, and very few of them address the Holocaust.

The very first German film to be shot and premiered after the war became also one of the most significant of the genre—Wolfgang Staudte's 1946 *Die Mörder sind unter uns/The Murderers Are Among Us*, produced by the newly founded DEFA film studios in the Soviet Occupation zone. Together with Roberto Rossellini's neorealist *Germania Anno Zero/Germany, Year Zero* from 1947 (though not released in Germany until 1952), it became the most widely acknowledged portrait of immediate postwar Berlin. Made within one year of each other and produced by the same studio, the two films make remarkably different use of Berlin's ruins, even though both actually mix studio photography with location shooting. Rossellini's film, cowritten by Wilder's longtime friend Max Colpet and much admired by Wilder and Dietrich, is a filmic testimony to Berlin and the Germans of 1945 that revolves around a destitute family, among them a boy who prefers death to life.¹⁸ For Rossellini, the purpose of realism was, in its most reduced definition, finding images that convey the experience of suffering so as to avoid its perpetuation or repetition. *Germania Anno Zero's* sights of a dead, ghostly city with its disconnected streets, piles of detritus, and a landscape of ruins resemble an abstract portrait, turning it into a symbol

not only of Germany's fall but also of a world destroyed by ambition. A cruel and unsentimental film that avoids any optimism, it resonates with *A Foreign Affair's* sober look at Berlin two years later.¹⁹

Die Mörder sind unter uns taps into different traditions of (anti-)realism to convey its sense of postwar Berlin, most strongly German expressionist cinema, itself a reaction to the aftermath of World War I (in contrast to Expressionist poetry, drama, and art which had warned of the coming of the war). Staudte's use of chiaroscuro lighting, distorted camerawork, shadows, and dramatic backdrops that look like cutouts visually capture the inner torment of the film's male protagonist much like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* had done two-and-a-half decades earlier. Relying on ruins rebuilt in the studio for heightened dramatic effect, the film uses location shots to render interiority visible, while the narrative (in somewhat inconsistent ways) mixes expressionism with melodrama. Compared to Rossellini's aesthetic break with tradition, Staudte's film already points to infelicitous continuities between the German cinema of the 1930s and the 1950s.²⁰

Apart from the locations, *Die Mörder sind unter uns* and *A Foreign Affair* have little in common, an indication perhaps how different the outlook was between the exile Wilder and the "Mitläufer" (fellow traveler) Staudte who despite his opposition to Goebbels had to play a small role



Figure 3.4. Incurrrible German Youth

in the anti-Semitic *Jud Süß/Jew Süß* (Veit Harlan, 1940). Where Staudte's film raises the question of how the German nation can heal, only to answer it in humanist rather than political terms, Wilder's film understands de-Nazification as an American, not a German, task, without however putting too much faith in their efforts. *A Foreign Affair* portrays the Germans as having the lessons of Nazism too deeply ingrained in them to promise betterment in the near future. The boy who compulsively draws swastikas is a long, long way from being a good democrat, and his distant cousin, the heal-clicking Schlemmer of Wilder's *One, Two, Three* will still embody authoritarian traits more than a decade later.

Allegories of the Nation

The previous section discusses how different in style and genre Wilder's film is from the many contemporaneous efforts to capture the reality of postwar Germany. Indeed, *A Foreign Affair* is much more indebted to the cinematic traditions that first shaped Wilder's own development as a writer, both at Ufa and Paramount, and it is precisely by consciously alluding to these traditions that the film contributes most to the discourse on postwar German reeducation and cinema. In this section I want to continue my analysis of the dual perspective of Wilder's film by focusing on how these film traditions are embodied by the two female figures in *A Foreign Affair* as well as the stars who played them, Jean Arthur and Marlene Dietrich. Before doing so, however, a few general remarks are in order on how the film anchors itself in both German and American films of the 1930s.

The most direct allusion is of course to *Der blaue Engel/The Blue Angel* (Josef von Sternberg, 1930), which not only launched Marlene Dietrich's international stardom but also underscored Ufa's standings as an artistically innovative and commercially successful studio under the leadership of its star producer Erich Pommer. The look and feel of this film informs virtually every frame of *A Foreign Affair*, whether Dietrich is present or not. The same artist, Friedrich Hollaender, who also happens to play the piano at the Lorelei nightclub, composed the songs for both films.²¹ Performing with him are the Syncopators, whose members were backup musicians on *The Blue Angel*, while the bass drum advertises the Hotel Eden, a famous Berlin establishment of the 1920s. The presence of Hollaender and Dietrich as fellow émigrés recuperates a film culture that has apparently survived the Third Reich unscathed. But unlike the expressionism conjured up by *Die Mörder sind unter uns*, this is a decidedly cosmopolitan (and Jewish) Weimar culture, created partly by foreign talent and celebrating the wit, decadence, and sexual freedom that was soon to become the target of Nazi *völkisch* cultural politics. (Wilder would pay another extended homage to Weimar cabaret culture in *Witness for the Prosecution*, again with Marlene



Figure 3.5. Dietrich with Hollaender at the piano in 1930 and in 1945

Dietrich in the role of a singer.) The sexual barter as a plot device goes back to Wilder's first Ufa scripts, which often revolved around adulterous affairs, temptation, and marital disputes caused by jealousy.

While the references to Weimar cinema are too obvious to be overlooked, it has less often been noted that the brash and witty dialogue of *A Foreign Affair* belongs with Brackett and Wilder's 1930s screwball comedies such as *Ball of Fire* and *Midnight*. The character reversal of Phoebe Frost recalls that of Ninotchka (played by Greta Garbo) in the film of that title. Like Frost, Ninotchka is a political representative sent abroad on her government's mission who experiences her version of a foreign affair as she awakens to consumerism and romance in a Western European capital. And like *A Foreign Affair*, *Ninotchka* satirizes political ideology through what contemporary audiences considered politically incorrect humor. Garbo's pronouncement that "the mass trials [in Moscow] were a great success—there are going to be fewer but better Russians" rivals some of Dietrich's most acerbic lines.

The 1930s are, of course, also the decade that saw both Jean Arthur and Marlene Dietrich rise to stardom in Hollywood, after beginning their careers during the silent era.²² While Dietrich's image as seductress was shaped in a series of highly stylized Paramount productions directed by Josef von Sternberg, Arthur developed a flair for farcical comedy in films by John Ford and Frank Capra, most notably *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), in which she costarred with Gary Cooper and James Stewart, respectively. In the former, she plays a famous journalist who has to cover the doings of a millionaire heir for her paper, while in the latter she is a hard-working, Washington-savvy secretary to freshman senator Smith. In both films she plays an independent, smart, yet down-to-earth woman who rescues a besieged hero and becomes a heroine of sorts herself. Persuaded by Brackett and Wilder to come out of retirement, she was cast against character in *A Foreign Affair* as a prissy, puritanical, and uptight Congresswoman from Iowa who is the butt of many jokes. (Dietrich, for example, comments on her looks by saying: "What a curious way to do your hair—or rather not to do it.") Although one year her senior, Arthur's wide-eyed innocent and somewhat pudgyish Frost comes across as much younger than Dietrich's "used" glamorous-hard appearance. At the beginning of the film, the two women are introduced as direct opposites, with Frost's naïveté emphasized by the film's narration, as the audience finds out about Pringle's corruption long before she does. The alluring and experienced von Schlütow, in contrast, knows about everything, from how to survive in difficult times (be it in Hitler's Germany or the ruins of Berlin) to how to change the line of her eyebrows. (Dietrich herself changed her eye line as part of von Sternberg's makeover of her.) Ironically, Dietrich functions as a role model for Arthur, enlightening her both about men and how to be a woman, in the process corrupting Arthur's moral superiority all the while making her more at-

tractive for Captain Pringle. It is even possible to argue that Frost is more drawn to von Schlütow than Pringle, making Dietrich and not John Lund the center of the love triangle that structures the film. She not only affects Frost's character reversal, but also seems to be the true object of Frost's desire. When von Schlütow's analytically seductive songs melt Frost's defense layers, thereby awakening Frost's own sexuality, Frost's eyes are fixated on her.²³ Building on the Dietrich of the Weimar cabaret and early von Sternberg films at Paramount when the star flaunted her attraction to women, Dietrich's von Schlütow unsettles gender roles, just as she questions the line between what is typically German and what American.

The two women are obvious symbols for the state of mind of the respective countries they come from, and were used as such in the advertising campaign for the film. As one Paramount cartoon had it: "Jean Arthur: The People's Choice in IOWA. Marlene Dietrich: The Army's Choice in BERLIN." The German is a femme fatale with a past, only in this tale that past has not only sexual but also political connotations. Dietrich is cast in the mid-1930s Sternbergian glamor *chiaroscuro*, an ironic comment on her old image with an undercurrent of self-parody. Arthur's face, in contrast, is mostly shown from the front and in full light, giving it the scrubbed look Dietrich ridicules. The morally upright but sexually repressed American with the telling name Frost is a symbol for stability and steadfastness, including puritan virtues and political incorruptibility, but also simple-mindedness, provincialism, and naïveté, while the worldly but cynical von Schlütow represents a defeated yet resilient urban culture where, as Brecht knew, food comes before morals. Yet not only does Miss Frost undergo a character change that will make her closer to Dietrich's allure (including bartering on the black market and singing at the Lorelei), but from the outset the line that divides these two distinct representations of national identity is more blurred than the stereotypes suggest.

Contemporary German audiences especially will have seen more in Phoebe Frost than an American, and more in Marlene Dietrich than a former Nazi. Frost's rhetoric about Berlin being "infected by moral malaria" that needs to be "fumigated with all insecticides at our disposal" resonates not only with official political discourse of US wartime and postwar intelligence but also quotes almost verbatim Nazi rhetoric of defending the purity of the German soul. (Incidentally, the Nazis too considered Berlin a decadent city in need of fumigation.) Frost's straw-blond hair in tight braids, her wholesome features, and her upright posture make her look like the girls in the *Bund deutscher Mädchen* (Confederation of German Girls), and Joseph Goebbels would have been pleased with her restrained sexuality and overall concern with duty to the fatherland. Conservative and virtually crime-free Iowa, where 62 per cent of voters support the Republicans, was certainly not that different from life in the German provinces during the Third Reich. And while the Nazis did not favor women in the role of political leadership, they would have approved of Phoebe



Figure 3.6. Two different German types: BDM girl (Frost) and decadent singer (von Schlütow)

Frost's (initial) sense of restraint and incorruptibility. No wonder, then, that when the two women first confront each other in the film, Dietrich expresses her surprise about Arthur's looks. To Pringle's question as to whether Dietrich realizes to whom she is speaking, Dietrich replies: "An American woman. And I'm a little disappointed, to tell you the truth. We apparently have a false idea about the chic American woman. Oh, I suppose that's publicity from Hollywood."

The film further underscores Arthur's resemblance to German women by the fact that Frost is actually able twice to pass for a German woman—first as "Gretchen Gesundheit" with the American GIs, and then with the German police after being picked up during a raid at the Lorelei. Afterwards, at her apartment, von Schlütow comments on Frost's lack of honesty vis-à-vis the German police, "Now you're one of us." When Frost leaves that apartment, in the one moment the film bestows true dignity on her after she finds out about Pringle's feelings for von Schlütow, she walks alone among the dark ruins, the looming shadows of the destroyed buildings now also an appropriate metaphor for the state of mind of an *American*.

Just as Jean Arthur's Phoebe Frost is more than just an American woman, Marlene Dietrich plays a German who for many contemporary viewers must have looked very un-German. A native Berliner, Dietrich had left Germany in 1930 with von Sternberg after her success in *The Blue Angel* and under his direction became a major star at Paramount. Her role as Erika von Schlütow thus goes back not only to *Lola Lola*, but also to her American roles of Amy Jolly, *Blonde Venus*, *Shanghai Lily*, and *Concha Perez*. As Gaylyn Studlar has shown, Dietrich was carefully Americanized by Paramount studios, a process that ironically occurred at the hands of such European directors as von Sternberg and Ernst Lubitsch (and later Wilder). Hers was the kind of image of womanhood the Nazis derided, and one that in the immediate postwar years would be associated with the alleged "decadence" of American society propagated by the Nazis. (Many Germans in fact considered Dietrich a traitor, and her 1960 tour through Germany was picketed with signs that read "Marlene, go home!") Yet even though Goebbels discredited the parts Dietrich played in Hollywood, he repeatedly extended generous offers to her to rejoin the German film industry under his command, which she steadfastly refused. Having become a US citizen in 1939, she entertained American troops during the war for extended periods in North Africa and Italy. By wearing her own dress from the USO shows in the *Lorelei* scenes, Dietrich underscores the continuity between her on-screen and off-screen incarnations. That she now performs in a Berlin nightclub creates the illusion of a permanent return to her native city (even if, as noted earlier, all her scenes were shot on the Paramount lot.) Seen in this light, the title of Wilder's film may have suggested to Berliners that Dietrich's liaison with America, *her* foreign affair, was now over.

There are thus multiple ironies in casting the steadfast opponent to Hitler as the former concubine of a high-ranking Nazi. Because of Dietrich's performances for the USO, a widely publicized and carefully integrated part of her star image, her Erika von Schlütow is a complex and contradictory figure. Dietrich's appearance in the film conjures up the memory not only of all of her previous roles but also her off-screen and public persona, turning the figure of the Nazi sympathizer into a politically much more layered and ultimately sympathetic character. After all, Erika von Schlütow continues what Marlene had been doing during the war, namely "taking care of the boys." When at the end of the film von Schlütow gets sent off to a labor camp under the escort of first two, then four, and finally five GIs (each assigned to watch the others watch von Schlütow) the audience registers with relief that she will in all likelihood avoid harsh punishment. Marlene's exit as an unrepentant and unpunished German provides a strong contrast to the highly conventional (and improbable) melodramatic climax that finds the two Americans united and going home together—a conclusion obviously meant to placate the Production Code Administration that remains too unconvincing to be taken seriously.

Before the Curtain Fell

Nine months before the capitulation of the German Wehrmacht, Theodor W. Adorno reflected in Los Angeles on the issue of justice in a future Germany. "To the question what is to be done with the defeated Germany, I could say only two things in reply. Firstly: at no price, on no conditions, would I wish to be an executioner or to supply legitimations for executioners. Secondly: I should not wish, least of all with legal machinery, to stay the hand of anyone who was avenging past misdeeds. This is a thoroughly unsatisfactory, contradictory answer, one that makes a mockery of both principle and practice. But perhaps the fault lies in the question and not only in me."²⁴ Billy Wilder's *A Foreign Affair* offers a similarly unsatisfactory answer to the question Adorno raises. His mixed messages about good and bad Germans, about sincere reeducation and American simple mindedness, cultural hypocrisy, and sexual repression, embody the paradoxical situation of the exile contemplating a possible return to the land that had chased him out.

As Wilder told Cameron Crowe, *A Foreign Affair* is (in hindsight) his most personal film (he originally even intended to make the Pringle character a Jew). It is indeed an extended homage to a culture and a city that served as his training ground before abruptly forcing him out. The film suggests that the period before 1933 becomes for Germans the only possible orientation for rebuilding, a time warp Wilder deftly captures in the shots of Hollaender at the Lorelei which create the impression that he has been sitting at that same piano for the last fifteen years. Dietrich's lack of sentimentalism, her worldliness, and her resilience are the guarantee that, as she sings, "they won't return/the phantoms of the past." Unlike in any other film of that period, the Germans are portrayed not only as perpetrators but also victims. Von Schlütow is allowed to tell her story of bomb raids and the threat of being raped by the conquering Russians, which clearly makes an impression on Congresswoman Frost. (Dietrich would play similar ambassador roles in Wilder's *Witness for the Prosecution* and Stanley Kramer's *Judgment at Nuremberg* where as the widow of a high ranking German officer she explains to the judge of a war tribunal [Spencer Tracy]: "I have a mission with the Americans—to convince you that we're not all monsters.") The Berlin of 1945/1947 is indeed a city where the return to the time before the descent into barbarism seems possible, a site of unprecedented exchange, openness, and experimentation. A truly international city that united not only the four victorious powers but also German Jews coming out of hiding as well as refugees and displaced people from all over Eastern Europe, there was much life in the ruins of Berlin.

Yet there is also something profoundly nostalgic in Wilder's defense of a culture irrevocably lost, for it overlooks the fact that this culture not only had run its course *prior* to Hitler's inauguration but that it also offered

little to stand in his way. Accessing it now in 1945/47, as if it had been preserved in a “time capsule left untouched all those years,” as the historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch calls it, is certainly more naïve than Miss Frost’s unawareness of what occupation is all about.²⁵ But perhaps Wilder’s real audience are not the people in the ruins of Berlin but in the American heartland to whom he wants to tell a tale about a culture which shaped him, which disappeared, only to reappear for a brief moment before the Berlin airlift and the onset of the Cold War put Berlin into a forty-year deep freeze. And perhaps it is an appropriate gesture that at Postdamer Platz, the one-time wasteland that separated East and West Berlin until 1989, today a bistro called “Billy Wilder’s” celebrates the director’s faith in the city’s aptitude for rejuvenation and rebirth.

Notes

1. Quoted in Ed Sikov, *On Sunset Boulevard: The Life and Times of Billy Wilder* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 236.
2. Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Question: ‘What is German?’” trans Thomas Y. Levin, *New German Critique* 36 (1985): 125.
3. See Curt Riess, *Berlin Berlin: 1945–1953* (Berlin: Mittag & Co, 1953).
4. In a very detailed account of the production history of *Todesmühlen*, Brewster S. Chamberlin has shown that the US Information Control Division did not want to force Germans to watch atrocity films, but rather hoped that Germans would want to see them on their own accord. However, certain local military governments did make it a policy to stamp food ration cards of those who had sat through a screening of *Todesmühlen*. See Brewster S. Chamberlin, “*Todesmühlen*: Ein früher Versuch zur Massen-‘Umerziehung’ im besetzten Deutschland 1945–1946,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 3 (1981): 420–436.
5. In interviews, Wilder has given conflicting accounts as to the degree of his involvement in the editing of this film. According to Chamberlin, it is rather unclear what Wilder’s role really was. Chamberlin concludes that the reception of *Todesmühlen* by German audiences showed the Americans that documentary film was not successful as tool of reeducation, which is also what Wilder states in his memorandum (discussed below) to the Information Control Division.
6. On *Todesmühlen* see also: Jeanpaul Goergen, “Aufnahmen beglaubigter Kameralente: *Die Todesmühlen*” *Filmblatt* 7.19–20 (2002): 25–31.
7. In his memoirs, Czech director Hanus Burger claims that from the beginning Wilder disliked the concept of hitting the audience over the head with something they were unwilling to see. Wilder also claimed to have been instructed by Washington officials “not to antagonize our logical allies of tomorrow.” Quoted in Thomas Brandlmeier, “Von Hitler zu Adenauer: Deutsche Trümmerfilme,” *Zwischen Gestern und Morgen: Westdeutscher Nachkriegsfilm 1946–1962*, eds. Hilmar Hoffmann and Walter Schobert (Frankfurt/Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum Frankfurt/Main, 1989), 32–59; here 44. Wilder trimmed *Todesmühlen* from 86 to 22 minutes. The film was released in 1946 and widely shown, but pulled from distribution before the end of the year.
8. “The Wilder Memorandum,” reprinted in Ralph Willett, *The Americanization of Germany, 1945–1949* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 40–44; here 40.
9. “The Wilder Memorandum,” 42. Wilder did not use the song in his film. The lyrics are reprinted in Riess’s book: “Mir ist um das Herz so weh,/ wenn ich durch die Straßen geh,/ brauchst Berliner nicht zu sein,/ um zu wissen, was ich mein’!/ Doch was nützt die Grübele/, was geschehn ist, ist vorbei./ Und trotz allem tief hier drin,/ glaube ich an

- Berlin! Berlin kommt wieder, / das ist ein Lied, das jeder singt, / und das jetzt wieder / so schön in Berlin erklingt." ("My heart hurts / when I walk through the streets / you don't need to be a Berliner / to know what I mean! / But there's no use in pondering / what happened is over. / And despite everything, deep inside / I do believe in Berlin! / Berlin is coming back / that's a song everyone sings / and which now again resounds / so beautifully all over Berlin." (*Berlin Berlin* 29).
- 10 Cf. Max Colpet, *Sag' mir wo die Jahre sind: Erinnerungen eines unverbesserlichen Optimisten* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1978), 187.
 - 11 In 1945, a ticket for the movie theaters cost one Reichsmark, while a stick of butter on the black market cost 250 Reichsmark. There were also limitations as to how much box office revenue the film studios could take out of Germany. See Helmut Regel, "Der Film als Instrument alliierter Besatzungspolitik in Westdeutschland," in *Deutschland in Trümmern: Filmdokumente der Jahre 1945–1949*, ed. Klaus Jaeger and Helmut Regel (Oberhausen: Verlag Karl Maria Laufen, 1976), 49.
 - 12 It is important to note here that Wilder's successor in Germany, the producer Erich Pommer, was caught in the same conflict between serving OMGUS, the reconstruction of the German film industry, and the American film industry. Unlike Wilder, Pommer advocated a strengthening of German film production, but the decartelization imposed by OMGUS severely handicapped Pommer's reconstruction efforts. The Germans suspected him therefore of selling out to the Americans, while Hollywood accused him of revitalizing the German industry too fast, and foreclosing a lucrative market.
 - 13 This was also true for *Hold Back the Dawn*, which was not approved for German audiences because it showed the nation of immigrants denying entry to refugees.
 - 14 Stuart Schulberg, "A Communication: A Letter about Billy Wilder," *The Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television* 7.1 (1952): 434–436; here 435.
 - 15 *Todesmühlen* uses scenes of jubilant Nazi supporters from *Triumph of the Will* intercut with shots of German civilians forcibly marched through liberated concentration camps by the Allies, a contrast set up to question the lack of knowledge Germans claimed to have had about the evil of Nazism and the dimensions of the Holocaust.
 - 16 Already in his "Memorandum," Wilder had pitched his Berlin film as 85 per cent to be shot in the Hollywood studios, with only a skeleton crew and the two stars working on location. As it turned out, however, neither John Lund, Jean Arthur, nor Marlene Dietrich did any shooting in the actual Berlin.
 - 17 Max Colpet, Wilder's longtime friend, remarks in his memoirs that Rossellini would mark with chalk the ruins he used for location photography so as not to use the same location shots taken by Paramount for *A Foreign Affair* and RKO for *Berlin Express*. (*Sag mir, wo die Jahre sind*, 186.)
 - 18 Dietrich was so impressed with Rossellini's *Roma, Città Aperta* (1945) and *Paisà* (1946) that she offered to translate his treatment of *Germania Anno Zero* into English. See Werner Sudendorf, *Marlene Dietrich* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001), 143.
 - 19 Reviewing *A Foreign Affair*, *Le Nouvel Observateur* wrote: "C'est Rossellini en version ironique."
 - 20 For a perceptive analysis of this film and the genre of the *Trümmerfilm* in general see Robert Shandley, *Rubble Films: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001). Commenting on the postwar cinema of West Germany, Enno Patalas contends that the currency reform of 1948 brought with it a period of economic stability that ended a brief period of genuine artistic innovation, much like 1924 marked a caesura of post-World War artistic independence and creativity. After 1948, he claims, the German film industry reverted to the tried formulas, and often directors, of Ufa. See Enno Patalas, "The German Waste Land," *Sight and Sound* 23–25 (1953–56): 24–27.
 - 21 According to Dietrich's biographer Steven Bach, Hollaender wrote the songs not for the film but for his failed Hollywood cabaret, "Tingeltangel." "They are dark, corrosive, mockingly romantic. Their voice is that of a survivor not sure survival is all it's cracked

- up to be." See Steven Bach, *Marlene Dietrich: Life and Legend* (New York: Morrow, 1992), 332.
22. The careers of Jean Arthur (1900–1991) and Marlene Dietrich (1901–1992) offer some striking parallels. Both had their beginnings in the silent age, but did not find success until the sound era. Both actresses tried to hide their age, and both were often paired with younger men, as they are in *A Foreign Affair*.
 23. See Alice Kuzniar, "It's not often that I want a Man: Reading for a Queer Marlene," in *Dietrich Icon*, ed. Gerd Gemünden and Mary Desjardins, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 239–256.
 24. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections From Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London and New York: Verso, 1978), 56.
 25. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *In a Cold Crater: Cultural and Intellectual Life in Berlin, 1945–48*, trans. Kelly Barry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 14.

Chapter 4

GHOSTING HOLLYWOOD: *SUNSET BOULEVARD* (1950) AND *FEDORA* (1978)

"[A] ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back."

—Jacques Derrida¹

"The ghost of *Sunset Boulevard* was hanging over the production of *Fedora* ... and that I think was good."

—Billy Wilder²

Enter the Ghosts

Early into the 1940 musical comedy, *Rhythm on the River*, Oliver Courtney, a famous singer-composer suffering from writer's block, tries to persuade young writer Cherry Lane to write songs for him without receiving actual credit. Perplexed by his offer she expresses her fear that this would be a "misrepresentation," but Courtney puts her mind at ease when he explains this to be a common practice: "It's called ghost-writing. It's a very profitable profession." "For the ghost?" she wonders, only to be corrected by him: "For the writer."

Even though *Rhythm on the River* (originally called *Ghost Music*) contains some clearly Wilderesque dialogue, Wilder would only earn story credit on the film. Like Cherry Lane, he was familiar with the experience of being a ghost and hence at the short end of the rather lucrative stick of having a career in entertainment, an experience which extends back to his early days in Berlin where he claims to have written literally hundreds of uncredited stories and exposés for silent films. The term for such writers in the industry at the time was "Neger" (negro), and meant to convey both the invisibility of their labor and the slave-like conditions under which they produced their work. It is perhaps no coincidence that in the two films in which Wilder would turn the spotlight directly on the film industry, what came into view would be specifically the industry's strategies of making labor—and exploitation—invisible. Wilder's goal therefore was to illuminate the

human cost incurred in the making of films and the creation of stardom, and the notion of the ghost would become the central organizing metaphor.

The 1950 masterpiece *Sunset Boulevard* and the seldom-seen *Fedora* (1978) are companion pieces that forcefully foreground what haunts Hollywood filmmaking at distinct historical junctures of the studio era, exploring questions of visibility and invisibility; the changing roles of actor, writer, and producer; the transitory experience of fame and stardom; and the merciless process of aging. Both films skillfully depict the old and the new regime of filmmaking as parallel universes that enter a collision course at moments of crisis, their parallelism enhanced by the fact that the second film not only revisits the terrain of the first but takes it to a new extreme. Made almost thirty years apart, they are also elaborate reflections on what Wilder perceived to be his own respective position within that industry at key moments of his career, providing the most personal account of his ambivalent status as outsider and insider and the concomitant exilic perspective of his filmmaking.

Saturated with dense intertextuality, both films revolve around the logic of what in contemporary digital culture is referred to as ghosting—the copying and layering of images (by manipulating images in Photoshop, for example) or the lingering of a shadow that appears after an image has been moved on a computer screen. Taken together, they are a palimpsest of over sixty years of filmmaking history as well as an interrogation of the mechanisms that govern the writing of that history. The metaphor of the ghost here extends beyond its thematic use in the film. It follows Jacques Derrida's argument that the logic of ghosting goes beyond the realm of the visual, for it encompasses the key metaphysical categories through which we comprehend our lives. Ghosts, he contends, violate the binary category of alive and dead, body and spirit, present and absent. The presence of the specter casts into doubt the "border between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence, non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality."³ *Sunset Boulevard* and *Fedora* can be seen to probe similar oppositions, providing a hauntology of Hollywood that makes them the most somber and uncanny films of Wilder's career.

From the outset, *Sunset Boulevard* establishes itself as a story of death. Involving an old-time movie star in a murder case, it connects the sudden demise of a young man with the more gradual disappearance from view of a Hollywood actress. Opening with a famous shot of the murder victim floating in a pool as seen from below, we come to realize that we will be offered an unorthodox angle on what is to unfold. A voiceover promises to reveal to us "the facts, the whole truth" of the crime, but when a flashback begins and the corpse (clearly recognizable as the actor William Holden) is now seen sitting at a typewriter, we realize that the story is in fact told by a dead man, giving his "presence" in the film an eerie and ghostly quality. When we follow Joe Gillis on the screen, we are aware that we are in fact

witnessing a walking corpse, making his encounter with the undead figure of a film star, a person believed to have passed away a long time ago, doubly ironic.

Similarly haunted, *Fedora* opens with the mysterious suicide of a woman (Marthe Keller) who throws herself in front of a train. The terror-stricken look of the hooded woman just before she jumps evokes Edvard Munch's painting "The Scream," one of the most famous artistic representations of anguish and horror.⁴ As a newscaster informs us, the dead woman is the famous actress Fedora (halfway through the film we will learn that it was actually her daughter Antonia), known for her performances in *Madame Bovary*, *Joan of Arc*, and *Lola Montez*. At her subsequent lying-in-state in her palatial Paris residence, mourners gather to pay their last respects. As with Gillis' death, here too the cameras of the press are present to report to the news-hungry, establishing a tension between petty sensationalism, public melodrama, and private emotion that also structures *Sunset Boulevard*. Both films are told as flashback voice-over narratives—incidentally by the same voice, that of William Holden, who plays both Gillis and producer Barry Detweiler in *Fedora*—and follow a circular structure that lets each film end at the scene of death at which it opened. Both Fedora (Hildegard Knef) and Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson) are former stars responsible for the deaths we witness at the outset of each film—Desmond becomes a murderess when her kept lover rebuffs her and walks out on her, while



Figure 4.1. "Mort" signals Fedora's imminent suicide

Fedora's desire to prolong her fame by making her daughter her stand-in drives the daughter to drug addiction and suicide. Both are ghosts of their respective former selves; a refusal to come to terms with the natural process of aging has ultimately led them to live in complete social, geographical, and psychological isolation.

Norma Desmond is one of the living dead, embalmed in her own illusions (the dozens of photographs that clutter her house; the films of herself which her butler screens for her at night; the fake fan letters he writes to her); she is less a femme fatale than a vampire who sustains her fantasy by draining the lives of those who surround her.⁵ When Gillis stumbles into her home, she is in the midst of burying her pet chimpanzee and mistakes him for the undertaker; in an ironic reversal of roles, he will leave her house as a corpse six months later. The dilapidated mansion with heavy drawn curtains, the wind sighing through the pipe organ, and rats scurrying across the bottom of an empty swimming pool mark it as a gothic place that radiates pastness and decay. Even though the story begins at sunrise, Sunset Boulevard denotes a road that literally leads to death.

Fedora, too, features seemingly undead characters who command others so that they can live their imaginary lives. Fedora's ambition makes her a witness to her own death, as her daughter is mourned by hundreds, while her mother, Fedora under the assumed name Countess Sobryanski, orchestrates the memorial service. The need to have her daughter become her stand-in arose when cosmetic treatment meant to preserve her youthful looks went awfully wrong and permanently disfigured her. A ghoulish figure, the wheelchair-bound Fedora spends her days surrounded by electric heaters and hiding the mutilated half of her face behind a dark veil. Concerned about appearances until the very end, the Countess commands her dead daughter's make-up to be retouched and her white gloves exchanged while the lying-in-state ceremony is interrupted for lunch—a very literal enactment of what in Austria is called displaying “a schene Leich’,” (a beautiful corpse), a spectacle the young Wilder first experienced at age seven when the Emperor Franz Joseph was buried with royal pomp in Vienna.⁶

If *Sunset Boulevard* is the camped-up version of the haunted screen of Weimar that is both nostalgic and sarcastic in its look at the classic studio era, *Fedora*, too, is a swan song that wavers between somberness and romance—an elegy to classic studio filmmaking it is also a defiant response to the coming of the New Hollywood cinema. While the former film ironically inaugurated Wilder's most prolific decade in the studio system, the latter provides us with a last celebration of Wilder as author and anti-*auteur*.

When the Pictures Became Small

In both *Sunset Boulevard* and *Fedora* the enormous distance between the present and the past is highlighted in a recognizing scene between the Holden

character and the aging star. In *Sunset Boulevard*, it takes Joe Gillis some time to figure out into whose house he has unwittingly stumbled when fleeing from pursuers wanting to repossess his car. When he finally recognizes who his host is, he exclaims: "I know your face. You're Norma Desmond. You used to be in pictures. You used to be big." To which Desmond replies with one of the film's most memorable lines, "I *am* big. It's the pictures that got small." Desmond is of course referring to the demise of the silent age—which ended her career and that of many others—when the introduction of sound led to a complete restructuring of the industry that had no more use for her. What came after that is according to Desmond hardly worth considering. Detweiler's much delayed recognition of *Fedora*, which does not occur until halfway through the film, is an even more dramatic scene as it highlights the abyss that separates the beautiful star with whom he had spent a memorable night on the beach from her present morbid state. When Barry Detweiler finally understands who he has in front of him and says, "You are *Fedora*," the star responds by saying, "I *was* *Fedora*." She is alluding to the fact that for the public her daughter has unknowingly assumed the star identity of the mother. With the death of the daughter, the mother's identity as star has in fact died a second time, and this time without any hope for another "second chance" (*Fedora*'s term for "comeback," a word which she, like Desmond, shuns). As we learn at the end of the film, *Fedora* dies only six weeks after her daughter, further underscoring how mother and daughter had indeed become one.

Both films ultimately indict the measures the respective film stars take to cope with their failing careers, but not without a certain sympathy for them. In some ways, Norma is quite right about pictures getting smaller. The two pivotal changes in the film industry which provide the backdrop both for *Sunset Boulevard* and *Fedora* can indeed be understood as a dramatic change in the size of the picture, that is, the actual size of the image of the screen, the overall dimensions of film production and distribution, and the significance of the star. While Norma Desmond may be wrong in believing that she is still "big," her lament that with the transition to sound films became inferior is not incorrect. Artistically, the coming of sound *at first* did not mean progress but regression. A novelty killed a highly perfected art, as early sound film had severe mechanical limitations. Because the camera had to be encased to prevent its whirring mechanism from interfering with the microphones that recorded the voices of the actors, it became immobile and stationary. The movement of the actors, too, became more limited as they had to stay close to the microphone, often hidden in a stage prop or outside the frame. If before the visual style had told a story, now dialogue simply supplanted camerawork. The length of individual scenes became determined by dialogue and tended to last longer, with fewer cuts. During a transition period, the art of telling stories visually was disregarded, and it would take some time until sound film could match the artistic achievements of the late silent era.

At first sight, Fedora's disappearance from the screen—unlike Norma's—is not attributed to major changes in the industry but to the disfiguration she suffers at the hands of Dr. Vando, prompted as much by the industry's ruthless demand for youth as well as Fedora's zeal not only to halt the aging process but reverse it. When the Academy of Motion Pictures bestows on Antonia/Fedora an Oscar for life-time achievement, and subsequently a chance to renew her career arises, we realize, however, that changes in the industry have affected her career (and will continue to do so). Her "second chance," made possible by the wide media attention following the Oscar, will present itself under very different terms than during her rise to fame. As Fedora herself realizes, Hollywood filmmaking has changed, which is why she responds to Academy President Henry Fonda's encouragement to return to Hollywood by saying "they don't make women pictures anymore." Her lament, just as Norma Desmond's, points to a major transition in studio filmmaking, namely the demise in the 1950s of genres (such as the melodrama), which afforded actresses key roles. When Antonia/Fedora subsequently makes her "come-back" in the 1960s it is notably in smaller European productions that cash in on the established aura and mystique of the reclusive star. These second-tier productions are profoundly nostalgic films that satisfy a demand for "glamour," as Fedora calls it, no longer supplied by Hollywood; they are also completely at odds with current European art cinema of the time—the very cinema that Fedora dismisses as "what passes for entertainment today—cinema vérité, the naked truth, the uglier the better."

Thus both *Sunset Boulevard* and *Fedora* explicitly refer to dramatic transitions within the studio system to explain the psychological make up of its respective female star, thereby rendering their personal tragedies not only as the result of hubris, vanity, or delusion but concrete historical circumstances. What is more, both films were made at moments when further changes would radically challenge the ways in which films were written, produced, distributed, and seen by the audience.

Fedora is set in 1977, with an extensive flashback structure that covers moments in the late 1940s (when Detweiler first meets Fedora), the 1950s (when Antonia is a young girl and Fedora at the height of her fame), the 1960s (when Fedora's face is disfigured and Antonia begins her career as Fedora), and the 1970s (when Antonia/Fedora meets Michael York and is subsequently treated for depression). By the time Antonia commits suicide, American filmmaking was undergoing yet another radical transition, with two very different forms of movies gaining dominance. On the one hand, there was the success of Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) and George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977) that surprised everyone, including the relatively unknown filmmakers, and led to the calculated pursuit of the blockbuster film, a development which still dominates today's computer-generated mega-budget films which threaten the extinction of flesh-and-blood actors. On the other hand, there was the rise of an alternative aesthetic—the

auteurism of Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola, who in response to European influences such as the *Nouvelle vague* and Italian Neo-Realism created a grittier and more somber view of American society. In both instances, power shifted from studio bosses to individual filmmakers while production and distribution became more segmented. “The kids with beards,” as Detweiler refers to them, “have taken over.” They are symptomatic of “a whole different business” that has no place for people like him. “They don’t need a script—just give ‘em a hand-held camera with a zoom lens.” Detweiler’s efforts to coax Fedora back into the limelight for a second time (*his* only shot at a second chance) thus look pathetically anachronistic. As he learns the truth about her tragic story, he realizes that life has more moving stories to tell than his contrived script. But the story of Fedora will never be told, not only because the star asks Detweiler to keep “all this to yourself—for old time’s sake,” but also because, as the frail star astutely observes, with “Fedora” gone the last Hollywood star who could possibly have played the role has disappeared.

The reasons that caused figures like Fedora to disappear can be traced back to the late 1940s. By the mid-1940s it still seemed unimaginable that stars like her would ever go out of style. The old studio system appeared invulnerable, and any thought of it toppling preposterous. But by the end of the decade the boom of the war years and the immediate postwar years was over. For the first time in ten years, ticket sales were declining. The industry was also plagued by labor struggles, heightened production costs, and the onset of anti-Communist hysteria inaugurated by the HUAC hearings. And the production companies were literally becoming smaller. In the so-called Paramount decision, the Federal Court ruled the dismantling of the corporate structure of the studio and its movie theaters. The year 1950 became one of heavy losses for Paramount and the other major studios as they began to divest their affiliated theaters. Divestment de facto initiated the end of the classic studio era. At the same time the industry tried to move away from the star system that was perceived as too expensive with individual stars commanding too much power. Finally, the advent of television heralded the coming of a medium in which pictures would be even smaller than Norma Desmond could have ever imagined. (Ironically, Gloria Swanson did have a career in television, not least because of her very successful comeback through *Sunset Boulevard*, and it was on television that a truncated version of *Queen Kelly*—the silent film Desmond screens for Gillis—was first shown to a larger American public.) While a television announcer informs us about the passing of Fedora, and television cameras are ubiquitous at the lying-in-state, television is conspicuously absent in *Sunset Boulevard*. The cameras photographing the floating Gillis are from the print media, and even though the voiceover makes brief mention that the murder will be covered by television, the word is never again used in the film. Needless to say, there is no television set in Norma’s mansion (nor a radio for that matter); instead a huge painting hides a screen for her

private film projections. Yet elsewhere in Los Angeles, television was very much on people's mind. Paramount's own station KTLA was a leader in the young industry that ultimately contributed its share to the demise of the studio system. Television is an issue in another famous film from that year (one often compared to *Sunset Boulevard*)—Joseph Mankiewicz's *All About Eve*, which also revolves around an aging actress, this time a Broadway star, played by Bette Davis. A young Marilyn Monroe stars as an ingénue hoping for a career in television at the precise historic moment when both Hollywood and Broadway are losing their shared monopoly over the American entertainment industry. (It is fitting that Monroe would be the star to inaugurate the last phase of the classic studio system, notably twice under Wilder's direction, and that her tragic, premature death is considered by Fedora the "correct" form of exit).

In this context, Cecil B. DeMille's *Samson and Delilah*, produced at Paramount at the same time as *Sunset Boulevard* and an integral part of its plot, takes on its real significance. Norma seeks out DeMille (playing himself) at the studio because she mistakenly believes the veteran filmmaker, who was instrumental in establishing Norma's (and Gloria Swanson's) early stardom, is interested in directing her script, "Salomé." The fact that at age seventy his career is still going strong is indicative, of course, of the gender inequality within the studio system.⁷ But it is also an example of a



Figure 4.2. Norma Desmond and Cecil B. DeMille, two veterans of the film industry

film professional with the very ability for reinvention that Norma lacks. At first sight, *Samson and Delilah* looks like a throwback to DeMille's biblical extravaganzas of the silent period, but ironically the monumental technicolor production points toward the future. Totally at odds with dominant genres, stylistic trends, and market strategies of the period, it topped the box office in 1950 and became the biggest hit of the decade, inspiring a wave of imitators, including *David and Bathsheba* (1951), *Quo Vadis* (1951), *The Robe* (1953, the film to introduce CinemaScope), DeMille's remake of his own *The Ten Commandments* (1956), and *Ben Hur* (1959). With its scale of production—brilliant colors, monumental dimensions, and lavish sets designed by the same Hans Dreier who was also art director on *Sunset Boulevard*—it would offer viewers a spectacle television would not be able to compete with for a long time. But perhaps Norma Desmond was not out of touch with the times at all. Her "Salomé" script, had it been made, would most likely not have been that different from DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* extravaganza. Indeed, a version of the film was made in 1953, directed by William Dieterle and starring Rita Hayworth as Salomé. A central character of that film was actress Judith Anderson as Herod's wife, Salomé's stepmother. A middle-aged woman of beauty and evil sexuality, her characterization of the role exudes a melodramatic intensity that one could have also expected from Norma Desmond.⁸

"A Little Plot of My Own"

The previous section has outlined the broader historical changes in the studio system that provide both backdrop and plot elements for *Sunset Boulevard* and *Fedora*. It is now time to take a closer look at how these respective changes impact the role of the writer and the star as well as the relationship between them. In both films, that relationship is one of competition and rivalry, but also mutual dependency. Both films furthermore concur in depicting that rivalry as a struggle over controlling the narrative of the film(s) the writer and the star are involved in making, as well as the narratives of their own lives. In order to establish that control the Holden character in both films uses dialogue and plot(ing) while both Norma and Fedora rely on the attributes of the film star, primarily the face. Let us first turn to the figure of the writer.

The fact that both films are told as flashbacks with voice-over by the Holden character suggest that Gillis and Detweiler are in control of their respective narratives. At the outset of *Sunset Boulevard*, Gillis assures the viewers that they "have come to the right party" if they want to hear "the facts, the whole truth" before it is "all distorted and blown out of proportion" by "those Hollywood columnists," thus promising to cut through illusion and deception in a narrative that will offer little else but that. As the story unfolds we learn that Gillis actually has trouble exercising control

over his stories—a professional writer, he has not only not sold a script for several months, but will also end up as invisible editor on Norma's Salomé material, and even invites aspiring young colleague Betty Schaefer (Nancy Olson) to use whatever she can from his writings without himself demanding credit. There is thus considerable irony in the fact that only as a corpse does he finally get to tell his story, a ghostwriter in a much more radical sense than he had anticipated.

Detweiler, too, appears to possess authorial control over the narrative, until he—and the viewer—learns halfway through the film that he has been thoroughly duped by Fedora. The second part of the film is comprised of the flashback narrations of the true Fedora, Dr. Vando, Miss Balfour, and Count Sobryanski which offer a startling contrast to Detweiler's, revealing that he had never mastered his material in the first place. His lack of power to probe beyond the surface is captured in the shot when the hotel manager shows him the headline of a newspaper reporting the death of Fedora—it is literally all Greek to him, and the real Fedora is correct in telling him that he is "both blind and stupid!"

Thus, both Detweiler and Gillis find themselves in the position of being deceived deceivers. Detweiler's initial ruse was to make Fedora believe that his big-budget film would ensure her triumphant comeback when in



Figure 4.3. Gillis editing Desmond: A ghostwriter in more ways than planned

truth the shaky finances of that production depended entirely on Fedora's willingness to appear in front of the camera again. Gillis, who likewise sees in Norma Desmond an opportunity to regain his financial independence, concocts "a little plot of my own"—he plans to charge a hefty sum for a "patch-up job" on her script—which quickly backfires. Satisfied with himself for "the way I handled the situation—I dropped the hook and she snapped at it," he soon learns that she is one step ahead of him in a game that will eventually turn him into her gigolo. (Gillis and Detweiler belong indeed to a long list of Wilder's male protagonists whose powers of detection and scrutiny fail them at critical moments, and which include claims investigator Barton Keyes, private detective Sherlock Holmes, and defense attorney Sir Wilfried Robarts in *Witness for the Prosecution*.)

The fact that Detweiler and Gillis are unsuccessful in claiming control over their lives is related in both films to the very problem of claiming authorship within the film industry. In other words, the failure of both Detweiler and Gillis is presented as the logical consequence of the conditions according to which film scripts are conceived, written, and produced. Notions such as originality, autonomy, creativity, and inspiration, which have been central since Romanticism invented the modern author, are radically redefined within the confines of the culture industry. The key image for the problematic position of the writer in that industry is the swimming pool, the symbol of success for Gillis and his Paramount peers (at Artie's New Year's Eve party they sing "Hollywood for us ain't been so good/got no swimming pool" while Gillis makes his entrance) but also of his failure. Floating head down in the brightly illuminated pool at the end of the film, Gillis comments wryly on his one moment in the limelight, "Well, in the end he got himself a pool—only the price turned out a little high." In his poetry cycle "Hollywood Elegies," the exiled German poet Bertolt Brecht, struggling to find employment in the film industry in the early 1940s, described the city as a place where "musicians play the whore," and where moneyed moguls "with blue rings round their eyes/Feed the writers in their swimming pools every/morning."⁹ Brecht's vision of screenwriters being kept like gold fish resonates with Gillis' predicament of being a kept man at Norma's house, ultimately contained in the pool, and implicitly compared to two different animals. In his first night at the house he sees rats scurrying at the bottom of the empty pool, whose place he will soon take (emphasizing later that he is "no Valentino," the star who regularly swam there), and he subsequently has "a mixed-up dream" of a "chimp ... dancing for pennies," the very pet whose role of keeping Norma company he just assumed.¹⁰

The pool is also of some importance to the plot of *Fedora*. It is while she is floating naked in a pool on a film set that young Dutch Detweiler first notices, or rather fails to notice Fedora, thereby irking the offended star into spending a night with him. In his capacity as assistant director, it is Dutch's job to cover her breasts with water lilies to avoid problems with

the censors, thereby facilitating the circulation of the star image. This misrecognition is repeated at the lying-in-state when Detweiler yet again fails to comprehend the identity of the horizontal woman surrounded by flowers in front of him: the real Fedora's powers of creating illusions clearly top those of a veteran producer, indicating his professional inferiority very much like the pool scenes in *Sunset Boulevard* symbolize that of Gillis.

But why is it that the writer, or the writer-producer, should be in such an inferior position? In what predicament do these professionals find themselves during the late 1940s and the 1970s, respectively? In the first shot of Gillis's flashback we see him sitting at his typewriter, the tool that anchors his professional identity and that will also be with him at the moment of his death. In voice-over, he explains that things have not been going well for him: "I hadn't worked in a studio for a long time. So I sat there grinding out original stories, two a week. Only I seemed to have lost my touch. Maybe they weren't original enough. Maybe they were too original. All I know is they didn't sell." Clearly, the terms of Gillis' employment are circumscribed by the demands of an industry which turns creative work into "grinding out," and which, to a radical degree, renders relative the meaning of originality—if the work is too derivative, it will be discarded for lack of innovation, but if it is too daring and new, it will likewise be ill-suited. Under these conditions, originality becomes redefined as the kind of material that studio executives consider appropriate to meet the changing tastes of the viewing public. But more than taste and fashion determine the viability of a script. As becomes evident when Gillis pitches his idea to the producer Sheldrake, stories are evaluated according to whether or not they will be suitable for certain actors who are contractually bound to individual studios. Thus Gillis' "original story" of "Bases Loaded," a drama about a poor athlete mixed up with professional gamblers, is meant for Paramount star Alan Ladd, but producer Sheldrake, who is "always looking for a Betty Hutton," suggests to "put in a few numbers" and turn it into a musical entitled, "It Happened in the Bull Pen." Apart from keeping the star employed (and on the mind of the public), other production costs are also an important factor. When unexpected rain falls in Arizona, rather than halt production the film on which Artie works as assistant director has to be rewritten to accommodate the weather. As a selling point of his script, Gillis emphasizes that making it would be rather inexpensive, because "it's pretty simple to shoot, lots of outdoor stuff," as opposed to elaborate setups in the studio.

Creating and evaluating scripts for industrial production involves a series of professionals within a highly segmented system. This is a part of the studio system that has grown significantly since the advent of sound, as the many offices that were formerly occupied by Norma Desmond—pointed out to Gillis by Max—now form the Writers' Annex. Betty Schaefer of the Readers' Department is housed here, and her assignment is to cover story outlines with a short synopsis that recommends whether they war-

rant further development. Then there are writers in charge of writing “additional dialogue,” an assignment Gillis pleads to take on when all other options fail. The process from initial story to screenplay to actual film in fact involves so many revisions that the final product can become virtually unrecognizable. As Gillis explains to Norma, “The last picture I wrote was about Oakies in the dust bowl. When it reached the screen, it played on a torpedo boat.”

By the late 1970s, the status of the writer had changed significantly again, as the new directors, as Detweiler remarks, can do entirely without screenplays. The decline in the significance of the film script can be seen in the trajectory from carefully guarded treasure—Norma will not allow her Salomé script to leave the house—to photocopied tome which Detweiler sends to multiple addresses and subsequently unsuccessfully “forgets” at the Villa Calypso and the hotel bar, as if to dissociate himself from it.

Given the industrial nature of studio production, the use of certain generic formulas, as well as the remake, are of central importance for scriptwriting. As Gillis implies in his statement about being too original or not original enough, the key to success is to manipulate what has proven itself just enough to create novelty and stretch its longevity (even if he seems no longer in possession of that key). For this approach he is reprimanded by Betty, who accuses him of taking “plot 27-A, [to] make it glossy, make it slick.” A counterpart to Gillis’ cynicism and disillusionment, the idealistic Betty supports a realism that is based on authentic experiences (of which she finds traces in Gillis’ story “Dark Window”) and advocates films “that say a little something.” The screenplay she will work on with Gillis follows that sense of realism, abandoning Gillis’ original “psychological stuff—exploring a killer’s sick mind,” a trademark of *noir* narratives that had dominated the 1940s and had now run its cycle. Yet ironically their script about two people who share the same bed but do not even know each other because one works during the day and the other at night had in fact been told before—in Ludwig Berger’s *Ich bei Tag und du bei Nacht* (1932). (Its insertion here has to be seen as an in-joke by Wilder who was in all likelihood the only one on the set familiar with this film.)

The remake is also the narrative convention that dominates *Fedora*. Not only has the film itself been seen as a remake of *Sunset Boulevard* (and would become the basis for Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Die Sehnsucht der Veronika Voss* [1982]), but Wilder quipped that he should have called it *Fedora II*, to cash in on the fad for remakes at the time.¹¹ Detweiler’s script intended to facilitate *Fedora*’s *third* comeback—ironically entitled, “The Snows of Yesteryear”—is based on Tolstoi’s *Anna Karenina*, one of the most often adapted novels in film history. As *Fedora* observes, the great Greta Garbo (a recluse very much like herself) had already starred in two versions (1927 and 1935), thus making the material, which *Fedora* calls “a Russian soap opera,” doubly unsuited for her. Yet the fact that Antonia takes her own life in the same way as Tolstoi’s famous heroine

did—a carefully planned act of retribution against her mother—suggests that certain plots retain their currency, no matter how often they have been used before, and that Tolstoi’s work continues to hold power over its readers. In an ironic twist, through Antonia’s suicide “The Snows of Yesterday” becomes a reality, just as “Salomé” is enacted by the delusional Norma Desmond descending the staircase, under the “direction” of Max von Mayerling. Thus, the notion of the remake as such is not condemned by either of Wilder’s films but presented as a highly ambivalent form of storytelling contingent upon multiple factors. As noted above, DeMille is able to prolong his career precisely because of his mastery of remakes, just as the “Salomé” material not only proved to be less anachronistic than was presented in *Sunset Boulevard* but could itself look back upon a long screen tradition, including most famously a 1923 version starring the legendary Russian silent star Alla Nazimova in a scandalous performance that may well have inspired Norma Desmond in the first place.

Face Value

If the position of the writer is determined by the demands and constraints of the film industry and subject to encompassing historical change both within the era of the classic studio filmmaking and its aftermath, the changes that affect the construction and function of the film star have to be seen as even more radical. While Detweiler and Gillis are represented as down-on-their-luck writers exploited by a culture industry that has little use for them, the stars they encounter are even more abject, both by virtue of the fact that they are female and that the star is the most visible and volatile component of that industry.

As noted above, the relationship between star and writer in both *Fedora* and *Sunset Boulevard* is presented as a mixture of rivalry and mutual dependency in controlling the narrative of one’s life and films, an unusual scenario as the studio system traditionally assigned each very specific roles that prevented them from entering into direct contact. In both films, the tension between the two serves to highlight the predicament with which each has to struggle. If plotting and plot are the domains of the writer, the face becomes the primary tool of the star to anchor her power and to exert control over her career and life.

Norma Desmond’s use of the face is her central weapon in the confrontation with narrative and dialogue as embodied by Joe Gillis, as well as in her attempt to orchestrate her “return.”¹² Gloria Swanson’s acting style with its self-absorbed posturing deliberately invokes that of the silent era, providing a sharp contrast to Holden’s modern style, which is detached, cool, and laid back, but ultimately also corrupt. Desmond is a silent movie queen clothed in furs and silks, made up like a siren, and drawing in the viewer with her eyes. Such externalization was of course the tool of the

silent actress, where the lack of dialogue was compensated for by exaggerated body language and facial expressions. As Norma puts it, "We didn't need dialogue. We had faces!" She views her power as relying on the visual, not the aural, as indicated by her blunt rejection of Gillis' suggestion that her screenplay needs more dialogue—"What for? I can say anything I want with my eyes." The power of her gaze is furthermore underscored by the fact that she sees and commands him—"You there! Why are you so late?"—before he can make her out behind the blinds of her villa. Throughout the film, "those dark glasses" will observe every move of his.

Norma Desmond is the prime example of the film star invented by the silent era as a bankable commodity guaranteed to draw an audience. During its heyday, the studios paid their stars astronomical salaries, and their much-publicized life styles served as a fantasy life that could be sold to the people. With the introduction of sound, films lost for a while their international appeal and market, terminating the careers of many a great star, including Norma Desmond. However, for others the ascendance of sound did *not* pose an insurmountable challenge; Fedora and the two famous stars on which her figure is based, Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich, all mastered that transition, as did Gloria Swanson who had one of her biggest successes in the early sound feature *The Trespasser* (1929). Clearly then, the real challenge to Norma and Fedora's career is age; the exorbitant demands show business makes on the youthful looks of feminine stars determine the longevity of their respective careers. While *Sunset Boulevard* presents its heroine as a grotesque but ultimately human figure victimized by the hypocrisy of a system that creates stars only to discard them when the public's taste alters, Fedora is a self-empowered woman apparently beating the dream factory at its own game, but ultimately suffering a cruel defeat twice.

It is the tragedy of Norma that her image, the source of her power while a star of the silent era, becomes the source of her madness. Throughout *Sunset Boulevard*, Norma is shown looking into mirrors, or watching her celluloid self on the screen. It is as though her isolation from the film industry has split her personality in two, and she is seeking a way to re-simulate herself with the star image. Her failure to distinguish between herself and the image on the screen, between reality and the myths Hollywood created for her, only to snatch them away when it no longer needed her, are at the heart of her insanity. They are also the fantasies that fuel the star system, which relies on merging the image of the actress with the parts she plays in order to sell films. It is thus fitting that the end of the film unites the two spheres by having Norma become delusional, thereby abandoning the borders that separate the real from the imagined. As Gillis, who has just been shot by her, comments with true sympathy: "The dream she had clung to so desperately had enfolded her."

Even though *Sunset Boulevard* presents Norma as a delusional film star of a former era unable to cope with the present, the film is careful to couch

her psychological predicament within the wider mechanisms that govern the creation of stardom. Thus Betty Schafer's confession to Gillis that as aspiring actress she had her nose "fixed"—an act far more drastic than anything Desmond ever did—attests to the "culturally shared willingness to endure almost anything in order to be chosen for cinematic exploitation" and recasts Desmond's antics as behavior determined by the industry.¹³

Similarly, director Cecil B. DeMille renders what appears to be the psychological deformation of a single individual in terms that blame the industry at large: "You didn't know her when she was a lovely little girl of seventeen with more courage and wit and heart than ever came together in a youngster. . . . A dozen press agents working overtime can do terrible things to the human spirit." An ambivalent figure, DeMille offers sympathy and understanding, but is also complicit in keeping Desmond's illusions alive. When he commands gaffer Hog-Eye to "turn that light back where it belongs," we know that Desmond will disappear into obscurity forever. Indeed, the real star getting ready for DeMille's close-up was significantly younger than Norma Desmond—thirty-six-year old Hedy Lamarr, an Austrian expatriate like Wilder, and considered by Louis B. Mayer "the most beautiful girl in the world." Confined in *Samson and Delilah* as in many films to portraying her beauty rather than allowing her to demonstrate her acting skills, her static, statuary roles are reminiscent of a model and could not be further away from the grandiose gestures of Norma Desmond.¹⁴



Figure 4.4. Another victim of the film industry: Betty Schaefer's confession about her nose job

If Barry Detweiler can be seen as a reincarnation of the wise cracking, cynical Joe Gillis, Fedora is a reborn Norma intent on not getting caught up in illusions ever again. A producer as much as a product of Hollywood's star system, she is a calculating mastermind that sets out to beat Hollywood at its own game, only to face similarly tragic consequences. Like Norma, Fedora realizes that the central attribute of the star is her face, and her eagerness to preserve her youthful looks will force Dr. Vando into the experimental treatment that ends in catastrophe. With her face destroyed, she actually ceased to be "Fedora," as she explains to Detweiler. Whereas Norma is surrounded by an excess of Desmonds, Fedora will ban all mirrors in her home and everything else that ties her to her past. Yet when her daughter becomes "my mirror" and Fedora notices a startling resemblance, she will be prompted to revive a face she believed to be lost. The efforts for restoring that face (and the fame connected with it) are outlined in a number of scenes that directly reference *Sunset Boulevard*. While a short montage shows how Norma undergoes "a merciless series of treatments" to prepare her for her return to the screen, a similar sequence illustrates how Antonia is artificially aged thirty years to resemble the timeless beauty of an "ageless" star. When Antonia receives coaching on how to act as Fedora by watching privately screened films of her mother, the mother explains that the secret of her success did not lie in her skill as an actress: "Acting, that's Old Vic. But ever so often a face comes along the camera falls in love with"—a clear echo of Desmond's comment during the screening of *Queen Kelly*: "We had faces!"

The scene that inaugurates the relationship between the old and the new Fedora and that maps the future course described above is the bestowing of the Academy Award by Henry Fonda, the president of the Academy of Motion Pictures, who visits the star on her Greek island. At first reluctant to accept the award, the true Fedora suddenly changes her mind when she hatches the plan of using Antonia as a double, a form of ghosting that goes far beyond what Gillis had in mind. The scene is charged with the metaphors of ghosting and doubling that structure both *Fedora* and *Sunset Boulevard*. At dusk, "when the light fades," Antonia (as Fedora) accepts the award from Fonda (as himself) while the true Fedora observes hidden from view, with Dr. Vando behind her, an appropriate position for the man who is behind so much of what (mis)shaped her. In one of the few scenes in which cinematographer Gerry Fisher allows the beauty of the Greek islands to shine through, Antonia/Fedora is (re)born as star, literally illuminating her surroundings in her all-white suite, with Garboesque dark glasses and wide-brimmed hat hiding much of her face. With its soft-focus, golden-hour picture perfectness the scene deliberately imitates Hollywood's style for rendering happy endings, thereby demonstrating that Fedora's powers for creating illusions match those of the film industry and are surely worthy of an Oscar. Elated as much about her success at impersonating her mother as about the recognition her mother has received,



Figure 4.5. An Oscar-worthy performance by Antonia as Fedora

Antonia will soon realize that for the legend to continue the role playing may never stop. Fedora here literally becomes a witness to her rebirth, just as Antonia's suicide will make her a witness to her own death. The second mutilation of her face—so complete that a team of surgeons has to work overtime to prepare the corpse for the lying-in-state—is the final destruction of Fedora. All that remains to be done is to orchestrate the last exit, because “that’s what people remember.”

Both films highlight that the construction of the star is not only due to the efforts of an industry but also relies to a considerable extent on personal discipline and willpower. What is needed is “sugar and spice, and underneath that stainless steel and cement,” as Detweiler observes.¹⁵ One of Hollywood’s stars most closely fitting that description, and someone considered in full control of her public persona, is Marlene Dietrich, whose condolence letter Fedora comments on by saying, “a true fighter.” The same could be said about Hildegard Knef herself, the actress playing the old Fedora, not only because of her close ties to Dietrich but also because German audiences knew her as a woman who would not give up, having recovered from a serious bout with cancer and persevered in a career with steep ups and downs. Indeed, the permanence of the comeback is one of Knef’s main attributes as star, lending her representation of Fedora as rich a subtext as Gloria Swanson’s of Norma Desmond.¹⁶

It must be added that no matter how great the personal effort may be, neither Fedora nor Norma can sustain the act of saving face alone. Max



Figure 4.6. Von Stroheim as his master's gatekeeper and servant

von Mayerling doubles as servant and guardian and is instrumental in maintaining Norma's illusion that "Madame is the greatest star of them all" by keeping the outside at bay and the fan letters coming. Her erstwhile director and former husband, Max is also a has-been whose career—like that of Erich von Stroheim, who directed Gloria Swanson¹⁷—ended with silent film; when at the end he "directs" her "descending the staircase of the Palace," he proves for the last time how his fate is tied to hers. Her exit into the waiting police cars will also bring to an end his life time project. The same can be said of the people surrounding Fedora, for Dr. Vando and Miss Balfour are inseparably bound to the star—the Doctor ostensibly atoning for past mishaps, and Miss Balfour as the faithful assistant in charge of numerous responsibilities that include carefully upholding the star's public persona, barring access to intruders, and keeping Antonia's performance as Fedora under surveillance (as well as phone and liquor under lock and key). Parallel scenes of Max and Dr. Vando reminding the Holden character to "wipe your feet" before entering the house, or of Max and Miss Balfour running old films of the star underline the symmetry in the two stars' support system. Vando and Balfour are Fedora's waxworks, companions who shared her biggest successes and failures, and who pro-

vide the only possible camaraderie to a relic, just as Buster Keaton, Anna Q. Nilsson, and H.B. Warner do for Norma Desmond.

The Outsider as Insider

Of the many incidents Billy Wilder was fond of recalling for the benefit of his biographers and interview partners, there may have been none he relished retelling more than the one about using the f-word to insult studio boss Louis B. Mayer after the very first Hollywood screening of *Sunset Boulevard*. Mayer had been incensed not only about the film's attack on the industry but particularly by the fact that it was written and directed by someone whom that very industry had made rich and famous; for having bitten the hand that fed him, Mayer shouted, Wilder "should be tarred and feathered and run out of town."¹⁸ The fact that Mayer addressed his scorn only toward Wilder and not toward coauthor and producer Charles Brackett suggests that it was largely fueled by the fact that a foreigner had dared to shine an unflattering light at "Hollywood from the inside" (as the movie poster caption had it), and at least one critic claims that Mayer explicitly called Wilder a "goddam foreigner son of a bitch."¹⁹

Obviously, Mayer attacked Wilder for what he perceived as a lack of gratitude to his host country and a sign of halfhearted assimilation, a stance to which he himself provided the perfect counterexample. The son of Russian-Jewish émigrés, Mayer had come to this country at age three, and throughout his life displayed an overzealousness for assimilation and patriotism typical of first-generation immigrants—most ostensibly by making the fourth of July his birthday, thereby conflating a celebration of himself and of his adopted home country's independence. By singling out Wilder as responsible for the glaring attack on Hollywood, Mayer also (unwittingly) confirms what is the basic premise of this study—that it was precisely Wilder's status as exile and outsider that provided him with a perspective from which to articulate such a critique in the first place.²⁰

His status as insider/outsider provides, of course, some striking similarities to both Joe Gillis and Barry Detweiler and lends the two films' reflections on the film industry a rich biographical subtext. Gillis is the only non-Angelino in *Sunset Boulevard* and began his career as a journalist before arriving in Hollywood in 1945 (as we learn from the prologue not included in the final film). He reads *The Young Lions* and *The Naked and the Dead*, clearly seeing himself in the tradition of Hemingway who was also a reporter first and wrote fiction with a voice of authenticity and realism. Gillis's struggles thus resemble Wilder's tough beginnings as a writer hawking scripts that lasted from 1934 until he was paired with Brackett. Yet whereas Gillis laments that he seems to have lost his touch, Wilder's career took off with Brackett, and by the time he directed *Sunset Boulevard*, "Brackett and Wilder", as they were called, had become the most

sought-after writers in Hollywood, while Wilder as director had a series of commercially and critically acclaimed films under his belt, including two Academy Awards for *The Lost Weekend* (1945). The very fact that Wilder could depict Paramount Studios, his own employer, in the film and not just use a fictitious name, shows the enormous status Wilder commanded in the industry.

This important fact is of course also part of the film's sense of realism that includes using real locations (Schwab's, the Alto Nido apartments, the Bel Air golf course) as well as the names of numerous film professionals. John F. Seitz's cinematography deliberately inserts the film both in the tradition of the Weimar street film as well as Hollywood's silent era's star vehicles—a task for which Seitz had all the credentials, since his career had begun in 1916 and included filming Valentino. *Sunset Boulevard* contains some of the most stunning cinematography in Wilder's oeuvre, breaking with his credo that images should not draw attention to themselves. From the pool shot using mirrors to the wide-angle shots with extreme depth-of-field—for example in the scenes when Max' white-gloved hands dominate the foreground when he plays the organ, or when the bandaged wrists of Desmond after her suicide attempt are featured big in the foreground while her soon-to-be-lover is kept in sharp focus in the background—the film presents a daring cinematography which even includes several of the very zoom-shots ridiculed by Detweiler (for example when Gillis recognizes the repo-men in his rearview mirror, or when he first discovers Norma Desmond standing behind the blinds of her mansion).²¹ It thereby matches visually its outspoken social criticism and satire, and firmly situates Wilder in a von Stroheim tradition of realism. One could even see *Sunset Boulevard* as Wilder's successful attempt to wed von Stroheim's intelligence with DeMille's power—after all, it is *not* a baseball picture that ends up as a musical but a forceful critique of Hollywood articulated by a writer-director whose works would eventually rank with the most canonical of 1940s and 1950s American cinema.

If *Sunset Boulevard* is the work of an accomplished insider taking an outsider's hard look at the industry that made him, the situation is reversed in *Fedora*, where a director pushed to the outside by very same forces as his protagonists contemplates his career. The situation of Barry Detweiler at the time was thus much closer to Wilder's own than Gillis's ever was. *Fedora* was commissioned by Universal, after they bought Tom Tryon's collection of short novels, *Crowned Heads*. But the studio ultimately rejected Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond's screenplay, forcing the director to peddle his wares as he had had to do in the 30s. Wilder indeed had sunk low in the Hollywood hierarchy. With the help of Paul Kohner, Wilder secured some German tax shelter money, just like Detweiler, in order to get the film made.²² The film was clearly written with a certain star in mind—Wilder and Diamond had thought of Marlene Dietrich or Faye Dunaway—but both declined, and Wilder had to resort to two actresses playing the part,

which he blames for the film's lack of success in the United States (it hardly seems to matter to him that the film did very well in France).

The two films' very different emotional register is best expressed in their respective use of the voice-over narration. Gillis's tale is detached, ironic, and seemingly at ease with the peace he has found in death (he is notably much kinder to Norma in his commentary than when talking to her); he (now) stands above the story. Detweiler's commentary, in contrast, is nostalgic and elegiac. Surveying not just the events of the last six months but those of a lifetime, he is a witness to the passing of time and to the impossibility of stopping it. Time told coincides with the time it takes to tell the story—the approximately two hours he spends at the open coffin of Antonia/Fedora—and it is only for these hours that time will seemingly pause. The flashback is indeed the mode of narration that promises, even if for a moment, to arrest time, an attempt that finds its visual expression in the freeze-frame of Antonia's suicide that opens the film²³—the entire film can be seen as an effort to comment on and comprehend this split second. *Sunset Boulevard*, by contrast, culminates in the shot of Norma Desmond approaching "DeMille's" camera, ready for her closeup but ironically never getting it as she slips out of focus and out of film history. The scene provides a sense of closure denied to Detweiler who will survive all surrounding him; he will be condemned to move on, without making his film, and without being able to share the incredible story he has just heard.

Whereas one of the structuring tensions of *Sunset Boulevard* is the Old versus the New Hollywood, everybody in *Fedora* is part of the former New Hollywood that has now grown old; the only young person in the film, Antonia, is forced to artificially age. The film's sense of datedness and even anachronism is further enhanced by Miklós Rózsa's vintage 40s score as well as the voice-over flashback narration itself: while pathbreaking in *Double Indemnity* and still highly effective in *Sunset Boulevard*, the technique was basically unheard of by the late 70s. *Fedora* is indeed a swan song both of, and about, Wilder's career as writer and director. It would be followed by only one more film three years later, the eminently forgettable *Buddy Buddy*.

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 99
2. Cameron Crowe, *Conversations with Wilder* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 105.
3. Derrida, 39.
4. The comparison with Munch's painting was first made by Neil Sinyard and Adrian Turner, *Billy Wilders Filme* (Berlin: Volker Spiess, 1980), 353.
5. For an elaboration of the vampirism in the film see Lucy Fischer, "Sunset Boulevard: Fading Stars," in *Women and Film*, ed. Janet Todd (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1988), 97–113, especially 103f.

6. According to Wilder's biographer Charlotte Chandler, the scene of Michael York placing a rose on the dead Antonia/Fedora was inspired by Wilder's memory of the actress Katharina Schrott, Franz Joseph's mistress, leaving flowers on the chest of the emperor at his funeral (*Nobody's Perfect*, 293). *Sunset Boulevard* was originally meant to open with a scene at the morgue where dead people have a conversation about what got them there, but the scene was dropped when preview audiences expressed dislike.
7. See Lucy Fischer, "*Sunset Boulevard: Fading Stars*"; Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Mollie Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987).
8. The significance of Wilde's "Salomé" for *Sunset Boulevard* has been explored in Daniel Brown, "Wilde and Wilder" *PMLA* 119.5 (2004): 1216–1230. Some of my observations on the writer are based on Brown's very perceptive analysis. However, he fails to consider Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a central text regarding the fear of aging that underlies both *Sunset Boulevard* and *Fedora*, a connection which Wilder himself acknowledged: "[Fedora] was sort of like *Dorian Gray*, except it was herself she kept in the closet instead of the portrait. Maybe we should have called our film *The Picture of Fedora Gray*, by Oscar Wilder." Charlotte Chandler, *Nobody's Perfect: Billy Wilder, A Personal Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 289.
9. Bertolt Brecht, *Poems 1913–1956*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Mannheim (New York: Methuen, 1976), 380–381.
10. Wilder is fond of telling the anecdote of how he explained the significance of burying the monkey to Swanson by saying, "There goes your last lover." (See Crowe, 318.)
11. Wilder quoted in Adrian Turner and Neil Sinyard, "Billy Wilder's *Fedora*," *Sight and Sound* (Summer 1977): 160–165; here 160.
12. The following remarks are indebted to Lawrence's insightful analysis of the use of sound and visuals in *Sunset Boulevard*.
13. Lawrence, 158.
14. Wilder had planned to highlight the displacement of the older star by the young beauty by having DeMille ask Lamarr to let Norma use her chair when she visits the studio. "[Lamarr] said she would do it—for twenty-five thousand dollars. I said it would be enough for Norma to sit in a chair with Hedy Lamarr's name on it. That was ten thousand dollars. So I put her in DeMille's chair." Quoted in: David Freeman, "*Sunset Boulevard* Revisited," *The New Yorker* 21 June 1993, 72–79; here 77.
15. Wilder apparently recognized some of these attributes in Holden, too, whom he considered perfect for the part precisely because the underneath coincides with that which is visible: "Holden is probably the only actor of his age in Hollywood who hasn't had a facelift. This is truly remarkable in a town that has enough pieces of skin lying around taken from one star's face to refashion five or six stars." (From the *Fedora* press kit.)
16. On Knief's penchant for the comeback see Johannes von Moltke and Hans-J. Wulff, "Trümmer-Diva: Hildegard Knief," *Idole des deutschen Films*, ed. Thomas Koebner (Munich: Text+Kritik, 1997), 304–316.
17. Billy Wilder mentioned "die Swanson" as far back as 1929, in a feature on Erich von Stroheim's career published in *Der Querschnitt*, in which he also writes that *Queen Kelly* "is allegedly a great film." The review is reprinted in Billy Wilder, *Der Prinz von Wales geht auf Urlaub: Berliner Reportagen, Feuilletons und Kritiken der zwanziger Jahre* (Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1996), 108–112.
18. The episode is recounted with little variations in the biographies by Zolotow, Lally, Karasek, and Sikov, as well as in Crowe's long interview.
19. Sam Staggs, *Close-Up on Sunset Boulevard: Billy Wilder, Norma Desmond and the Dark Hollywood Dream* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2003), 164. Ironically, it was Mayer, not Wilder, who was ousted only a year later, because his management style and leadership qualities seemed out of touch with the demands of running the very studio he had founded.

20. The hostile comments of the MGM studio head illustrate not only the widespread taboo to challenge an industry that had provided wealth and comfort for so many who had come here from near and far. It also speaks to the Hollywood moguls' volatile sense of belonging, which was premised on clear-cut distinctions between "us" and "them." For Mayer and many other moguls who, like Wilder, were first- and second-generation Central European Jewish immigrants, it was important to assimilate without criticism to the United States since it had allowed them the creation of their own empire—the film industry—something that had proven difficult in the Midwest and on the East Coast. Thus even though *Sunset Boulevard* does not revolve around questions of Jewish identity, it presents an attack on Hollywood that has its origin in Wilder's sense of Jewish identity—nonassimilated, critical, and outspoken—that was very different from the camouflaging of ethnic origins of many industry professionals.
21. The depth-of-field photography is discussed in Herb Lichtman, "Old Master, New Tricks: A Combination that Spelled Success for Photography in *Sunset Boulevard*," *American Cinematographer* (September 1950): 309; 318–320.
22. In an interview, Wilder tried to give the fact that he had to rely on tax shelter funding a typical positive spin: "I can't lose, because if this picture is a big hit, it's my revenge on Hollywood. If it is a total financial disaster, it's my revenge for Auschwitz." In Robert Horton, ed., *Billy Wilder Interviews*, 144–45.
23. See Sinyard and Turner, 354.

Chapter 5

ALL DRESSED UP AND RUNNING WILD: SOME LIKE IT HOT (1959)

“Whatever meaning you will find in my pictures, it’s all put in kind of contraband, you know—sort of smuggled in.”

—Billy Wilder¹

“Satires that are understood by the censor should indeed be forbidden.”

—Karl Kraus²

Trading in Counterfeits

A hearse drives through a city at night, four somber men inside seated around a coffin. A siren is heard, faint at first but rapidly growing louder. The driver and the man next to him exchange nervous glances; the men in back peek through the curtain and see a police car bearing down on them. The driver accelerates, weaving crazily through traffic while the policemen behind them open fire. The men in back pull a couple of sawed-off shotguns from a hidden overhead rack and return fire. Bullets riddle their car, smashing the glass panel. Suddenly, the police car skids out of control, jumps the curb, and comes to a screeching halt while the gangsters escape. But bullets have penetrated the coffin and liquid is spurting through the bullet holes. Taking the lid off the men reveal that the coffin is filled to the top with liquor bottles, some of them broken. A superimposed title informs us where we are—it’s Chicago, 1929.

Thus opens *Some Like It Hot*, set in Al Capone’s wintry city during the time of Prohibition, the speakeasy, organized crime, and gang warfare. Yet what begins as a gangster film in the tradition of *Scarface* (Howard Hawks, 1932) and such Warner classics as *The Public Enemy* (William Wellman, 1931), *Angels with Dirty Faces* (Michael Curtiz, 1938) and *The Roaring Twenties* (Raoul Walsh, 1939) soon reveals its more parodic dimension. The destination of the hearse is a speakeasy made up as “Mozarella’s Funeral Parlor,” where patrons wear a mourning band and pretend to attend



Figure 5.1. Josephine and Daphne put a little heat under Sugar's performance

"Grandma's funeral"; once they are admitted, an organ player pulls out a stop to open a secret doorway to "the chapel"—a boisterous bar where guests can request a "pew" and order various kinds of coffees—Scotch coffee, Canadian coffee, sour-mash coffee, and so on—while they are being entertained by a jazz orchestra and chorus of dancing girls. As soon as Joe (Tony Curtis) and Jerry (Jack Lemmon) enter the film—as wisecracking, down in the heel jazz musicians—we have firmly arrived in the world of comedy. Their first exchange revolves around eliminating their many debts by betting their paycheck at the races. Jerry is reluctant because he

fears to lose the little money they make; Joe admonishes him not to be a pessimist:

Joe: Jerry-boy—why do you have to paint everything so black? Suppose you get hit by a truck? Suppose the stock market crashes? ... Suppose Mary Pickford divorces Douglas Fairbanks? Suppose the Dodgers leave Brooklyn? Suppose Lake Michigan overflows?

Jerry: (who has noticed that one client is hiding a police badge and a raid is about to ensue) Don't look now but the whole town is under water!

This exchange establishes an explicit parallel between the late 1920s and the late 1950s. The humor here derives from the fact that events referred to would occur in the immediate future of the characters (the stock market would crash in October of that year, and Mary Pickford's troubled marriage would end in 1933), as well as the recent past of contemporary viewers (the Brooklyn Dodgers did move West in 1955), thereby confirming that most unlikely events do indeed take place, and that there are no safe bets in life. Conflating two distinct historical eras—the Roaring Twenties just before the Great Depression, and the Eisenhower Era that was soon to make way for the 1960s—*Some Like It Hot* provides detailed comments on the present by drawing on the past. Like *Sunset Boulevard*, it reflects on the 1920s both as a historical era and an era of filmmaking, with the use of black and white film stock, a conscious choice to invoke that period. (Some fifteen years later Wilder would also set *The Front Page* in the Chicago of 1929, while *The Spirit of St. Louis* commemorates Lindbergh's transatlantic flight of 1927.)

The opening passage efficiently establishes the central metaphor of counterfeit and camouflage and the binary opposition of being and appearance (“*Sein*” and “*Schein*”) that provides the central structuring device of the film. Dressing up the 1950s as the 1920s allows Wilder to contrast the stifling and confining Eisenhower years with an era that was known for its audaciousness and unlawfulness, its sexual liberties and progressive ideas, and its economic and political volatility. From rapidly growing American cities emerged the Jazz age that brought us great popular entertainment, the Charleston, and the flapper. In Weimar Berlin, Germany's most Americanized city at the time, Wilder had himself experienced Germany's furious race toward modernity, as I have outlined in chapter 1—only to be brought to a screeching halt by Black Friday, the same event that also silenced the roar of the American Twenties. It is thus no coincidence that by wedding two genres which were of particular importance at the time, *Some Like It Hot* foregrounds its ancestry both in Weimar cinema and Hollywood cinema of the 1920s and early 1930s. Joe and Jerry's antics in drag recall the farcical humor and slapstick comedy of Mack Sennett and the Keystone Cops (in the Keystone Comedy *Miss Fattie's Seaside Lovers* [1915], Fattie Arbuckle plays the rotund daughter of a wealthy family

who while at a seaside resort is pursued by three young lounge lizards, during which time Arbuckle, like Lemmon, has a lengthy scene on the beach in a bathing suit). While the American gangster film (and later *noir*) would revolve around alienation and disorientation, fatalism and loss, misogyny and troubled gender relations, Weimar gender-bending comedy, stylish in its own way, would question or ridicule patriarchy, exploring the relationship between men and women in humorous ways, often through impersonation, role reversal, and cross dressing. Finally, by setting the film in the time of pre-Code Hollywood, Wilder pays homage to a period of filmmaking that enjoyed considerably more leeway in its portrayal of sexual relationships, while itself contributing to the noticeable erosion of the Production Code in the late 1950s. With its allusions, double entendres, and blue jokes referencing homosexuality, oral sex, castration, impotence, and transsexuality, *Some Like It Hot* can claim to have pushed up against censorship more than most of its American predecessors.³

The film's playful but powerful critique of the power of appearance positions it firmly in the critical legacy of the Weimar Republic. For Peter Sloterdijk the culture of Weimar Germany serves as model for a liberating and productive cynicism that eroded patriarchy, militarism, and a broad spectrum of metaphysical beliefs: "Weimar culture ... stands before us as the most self-aware epoch of history; it was a highly reflective, thoughtful, imaginative, and expressive age that is thoroughly plowed up by the most manifold self-observations and self-analyses."⁴ Taking his cue from Sloterdijk's enlightened cynicism, Thomas Elsaesser has brought into focus the "transparent duplicities" of Weimar cinema by arguing that its resistance to referentiality has allowed for the creation of a highly sophisticated film language, both on the level of the image and the narrative, repeatedly using strategies of deception, camouflage, impersonation, and duplicity to make larger claims about the forming and deforming forces of modernity.⁵

Some Like It Hot presents a picture of modernity literally running wild, of heat and speed combining to unhinge assumed securities, beliefs, and identities. From the film's opening chase scene, through the ribaldry on the overnight train, shots of elevators endlessly going up and down, and the pivotal use of a bicycle, to the final getaway in a motor boat, there is constant movement and action, rapid transitions of costume and identity, and narrow escapes from all kinds of perpetrators. The uninterrupted motion lets the temperature rise: Sugar's (Marilyn Monroe's) behind gets caught in the hot steam of the locomotive, Sweet Sue demands her band to "put a little heat under" its performance, and Junior's glasses fog up—until the film comes to a boiling climax. The fast-paced dialogue, timed to perfection by Diamond and Wilder as well as Daphne's clever use of the maracas, is underscored with the pulsing rhythm of Sweet Sue's Society Syncopators, a close cousin to Friedrich Hollaender's "Syncopators" performing at the Lorelei in *A Foreign Affair*, which in turn were modeled after Paul Whiteman's famous jazz orchestra. It was Whiteman's music, after

all, that brought Wilder from Vienna to Berlin and made him speak of jazz as “the exigent rejuvenation of a fossilized Europe.”⁶

On another level, the notion of counterfeit trade is also an apt description of the predicament of the exile directors in Hollywood, as Elsaesser has argued. On the one hand, they were forced into accepting directorial assignments—such as Ernst Lubitsch’s or Max Ophuls’ portrayal of fin-de-siècle Paris, Vienna, and the Balkans—that had little to do with their work in Weimar Germany or their cultural origins. On the other hand, these settings do entertain important geopolitical parallels with the era of classic Hollywood: “The secret affinity that existed between Hollywood on one side and Vienna and Paris on the other was that they were societies of the spectacle, cities of make-believe and of the show. The decadence of the Hapsburg monarchy was in some ways the pervasive sense of impersonation, of pretending to be in possession of values and status that relied for credibility not on substance but on convincing performance, on persuading others to take an appearance for the reality.”⁷ A careful student of Lubitsch, Wilder, too, would become a master of make-believe, of using falsehood and pretension to question false securities. *Some Like It Hot* in particular is a masterpiece of playing with appearances, of self-consciously debunking the borders between “Sein” and “Schein” in order to seek a higher form of truth.

Clothes Make the (Wo)Man

From the 1931 Ufa film *Ihre Hoheit befiehlt*, in which a princess dresses up as commoner for a night of fun (remade by William Dieterle as *Adorable* in 1933) to Fedora’s elaborate scheme to claim eternal youth, Wilder’s scripts and films display a fascination, sometimes even an obsession, with disguise, masquerade, and role playing, with switching sexual, social, and professional identities. The prominence of this important dramatic device has certainly to do with its significance and ubiquity within the long theatrical tradition which Wilder venerates and which comes across in the three-act structure of his scripts and the fact that so many of them are based on plays and musicals. Both German and American film, from the 1910s onward, also employ the device time and again for comic or dramatic purposes. When Wilder makes use of it, he consciously situates himself within these important traditions. Nevertheless, Wilder’s penchant for masquerade and impersonation has also to be seen in terms of his experience of exile. The loss of political and economic security and of social and personal identity is a fundamental part of being a refugee, and strategies of impersonation, drag, shape shifting, and cultural mimicry are central to the exile’s efforts to survive forced displacement, economic hardship, and social ostracism. In order to meet the studio’s demand of what German and Austrian culture is all about, exiled film professionals had to perform

Expressionist angst, Viennese schmaltz, and Prussian militarism whether or not it had any relation to their cultural heritage or aesthetic sensibilities. Thus even when in the service of entertainment, impersonation and masquerade always entail a political dimension, serving as allegory for the price the exile has to pay in his or her quest for assimilation, for blending in, or for mere survival.

Role-playing, masquerade, and impersonation, whether in the service of disguise or deception, are part of almost every film Wilder wrote or directed. While Georges Iscovescu's pretension of love to gain entry into the US is necessitated by his refugee status, a direct reference to the experience is rare in Wilder, as it is in Hollywood cinema in general. And while there are few life-or-death scenarios that prompt masquerade (the case of Joe and Jerry being a very important exception) some sense of survival usually depends on it—be it to make a buck, to escape from a pursuer, or to dupe a spouse or superior. Wilder's first commercially successful scripts are still closely related to operatic traditions of role reversal. In *Ihre Hoheit befiehlt* as well as in *Der falsche Ehemann*, which involves identical twins switching positions, role reversals lead to a comedy of errors without lasting psychological repercussions. Similarly, in *Midnight* a down-on-her-luck Claudette Colbert impersonates a Baroness Czerny to fool the upper crust of Paris, only to be saved by, and swiftly married to, a cab driver impersonating the Baron Czerny. Far more sexually ambivalent are the films where women camouflage their age or maturity and where the males surrounding them fail to recognize the woman in the girl. Dolly Haas in *Scampolo* plays the same kind of boyish girl under which a sexually desiring woman hides, as tomboy Audrey Hepburn will in *Sabrina* and *Love in the Afternoon*, where she is an ingénue who poses as a fashion-conscious sophisticate in the hope of snaring Gary Cooper. (Incidentally, it is Hepburn's performance as Cooper's lover that first saves him from a jealous husband who suspects Cooper of having an affair with his wife.) Most daring in this respect is certainly *The Major and the Minor* in which Ginger Rogers pretends to be a twelve-year-old to pay half fare for the train, setting in motion a complicated play of hide and seek during which she also has to impersonate her mother. The closest precursor to *Some Like It Hot*—a link visually underscored by the last frame of the film, which envelops Rogers in the steam of a train that will also mark the entrance of Marilyn Monroe—Cameron Crowe has labeled the film a disguised bit of fluff which is in reality a dark comic spin on pedophilia.⁸

In Wilder's films set during wartime, impersonation is caught up in larger political stories of deception, espionage, or counter intelligence. In *Arise, My Love*, set during the Spanish Civil War, Claudette Colbert plays a journalist who successfully pretends to be the wife of an American pilot in order to save him from the firing squad of Franco's Army; British officer John Bramble (Franchot Tone) poses as an Alsatian waiter in order to outfox desert fox Field Marshal Rommel (Erich von Stroheim) while at



Figure 5.2. Echoes of Lolita: Ginger Rogers pretends to be a twelve-year-old

the same time being mistaken for a spy in the war drama *Five Graves to Cairo*; *Stalag 17* revolves around the efforts of American Prisoners of War in Germany to unmask the snitch hiding in their midst. The film entails memorable scenes of cross-dressing (Shapiro becomes number one war-time pin-up girl Betty Grable), as well as impersonation (one soldier fakes a Clark Gable accent and the whole barrack dresses up as Adolf Hitler). The plot of the Cold War comedy *One, Two, Three* consists almost entirely of the efforts of C.R. MacNamara (James Cagney) to remake the East German Marxist newlywed Otto Piffel (a young Horst Buchholz) into a Western aristocrat his American in-laws will accept; thus, the bulk of the film is given over to preparations (casting, scripting, costuming, and rehearsing) for a performance, inviting us to take pleasure in performance itself, a process rather than a finished product.⁹ This film also includes some cross dressing on the part of MacNamara's assistant Schlemmer (Hanns Lothar) who is made up to look like Fräulein Ingeborg (Lilo Pulver) to fool the East Germans.

One of the few Wilder films where the viewer is not privy to the actual act of masquerading is *Witness for the Prosecution*, which pivots around Marlene Dietrich's ability to fake a cockney accent and fool criminal law-



Figure 5.3. Wilder's other cross-dressers: Shapiro as Betty Grable in *Stalag 17* and Schlemmer as Fräulein Ingeborg in *One, Two, Three*



yer Charles Laughton. While most Wilder films derive their pleasure or suspense from the question whether the impersonating protagonist will be found out, this film's ending surprises viewers by revealing an impersonation where none was suspected. The most versatile of Wilder's con-artists is certainly Jack Lemmon who—apart from turning into Daphne and a bellhop in *Some Like It Hot*—simulates serious injury to mislead the insurance company in *The Fortune Cookie*, and transforms from lowly French cop Nestor into a pimp before passing himself off as an English lord in order to win the sympathy of Shirley MacLaine in *Irma La Douce*. In *The Apartment*, he will undergo an extensive character reversal from schmuck to mensch, as I will discuss in the next chapter. Lemmon is the Wilder (anti-)hero who has the greatest problems distinguishing where the self ends and its performance begins; he is the one most notoriously seeking venues to showcase himself or versions of himself because he falls in love with his masks. This falling for his own performances is invariably followed by rude awakenings, which makes him also Wilder's most tragic hero. (Ironically, at the end of *Irma La Douce* one of his masks seems to survive even after Lemmon has lifted it.)

The confrontation between the role one occupies in life and the role one imagines to occupy is explored in a lighthearted and comic way in *Ein blonder Traum*, and most dramatically and cruelly in *Sunset Boulevard* and *Fedora*, extended metaphors on the dangerous interference of the film industry with our imaginary. The creative conflation between Hollywood personae and scripted characters is also the strategy that underlies Wilder's repeated casting of stars and film professionals as "themselves," or in fictional roles modeled closely on their actual lives and careers; these include directors Erich von Stroheim, Cecil B. DeMille, and Mitchell Leisen, and the occasional supporting role or cameo by someone like composer Friedrich Hollaender or art designer Alexander Trauner. In his use of stars such as Marlene Dietrich, Gloria Swanson, Hildegard Knef, Henry Fonda, Buster Keaton, or Dean Martin, Wilder contrasts their off-screen persona—as carefully constructed of course as their cinematic roles—with the characters they embody in his films. In *The Seven Year Itch* and *Some Like It Hot* Marilyn Monroe provides performances that resonate closely with her celebrated and scandal-ridden public life, as I will explore in more detail below.

In most of Wilder's films, masquerade, impersonation, or role reversal is resolved in some neat and wholesome way. Georges Iscovescu in *Hold Back the Dawn* pretends attraction for Emmy, but then comes to realize a sense of sincere commitment and selflessness. *Scampolo*, *Sabrina*, and *Love in the Afternoon* involve virtually identical endings in which the older man finally recognizes the truth about the young woman and in a dramatic finale swoops her onto a departing train (*Love in the Afternoon*), onto an airplane (*Scampolo*), or arrives by helicopter to catch a departing steamer (*Sabrina*). After impersonating women that are either too young

or too old for Ray Milland, Ginger Rogers finally gets to “act her age” and to elope with Milland on a train to Las Vegas for a speedy wedding. Often, complicated plots are resolved with such efficiency and through such highly clichéd happy endings that the unsettling implications introduced through impersonation and role reversal are hardly toned down. Wilder’s films thus point a very visible finger to the compromises imposed both by censorship and what producers found in good taste. A notable exception here is *Kiss Me, Stupid*, in which Kim Nowak, as a hooker hired to perform as temporary housewife, plays her role with such conviction that the husband who hired her goes to bed with her. Ironically, the man she was supposed to seduce, Las Vegas entertainer Dino (Dean Martin), ends up with the real housewife, who extracts from him the promise to produce one of her husband’s songs before making love to him. The role reversal between housewife and hooker is complete when Novak, having enjoyed “marital bliss” for one night, decides to settle down for a life of domesticity (it is less clear if the adulterous wife will also change her life style). The damning public outrage and poor box office showing of the film indicated how little prepared American moviegoers were to accept forms of impersonation and role reversals that deny “clean” closure and resolution.¹⁰

The refusal of a traditional form of closure is of course also what has kept *Some Like It Hot* so remarkably fresh for almost fifty years. The famous and highly inconclusive conclusion of the film shows Jerry’s/Daphne’s futile attempt to reverse his/her crossdressing and escape marriage to millionaire Osgood:

Jerry: “Look, Osgood—I’m going to level with you. We can’t get married at all.”

Osgood: “Why not?”

Jerry: “Well, to begin with, I’m not a natural blonde.”

Osgood (tolerantly): “It doesn’t matter.”

Jerry: “And I smoke all the time.”

Osgood: “I don’t care.”

Jerry: “And I have a terrible past. For three years now, I’ve been living with a saxophone player.”

Osgood: “I forgive you.”

Jerry: (with growing desperation) “And I can never have children.”

Osgood: “We’ll adopt some.”

Jerry: “But you don’t understand! (he rips off his wig; in a male voice) I’m a MAN!”

Osgood: “Well—nobody’s perfect.”

Jerry's failed attempt to set the record straight is a rare and memorable example in which the effects of masquerade outlast the intention of those involved in the performance, thereby radically questioning the border between essence and performance. Slipping effortlessly and swiftly in and out of disguises and roles, Wilder's shapeshifters invite us to become suspicious of the borders and binarisms through which we define our sexual, social, or psychological identity. While Jerry may get confused about who he really is—at one point he's reminding himself "I'm a girl," while in the next he shouts "I'm a boy"—he and Wilder's other heroes rarely have an identity crisis. The question "Who am I?"—which Oedipus poses at the inauguration of the canon of Western literature—is of no concern to them. They view identity as malleable, open, and transient—an opportunity, not a predicament. No wonder, then, that the teachings of psychoanalysis have no impact on them, and Wilder rarely passes up an opportunity for ridicule. When Joe, as Shell heir and millionaire, tries to seduce Sugar Kane into seducing him by feigning impotence, he laments that he spent, without the slightest trace of success, "six months in Vienna with Professor Freud flat on my back."¹¹ It will take Sugar only a few minutes to fix what the famous doctor allegedly could not.¹²

Some Like it Lukewarm

Two musicians hard up for work hear from their agent's secretary that an all-female band is looking to replace two of its members (who incidentally play the very same instruments as the two men). Their circumstances leave them no choice, and they decide to join. Dressed as women, they climb on an overnight train to the resort hotel where the band will have its engagement. On boarding, they meet the bossy female director of the band, the somewhat subdued male manager, and all the girl musicians. Both men use the journey to flirt with the stunning lead vocalist, engaging in jealous rivalry that constantly threatens to give away their disguise. In the course of their stay at the hotel, the taller, better-looking man slips in and out of drag, finds himself pursued by a lecherous man, continues to compete with his buddy for the attention of the lead vocalist, and finds happiness with her at the end of the film. Sounds familiar? The above is the storyline of *Fanfaren der Liebe* (*Fanfares of Love*), a West German film from 1951, directed by Kurt Hoffmann and based on a story by Robert Thoeren and Michael Logan, which served as a model for Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot*. In interviews, Wilder has acknowledged this source, but usually only to dismiss it as a totally different film. But how different is it really?

Apart from the storyline, there are some truly remarkable parallels between the two films. Hoffmann's two protagonists—Hans (Dieter Borsche), a tall, self-confident, and handsome pianist and composer, and Peter (Georg Thomalla), his weaker, somewhat fearsome comic sidekick playing the

bass fiddle—come remarkably close to the male roles Curtis and Lemmon play, and there are also certain similarities in their respective gender reversals. While Curtis’s Josephine goes “towards the demure and Lemmon’s Daphne goes head first into the lugubrious and loud,”¹³ Borsche’s Hans transforms from weak male (early in the film he is insulted as “girlie face” [“Mädchengesicht”]) to strong female Hansi, and Thomalla’s Petra moves into slapstick while at the same time becoming aware (like Daphne) “what the poor women have to suffer” (“was die armen Frauen so erliden müssen”). Furthermore, there is significant overlap between the star persona the four actors occupy within the distinct national film industries in which



Figure 5.4. Some like it lukewarm: Wilder’s model, *Fanfaren der Liebe*

they were employed.¹⁴ Georg Thomalla shares with Jack Lemmon an acting style that foregrounds nervous tics and mannerisms, and a penchant for comic roles in which he plays the underdog and underachiever in the shadow of more successful rivals.¹⁵ Like Lemmon, Thomalla began as a stage actor and would frequently return to the theatre throughout his career. It is perhaps no coincidence that Thomalla would go on to speak Lemmon's part in the dubbed German version of this film, becoming as famous for his voice as for his acting. Often paired with Thomalla and another renowned comedian of the 1950s is Grethe Weiser, who plays the band leader Lydia; she instructs her girls about the dangers of men in terms very similar to those Joan Shawlee would later use in her role of the not so very Sweet Sue.

Wilder was of course right to emphasize that the key plot device he and Diamond introduced was having his male protagonists witness the St. Valentine's massacre, thereby making it impossible for them to go safely in and out of drag as Hans and Peter do. He further streamlined the plot by eliminating the two Germans' prior attempts at crossdressing. Before Hans and Peter would turn into Hansi and Petra, they tried their hand at ethnic drag by dressing up as Gypsies and in blackface in order to join a Balkan ensemble and an Afro-American jazz band, respectively. It is a telling indication of the postwar German mentality that despite recent history such a form of disguise was considered well-suited as comic material; it is also worth noting that donning women's clothes, according to the inner logic of *Fanfaren der Liebe*, is portrayed as the more daring form of disguise because it commands a greater effort to sustain this illusion than the acts of ethnic drag, which they pull off easily.¹⁶

Even though Jerry does remark that he and Joe played once in a "gypsy tearoom" wearing golden earrings, as well as in a Hawaiian band donning grass skirts, Wilder spares us any images of ethnic crossdressing as well as the equivalent of a longish scene in which Hans advises Peter how to transform into a woman. *Some Like It Hot*, in contrast, famously cuts from Joe using a female voice on the phone to inform the agency about accepting the job to Josephine and Daphne in full female regalia swaggering along the platform, thereby not only speeding up the action but also presenting the gender transformation as *fait accompli* (a cut which is copied in Sydney Pollack's 1982 film *Tootsie*). Nevertheless, the shot of Curtis's and Lemmon's derrières, swinging their hips and struggling with high heels, is a direct quote from Hoffmann's film which also presents the women from behind while they test their masquerade by parading by a street musician who knows them well (and fails to recognize them).

While the stakes are high in Wilder's mobster-infused comedy, *Fanfaren der Liebe* mixes comedy of errors with the revue film, one of the most popular German genres of the 1930s. Thus ample screentime is given to the elaborate musical numbers of the band whose repertoire includes typical Bavarian folk songs, waltz, swing music, syncopated big band numbers, and the "Schlager," a popular song with a venerable tradition in Germany

that is characterized by a catchy tune and lyrics that are easy to remember. In accordance with this emphasis on music, an important plot element consists of Hans trying to find an audience for a song he composed. His success at having the girls band perform his song in the end while he enters the stage dressed as man underscores the neat heterosexual closure of the film, combining the success of both his professional and romantic quest. (Wilder and Diamond eliminated this subplot but would use it for *Kiss Me, Stupid*.) This wholesome ending and the inconclusive conclusion of *Some Like It Hot* is certainly one of the most significant differences between the two films. Not surprisingly, the popular success of the German film prompted Borsche and Thomalla to costar again as Hans/Hansi Mertens and Peter/Petra Schmidt in *Fanfaren der Ehe* [*Fanfares of Marriage*, directed by Hans Grimm, 1953] in which, now happily married, they again dress up as women to accompany their musician wives on a cruise ship. In their script, Wilder and Diamond explicitly ruled out a sequel to *Some Like It Hot*. After Osgood has delivered his famous line, and we realize nothing has been settled, the script states: "Jerry looks at Osgood, who is grinning from ear to ear, claps his hand to his forehead. How is her [sic!] going to get himself out of this? But that's another story—and we're not quite sure the public is ready for it."¹⁷

The comparison between *Fanfaren der Liebe* and *Some Like It Hot* points not only to Wilder's aesthetic sensibilities but also opens up larger questions of the similarities and differences between two national cinemas of the 1950s. Given the fact that the German and the American cinemas of the 1920s and early 1930s were not only highly competitive and comparable, producing film professionals that were eminently compatible—one of the main reasons so many émigrés and exiles adapted so successfully to the Hollywood studio system—the discrepancy between postwar developments in both countries is astounding. German cinema of the 1950s was singularly detached from international contemporary developments, producing no significant styles or *auteurs*, and harboring few compelling institutional developments. Emphasizing domesticity and conformity, it was a cinema turned inward, making the "Heimatfilm" (films about the home or homeland) its most notable genre.¹⁸ The fact that the majority of *Fanfaren der Liebe* is set in a spa in the Alps, a typical "Heimatfilm" setting, underscores the film's—and the decade's—overall quest for healing and recovery. The Florida resort of *Some Like It Hot*, in contrast, is implicated differently in the modernity of the 1920s (and 1950s). If Chicago is cold, forbidding, and crime-infested, Florida is warm, welcoming, and leisure-oriented. As Sinyard and Turner have it, "Chicago is associated with night, death, violence and gangsters; its is predominantly the domain of the male. Miami, on the other hand, is immediately associated with sun, life, and song: it is predominantly a female world."¹⁹ But Florida is not just the opposite of Chicago, it is also its extension. If the city provides booze and night clubs, the resort affords sexual prowling for capitalists who live

off the gains reaped from exploiting the underemployed working class in the metropolis. Millionaires like Osgood enjoy a transgressive lifestyle that parallels that of the urban mobsters; no wonder, then, that they in turn disregard the boundaries between locations of labor and leisure and take their gangwar to the Seminole Ritz. Indeed, the melting away of fixed gender identities—another important boundary—is only thinkable under the hot Florida sun.

Both the German films of the Adenauer years as well as the American films of the Eisenhower era emphasize domesticity and conformity. While the former displayed an uncanny historical amnesia regarding the legacy of Fascist rule and the Holocaust—ridiculed by Wilder in both *A Foreign Affair* and *One, Two, Three*—the latter employed mechanisms of self-censorship enforced by the industry and heightened by the Cold War and the Red Scare. An atmosphere of political and cultural uniformity pervades the 1950s, but there are also pressures against it. With the popularization of psychoanalysis and the publication of the Kinsey reports (in 1947 and 1952), there was a greater emphasis on sexuality in American cinema, including suggestions of adultery (as can be seen in *The Seven Year Itch*, a film Wilder regrets having made precisely because he could not go beyond mere suggestions). And while the Production Code was still intact in 1959, stipulating that “sex perversion”—its term for homosexuality—could not be presented or implied in a motion picture, its interpretation had in fact loosened over the decade.

Bracketed by *Sunset Boulevard* and *The Apartment*, the 1950s was the decade of Wilder’s biggest achievements. While several fellow émigrés and exiles—including Fritz Lang, Douglas Sirk, William Dieterle, Robert Siodmak, Frank Wisbar, Walter Reisch, and Peter Lorre—attempted remigration to Germany, most of them with very limited success, Wilder never seriously contemplated a permanent return. Instead, his postwar films from *A Foreign Affair* onward revisited *prewar* German (and also American) genres and styles to articulate postwar US political predicaments and aesthetic sensibilities: the Weimar cabaret in *A Foreign Affair* and *Witness for the Prosecution*; von Stroheim’s naturalist territories in *Sunset Boulevard*; the famed Lubitsch touch in *Sabrina* and *Love in the Afternoon*; the frantic pace and burlesque humor of Kisch’s Berlin and Molnar’s Vienna in *One, Two, Three* and *Some Like It Hot*. Indeed, of the films listed above, *Some Like It Hot* can count as the most sophisticated attempt to heat up the muted 1950s by infusing them with the roar of the 1920s.

“Now and then Mother Nature throws somebody a dirty curve”

While 1950s German gender-bending comedies are indeed lukewarm, their famous predecessors of the Weimar years are a different matter. The

queer cinema of the Weimar years, about which I will have more to say in a moment, is certainly the most important point of reference for *Some Like it Hot*. Its significance may also explain an inconsistency in Wilder's recollections—when talking about writing the script of *Some Like It Hot* he has repeatedly described his source as a prewar German film from 1932, which does not exist.²⁰ What does exist, apart from Hoffmann's 1951 German film, is a 1935 French version, *Fanfare d'amour*, directed by Richard Pottier (also after the story by Thoeren and Logan). Even though Wilder knew Thoeren and possibly Pottier (born Richard Deutsch), both fellow Austro-Hungarian exiles in Paris, it is unlikely that Wilder is referring to the rather obscure French film, which was not premiered until after he had emigrated to the US.²¹ Wilder's lapse of memory may be explained by the fact that he associated gender bending, at least in its sexually daring and innovative form, with the legacy of Weimar cinema and thus placed Hoffmann's film in that tradition. As mentioned above, by setting *his* film in 1929 Wilder clearly desired to see it in that tradition—*Fanfaren der Liebe*, in contrast, has a contemporary setting—a year which, furthermore, references the point in time when he not only received his first credit as script-writer for *Der Teufelsreporter*, but also scored a surprise success with *Menschen am Sonntag*, that would become his entré billet to Ufa. The clearest reference to a German and Austrian theatre tradition within *Some Like It Hot*, though presented rather fleetingly, is a portrait of theater impresario



Figure 5.5. Joe and Jerry barter with secretary Nellie in front of a photograph showing, from left to right, theatre impresario Max Reinhardt, producer Morris Gest, and author Karl Vollmoeller

Max Reinhardt, most likely taken during his 1927 US tour, that adorns Poliakov's agency.²²

There can be no doubt that in Wilder's own recollections Weimar Berlin figures prominently as a time and space for experimentation with sexual identities. As a twenty-two-year old reporter, Wilder wrote a column for the Berlin newspaper *Tempo* under the pretense of being a woman, by using his nickname Billie (a woman's name in the Anglo-American world) and advising his female readers almost daily in matters of fashion, diet, health, beauty products, and domestic concerns. During the more than one year in which he used this camouflage, Billie spoofed "her" readers by claiming that she had learned from an Indian Yogi how to rid herself of rheumatism, toured Berlin beauty parlors to test their services and products, and confided her own anxieties about receiving the right presents from suitors (a matter of concern also for Daphne).²³ These associations are further underscored by the fact that, in order to instruct Lemmon and Curtis on how to act like women, Wilder brought in "Barbette," a German female impersonator he knew from his "younger days in Europe."²⁴ An apparent holdover of an era famous for drag queens, tomboys, and a spectrum of androgynous types, Barbette was successful in coaching Curtis on how to transform pushy, manipulative Joe into a demure, puckering Josephine, but had trouble with Lemmon who refused to let his Daphne be too feminine for fear of being "like a guy trying to impersonate a gay and overdoing it."²⁵

While Hoffmann's "Tunten" are just a faint echo of 1920s Berlin drag queens, *Some Like It Hot* possesses a far greater affinity to Weimar cinema's challenge to traditional sexual relations and gender identities. Between 1919 and 1933 the German cinema produced a plethora of films that ranged from openly gay and lesbian features to films that questioned traditional representations of gender and sexuality through more nuanced play with modes of concealment and revelation. The first film ever to openly address the issue of homosexuality, with an emphatic didactic bent, was *Anders als die Andern* (*Different From the Others*, 1919), directed by Richard Oswald, and starring Conrad Veidt, Reinhold Schünzel, and as himself, Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, whose work on "das dritte Geschlecht," (the third gender) would become vastly influential. Once Hirschfeld had pushed open the closet, representations of homo- and bisexuality would enter the art cinema of the 1920s. From Dr. Caligari's cabinet emerged the androgynous Cesare (played by Veidt, by now a gay icon), and strong gay and lesbian undertones are found in Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), Lang's Mabuse cycle, G.W. Pabst's *Die Büchse der Pandora* (*Pandora's Box*, 1929) and Leontine Sagan's *Mädchen in Uniform* (*Girls in Uniform*, 1931). Most playful and ambiguous in its blurring of homo- and heterosexuality is *Viktor und Viktoria* by Hoffmann's mentor Reinhold Schünzel, which involves a woman dressing up as a man pretending to be a woman.²⁶ Finally, there is Marlene Dietrich's embrace of the ambivalence of appearance, begin-

ning with her cabaret shows with Margo Lion, through von Sternberg's refashioning of the star, to Wilder's depiction of Dietrich as rolemodel for the sexual makeover of Jean Arthur in *A Foreign Affair*, a learning process with considerable lesbian flavor (and in which a male, Captain Pringle, coaches a woman, Phoebe Frost, how to dress up).

Drawing on the long stage tradition of the "Hosenrolle" (trouser role), films involving female crossdressing formed a particularly popular genre that included *Ich möchte kein Mann sein* (*I Don't Want to Be a Man*, 1919), directed by Wilder's mentor Ernst Lubitsch and starring Ossi Oswalda; Svend Gade's *Hamlet* (1920) with Asta Nielsen in the title role; Paul Czinner's *Der Geiger von Florenz* (*Impetuous Youth*, 1926) with Elisabeth Bergner; and Richard Eichberg's *Der Fürst von Pappenheim* (*The Masked Mannequin*, 1927) with Mona Maris and Curt Bois. As Alice Kuzniar observes, films such as these illustrate "gender confusion, but they also unsettle homo/heterosexual distinction, for with the wardrobe comes the closet and its related concern with appearances and camouflage. At a time when the mannish look was fashionably lesbian and young hustlers, similarly androgynous, wore makeup in the streets, these films provocatively raise the questions: Can transvestism be read as a disguise for homosexuality, a closet whose door is slightly left ajar?"²⁷

Wilder's *Some Like it Hot* has certainly been read along the lines Kuzniar suggests. Ed Sikov, for example, emphatically states that "Osgood's final declaration is openly gay, there's no question about that."²⁸ Discussing the scene following Daphne's engagement to Osgood, Jennifer Wicke similarly claims that Jerry has discovered another element of his sexuality: "There is no way not to interpret this as a homosexual awakening."²⁹ In a way it does make sense that Osgood, whose mama is concerned that he may end up "with the wrong girl," finds bliss with a man. When asked about the homosexual undertones of the film, I.A. L. Diamond defended the film as completely straight: "The whole trick in the picture is that, while the two were dressed in women's clothes, their thinking process [sic!] were at all times a hundred percent male. When there was a slight aberration, like Lemmon getting engaged, it became twice as funny. But they were not camping it up. They never thought of themselves as women. Just for one moment Lemmon forgot himself—that was all. The rest of the time, Curtis was out to seduce Monroe, no matter what clothes he was wearing." Wilder has reiterated Diamond's view, but concluded with a remark worthy of Osgood, making his take on the film as inconclusive as the famous "Nobody's perfect"-line: "But when he [Lemmon] forgot himself it was not a homosexual relationship. It was just the idea of being engaged to a millionaire. It's very appealing. You don't have to be a homosexual. It's security."³⁰

No matter how far one wants to push a queer reading of *Some Like It Hot*, there is general agreement that Wilder's transvestites certainly go further in becoming actual women than anyone before them in the long Hol-

lywood (though not Weimar) tradition of crossdressing, as a quick glance at Bob Hope in *Road to Zanzibar* (Victor Schertzinger, 1941) or Cary Grant in *I Was a Male War Bride* (Howard Hawks, 1949), two of the most popular films in that genre, will reveal. As Patrice Petro has pointed out, Joe and Jerry also undergo a significant character reversal regarding their view of women. At the beginning of the film, they are the holders of the male gaze, ogling Sugar Kane's legs and behind, and commenting on her physical movement in a classically motivated male point of view shot. "Look at that," says Jerry/Daphne, "it's just like Jell-O on a spring!" Yet in the course of the film, after having been pinched in the butt in an elevator and being pursued by a precocious bellhop who likes his women "big and sassy," they come to understand "how the other half lives." As Petro comments, "the film could be described ... as an object-lesson in the need for men to abandon their sexual identities in order to survive. Although not entirely or exactly feminist, the film nonetheless forces its audience (and its central male characters) to experience the world differently, as women do—subject to unwanted sexual overtures, male voyeurism, and the constraints and pleasures of feminine culture. This is the source of much of its humor—for both women and men."³¹

With gender reversal and androgyny becoming highly popular and visible in the 1980s—think of pop stars and entertainers such as Boy George, David Bowie, Michael Jackson, and Madonna, as well as the aforementioned films *Tootsie* and *Victor/Victoria*—*Some Like It Hot* has become in retrospect something of an "ur-text" of gender performance. Made at a time when the "homo" was as much a target of public scrutiny and castigation as the "pinko," the film was deliberately daring and progressive.³² Prohibition, the film suggests, did not end in 1933, it merely shifted to make other forms of "deviancy" illegal or immoral.³³

While the film's central plot device is certainly Joe and Jerry's cross-dressing adventure as Josephine and Daphne, gender performance is only one of many performances around which it revolves. In fact, the main strategy in its quest for undoing the binarism of being and appearance is the foregrounding of performativity itself, of showing to what extent ontology depends on sustained acts of representation. Judith Butler's work on gender performance may help us understand the larger epistemological questions raised by Wilder's film. As Butler has argued, sexual identity is something we institute through a stylized repetition of acts that create the *appearance* of substance. As Butler makes clear, we should not understand gender as a role that we simply put on to express or disguise an interior self. The selves do not exist prior to the cultural conventions that prescribe the modes of reenactment since the model of a private internal and a public external overlooks "that the ascription of interiority is itself a publicly regulated and sanctioned form of essence fabrication." Hence there is no "real" gender outside of performance: "Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed."³⁴

Billy Wilder himself commented that one reason for making a period film was that with everyone wearing a costume the men in drag would stick out less. Indeed, the film's clever play with all kinds of performances subsumes crossdressing as one of many acts of impersonation and role play. As soon as the curtain is raised in the back of the hearse (which itself performs as a stand in for a liquor truck) the show begins. Notably, Joe and Jerry are professional entertainers who are used to dressing for the occasion, including sporting golden earrings and grass skirts, if need be. When we first see Joe playing sax he even seems to be wearing eye makeup. During the course of the film, the two men will not only dress up as women, but Joe will also pretend to be wheelchair-bound while Jerry will become a bellhop (a disguise also used in *Emil und die Detektive*). Joe's second major persona, Junior, the Shell millionaire, will cleverly incorporate into his seduction scheme the knowledge gained by Josephine, bringing about a complex male-female role reversal: "[T]he male disguised as a female redisplayed as a male plays the conventional female sexual role, as the female disguised as a love-goddess redisplayed as a female stereotype must play the conventional male sexual role and seduce him."³⁵

Jerry's conversion into a woman is more complex than Joe's, leading him to suddenly abandon his first pseudonym "Geraldine" for "Daphne," thereby shedding not only the similarity and hence proximity between his male and female identity (which Joe-sephine of course preserves) but also consciously choosing a name whose mythical association foreshadows his own predicament as woman: fleeing the advances of god Apollo, the nymph Daphne was transformed by her father into a laurel tree to protect her from her suitor. Like the nymph, Jerry will learn that what he thought to be a temporary disguise has become a life sentence, with Osgood even more unrelenting in his quest than the Greek god. Furthermore, another notable allusion, this time to the world of fairytale, is Jerry's introducing himself to Osgood the Third as "Cinderella the Second," thereby referencing not only the brother Grimm's well-known rags-to-riches story but also the permanence of the "happily ever after" that concluded this famous transformation.

In the course of the film, both performers will undergo significant character reversals for which their experience in drag serves as an important catalyst. If Jerry, concerned with feeling comfortable and secure from the first moment of the film (when he plans to use a long-awaited pay check to see the dentist), will accept engagement to Osgood precisely for "security," only to be unable to reverse his emergence into Daphne, Joe, the con artist always ready to use his good looks and power of gab in order to get a woman or make the fast buck, learns from his friendship with Sugar how exploitative typical male behavior really is and decides not to let her end up again with the fuzzy end of the lollipop. In one of the film's most emotional scenes, at the conclusion of Sugar's song "I'm Thru with Love," Josephine kisses her on the mouth and says, "None of that, Sugar—no guy

is worth it"—attesting thereby to his newfound moral integrity while giving away his disguise at the very moment the gangsters approach. (Joe's decision to drop both the mask of Josephine as well as the pretense of being a caring male equals Joe Gillis's decision to reveal the truth about himself to Betty Schafer. In both cases the male protagonist saves a young innocent female by highlighting his own shortcomings; in the fated world of *noir* such a revelation cannot rescue those who are already doomed, but in comedy such reversals will be rewarded.)

Performativity is of course also central both to Marilyn Monroe as well as her role as Sugar Kane. Sugar's overemphasized femininity—superblonde and super-curvy—is as much beyond the natural as the men in drag. As we learn from Sugar, her stage name is derived from Kowalczyk, revealing a Polish ancestry which she is trying to leave behind (together with a few other things). Monroe, in Wilder's second film with her, is a curious picture of vulnerability and sexuality, unusual in the Wilder world (though shared perhaps by Shirley MacLaine). If Wilder played with Tony Curtis's on-screen sex appeal as the already established Hollywood actor, as well as his off-screen origins of Bernie Schwartz from the Bronx, with Monroe this layering becomes even more complex.³⁶ While some liked her hot (as Wilder did in *The Seven Year Itch*), here he emphasizes Monroe's talent as comedienne.³⁷ Thus *Some Like It Hot* plays with the dominant narrative of 1950s sexual comedy in which an attractive woman typically is in search of a rich husband for reasons of social mobility. Both in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Howard Hawks, 1953) and *How to Marry a Millionaire* (Jean Negulesco, 1953), we see Monroe involved in a mercenary manhunt, exploiting her outrageous sex appeal for economic gains. Together with Betty Grable, Doris Day, and Jane Russell, Monroe became the prototype of a woman whose only quest in life is to "meet the right man and biology will take care of the rest."³⁸ As Leland Poague has observed, this narrative is reworked with considerable irony by Wilder who "borrows certain Hawksian motifs—transvestism; the golddigging blonde; the shy, ineffectual Cary Grantish character— . . . to suit his own purpose."³⁹ It is no accident that in Wilder's playful subversion of stereotype, it is Jerry as Daphne who successfully assumes the typical Monroe role of the flapper in search of a millionaire, while Junior as Cary Grant, the cliché of male desirability, gets the trophy woman, but only at the price of self-renunciation.

By the time of the film's making, Monroe's highly publicized private life had become increasingly tumultuous and crisis ridden. Her health was deteriorating due to alcohol and drug abuse, and her marriage to playwright Arthur Miller, spoofed in Sugar's attraction for bespectacled men, was in jeopardy. While Sugar asserted, "I can stop [drinking] any time I want to—only I don't want to," Monroe could not. Wilder's altercations with her on the set have become legendary as virtually every biographer has recounted in detail. Against this loaded background, the last of Monroe's three songs that give the film its three act structure slices through the

film's overall play with stereotypes and reveals the image of a star without the armor of a persona: "'I'm Thru With Love' is worth all the Method performances she never gave; it encapsulates a tawdry childhood, three disappointing marriages, the adulation-mockery of curious fans, even a final, abortive phone call. Astoundingly enough, Monroe's singing builds audacious swirls of tremolos and breathiness on the solid foundation of a confident vocal technique."⁴⁰

The play with stereotypes and clichés is equally pronounced in the films' supporting roles. Pat O'Brien as a policeman rehashes his many appearances as an Irish cop while George Raft plays a composite of his entire screen career, replete with coin tricks and asides about grapefruit-shoving. The characterization of mobster Spats Colombo brings into focus another important source from the Weimar years, and one rarely associated with Wilder's film—the early plays and parables of Bertolt Brecht. Brecht's interest in urban crime, which permeates *Mahagonny*, *Happy Together*, *The Threepenny Opera*, and *Jungle of Cities*, was expanded by his readings about Al Capone and seeing American gangster films such as *Scarface*. While it would certainly be wrong to see Wilder's notion of realism within a Brechtian tradition of antiillusionism, *Some Like It Hot* sketches its characters very much along Brecht's theatrical devices, making gangster Spats Colombo a close cousin of the glove-wearing Mack the Knife, while *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui* features a cauliflower trust that is as thin a veil for the Mafiosi as Wilder's "Friends of the Italian Opera." Brecht's plays present their material in the form of a parable that highlights the interconnectedness of crime and capitalism, not unlike the broad brushstrokes used by Wilder to paint a modernity running wild.

Lastly, the use of location is also implicated in the films' overall concern with performativity. While the streets of Chicago look like sets from the Warner gangster series, the San Diego Coronado Hotel, the Seminole Ritz of the film, is equally nonrealist. Frozen in time, it provides the natural stomping ground for Osgood and his companions; like other seaside resorts, it connotes sexual liberty and the seedier side of life (as it does in the aforementioned Arbuckle short). San Diego is an appropriate stand in for Florida, because the Florida of the film purposely resembles Hollywood and Southern California—being filled with millionaires, sharks, and young women hoping to be "discovered."

At the time of the film's making, industry leaders considered a film that combines the St. Valentine's Day Massacre with uproarious laughter a serious mistake.⁴¹ Yet Wilder's film would turn out to be a commercial and critical success, precisely because his crime-inflected comedy managed to pass by the censors the kind of visual and verbal sexual innuendo that a "straight" dramatic film could not. A bootlegger in mixed messages, Wilder created a film whose risqué probing of gender relations and sexual identity challenged and excited contemporary audiences; since its 1959 premiere, it has lost little of its topicality and none of its comic appeal. *Some*

Like It Hot comes at the end of a decade during which Wilder hit his stride, directing ten films which are quite remarkable for their consistency, cleverness, and vitality. It cemented Wilder's partnership with I.A.L. Diamond and inaugurated his collaboration with Jack Lemmon, who together with William Holden would become the star to define most clearly the films of Billy Wilder. Wilder would work with both Diamond and Lemmon for the rest of his career. In 1998, the American Film Institute voted *Some Like It Hot* the funniest comedy in US filmmaking history.

Notes

1. *Interviews*, 68.
2. Karl Kraus, *Beim Wort genommen* (Munich: Kösel, 1965), 224. ["Satiren, die der Zensor versteht, werden mit recht verboten."]
3. On the erosion of the Production Code see Jack Hamilton, "Hollywood Bypasses the Production Code," *Look* 29 September 1959, 80–84. The film director who can claim to have repeatedly and most unrelentingly challenged Hollywood's censorship practices is Wilder's compatriot and fellow émigré Otto Preminger.
4. Peter Sloterdijk, *A Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 389.
5. Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).
6. Wilder quoted in Hutter and Kamolz, 93. Hollaender explained how the Weintraub Syncopators, whom he joined in 1927, were inspired by Whiteman's music: "When you hear 'Rhapsody in Blue' by Whiteman, you want to throw your trumpet away. But five smart boys are hanging in there ... The Weintraub Syncopators." ["Wenn man 'Rhapsody in Blue' von Whiteman hört, möchte man die Trompete ins Korn werfen. Fünf smarte Jungs aber halten durch ... Die Weintraub Syncopators."] Hollaender quoted in Cornelius Partsch, *Schräge Töne: Jazz und Unterhaltungsmusik in der Kultur der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 112. *Mauvaise graine*, made and set in the Paris of 1934, also has a syncopated soundtrack (by Franz Waxman) and emphasizes speed and modernity in a narrative about young men and a woman running wild.
7. See Thomas Elsaesser, "Ethnicity, Authenticity, and Exile: A Counterfeit Trade?," in *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, ed. Hamid Naficy, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 97–123; here 112.
8. *Conversations with Wilder*, 337
9. As Henry Jenkins and Kristine Brunovska Karnick point out: "The film's dependence upon a system of typeage, of extremely stereotypical characters, does not allow us to see the characters as psychologically rounded individuals, but rather invites an exploration of the false perceptions that block understanding within its Cold-War context. *One, Two, Three* becomes an extreme example of the potentials for excessive or disruptive performance within the romantic comedy tradition." See *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, ed. Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins (New York: Routledge, 1995), 166.
10. For a particularly incensed review of the film see Judith Crist, "Billy's Getting Wilder," in *The Private Eye, the Cowboy and the Very Naked Girl: Movies From Cleo to Clyde* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 95–98. Crist also has some damning things to say about *Some Like It Hot*: "Seen it lately? All pretty cute and jazzy ... Look at it closely again and you start to notice how for every raucous and/or ribald masquerade joke there is another that involves a transvestite leer, a homosexual "in" joke or a perverse gag" (96).
11. It appears that Wilder never forgave Freud for showing him the door when the young reporter from *Die Stunde* came to interview him, for the founder of psychoanalysis is rid-

- iculed in numerous films, including the figure of dog psychoanalyst Dr. Zwieback (Sig Ruman) in *The Emperor Waltz*; of the criminal psychologist Dr. Eggelhofer (Martin Gabel) in *The Front Page*; of the sex therapist Dr. Zuckerbrot (Klaus Kinski) in *Buddy Buddy*; and author Dr. Brubaker (Oscar Homolka) in *The Seven Year Itch*, whose manuscript "Of Man and the Unconscious" editor Richard Sherman proposes to publish as "Of Sex and Violence," in order to "reach as wide an audience as possible."
12. The allusion to psychoanalysis provides also one of the film's many ironic and self-reflexive comments on the lives of the stars: by the time the film was made, Monroe had been seeing an analyst for several years.
 13. Anthony Lane, *Nobody's Perfect: Writings From the New Yorker* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 718.
 14. Like Curtis's, Borsche's acting career began after the war and made him one of the most sought-after leads of the 1950s, often in charismatic roles that involved romance. Associated mostly with popular film and later television, Borsche became the embodiment of the cinema of the Adenauer era; while he never was the teen idol that Curtis was, his popularity stemmed from roles that emphasized nobility, decency, and mature personality with a clear sense of values.
 15. A clowning small man who invariably conveys the feeling that he would have liked to be taller, Thomalla's characters are always charged up and ready to run wild. Like Lemmon's Joe/Daphne, Thomalla's Peter/Petra was a breakthrough role that made him a national star. Thomalla would go on to have a leading role in a 1957 remake of Reinhold Schünzel's 1933 gender-bending comedy *Viktor und Viktoria*, for which Hoffmann had served as Schünzel's assistant, and which was to be remade again by Blake Edwards in 1982 as the highly successful *Victor/Victoria*.
 16. Aware of how awkward and problematic it would be for an American film to show actors in black face, Wilder has explained that in prewar Germany "we could do that," alluding to the politically liberal climate of the Weimar years, without however accounting for the fact that even then such form of drag was troubling. See Alison Castle, ed., *Billy Wilder's Some Like It Hot* (Cologne: Taschen, 2001), 244.
 17. *Billy Wilder's Some Like It Hot* 222. A sure sign of the film's perfection is that to this date neither a sequel nor a remake has been attempted, though it has spawned a revival of the cross-dressing genre.
 18. The tradition of the "Heimattfilm" extends long before the 1950s and is fraught with considerable contradictions and ambiguities. For an excellent cultural history of the genre see Johannes von Moltke, *No Place Like Home: Locations of Heimat in German Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
 19. Sinyard and Turner, 215f.
 20. See *Billy Wilder's Some Like It Hot*, 244; *Conversations with Wilder*, 160. It is surprising that none of the many people who interviewed Wilder ever pressed him on this point; apparently, they were all unaware that two versions of the film exist.
 21. Stanley Kauffmann claims to possess a letter in which Wilder wrote him that Thören was "an old chum from the Berlin days." See Kaufmann's "Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot*," *Horizon* 15.1 (1973): 65–71; here 66. Further evidence that Wilder was probably familiar with Thören's work can be found in the fact that Thören also cowrote the script for *Hotel Imperial* (directed by Robert Florey, 1939), which was based on the same Lajos Biró play which Wilder would later use for *Five Graves to Cairo*.
 22. As I learned from Brigitte Mayr, Vollmoeller's partner, Ruth Landsdorff-Yorck, was a journalist colleague of Wilder's with the Ullstein publisher in Berlin.
 23. Hutter and Kamolz, 116ff.
 24. Tony Curtis and Barry Paris, *Tony Curtis: The Autobiography* (New York: William Morrow, 1993), 160. There is no indication whether this Barbette is identical with the Texas-born French actor and artist who befriended Jean Cocteau and starred in his *Le Sang d'un poète* (1930).
 25. *Billy Wilder's Some Like It Hot*, 260.

26. See Wolfgang Theis, "Schünzels Requisiten. Zum Beispiel: Die Handschuhe," in *Reinhold Schünzel: Schauspieler und Regisseur*, ed. Jörg Schöning, (Munich: Text+Kritik, 1989), 21–24. *Viktor und Viktoria* is another excellent example to measure the distance between Weimar and postwar Germany. The film's tame remake by Karl Anton, starring again Georg Thomalla, dilutes Schünzel's sophisticated efforts to blur the lines between homo- and heterosexuality.
27. Alice A. Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 22.
28. Sikov, *Laughing Hysterically: American Screen Comedy of the 1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 146.
29. See Jennifer Wicke, "Double-Cross-Dressing: The Politics of a Genre," *Annals of Scholarship* 11.4 (1997): 359–377; here 369.
30. *Billy Wilder Interviews*, 124. Lemmon's costars have also offered curious remarks on homosexuality. Curtis has stated how the small print in his contracts stipulated that he have affairs with his leading ladies, for publicity purposes: "[W]ith two or three exceptions, I did. One of those few leading ladies I didn't have an affair with was Jack Lemmon. It just didn't seem right to me. I had some aversions to his charms." (Curtis and Paris, 166.) Walter Matthau, in contrast, has said about Jack Lemmon: "If I were a homosexual, I'd marry him in a minute." (Quoted in Aurich, 14.)
31. Patrice Petro, "Legacies of Weimar Cinema," in *Cinema and Modernity*, ed. Murray Pomerance; forthcoming from Rutgers University Press.
32. For a contrary view see Peter Biskind who asserts: "In films like *Some Like It Hot* (1959), transvestism had become a harmless and humorous metaphor for the feminization of men." See Peter Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 340.
33. On the persecution of homosexuals in the 1950s, see David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004).
34. Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theater*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 270–282; here 278 and 279.
35. Gerald Mast, *The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979), 277.
36. The only actor not to be involved in this play on on-screen and off-screen identity is Jack Lemmon, who was considerably less known at the time.
37. While that film also attempted to play with Monroe's star image—Tom Ewell jokingly tells his neighbor "Marilyn Monroe is in the kitchen!"—it was largely complicit with other Hollywood films that portrayed her as a dumb blonde. *The Apartment*, too, will include a joke about Monroe, when executive Dobish picks up a woman at a bar who he claims looks like Marylin Monroe. What is even more startling is that actress Joyce Jameson actually sounds exactly like Monroe.
38. Christopher Beach, *Class, Language and American Film Comedy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 128.
39. Leland Pogue, *The Hollywood Professionals: Wilder and McCarey* (London: Tantivy Press, 1980), 81.
40. Richard Corliss, *Talking Pictures: Screenwriters in the American Cinema 1927–1973* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1974), 154.
41. As David Selznick told Wilder before shooting began, "You want machine guns and dead bodies and gags in the same picture? Forget about it, Billy. You'll never make it work." (Quoted in Sikov, *On Sunset Boulevard*, 415.)

Chapter 6

BEING A *MENSCH* IN THE ADMINISTERED WORLD: *THE APARTMENT* (1960)

“People will do anything for money—except some people who will do almost anything for money.”

—Billy Wilder¹

“The National Board for Economic Viability’s definition has no place for the term ‘human beings.’ Presumably it has been forgotten because it no longer plays any very important role.”

—Siegfried Kracauer²

Meet C.C. Baxter

A helicopter shot pans the Manhattan skyline from right to left, with the skyscrapers brought into relief by the afternoon sun, while a somewhat hectic voiceover informs us that on this day, November 1, 1959, the exact population of New York City is 8,042,783. We cut to an exterior shot of one of the tall buildings that presumably just passed by in the establishing shot, and the camera pans up its steel and glass façade, then dissolves into a panoramic shot of the interior of an immense office furnished with literally hundreds of desks behind which employees operate calculators and typewriters. Here the camera holds for a moment, interrupting the fluidity of the horizontal and vertical panning of the first two shots, to allow us to take in the vastness of the space. As the voiceover explains, we are at Consolidated Life, an insurance company that employs 31,259 people at its New York headquarters: “I work on the nineteenth floor – Ordinary Policy Department – Premium Accounting Division – Section W – desk number 861.” Prompted by this information, we seek to make out the narrator (Jack Lemmon) among the mass of employees but are frustrated for a few moments until the camera cuts to medium closeup of desk 861 with the name plate “C.C. Baxter” attached to it, an observation immediately

confirmed by the narrator who explains his full name to be “C. for Calvin, C. for Clifford – however, most people call me Bud.”

The four opening shots of *The Apartment* take up less than one minute of screentime and thus establish with appropriate efficiency the nature of efficiency in the American corporate world. Insurance companies, we understand, base their business on the coordination of data and facts, which are translated into numbers. The vertical and horizontal panning of the camera comes to a rest at precisely the moment at which it has located its target—desk number 861—within the system of coordinates. Combined with the information that it is November 1, 1959, we have been provided with the exact temporal and spatial information to place the subject in question. While a nineteenth-century omniscient narrator would have taken quite some time to zoom in on his or her protagonist, making sure that the reader understood the full significance of the formative power of time and place, our narrator takes care of such matters with expediency. What is more, after the opening sequence he is never heard from again, suggesting that he is no master of his tale in the realist tradition but subject to a process of storytelling in which the narrator has lost the power of organization and control.

The camera work and the voiceover leave no doubt that Baxter is entirely a product of the insurance business; he has climbed the corporate ladder by transferring from the branch office in Cincinnati (as we will learn later), but that advancement has come at a price: the “facts” he has been taught to remember—that, for example, the entire population of New York “if laid ... end to end, figuring an average height of five feet six and a half inches, ... would reach from Times Square to the outskirts of Karachi, Pakistan” or that the number of people employed by his company is higher “than the entire population of Natchez, Mississippi”—are essentially useless, a symptom of data gathering that serves no purpose. When Baxter operates his calculator, his head nods slightly to the rhythm of the machine, signaling that it is turning him into a robot. Indeed, if no nameplate were attached to his desk, it would be impossible to identify the identity of the person operating the machine. Baxter is the American everyman driven to an extreme, a cog in a gigantic mechanism. In this world, status is defined in purely symbolic terms; the higher the floor number one occupies in Consolidated Life, the more spacious the office, the more numerous the privileges, and hence the more important and powerful the person. Being located on the nineteenth floor in a building that numbers over thirty, we immediately understand that Baxter occupies a mid-level position, and as we will learn soon after, like most employees Baxter desires something higher.

The counterpart to the overcrowded, high-rising public office where Baxter works is the emptiness of his bachelor pad in a low-level brown-stone near Central Park. In fact, with very few exceptions we see Baxter only in these two opposed spaces, suggesting that his life consists of work



Figure 6.1. Trauner set design

and of moments of rest so that he can work more. The central plot element of Wilder and Diamond's carefully crafted scenario stipulates that a gain in office space is dependent upon relinquishing his private space: by allowing his superiors to use his apartment for their extramarital affairs, he wins their favor and promotion, but in the process he ironically becomes homeless. Buddy's key to success, both symbolically and literally, is his apartment key, the lending of which is rewarded with a key to the executive washroom, the sign of newly gained stature. At the beginning of the film, Baxter has to spend a cold night in the park because one of his "customers" accidentally leaves the washroom key under the doormat instead of the apartment key. By the film's end, when Baxter finally regains his moral integrity, the situation will be reversed; Baxter responds to the demand of his superior, Sheldrake (Fred MacMurray), for the apartment key with returning the washroom key, fully accepting the consequences.³

As the only visible way to move between floors is by elevator, the elevator's operator, Miss Fran Kubelick (Shirley MacLaine), is the inadvertent facilitator of upward mobility; ironically, she is also the prize for which Baxter and Sheldrake compete, and for which Baxter will ultimately forfeit his professional achievements when he realizes the extent to which Miss Kubelick suffers at the hands of Sheldrake, as well as his complicity in her exploitation. Regaining his moral standards, he abandons his professional climbing for human integrity, a decision which finally wins him the attention of Miss Kubelick in a happy ending that remains as open as that of *Some Like It Hot* and many other Wilder films.

The Apartment is one of very few Wilder films that uses a location as its title, and those that do—such as *Stalag 17* or *Sunset Boulevard*—allude to specific places that connote a certain historical and geographic meaning. In contrast, the generic nature of this title, from Wilder's first original script since *Ace in the Hole* nine years earlier, signals that the true protagonist may not be Baxter but the place he lives in, and that the basic tension explored by the film is that between being a certain *type* of human being and what actually makes that being *human*. A Buddy-Boy without real friends,

Baxter leads a solitary life of TV dinners, surrounded by run-of-the-mill furniture, minimal kitchen appliances, and posters of modern paintings, which we later understand to have been purchased while passing time in various museums because his apartment is occupied.⁴ Clearly, places like these produce and shape types like Baxter, while types like Baxter will seek out places like these to make their “home.” The notion of home needs to be rendered in quotation marks, not only because Baxter’s professional ambition literally makes him homeless, but also because even when occupied by himself, the apartment provides Baxter with only the most spurious sense of belonging. Similar in nature to how Walter Neff and Joe Gillis reside in their respective Los Angeles apartments, Baxter’s way of dwelling resembles that of a guest staying in a hotel, with departure imminent and suitcases close by. Significantly, the first time we see him in his apartment he performs what amounts to room service, namely picking up after paying guests have left. It is no coincidence that the one film we are privy to watch with self-described television fan Baxter is *Grand Hotel* (Edmund Goulding, 1932, based on the novel and subsequent play by Wilder’s fellow émigré Vicki Baum). The film chronicles the parallel stories of rich and poor hotel guests, including an accountant like Baxter who succeeds in winning the favor of a secretary by wresting her away from a corrupt industrialist. (Indeed, it is startling to keep track of how many of the films Wilder wrote or directed use a hotel as a central setting, thereby emphasizing the transient nature of dwelling in the twentieth century, as well as his own status as exile.)⁵ That the pleasure the film affords Baxter is ruined by television ads further underscores the theme of commercialization that pervades *The Apartment*.

Baxter’s apartment slowly begins to feel more like a home after Fran’s suicide attempt, when the film settles there for a good half hour. When Dreyfuss and Baxter drag Fran around the apartment, a black puppet comes into view in the background, a satiric comment on the fate of the woman now in the hands of these two men, but also on Baxter’s own sta-



Figure 6.2. Baxter waits in vain for *Grand Hotel*

tus, because his strings are being pulled by his superiors. Ironically, it is at the moment of least anchored living—when in the final shot we watch Baxter and Fran playing cards among packed boxes—that the film conveys the strongest sense of two people not only truly belonging to each other but also to and in this place.

The apartment is the object that leads to both Baxter's promotion and demotion, as well as the location for most of the events that drive the plot, including Sheldrake's encounters with Fran, Fran's suicide attempt, and the awakening of Baxter's sense of male pride after being beaten by Fran's brother-in-law Karl; furthermore, it is the location that is under careful scrutiny by virtually all supporting characters in the film, ranging from Sheldrake through the four mid-level executives at Consolidated Life to Baxter's Jewish landlady and neighbors (about whose positive influence on Baxter I will have more to say below). The opening credits—about equal in length to the four shots described above—roll over Alexander Trauner's exterior set of the apartment, establishing from the outset the studio quality of the film; even though there will be brief location photography of the Majestic Theatre, a few shots of Central Park, and the street where the "Rickshaw Boy" restaurant is located, the film creates the sense that its story is universal and not specific to New York. Indeed, most of Wilder's New York films, including *The Major and the Minor*, *The Seven Year Itch*, and *The Apartment*, use the city as a generic backdrop, privileging extensive use of studio sets over location photography for narratives in which the city's specific history and geography seems to matter very little. This sets them apart quite distinctively from his Los Angeles films in which the city not only is portrayed far more authentically—even to the point of becoming an important participant in the narrative—but is also tied to these films' inherent self-reflexivity. *Hold Back the Dawn*, *Double Indemnity*, and *Sunset Boulevard* all revolve around the role of the film industry in the American imaginary; both *Sunset Boulevard* and *Hold Back the Dawn* not only explicitly foreground how the construction and selling of narratives to the film industry is a matter of life or death but also implicate Hollywood in the construction of images that have no reference in reality—be it a critique of a false notion of eternal youth, or that of the United States as promised land (with *Hold Back the Dawn* featuring a gate separating Mexico from its Northern neighbor that conspicuously resembles the gate of Paramount film studios in *Sunset Boulevard*). *Double Indemnity*, as I have suggested in chapter 3, uses the insurance business as an extended metaphor for the workings of the film industry and thus similarly highlights the conditions which make films like itself possible in the first place.

None of Wilder's New York films can claim such an approach. The only exception regarding the use of location among his New York films is *The Lost Weekend*, which features extensive footage of the seedier underbelly of the Upper East Side and was celebrated for that reason at the time of its release. One of the first critics not only to observe the realism of Wilder's

location photography but also relate it to the German street films of the 1920s as Siegfried Kracauer: "Third Avenue and its iron-work, its bars and its pawnshops [feature] as the region of anarchy and distress. (Significantly enough, shots of street life were also prominent in German films of the pre-Hitler Weimar Republic periods that described the tragedies of instinct-possessed beings.)"⁶ Kracauer's observation is part of a larger argument (discussed extensively in chapter 3) that connects Weimar modernity with the emergence of *noir*; indeed, much of what Kracauer says about Hollywood's "terror films" (the term *film noir* had not yet gained currency) would pertain even more to *Double Indemnity* and *Sunset Boulevard*, underscoring my argument about the very different notions of realism that divide Wilder's East Coast and West Coast settings. Furthermore, unlike his Los Angeles films, *The Lost Weekend* tells a story—the struggles of an alcoholic writer—for which the city in which it occurs serves merely as background for life in an anonymous metropolis.

The different notion of realism and use of location photography underlying Wilder's New York films is related to the origins of their respective sources as well as the conditions for filming. *The Seven Year Itch* was based on a successful Broadway play, just as *The Apartment* was originally conceived as a production for the stage, as Wilder has explained.⁷ Since it was set in the winter, outdoor shooting for *The Apartment* proved difficult and expensive, and Wilder decided to have exteriors reconstructed in the studio in Los Angeles. Yet apart from these practical concerns the point bears repetition that New York for Wilder always remained a far more generic and abstract American metropolis than Los Angeles, and thus far-better suited for a drama emphasizing the generic nature of the existence of a certain type of person. What we see in C.C. Baxter's story is the struggle of an individual with the power of corporate capitalism as well as the force of modernity in shaping the ambitions, moral values, and desires of the white-collar worker, a class that rose to prominence after World War II and began to dominate the professional landscape of America during the 1950s.⁸

The Salaried Masses

As Billy Wilder has repeatedly acknowledged, the opening sequence of *The Apartment* was inspired by the beginning of King Vidor's famous silent film, *The Crowd* (1928). In that film, it was young John Sims who at age twenty-one comes to New York in the hope of finding a better future. Following his arrival by boat, and confronting the viewer with a series of shots documenting the buzzing street life of the metropolis reminiscent of Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, Symphony of a Big City* (made the year before), the camera cuts to the exterior of a large office building, travels up its façade and glides indoors, until it spots our "hero," now labeled worker #137,



Figure 6.3. King Vidor, *The Crowd*: Sims, a man in the mass

among hundreds of clerks in an office room of enormous proportions.⁹ Unlike the slightly robotic Baxter, Sims is an upbeat employee who eyes with anticipation the clock striking five to end his workday (which Baxter will ignore for different reasons); but soon enough his youthful enthusiasm will be revealed as naïveté regarding the severity of the struggle to stay ahead of the crowd, as the film follows his troubled attempts to make it in the big city.

If the relationship between the apartment and the psychological and social dimension of its inhabitant is the focus of Wilder's film, Vidor's is a chronicle of the story of an individual in the emerging mass society of the twentieth century. Sims is a face in the crowd that moves in for a closeup for the duration of the film, only to recede into a mass of people again at the film's closing. We follow this average man through his workday, honeymoon, the birth of his children, and marital crisis by focusing entirely on Sims (there is hardly a shot in the film without him in it); the plot consists of mundane events and revolves around Sims's efforts to stick out in the crowd, which are eventually tempered into his acceptance of being one them.

If *The Crowd* depicts the drama of defining one's place in modern mass society—where assembly-line production has come to encompass now also the working and living conditions of the white-collar worker—*The Apartment* focuses on the effects of corporate capitalism and mass culture more than thirty years later. The focal point of Baxter's life is no longer the struggle for survival; by the late 1950s, the white-collar workers have established themselves as major players in the American workforce and enjoy the benefits of regulated, unionized labor agreements, relative job security, and benefits. What befalls Baxter is the concomitant alienation

and loneliness that marks the modern workplace, as efficiency and anonymity have dramatically increased, indicated through a telling touch in the opening scene, namely that working hours have been staggered by floor so as to avoid elevator jams. Of Sims's youthful vitality and arrogance nothing seems to have survived in jaded and complacent C.C. Baxter. Whereas Sims is never seen alone—either he is swallowed up by a New York crowd or surrounded by friends or family—Baxter is repeatedly shown in isolation, either working late in a deserted office, waiting for a date that will never show, or sitting on a park bench while his apartment is occupied, often depicted in long-shots that powerfully illustrate his loneliness—he even goes so far as to call himself “Robinson Crusoe—shipwrecked among eight million people.” Whereas *The Crowd* presents survival in the city as cutthroat but ultimately meaningful and rewarding, *The Apartment* shows the workplace in that same city more than three decades later to be comfortable but empty.

While Wilder's films have often been filled with allusions and references to other films, star personae, and directors—most notably in those that revolve around the film industry itself—the extensive quoting of Vidor's silent classic at the opening of *The Apartment* is unparalleled in his oeuvre and begs for further examination.¹⁰ The parallel openings suggest that Sims and Baxter are universal types of different historical eras, representatives of an ever-increasing number of Americans whose moral values, tastes, desires, and dreams are shaped almost entirely by their work environment. Casting Baxter as Sims' descendant endows a man who seems to have no family or relatives (except for an ex-wife) with an ancestry, but one rooted in (film) history rather than a personal one. If we take into account that Vidor's use of the mobile camera and location photography was modeled, in his own words, on the vision of F.W. Murnau, E.A. Dupont, and Fritz Lang, as well as the “enlightening influence from European studios,” we have in *The Apartment* yet another example of a Wilder film establishing a distinct genealogy between the American and German cinema of the 1920s and the American 1950s.¹¹

This genealogy is further corroborated by the fact that Vidor's portrait of mass society, which follows a tradition from Edgar Allan Poe to Elmer Rice and Sinclair Lewis, should not only be seen influenced stylistically by German film professionals but also to be in direct dialogic relationship with Weimar Germany's sophisticated discourse on mass society and mass culture, and particularly what role America played in its emergence (as discussed in chapter 2). Of particular relevance here is Siegfried Kracauer's *Die Angestellten* (*The Salaried Masses*), first published in installments in 1929/30 in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and subsequently as a book, a study of white-collar workers in Berlin whose numbers had swelled dramatically in Germany (as in the US) in the first three decades of the twentieth century.¹² Kracauer's approach to grasping the social, economic, and psychological dimension of this new class was to write neither an empiri-

cal study nor a reportage (a form of reporting using 'snapshots of reality' first made fashionable by Wilder's mentor Egon Erwin Kisch); instead, he intended to compose a "mosaic" of observations, interviews, and data in order to capture the habits, thoughts, tastes, and patterns of speech of this emerging class.¹³ Stressing the ubiquity and yet strangeness of his object of study, Kracauer purposely assumed the position of an ethnographer: "Hundreds of thousands of salaried employees throng the streets of Berlin daily, yet their life is more unknown than that of the primitive tribes at whose habits those same employees marvel in films."¹⁴ Just as Vidor preserves a certain distance from his anti-hero Sims by treating him as an example of a new species, so Kracauer too stresses the foreignness of the all-too familiar to highlight what the subtitle of his essay labels "the newest Germany." (Baxter will usher Miss Kubelick into the office where the Christmas party is held with the words, "shall we join the natives?" thereby underscoring his own sense of foreignness.)

Like many of his contemporaries, Kracauer located the origins of the forces of modernization in the United States.¹⁵ Thus he quotes an employee who explains the desirability of putting on a smiling face when reporting to work as something to be learned from the Americans;¹⁶ and he specifically alludes to Taylorism when he writes of the "the irruption of the machine and 'assembly-line' methods into the clerical departments of big firms" as following an "American pattern"—a phenomenon with very visible traces also in both Sims's and Baxter's job duties.¹⁷ Specific for Germany, however, was that the new white-collar class was composed less of upwardly mobile blue-collar workers and more of an impoverished bourgeoisie, left without savings and property after the World War and the inflation. Thus Kracauer cites the example of girls who "when the middle classes were still in a better state ... nimbly practiced their *études* on their parents piano," but now use their dexterous fingers to punch holes in cards; ingenious managers have found out that the speed with which girls can perform this task can be increased if a certain music, such as a vivacious military march, is played in the background.¹⁸ (As if commenting on this observation, during the opening scene of *The Apartment* the nature of Baxter's assembly-line work is heightened by Adolph Deutsch's brisk marching score.)

The defining new feature of this emerging middle class is, according to Kracauer, a radically changed relation between work and leisure in which the process of identity formation, shaped in the past by origin and tradition, has been increasingly replaced by the culture industry. But since the sites and sights of distraction provided by the movie theatres, amusement parks, and establishments like Haus Vaterland, a leisure palace of enormous proportions, employ the very same means of standardization and rationalization to cater to the fantasies of the new middle class that also shapes the workplace from which they desire to escape in the first place, there is no outside of this new form of capitalist rationality, making the

salaried masses not just a new class but a representative of a new type of worker.¹⁹ Bereft of spiritual and traditional guidance, as well as any class-consciousness, this new worker operates in a vacuum: "The mass of salaried employees differ from the worker proletariat in that they are spiritually homeless."²⁰ Seeking shelter in the only "asylum" available for them, namely the culture industry, they become vulnerable, so Kracauer, to the very mechanisms of manipulation and distortion which only a few years later the National Socialists would so cleverly exploit (driving Kracauer into exile and making *The Salaried Masses* one of the first volumes to be burnt on the pyre).

It needs to be stressed that Kracauer withheld in his study any formulations that summarize his ideological leanings; instead, he described the work situation of white-collar workers in detail and complexity, allowing for multiple perspectives and drawing out contradictions and ironies, thereby letting the material itself articulate his theory. As has been pointed out, it is perhaps no coincidence that Kracauer's representational methods, which include closeups, cuts, and montage, recall those of film, thereby underscoring his faith in the medium of the optical and his fascination with surface-level phenomena.²¹ At the same time, it cannot be denied that the argument put forth by *The Salaried Masses*, as well as other essays of the period, anticipates Adorno's indictment of the culture industry, written in American exile some fifteen years later. And while *The Salaried Masses* at times reads like a theoretical compendium of the life of John Sims (notice Kracauer's and Vidor's mutual emphasis on how work and leisure activities mutually inform each other), Adorno's observations on the administered world ("verwaltete Welt") capture *in nuce* the professional and private predicament of C.C. Baxter.

If "the racket" had been the term of choice for Adorno's theory of society during the time of fascism, pointing to the similarities between criminals and the heads of state running not only Nazi Germany but also liberal democracies, the administered world describes the totalizing force of "the system" of the postwar years intent on destroying the last residues of autonomy and individuality. It is a world in which the exchange principle and the almighty reign of organizations have turned individuals into commodities, objects, or processes, forcing them into hasty conformism or face the threat of disappearance, and thereby effectively doing away with any notion of subjectivity. In the process, the private, often considered the last residue of humanity and resistance, becomes easy prey for the totalizing forces Adorno sees at work in modern society: "The subjugation of life to the process of production imposes as humiliation on everyone something of the isolation and solitude that we are tempted to regard as resulting from our own superior choice."²²

Seen in this light, the solitude of C.C. Baxter's life is not an attempt to escape the rat race of Consolidated Insurance but an inescapable consequence of being part of "the process of production." Indeed, loneliness

as a central experience of postwar modernity may explain the desire of Baxter's superiors for extra-marital affairs to be less a search for adventure and more an escape from deadening domestic routines, just as it explains the female employees' willingness to enter into affairs with married colleagues as motivated by reasons other than romance or professional advancement. In other words, by focusing on the structural dimensions of corporate capitalism, and the systemic forces that regulate subjugation, Adorno's theory shifts blame from the moral shortcomings of individuals toward the omnipotence of a system that disallows meaningful interhuman relationships. If one follows this line of reasoning, Baxter's moral failure, which after all approximates prostitution and pimping, are but the product of a system that not only does *not* reward moral integrity but is bent on annihilating the very source of human integrity, the individual.

A Man Without Qualities?

Given the fact that central common experiences have shaped the lives and careers of Theodor W. Adorno and Billy Wilder (as pointed out in chapter 2), it should come as no surprise that these two fellow Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany should share a certain view of the world, and that their attempt to explain post-World War II industrial imperialism, upward mobility, and rapid consumerism would inevitably recall their experience of the political, economic, and social failure of Weimar modernity (as evident in many of the films discussed in detail in this volume as well as *Sabrina*; *One, Two, Three*; *The Fortune Cookie*; and *Avanti!*).²³ Wilder himself has been emphatic in placing *The Apartment* in a tradition of realism that takes on the shortcomings of contemporary society (a critique that is informed by what I have earlier called the parallel modernity of Weimar Berlin): "We have a prefabricated loneliness in America—TV dinners and everything. With this loneliness goes the urge to better oneself and rise from the masses ... I portray Americans as beasts ... I never considered *The Apartment* to be a comedy."²⁴ Adorno's numerous remarks about the vacuity of (American) consumer culture and the hypocrisy and double standard of the middleclass in *Minima Moralia* find their equivalent in Wilder's biting satire of the Christmas season, as the most flamboyant example of how consumerism has not only corrupted spiritual values but turned what used to be holy days of reflection and introspection into holidays from reason and restraint. The Christmas party scene at the office, strategically located at the halfway mark of the film, is of central importance to the film.²⁵ Not only does it provide a grotesque portrait of unchecked libidos and corporate fraternization seemingly devoid of hierarchical structure (soon revealed to be of a very temporary nature) at the very location where anonymity and efficiency usually reign supreme, but it also contains two revelatory scenes—Fran learns about Sheldrake's many prior affairs with



Figure 6.4. Anything goes: The office Christmas party

girls in the office, while Baxter realizes that she is Sheldrake's mistress—that gain their full emotional power against the background of spurious laughter and obscene debauchery. The heavy-drinking Kris Kringle at the bar, Sheldrake's monetary Christmas gift to Fran (which effectively turns her into a prostitute),²⁶ the pathetic little Christmas tree in Baxter's apartment, the pricetags on Sheldrake's new dressrobe as reminders of crass commercialism—all these examples underscore the nightmarish dimensions of the season to be jolly from which Baxter only awakens when Karl Matuschka knocks him into his Christmas tree and causes the tree to tumble to the ground.

Many contemporary reviewers, especially outside the United States, lauded *The Apartment* for its realistic portrayal of the kind of personality corporate capitalism breeds, sometimes even using terms provided by Adorno and other contemporary sociologists.²⁷ Indeed, so convincing did some of them find the figure of C.C. Baxter that they lamented that his turnaround at the end of the film not only represented a box office-oriented compromise on the part of the director but remained highly implausible, given how persuasively the film had demonstrated the omnipotence of the system.²⁸ Yet it needs to be pointed out that what lends the film its vitality, and what creates any sympathy on the part of viewers for its implausible hero, is precisely the moral tension that marks Baxter's struggle to stay decent in an indecent world. Although certainly a monad in Adorno's sense,

he is not what Kracauer called a “Radfahrer” (cyclist) to describe employees “who bow down to those above them and trample those below.”²⁹ Unlike the exploits of mid-level sharks Dobish and Kirkeby, Baxter’s spinelessness harms no one except himself, and he does not use his newly found power to exert pressure on underlings. If his own story is to be trusted, he got into the habit of lending his apartment because of generosity not cunning, and probably kept it up as much due to his inability to say no as for monetary reasons.

The credit for imbuing Baxter’s moral ambiguity with credibility and dignity, and for constantly straddling the fine line between comedy and tragedy, has to go, of course, to Jack Lemmon’s outstanding performance. As Sinyard and Turner comment, “to play Baxter as a cold-hearted opportunist who knows what he is doing might have alienated our sympathies; and to play him as a nice, dumb sort of guy who did not see he was being used might have stretched our credulity. Lemmon’s performance takes a meticulously judged line between the two extremes. It is a portrayal that is at once comic and poignant.”³⁰ The role of Baxter is one of many in which Lemmon plays “the average guy,” an insecure and confused man in search of the American Dream, extending back to *Some Like It Hot* and forwards to *The Fortune Cookie* and *Buddy Buddy*, Wilder’s final film. Like the musician Jerry, Baxter is obsessed with comfort and security, and it is fitting that he should work for a corporation whose business it is to sell security to its customers. Unlike John Sims, for which Vidor purposely cast an extra without any real acting experience so as to avoid the strong viewer identification invited by a star, Lemmon’s Baxter is all too human; while he may be fussy, neurotic, and sexless, his constant sniffing and gasping, his naïveté, but also his chivalresque covering up for Fran vis-à-vis his neighbors and her brother-in-law make him a character deserving of pity and sympathy, with real desires and emotions, no matter how despicable his behavior at first may be.

In Shirley Maclaine, Lemmon has a partner who imbues Fran Kubelick with both vulnerability and sexuality: while her common sense invariably succumbs to her romantic side, and she just can’t help being one of the people who repeatedly “get took” by “takers” like Sheldrake, she eventually realizes who is truly deserving of her affection. And while she may have traits in common with Kracauer’s poor little shopgirls, whose dreams are molded by the film industry and who “in the dark movie theaters . . . grope for their date’s hand and think of the coming Sunday,” Fran is a self-determined young woman—noticeable by the fact that she cuts her hair short and that she wears a flower in the lapel of her uniform even though that is against regulations (as the script explains)—who does not blame Jeff Sheldrake but only her own naïveté for ending up with the fuzzy end of the lollipop, as it were.³¹ In that respect, the perky, uninhibited Maclaine portrays a woman who is significantly different from the dominant female images of the fifties such as “the sensuous softness of

Marilyn Monroe ... the sultry sophistication of Elizabeth Taylor [or] the cool aristocratic bearing of a Grace Kelly or an Audrey Hepburn."³² In contrast to the films of this period, which according to Molly Haskell "were all *about sex*, but *without sex*," *The Apartment* clearly implies premarital and adulterous sexual relationships, and the fact that Fran still ends up with the hero (even though a very unconventional one) rather than being punished in some way demonstrates the dramatically different way in which films began to represent the changing role of women in society in the 1960s.³³

The only one-dimensional character in the film is Sheldrake, for which Wilder yet again cast Fred MacMurray against type. As Wilder explained, "if the insurance salesman he played in *Double Indemnity* hadn't taken a wrong turn, he might have ended up running the whole company, like Sheldrake in *The Apartment*."³⁴ It might be added here that for Wilder the insurance business must have been the embodiment of what is wrong with capitalism, for it figures prominently not only in the two above-mentioned films but also in *The Fortune Cookie*, featuring the memorable observation by shyster lawyer Gingrich (Walter Matthau) that insurance companies have so much money that "they don't know what to do with it – they've run out of storage space – they have to microfilm it."³⁵

While the anonymity and loneliness of Baxter's life is powerfully conveyed in the shots discussed earlier, his lack of identity is most visible in his use of language (whereas Fran's comes across in her self depreciation). His brisk, nervous tone imitates the fact-driven but vacuous lingo of the insurance business, of which Mr. Kirkeby's habit of adding the suffix "–wise" to all kinds of adjectives, nouns, and even proper names (a habit readily imitated by Baxter but also by Sheldrake and Dobish) is the most extreme case—an example of what Adorno called speech being "sportified."³⁶ Indeed, repeating what other people say seems a staple of Baxter, pointing again to his lack of sense of who he really is (further underscored by his purchase of the bowler hat). Thus he uses Dr. Dreyfuss's admonition about an imminent death unless he changes his fast-paced lifestyle to impress barfly Margie; and he passes on Dreyfuss's advice that even though Fran's suicide attempt was averted she is "not out of the woods yet" to Sheldrake as if it were his own wisdom. Pretending to be a callous gigolo, he also repeats to Mrs. Dreyfuss the condescending comments Sheldrake made earlier about Fran—"I mean, you take a girl out a couple of times a week and right away she thinks you're serious"—to hide his true feelings about her and to shelter Sheldrake. Significantly, at the end of the film this pattern of imitation is reversed: Having rehearsed a speech for Sheldrake of how he will "take Miss Kubelick off [his] hands," he is disarmed when Sheldrake uses that same phrase on him. Having for once come up with a statement that reflects initiative and a sense of responsibility, the failure to be able to deliver it proves too much. Resigning himself to the fact that

Sheldrake has won Miss Kubelick, he decides no longer to be the facilitator of that affair and quits his job. Ironically, this leads to the one situation in which someone cites Baxter's words rather than Baxter parroting others—namely when Sheldrake explains to Fran that Baxter stipulated that he cannot bring anyone to Baxter's apartment, "especially not Miss Kubelick"—and occasioning a moment of recognition in Fran who then rushes to Baxter's apartment in a wonderful tracking shot which director Volker Schlöndorff has called one of the most liberating he has seen.³⁷

The film's emphasis on the subtlety of language is part of a narrative driven primarily by dialogue (as so many Wilder films are). Indeed, apart from the stunning opening sequence and the repeated long shots of Baxter mentioned earlier, the verbal dominates the visual throughout the film. Thus, little is made of the Panavision format, which ironically highlights verticality in a film concerned with upward mobility and thus suggests the suffocating low ceiling of corporate culture. While I would not go as far as Mark Cousins and claim that the film actually looks better on television than in a theater, I do agree that it straddles the transition between the two media much more easily than most films made in that format.³⁸ This compatibility with a television aesthetics went a long way toward establishing the film's lasting reputation, as it became a staple of American television, but it is also completely in accordance with the overall project Wilder pursues in this film. The film's black-and-white photography, much-talked about in relation to *Some Like It Hot* but hardly commented on in this case, not only serves to bring out the gray-tones in the two protagonists but to underscore yet again the film's affinity to a medium that in the decade to come would profoundly shape the production, distribution, and look of new films. In this context, finally, it is only appropriate that Trauner and Boyle's art direction and set design should be rewarded with an Oscar, while Joseph LaSelle's fine cinematography went unnoticed.³⁹

As with most films made for television, *The Apartment* relies primarily on the strength of its performers. The foregrounding of studio photography as well as the sparse use of original locations highlight, as remarked earlier, the generic nature of Baxter and his world, while making one locale central to the plot anticipates at the same time the advent of television soap operas and series, of which *Seinfeld* would become the most famous to claim Wilder's film as an ancestor.⁴⁰ Television in *The Apartment* is no longer treated as an invisible threat lingering under the surface, as it was in *Sunset Boulevard*; instead, it has become second nature. For Baxter, people like Ed Sullivan, Perry Como, or Mae West are his only companions at night, while telephone operator Sylvia schedules her rendezvous with Kirkeby around Robert Stack's television series "The Untouchables." By alluding to former film stars whose careers have been prolonged by television (in West's case through reruns, and in Stack's through a successful transi-

tion to television), Wilder's film is at the same time highly self-conscious that television may also figure prominently in its own afterlife.

Being a *Mensch*

As mentioned above, the conversion of spineless, opportunistic C.C. Baxter into a morally upright person who quits his job rather than keep supporting his superior's exploitations has been considered by numerous critics a less than believable turn of events. Enno Patalas spoke for many when he commented, "the tagged-on sentimental happy-ending hardly claims to be credible."⁴¹ While the character reversal has raised eyebrows, what has gone unnoticed is perhaps even more of an improbability in Wilder's works—Baxter's decision to become a "mensch ... a human being" is, in his own words, prompted by "following doctor's orders." What is unusual in this scenario is not only that doctors are not looked at kindly in Wilder's films—just think of the continued ridicule of shrinks alluded to in the last chapter, as well as the evil doings of Dr. Vando in *Fedora*—but, more importantly, that this doctor is one of the very few characters Wilder created who is clearly marked as Jewish. That Dr. Dreyfuss and his wife should be instrumental for "sending a clear message" in a film otherwise devoid of any positive endorsements raises larger question about the (overall lack of) representation of Jews in Wilder's films as well as his own understanding of Jewishness.

As pointed out in chapter 2, this question is indeed central to Wilder's definition as filmmaker. In interviews, Wilder has commented widely on issues including German and Austrian anti-Semitism, postwar amnesia and the Holocaust, and Hollywood's domination by Jewish moguls, usually without sentimentality or ire, and often in outrageous anecdotes that straddle the thin line between the hilarious and the insulting (one of which involves a film project on the Mayer family, called "The Foreskin Saga"). But unlike his mentor Ernst Lubitsch, whose early comedies about Jewish social climbers employ stereotypes uncomfortably close to contemporaneous anti-Semitic discourse, while his 1942 comedy *To Be or Not to Be* presented a distinct linking between the disappearance of the Eastern European Jewry and Hollywood's self-censorship, Wilder has rarely addressed Jewish identity on screen.⁴² Apart from the Dreyfuss family, the only characters clearly marked as Jewish in Wilder's films include Shapiro in *Stalag 17*, theater manager Poliakov in *Some Like It Hot*, and possibly Gingrich in *The Fortune Cookie* (by virtue of the fact that Walter Matthau is Jewish)—not many for his twenty-six films as director. It is unclear whether or not to read this as a concession to the very pressure for assimilation within the film industry which Wilder ridiculed often enough; nor do we know, for example, why the plan for making the John Pringle figure in *A Foreign Affair* Jewish was not followed through on.⁴³ (Given Wilder's personal

history, it is equally astonishing that Germans like Erich von Stroheim's Field Marshall Rommel in *Five Graves to Cairo*, Otto Preminger's camp commander von Scherbach in *Stalag 17*, and the Marlene Dietrich of *A Foreign Affair* imbue representatives of Nazi Germany with humor and complexity few contemporaneous films can claim.)⁴⁴

However, in a more general sense Wilder's films are distinctly Jewish—from their lack of sentimentality, through their emphasis on the power of gab, to their celebration of the survivor figure. In an attempt to highlight the greatness of an artist he had earlier dismissed, Andrew Sarris has claimed that the experience of exile and the Holocaust is what gave Wilder "the courage to be profoundly honest with himself," thereby allowing his films to "bridge the abyss between humor and horror."⁴⁵ Within Wilder's oeuvre, the films scripted with Diamond, a Central European Jew like Wilder, are more Yiddish and often reminiscent of boulevard sex comedies and farce (as well as the plays of Arthur Schnitzler). This is especially true for *The Apartment* where not only the dialogue but also the detailed scene directions (absent from earlier scripts) are peppered with terms like "nebbish," "schnook," "the meshugass," and "saftig dame"; indeed, the stinging satire on Christmas may be seen as a particular Jewish phobia for this specific holiday. C.C. Baxter, although decidedly a WASP-ish character, is of course one of the many schlemiel characters Lemmon would play for Wilder. As Ruth Wisse comments, "the *schlemiel* is the active disseminator of bad luck, and the *schlimazl* is its passive victim. The schlemiel's misfortune is his character. It is not accidental, but essential. Whereas comedy involving the *schlimazl* tends to be situational, the schlemiel's comedy is existential, deriving from his very nature in its confrontation with reality."⁴⁶ Indeed, in Lemmon's neurotic portrait of this figure we can glimpse a snapshot of Woody Allen's obsessions to come.

If being neurotic is often attributed to being Jewish, then the down-to-earth, common sense Dr. Dreyfuss and his wife are decidedly atypical. In a city where everyone seems to have the most spurious and superficial connection to home, job, and family, they appear also as the most grounded, radiating a sense of belonging and rootedness decidedly absent in Baxter, Fran Kubelick, or Sheldrake. Indeed, they and Mrs. Liebermann are the only true New Yorkers in a cast of bland middle Americans, providing the local color which the rest of the characters and the locations programmatically lack. In Mildred Dreyfuss, Wilder created, to my knowledge, the only character specifically drawn on his upbringing, modeling her after a woman who lived in the same building in Vienna where he grew up: "She used to visit my mother. I just had to stop a moment and close my eyes, and I could hear her voice in my head, like it was yesterday. I don't remember her name, but I remember that voice. She was a plump muse, always cooking, and she ate most of what she cooked. She spoke German in the Viennese way, and I tried to put that into English."⁴⁷ Naomi Stevens's Jewish mama certainly radiates warmth and concern, and enjoys



Figure 6.5. Echoes of Gertrude Berg: Mrs. Dreyfuss, the Jewish mama Wilder knew from Vienna

with her husband (who “tells [her] everything”) the kind of honesty and respect missing in all other couples presented in the film. As Ed Sikov has astutely remarked, in this film “home is where the Jews are.”⁴⁸

Yet it is of course puzzling that the notion of home should be associated with Jewishness. To be sure, New York has historically been a city with a large Jewish population who have felt welcome in its ethnic diversity, having for the most part experienced immigration as a process that despite many obstacles is ultimately rewarding (and the Jewish New York is also highlighted in *The Lost Weekend*). In particular Central European exiles and émigrés of Wilder’s generation found a permanent home here, including Kracauer who lived in New York until his death in 1966 (while Adorno worked there for several years).⁴⁹ Yet Kracauer and Adorno have always underscored that for Jews (as well as for exiles) any sense of home and belonging to a particular place is fraught with contradictions and a false sense of security. Even before the Third Reich made him a refugee, Kracauer thought of himself as “extra-territorial,” while Adorno underscored that Nazism only confirmed the nightmare he had been taught to expect in his youth: “The outbreak of the Third Reich did, it is true, surprise my political judgment, but not my unconscious fear ... it often seemed to my foolish terror as if the total State had been invented expressly against me, to inflict on me after all those things from which, in my childhood, its primeval form, I had been temporarily dispensed.”⁵⁰ While

in Los Angeles, Adorno augmented nonassimilation and nonbelonging into the cornerstone of his ethics of exile: “[I]t is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home.”⁵¹ As I have argued throughout this book, Wilder’s own sense of being an outsider—no matter how professionally successful he became—shares much with Adorno’s, and is reflected throughout his films, which, at a fundamental level, revolve around questions of straddling multiple identities and the hefty price of assimilation. Seen in this light, then, *The Apartment* offers a rare and conscious recasting of the experience of exile, portraying nonbelonging and alienation as a predicament for which Jews, commonly associated with diasporic or nomadic identities, can offer a remedy. That they do so by using a German and Yiddish word—*mensch*—underscores not only their appeal to a common humanity but also that the German language, considered by many Holocaust survivors *non grata*, can still provide a universally accepted terminology.

For Billy Wilder, *The Apartment* marked the climax of his professional success, capping a decade of extraordinary creative achievements by winning three Academy Awards, for producer, director, and screenplay (with Diamond).⁵² Wilder himself called it his “picture with the fewest faults.”⁵³ The film also ushered in the final decline of Hollywood’s era of self-censorship, particularly in regard to dealing with complex adult sexual relationships, supported in this quest by the release of three impressive European films on similar topics—*Hiroshima, Mon Amour*; *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*; and *Room at the Top*. Subsequent films by Wilder would feature even more outrageous portraits of extramarital affairs, prostitution, nudity, and foul language. However, *The Apartment* would prove to be Wilder’s last critical success for a while. While *Irma la Douce*, again starring Lemmon and MacLaine, would go on to become his commercially most successful film ever, critics panned it as well as *The Fortune Cookie* and *Kiss me, Stupid*, which caused a major public scandal. It would not be until *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* that a film of his would meet again with (much belated) critical success.

Notes

1. *Billy Wilder Interviews*, 106
2. Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1998), 43. The essay was first published in 1929 in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.
3. The key to the executive washroom, as well as a reference to the office Christmas party, also feature prominently in *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* (Frank Tashlin, 1957), a spoof on a Madison Avenue-based advertising business.
4. Trauner has described the idea behind designing Baxter’s apartment as follows: “Nous avons décidé de le situer dans des quartiers très chics qu’on a laissés se dégrader comme Harlem. Des quartiers élégants à une certaine époque, mais qu’on a délaissés et où l’on trouve maintenant une population plus pauvre.” Alexandre Trauner, *Décors de cinéma* (Paris: Jade-Flammarion, 1988), 152. (“We decided to place him [Baxter] in one of those

- upscale neighborhoods that had been allowed to go to seed—one of those apartments which during a certain era were quite elegant, but which have seen better days and where you now find poorer people.”)
5. These include *Der Teufelsreporter*, *Emil und die Detektive*, *Scampolo*, *Was Frauen träumen*, *Ninotchka*, *Arise*, *My Love*, *Hold Back the Dawn*, *Five Graves to Cairo*, *Love in the Afternoon*, *Some Like It Hot*, *Irma La Douce*, *Avanti!*, *Fedora*, and *Buddy Buddy*.
 6. Siegfried Kracauer, “Hollywood’s Terror Films: Do They Reflect an American State of Mind?” *Commentary* 2 (1946): 132–36; here 134.
 7. As Diamond has stated, “originally Billy wanted to do *The Apartment* as a play, but since there had to be such a visual contrast between the apartment and the three-hundred desk office, it was not feasible.” Quoted in Sikov, *On Sunset Boulevard*, 431.
 8. Wilder has repeatedly stated that the story could take place in any modern city in the United States or Europe.
 9. Though not identified as such in the film, Vidor later explained that the exterior shots, taken by a hidden camera during lunch hour, were of the Equitable Life Insurance Building. See King Vidor, *A Tree is a Tree* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952), 151.
 10. King Vidor’s description of the use of forced perspective to create the impression of a very large office space seems to have been instrumental for Trauner’s famous set design. King Vidor even claims to have used dwarfs to create perspective, an anecdote also often told by Wilder. See King Vidor, *On Filmmaking* (New York: McKay, 1972), 70, as well as Wilder in his preface to Alexandre Trauner: *Décors de cinéma* (Paris: Jade-Flammarion, 1988), 5.
 11. Vidor, *A Tree is a Tree*, 150.
 12. A long-time journalist for the culture section of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Kracauer transferred to Berlin in 1930 to head up the “Feuilleton” section of the paper. A regular reviewer of German film, he was familiar with all the films Wilder scripted. As fellow journalists it is possible that Kracauer and Wilder knew each other personally, although they worked for very different kinds of papers, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* being a high-brow liberal newspaper that many Jewish intellectuals read, while Wilder wrote mostly for sensationalist papers. The publication of *Die Angestellten* was widely discussed and reviewed in the German press at the time.
 13. In the United States, a somewhat similar approach to the topic was taken at the same time by Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929). More recently, Kracauer’s method has been compared to Clifford Geertz’ notion of “thick description.”
 14. *The Salaried Masses*, 29.
 15. It should be pointed out here that Kracauer mistakenly believed that the Tiller Girls, who are central to his essay “The Mass Ornament,” came from America while they in fact hailed from Manchester, England. Wilder, too, highlighted a connection between American capitalism and the impoverished German middleclass in a film from that period. In *Scampolo*, the jobless banker Maximilian instructs students in a language school that the most important word in the English language is “the money” (while in French it is “l’amour”), confirming widespread stereotypes of the time about American greed and consumerism.
 16. *The Salaried Masses*, 38.
 17. *The Salaried Masses*, 30
 18. *The Salaried Masses*, 29.
 19. The relationship between the working day and the weekend was also the focus of Wilder’s *Menschen am Sonntag*, shot during the summer of 1929 and released only a few weeks prior to Kracauer’s essay. While Wilder’s young Berliners prefer to spend time in nature rather than in amusement establishments to be found in the city, the fact that these workers also follow the instinct of the herd—note how the lake is as crowded on Sunday as the city is on a workday—underlines that the film is sympathetic to Kracauer’s ideas.
 20. *The Salaried Masses*, 89.

21. See Inka Mülder-Bach, "Introduction," *The Salaried Masses*, 3–22; here 14.
22. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 27. Important American studies of 1950s society that follow similar lines of inquiry include David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950) and William Hollingsworth Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956).
23. For an insightful reading of *Sabrina* along these lines see Dinah M. Smith, "Global Cinderella: *Sabrina* (1954), Hollywood, and Postwar Internationalism," *Cinema Journal* 41.4 (2002): 27–51.
24. Wilder quoted in Sinyard and Turner, *Journey Down Sunset Boulevard*, 161.
25. The office Christmas party was actually shot on December 23, 1959, a poignant example of the unusual parallel between the time period during which the film was shot and the period depicted in the film. See Christopher Paul Denis, *The Films of Shirley MacLaine* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadell Press, 1980), 97.
26. Prostitution is of course an implicit motif in many Wilder films (and explicit in *Irma la Douce* and *Kiss me, Stupid*) which is often connected to betrayal, deceit, and masquerade. Typically, a man or woman prostitutes feelings, values, possessions, and the body for material success; at some point the cheater is brought to a moment of crisis, for which he or she pays dearly in Wilder's dramas, but undergoes a character reversal in his comedies (though in accordance with Wilder's penchant to blur the line between tragedy and comedy the opportunity to go on with one's life often feels like more of a condemnation than death).
27. In his review of the film, Jean Douchet describes the reality depicted in it as "un monde conditionné, fonctionnarisé, hiérarchisé [où] la réussite sociale n'est possible qu'au prix des plus basses compromissions" ("a conditioned, functionalized and hierarchic world in which social mobility is not possible without the lowest form of compromise"). See Douchet, "L'école de Vienne," *Cahiers du cinéma* 113 (1960): 58–60; here 58. Enno Patalas is even more explicit: "Time called the latest film by Billy Wilder the funniest movie ever made in Hollywood since *Some Like It Hot*. That reminds us of the sentence from Adorno's essay on the culture industry: Fun is a bath of steel. Rarely ever has a film focused as relentlessly on humiliation in the office space, and rarely has one been as cynical about it." ("*The Apartment*," *Filmkritik* August 1960, 249.)
28. The initial critical reception of the film was rather mixed. For a summary of contemporary reviews see Dick, *Billy Wilder*, 91; Sidkov, *On Sunset Boulevard* 442ff; Cousins, xiiff; Sinyard and Turner, 161ff.
29. *The Salaried Masses*, 49.
30. Sinyard and Turner, *Journey Down Sunset Boulevard*, 157.
31. Siegfried Kracauer, "The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. and ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 297. First published in March 1927.
32. Patricia Erens, *The Films of Shirley MacLaine* (South Brunswick and New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1978), 13.
33. Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 235.
34. Charlotte Chandler, *Nobody's Perfect*, 228.
35. If insurance companies are the business of choice to question capitalism and corporate mentality within the United States, the role of American consumer goods abroad, including the concomitant question of cultural imperialism, is explored through the example of soft drink companies—Pepsi in *Love in the Afternoon* and Coke in *One, Two, Three*.
36. Adorno, *Mimima Moralia*, 137.
37. Volker Schlöndorff, "The Apartment," *Premiere* April 1992, 127.
38. Mark Cousins, "Introduction," *The Apartment* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1998) vii–xx; here xix.
39. Wilder was so impressed with Trauner's work that he called him "the Hungarian Michelangelo." (Wilder quoted in Rex McGee, "The Life and Hard Times of *Fedora*," *American Film*, February 1979, 17–32; here 18.)

40. The only Wilder film that can claim the dubious distinction of having become a direct blueprint for a television series is *Stalag 17*, which was turned into *Hogan's Heroes*.
41. Patalas, 249.
42. As noted earlier, Wilder seems to have been unfamiliar with the early films by Lubitsch. On Lubitsch and the Holocaust, see Gerd Gemünden, "Space Out of Joint: Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be*," *New German Critique* 89 (2003): 59–80.
43. The first time Wilder mentioned this plan was in the interview with Cameron Crowe, forty years after the film's release. (*Conversations with Wilder*, 75.) According to Wilder, the protagonist of *Arise, My Love*, played by Ray Milland, was also supposed to have been Jewish: "[W]hen Ray is taking a bath, I had one of his buddies look into the bathtub and say, 'I didn't know you were Jewish.' Of course, they made me take it out." Wilder quoted in Kevin Lally, *Wilder Times: The Life of Billy Wilder* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 95.
44. In this context it is also worth commenting that Wilder's films are virtually absent from the criticism on Jewish-American film history.
45. Andrew Sarris, "Billy Wilder and the Holocaust," *Village Voice*, 4 May 1982, 57.
46. Ruth Wisse, *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 14.
47. Chandler, *Nobody's Perfect*, 232.
48. Sikov, *On Sunset Boulevard*, 435.
49. Charlotte Chandler reports that while filming *The Apartment* Wilder was approached on the set by a former schoolmate of his from Vienna, Koko Löwenstein, who had also escaped the Holocaust and lived nearby.
50. *Minima Moralia*, 192.
51. *Minima Moralia*, 39.
52. Although it is often noted that Wilder's achievement was a first, Leo McCarey had actually done so in 1944, winning three Oscars for cowriting, producing, and directing *Going My Way*. However, since Paramount claimed the best picture award, as was custom then, McCarey only took home two statues.
53. Crowe, *Conversations with Wilder*, 27.

Chapter 7

IN THE CLOSET OF SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE: *THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (1970)*

"I should have been more daring. I have this theory. I wanted to have Holmes homosexual and not admitting it to anyone, including maybe even himself. The burden of keeping it secret was the reason he took dope."

—Billy Wilder¹

Watson: "I hope I'm not being presumptuous, but there *have* been women in your life?"

Holmes: "The answer is yes. You're being presumptuous."

—From *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*

About halfway through the episodic *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, the famous detective (Robert Stephens), his trusted companion, Dr. Watson (Colin Blakely), and their client, the Belgian Gabrielle Valladon (Geneviève Page), take an overnight train to Inverness, Scotland, where they hope to find a trace of Gabrielle's missing engineer husband, Emile. Pretending to be Mr. and Mrs. Ashdown, Holmes and Gabrielle share a sleeping compartment, while Watson, disguised as their valet, travels in third class. As Holmes in the upper berth and Gabrielle below him get ready for sleep, the conversation turns to the topic of women, and the following exchange ensues:

Gabrielle: "Women are never entirely to be trusted—not the best of them."

Holmes: "What did you say?"

Gabrielle: "I didn't say it—you did. According to Dr. Watson."

Holmes: "Oh!"

Gabrielle: "He gave me some old copies of Strand Magazine."

Holmes: "The good doctor is constantly putting words into my mouth."

Gabrielle: "Then you deny it?"

Holmes: "Not at all. I am not a whole-hearted admirer of womankind."

As the scene continues, Holmes's last words prove to be something of an understatement as he explains his deep mistrust of women to stem from various serious firsthand disappointments, ranging from a passionate laboratory affair instigated by a woman planning to "steal cyanide to sprinkle on her husband's steak and kidney pie" to his own engagement broken off due to his fiancée's succumbing to influenza twenty-four hours before the wedding—an experience which Holmes claims merely to prove that "women are unreliable and not to be trusted." The coldheartedness in these remarks reveals a bitter sense of betrayal and disappointment, which actually dates back to his student days in Oxford as a flashback underscores (significantly omitted from the released version). In it, we see a young Holmes winning a lottery organized by members of his crew team—a visit with a local prostitute who turns out to be the very same young girl Holmes had long naively adored from afar. The shock of this experience, Holmes tells Valladon, has taught him a valuable lesson: "Any emotional involvement warps your judgment and clouds your reason."

The image of Holmes as wavering between being suspicious of women and being an outright misogynist is of course familiar from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fiction. The stories and novels that speak of Holmes's achievement as master detective, almost all of them told as first-person narratives by his collaborator Dr. Watson, are sprinkled with Holmes's derogatory asides about women, the importance of not letting emotions diminish one's faculties of reasoning and deduction, as well as a barely disguised disapproval of Watson's own marriage(s).² In Wilder's film, however, Holmes's relation to women, and the very question of his sexual preference, take center stage. What is private in the life of Sherlock Holmes, the film suggests, revolves very much around the detective's love life, or lack thereof, while Holmes's use of cocaine, often alluded to in Doyle's fiction, is presented here as a habit to console for failed relationships.

The scene on the train to Inverness recalls two other Wilder films in which masquerading characters aboard overnight trains barely keep their sexuality in check. In Wilder's directorial debut *The Major and the Minor*, full-grown Susan Applegate, pretending to be twelve years old, is invited to share a compartment by unsuspecting Major Kirby, while Joe and Jerry in *Some Like It Hot* have their hands full to keep their libido from tearing up their disguise as bedfellows Josephine and Daphne amid the all-girl band. In both films, some of the characters on the train withhold crucial information from others—pertaining respectively to true age or gender—in order to gain safe passage. This situation is only slightly modified in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* where Holmes and Valladon are of course traveling as Mr. and Mrs. Ashdown, but with the added twist that Valladon is in fact the German undercover agent Ilse von Hoffmannsthal, who has cleverly enlisted Holmes in her mission to spy on England's secret plans for developing a submarine. Valladon's curiosity about Holmes's interest in women is thus part of her agenda to use her sex appeal in manipulating

the detective, a task which she achieves with bravura, for Holmes never suspects her until his brother Mycroft enlightens him about his deception. Seen in this light, Holmes's inability to see through Valladon's disguise can ironically be attributed to the very clouding of reason through affection about which he lectures her so pompously aboard the train. Yet in a less romantic and nonheterosexual interpretation of the film, Holmes's misreading of Valladon can be attributed to the opposite reason—not a surplus of emotional involvement but a complete lack thereof, and not for reasons of rationality but entirely different ones. For in the first episode of the film, when Holmes meets the famous ballerina Mme. Petrova, he explains his relationship with Watson to be more than mere companionship. And even though he does so apparently only to extricate himself from the uncomfortable position of having to father a child with Petrova, he is reluctant to put to rest Watson's fears that he is indeed not interested in women, as the motto cited above indicates.

The suggestion of Holmes's homosexuality is indeed never entirely dispelled in the film and resurfaces time and again. In the episode "The Curious Case of the Upside Down Room" (eliminated from the final film), an alleged murder mystery concocted by Watson to keep his friend Holmes's mind occupied and off cocaine, Watson and Holmes get into an argument over Holmes's repeated drug use. The imminent breakup of the relationship prompts housekeeper Mrs. Hudson to comment that, "I once went through a divorce myself," thereby likening the two men's living arrange-



Figure 7.1. Watson suspiciously eyes Valladon's advances towards Holmes

ments to a marriage. And she is aghast at the prospect of a woman spending a night in their flat, presumably because such an intrusion would offset the male-male relationship. During this heated exchange Watson also accuses Holmes of moving in with him only for a ready supply of drugs, to which Holmes replies, "Now Watson, you mustn't underestimate your many other charms," finally calming Watson by saying that "in my cold and unemotional way I am very fond of you." The screenplay is full of this sort of innuendo and double entendre. In one particular scene Watson converses with Holmes while the detective is taking a bath, while in another Watson sports a kilt. With his chalky white face, rouged lips, mascara and affected language Holmes suggests an effeminate man (his hairstyle actually reminiscent of Doyle's contemporary Oscar Wilde), and the fact that he is outwitted both by a woman and his more virile brother Mycroft hints at both intellectual inferiority and sexual impotence.³

As in *Some Like It Hot*, Wilder is certainly more interested in suggesting the possibility of a homosexual relationship rather than presenting irrevocable facts; ambiguity is clearly more titillating than certainty. It is furthermore safe to assume that the heirs of Conan Doyle, from whom the right to use his characters were purchased, kept a close watch over the kind of image Wilder and Diamond portrayed of the famous detective and his companion. As it stands, the ambiguity surrounding Holmes's possible homosexuality provides a most fitting subtext for a film about two males involved in an obsessive yet futile search for clues and certainties, in the course of which they repeatedly misread evidence, botch conclusions, and face sudden, unexpected revelations. Thus, the desire for detecting evidence becomes an allegory for indecipherability itself, which is part of a larger critique of instrumental reason and rationality that has tragic consequences for all characters involved. Even though *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* is Wilder's only film that uses as protagonists famous characters created by another author, it can be seen to be one of his most personal films, providing a captivating and emotional reflection on his own career at a moment in his life when he is ready to draw the sum of his existence.

Between Men

The exploits of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson have made them arguably the most famous male couple ever created in fiction, and inspired numerous re-creations by other novelists and filmmakers.⁴ Within Wilder's oeuvre, the detective and his valiant assistant occupy a prominent place among other male buddies who are closely united through habitat, profession, or a monetary or romantic quest.

Indeed, Wilder's first real commercial success was his script for *Ein blonder Traum*, which revolves around two window cleaners, incidentally both called Willy, who become rivals over a woman but reconcile and stay



Figure 7.2. Watson and Holmes, possibly the most famous male friendship in literature

best friends. Male bonding disrupted by the intrusion of a woman is also the key tension of *Double Indemnity*, in which insurance salesman Walter Neff and claims manager Keyes prove to have the most lasting affection in the film. This film, too, suggests more than just male friendship when the dying Neff confesses to Keyes, "I love you too."⁵ In the aforementioned *Some Like It Hot*, jazz musicians Joe and Jerry develop very different feminine personae when forced into drag to escape from the mob; as shown in chapter 6, male bonding is recast here as female rivalry, and ends with the forming both of a heterosexual and a homosexual couple. *Kiss Me, Stupid* also features a pair of musician buddies willing to go to extensive lengths to pursue their goal, namely achieve fame by having a Las Vegas star perform one of their songs. The three Wilder films that pair Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau present the most comic take on male bonding, casting them respectively as injured sports reporter Harry Hinkle and brother-in-law and shyster lawyer Gingrich out to scam an insurance company in *The Fortune Cookie*; as star reporter Hildy Johnson and his editor Walter Burns, who stops short of nothing to prevent Hildy from quitting his job (*The Front Page*); and as depressive Victor Clooney whose plans to commit suicide in a hotel interfere with gunman Trabucco's assignment to rub out a mobster about to serve as witness in a trial (*Buddy Buddy*). The relationship between the various Lemmon and Matthau characters in all three films is one of both rivalry and camaraderie, while the women serve as both antagonist and catalyst in the process of male bonding. Thus Hinkle only agrees to Gingrich's shady plans in order to win back his estranged wife, but when wisened up about her egotism and materialism prefers the

friendship of football player Jackson. Burns' goal is to hinder Hildy from getting married since having a wife threatens to end not only Hildy's career but also his usefulness for Burns. Clooney's depression is attributed to having been left by his wife, a problem that also becomes Trabucco's since he cannot let a suicide draw attention to his mission as killer.

Within the larger context of Wilder's gender politics, male bonding, whether in the form of friendship, mentorship, or amicable rivalry, thus often takes place at the expense of lasting heterosexual relationships. At the same time, however, homosocial bonds do often carry undertones of homophobia. When Detweiler seeks contact with Dr. Vando in order to smuggle his screenplay into Fedora's home, the doctor misunderstands Detweiler's approach as guided by sexual motives, warning him that his earring "should not fool" him. Homophobia is strongest in *The Front Page*, which contains Wilder's most stereotypical portrait of a gay man in the effeminate Bensinger, "a classic mincing fag" as Sikov has called him.⁶ Within the logic of the film, Bensinger serves as counterimage to the virile, tough newspaper man, an example of what may happen to Hildy, should he decide to forfeit his career, as Burns makes clear: "Jesus, Hildy, you're a newspaperman, not some faggot writing poetry about brassieres and laxatives." As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued it is precisely this "'obligatory heterosexuality' [that] is built into male-dominated kinship systems," and intended to dispel any continuities between the homosocial and the homosexual.⁷ Thus in many Wilder films, characters involved in male friendships face the impossibility of a heterosexual relationship and the taboo of a homosexual one. When Wilder's films do conclude with a heterosexual romance, that happy ending often appears improbable, tagged-on, or otherwise compromised (as it does in *Hold Back the Dawn*; *A Foreign Affair*; *Sabrina*; *Love in the Afternoon*; and *The Apartment*). It is in this context that the playful allusion to homosexuality in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (as well as in *Some Like It Hot* and possibly *Double Indemnity*) gains its liberating significance.

Male bonding, finally, is of course also central to Wilder professional relationships, most notably his two longterm writing partners Charles Brackett and I.A.L. Diamond (while his closest personal friends were William Holden and Jack Lemmon, the two actors he most frequently cast). Wilder himself used the term "marriage" to allude to the significance of a shared daily routine of the writing partners, a mutual tolerance for each other's quirks, a commitment to a common goal—sometimes punctured by "infidelities," that is, stints with other writing partners—and an acknowledgement that the sum of their labor is more than the mere process of adding together two individual efforts. While Wilder's collaboration with Brackett began with their script of *Bluebeard's Eight Wife* and ended after *Sunset Boulevard*, the one with Diamond started with *Love in the Afternoon* and ended with *Buddy Buddy*, the last feature for both of them. Many critics have felt that Wilder's collaboration with Brackett—a person

in character, upbringing, education, and political beliefs a direct opposite of Wilder—has ultimately produced greater films than those cowritten with Diamond, also a Central European Jewish émigré who shared many of Wilder's tastes and sensibilities.

Anything But Elementary: The Fumbling Detective

Billy Wilder has described *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* as “more *The Odd Couple* than Conan Doyle,” suggesting that it fits squarely into the ancestry of the buddy film outlined above.⁸ Indeed, Colin Blakely imbues his Dr. Watson with qualities worthy of Jack Lemmon, making him at turns oversensitive, nervous, jealous, and neurotic; just as Jerry is shown clenching a flower in his mouth when doing a tango with Osgood, so Watson too wears a flower behind his ear when dancing with a chorus line in which the girls are replaced one after another by male dancers, once Holmes has spread “the truth” about him and Watson.

Yet despite thematic continuities with Wilder's earlier films, *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* is a film in a league of its own, displaying a strong respect for the work of Conan Doyle and a profound familiarity with his characters. Even though the various episodes Wilder and Diamond wrote for the film are original material intended to focus on parts of Holmes's persona not addressed by Doyle, they incorporate many of the character traits, settings, plot elements, and objects that are essential to Doyle's stories and novels, making it in tone one of the most faithful of Wilder's many literary adaptations. A pronounced Sherlock Holmes fan, Wilder was as much intent on capturing the mystique of Holmes as on debunking a myth.

Like so many other Wilder films, *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* revolves around the tension between appearance and being (“Schein” and “Sein”), which can be traced along three distinct levels of deception, or forms of closeting. As the title of the film signals, the story revolves around what narrator Dr. Watson has kept private about the famous hero, namely his possible homosexuality, his problematic relationship with women, his excessive use of drugs (which is given much more space here than in the stories and novels), and the repeated failure of his powers of detection, which stands in distinct contrast to Holmes's near infallibility demonstrated in Doyle's works (where in over sixty adventures he only twice fails to solve a case). As Watson has determined before his death, fifty years will provide the appropriate passage of time to share these secrets, for after all, as he always insisted to Holmes, “the public has a right to know these things.”

Ironically, it is this desire to reach an audience that has created a second level of deception, for Watson's embellishments have painted a larger-than-life image of Holmes to which the detective cannot live up. His words

to Mme. Valladon, cited above, that “the good doctor is constantly putting words into my mouth,” attest to the detective’s unease about Watson’s storytelling, and the fact that Watson has described him, for example, as a violin virtuoso when Holmes perceives himself to be a musician who could barely hold his own “in the Pit Orchestra of a second rate Music Hall” has created the potential for serious public embarrassment. Holmes literally fails to live up to the expectations of Mme. Petrova, who thought him to be taller and of course interested in women. Finally, Holmes’s complaints about having to wear an “improbable costume” in public—the deerstalker cap, Inverness cape, and calabash pipe—in order to meet the expectations Watson’s stories have created points to the power of the media in determining one’s “true” identity, a central concern also in Wilder’s films about the twentieth-century print media and culture industry, of which *Strand Magazine* and the tabloids of the Victorian age are cast here as important precursors.⁹ *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* presents Watson as both the creator of the myth of the famous detective and its debunker, a position not unlike that of the Hollywood director taking on an industry in which he has been a key player for many years.

The discerning of the difference between what is real and what is not, the distinction between ruse and real evidence, is of course the true stuff detective fiction is made of, and lies at the core of the plot and plotting of *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*. Deception abounds, as a Belgian damsel in distress is actually a German spy, with her allies disguised as Trappist monks who end up trapped in a submarine made to look like the Loch Ness monster; Mycroft’s Diogenes Club is a decoy for British intelligence while Holmes and Watson’s relationship apparently entails more than it seems, with the greatest surprise being that Holmes ends up with the short end of the stick in the overall game of make believe—not only is he outwitted by an opponent, but he, too, turns to be out a different kind of man than commonly believed. Like almost all other adventures of Sherlock Holmes, this one also has been recorded by Dr. Watson. Thus in accordance with convention, the film opens with Watson’s voiceover, addressing his heirs from beyond the grave as it were (but in a less gruesome way than Joe Gillis or the dying Walter Neff), as an omniscient tone familiar from Doyle’s fiction describes the setting for the newest adventure to unfold. The voiceover then disappears, only to emerge briefly to comment on Holmes’s cocaine binges and to bridge the Petrova and the Valladon episode. What is fundamentally different in this Holmes adventure, though, is that with the appearance of Mme. Valladon at Baker Street the viewer is aware of something that Holmes and Watson do not yet know—that her arrival has been observed by a third party, and that unbeknownst to Holmes and Watson she is subsequently relating messages to that party.¹⁰ The position of the audience being more cognizant than the detective not only curtails his opportunity to explain in detail the stunning solution to a case, often from the skimpiest of evidence, to a totally unsuspecting and

baffled reader (the kind of scene which invariably concludes a Holmes adventure); more importantly, it also sets up his failure as the audience is in a position to judge every wrong step he takes and every bungled or belated conclusion he draws. Thus when Mycroft reveals to his younger brother that his client is a spy, he only confirms suspicions viewers have had all along.¹¹ With Watson no longer the sole master of the narrative, Holmes's command over the case slips away as well.

Highlighting Holmes's failing powers of reasoning and deduction, both on the level of the plot as well as through a changed narrative strategy, must be seen as the most dramatic reworking of Doyle's famous character in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, since this detective has always been the symbol for the accomplishments of reason and rationalism. Holmes's success is built on keen observation and stringent logical deduction; the reward for solving a crime lies solely in the intellectual challenge, as he gladly lets the inferior Scotland Yard detectives claim the limelight for cases he has solved. That he ends up on the right side of the law seems merely accidental for it is the intellectual not the moral challenge that drives him (even though the ability to break the law in order to gather evidence—as for example in the breakin shown in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*—puts him at an advantage over the police force). As Heide Schlüpmann has observed: "For the detective, rationality is a means in itself."¹²

It is precisely this emphasis on reason that attracted Siegfried Kracauer to write about Doyle and other noted contemporary crime novelists. In his 1925 essay, "The Detective Novel," Kracauer presented the genre as mirror of a society dominated by rationalism, praising it for its ability to capture in the form of a caricature "the condition of a society in which the unattached intellect has achieved its final victory."¹³ Long before Adorno bemoaned a modernity gone awry because of its adoration of instrumental reason, Kracauer diagnosed the same symptom through the help of the detective novel. Holmes's obsession is brought into relief through his pairing with Dr. Watson, since the profession of the medical doctor at first sight resembles that of the detective. The doctor bases his diagnosis on observing and interpreting symptoms, just as the detective formulates his hypotheses through the assembly of clues and circumstantial evidence. Yet while the doctor wants to heal, argues Kracauer, the detective uses sick society as mere cause and material for his deductions, which are an end in themselves. Holmes is ultimately not interested in a moral betterment of society but only in the problem a case poses to his intellectual capabilities; that solving a crime also coincides with helping the police is a mere byproduct and of no concern to Holmes.

Wilder's rejection of the image of Holmes as a coldhearted rationalist stands in distinct contrast to Doyle; it makes Holmes more human, but it also turns him into a tragic figure, a closeted romanticist as it were (a point I will return to below). Yet in order to be credible and not let the film deteriorate into sensationalism or mere parody, Wilder needed to bal-

ance his ambition to recast Holmes with a fidelity to the figure(s) Conan Doyle created.¹⁴ As has been observed by several Wilder critics as well as the numerous scholars and fans that make up the Sherlock Holmes industry, Wilder did indeed know his Doyle and carefully incorporated materials found in other Holmes adventures as well as Doyle's own biography.¹⁵ Thus tobacco experiments are conducted in *The Sign of Four* and "The Boscombe Valley Mystery," while the theft of a submarine is the topic of "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans," and a hydraulic pump takes center stage in "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb." The ridiculing of Scotland Yard detective Lestrade, a favorite pastime of Doyle's Holmes, was reiterated in the episode of the upside down room, where Watson and Holmes persuade Lestrade to stand on his head to better understand the dimension of the crime, while advising the other police officers not to disturb him.¹⁶

Most important of course are the similarities between Mme Valladon/Ilse von Hoffmannsthal and Irene Adler from "A Scandal in Bohemia," as Sinyard and Turner have pointed out.¹⁷ As Watson has it, "to Sherlock Holmes she is always *the* woman," underscoring her singularity both as the only woman who seems to have mattered in Holmes's entire life, as well as the only adversary he could not beat.¹⁸ Yet the significance of this story for the film goes further than Sinyard and Turner describe. Not only are von Hoffmannsthal and Adler both German, but in both cases all that is left to console the defeated detective is a portrait of the woman who outwitted him. Adler's portrait was the only reward Holmes claimed from his client for bringing the case to a fortuitous conclusion (even though he himself had little to do with that), while von Hoffmannsthal's portrait adorns the pocket watch that is taken from the strongbox at the beginning of the film, a memento that Holmes apparently cherished until his end.¹⁹ Moreover, it is in this story that Watson for the first time describes in more detail Holmes's drug abuse, "alternating from week to week between cocaine and ambition, the drowsiness of the drug, and the fierce energy of his own keen nature,"²⁰ which coincides with Watson having moved out of the Baker Street apartment, due to his marriage. And it is in this story that Holmes twice wears a disguise to outwit his opponent, with lack of success equal to that his Mr. Ashdown camouflage has in Scotland, where he is readily recognized as Holmes. The tone of defeat, unrequited love, and loneliness is stronger in this story than in almost any other written by Doyle and presents a strong link to *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*.

Wilder's intention to stay close to that tone can also be seen in the fact that he deliberately did not cast big stars who would have imposed their persona on Watson's and Holmes's characters, opting instead to use actors largely unknown outside the United Kingdom. Both Robert Stephens (as Holmes) and Colin Blakely (as Watson) had been significant stage actors in England, but had had limited screen appearances. Equally unorthodox was Wilder's choice to have Christopher Lee appear as brother Mycroft

(disregarding Doyle's description of Sherlock's brother as portly), for Lee had already played Holmes in the Artur Brauner-produced *Sherlock Holmes und das Halsband des Todes* (Terence Fisher and Frank Winterstein, 1962) and had starred as Sir Henry Baskerville in Terence Fisher's 1959 spiced-up adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* made by Hammer studios, whose good helping of bare-bosomed women, bloody daggers, and campy horror stands in stark contrast to the autumnal and melancholy quality of Wilder's film.²¹ Thus Lee's Mycroft possesses the mental superiority his Holmes used to have but which is lacking in the Holmes played by Stephens.

If Holmes complains that Watson has burdened him with an image the public now expects him to conform to, this observation is even more fitting for Wilder's task to cast Holmes and Watson. For by 1970 the image of these characters had been much more determined by the screen versions than Doyle's fiction, making Wilder's film, according to a memo by United Artists, the 127th adaptation in the tradition.²² Perhaps no other performer, particularly within the US, did as much as Basil Rathbone to define the look and character of the master sleuth (with Nigel Bruce starring as his sidekick) in his fourteen appearances between 1939 and 1946, and Wilder's recasting of Holmes as the rationalist foiled by his inner romanticism must be seen as much a reworking of Rathbone's interpretation of the role (and that of his many followers) as of the one established by Doyle.

Within the balancing act of working within and against the grain of the Holmes tradition, one more avenue of innovation needs to be mentioned. Even though as a period film *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* seems to be contained in its own fictional space, it is not removed from political events which then mattered, highlighting a topicality that is given more weight than in Doyle's fiction. The reference to the Wilhelmstrasse for which—according to Mycroft—Holmes has inadvertently been working, clearly hints at a German militarism then gaining prominence (inaugurated with Germany's defeat of France some fifteen years earlier), while also foreshadowing German warfare of the twentieth century. (The ambivalence toward Germany—wavering between the attraction to a beautiful woman and the threat of its military power—resonates of course also with the exile's conflicted stand toward his homeland.) In this same context belongs also Queen Victoria's lack of interest in submarines, which would prove to have dramatic consequences for England during World War I, when the Royal Navy was illprepared to face an underwater threat from the Germans. Indeed, Doyle himself wrote the story, "Danger!" based on the fictional diary of a submarine commander, just two years before the outbreak of World War I with the explicit intent of alerting Britain to the threat posed by the German fleet commanded by Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, the namesake of the German spy working with Ilse von Hoffmannsthal. Similarly, Holmes's remark to Mme. Petrova that he is "a bleeder" is an

allusion to the then little known fact that Queen Victoria was a carrier of hemophilia (though not affected by it). These allusions to current and future events create the sense that the time and place depicted in the film are about to disappear, offering a glimpse of a society and worldview to vanish forever, surviving only as memory and dusty mementoes collected in a strongbox locked up in a vault.²³

Portrait of the Director as a Melancholic Detective

As noted above, the recasting of Sherlock Holmes as closeted romantic (and possible homosexual) with failing powers of reasoning is carefully balanced with a fidelity to Doyle's characters and the world they inhabit.²⁴ There is, furthermore, a strong recurrence in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* of themes that pervade the rest of Wilder's oeuvre, allowing us to see this film also as a meditation on the figure of the (aging) film director and artist in a rapidly changing world. As Maurice Zolotow (and numerous critics after him) have observed, *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* may indeed be Wilder's "most personal film."²⁵

Wilder's affinity to both Holmes and Watson must be seen as closely related to his own journalistic upbringing, which included covering the crime beat and writing portraits of contemporaries that would capture the public imagination. The appeal of the adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson lies in the fact that it combines two figures—the detective and the writer-journalist—that are most central to Wilder's own career and professional self-understanding. Like the writers and journalists described in earlier chapters, the detective is ubiquitous in Wilder's films, from the hordes of self-proclaimed young detectives who surround Emil in his quest to catch a thief, through a private eye disregarding all rights for privacy while spying on Harry Hinkle on behalf of a suspicious insurance company (*The Fortune Cookie*), the doting father detective Claude Chavasse (*Love in the Afternoon*), to claims inspector Keyes in *Double Indemnity*, like Holmes a self-described misogynist. In *Witness for the Prosecution* (based on the work of Agatha Christie, another notable British crime writer), we see a famous lawyer double as detective, only also to be outwitted by a woman. What is unique in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, however, is that the figure of the detective and that of the journalist are brought into tension within the same film, allowing Wilder to play off the investigative part of the detective/journalist with the act of recording and publication.

Wilder has often underscored his lifelong fascination with Doyle's adventures, and his efforts to produce a work based on them date as far back as 1957.²⁶ However, when the project finally came to fruition it proved to be one of his biggest commercial and critical failures, dealing his career a blow from which he never quite recovered. One common reaction was an unwillingness to accept a romantic film from a director who in the public

eye was largely considered a cynic, especially after the scandal of *Kiss Me, Stupid*. Wilder himself blamed the cuts imposed by the studio on the film's lack of success. As we know, the film that was premiered by United Artists with a running time of 125 minutes presents a seriously curtailed version of Wilder's envisioned film of over 200 minutes.

In the past, imagining the original version of the film required some serious detective work, but is now facilitated by the DVD edition, which not only contains footage and audio of parts of the eliminated episodes but also an interview with editor Ernest Walter, whom Wilder left in charge to make the imposed cuts when he had to move on to another assignment. Originally, the film was to consist of four individual episodes, loosely connected by a frame narrative: "The Curious Case of the Upside Down Room," "The Singular Affair of the Russian Ballerina," "The Dreadful Business of the Naked Honeymooners," and "The Adventure of the Dumbfounded Detective." There was also an extended prologue featuring the Canadian grandson of Dr. Watson arriving in London to open the safe deposit box, the Oxford flashback described earlier, and a short comic interlude on the train that was to precede Holmes's and Watson's return to Baker Street in August of 1887, which now opens the film proper. While



Figure 7.3. One of the episodes that was cut: "The Curious Case of the Upside Down Room"

the individual episodes are self-contained and significantly different in tone, one common underlying thread is the relationship between men and women. In the comic interlude, a sudden intruder surprises Holmes and Watson aboard a train, only to fall unconscious in their compartment. In a stunning display of his powers of observation and deduction, Holmes identifies the man as an adulterer caught *in flagranti*, a hypothesis he confirms by scaring the man into jumping off the running train. His conduct introduces Holmes as the coldhearted and unemotional rationalist that was to be contradicted in the final episode, "The Adventure of the Dumbfounded Detective," revolving around his encounter with Mme. Valladon. In "The Naked Honeymooners," Watson is allowed to prove *his* talents as detective, an opportunity he thoroughly bungles as he mistakes a couple of sleeping newlyweds for victims of a double homicide. "The Curious Case of the Upside Room" confirms again Holmes's superior mental powers—as well as a lack of imagination on Watson's part as his concocted crime is all too apparent for Holmes—but more importantly the episode plays off the close male relationship described earlier. These allusions to homosexuality then take center stage in the episode with Mme. Petrova, never to be entirely dispelled for the rest of the film.²⁷ They were to resurface in the coda which editor Walter suggested (but Wilder did not accept)—Rogozhin was to appear at 221B Baker Street, presenting the Stradivarius to Holmes (for services that were never rendered) and a bouquet of flowers to Watson, as sign of his own affection for the doctor.²⁸

As Wilder commented, the episodic structure was to resemble the movements of a symphony: "I structured my film in four parts, like a symphony: one for drama, one for comedy, one for farce, and one for romance."²⁹ Of central importance for the film was the score by Miklós Rózsa, which built on a violin concerto written in 1953 for the virtuoso Jascha Heifetz that Wilder liked very much. (Working with Rózsa meant resuming a collaboration after a twenty-five year break, after he had scored *Five Graves to Cairo*, *Double Indemnity*, and *The Lost Weekend*; Rózsa would work with Wilder again one last time on *Fedora*).³⁰ Using a violin concerto was of course an obvious choice for the violin amateur Holmes, and throughout the film diegetic and nondiegetic violin music is used as a structuring device. As Poague has shown, the violin is always associated with sexuality—in the opening credits we listen to the music Holmes wrote for "Ilse von H," while the score is taken out of the box and her portrait is shown (this was in fact Rózsa's concerto, written some fifty years after Holmes's death but sounding very much in character), establishing a connection between violin music and Holmes's attraction to Ilse that will also conclude the film. Then there is of course the fact that Petrova's gift for fathering a child is a Stradivarius, and that Holmes's first love was the daughter of his violin teacher.³¹

While Holmes the violin amateur is of course Doyle's creation, the significance of this artistic streak is much emphasized in Wilder's film. It is

Wilder's Watson, not Doyle's, who explains that Holmes "elevated a science [detection] to an art," thereby establishing a hierarchy that is very different in Doyle's fiction, where Holmes is primarily seen as a scientist and presents Watson early on in their relationship with a document "Sherlock Holmes—his limits" that reads: "1. Knowledge of literature—Nil; Knowledge of Philosophy—Nil; Knowledge of Chemistry—Profound," thereby proudly attesting to his lack of interest in matters that do not further his professional qualifications.³² This artistic and aesthetic streak in Holmes finds its equivalent in Ilse von Hoffmannsthal, who shares her name with the Austrian poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929), while her undercover name Valladon seems to be inspired by another artist, the French post-impressionist painter Suzanne Valadon (1865–1938). If Holmes hides his vulnerability under the mask of rationalism, Valladon, too, is disclosed as being more than just an ambitious master spy. She professes to have taken on the assignment in England because she "couldn't resist the challenge of coming up against the best," but in the end finds herself much closer to Holmes than anticipated (and vice versa). Tragically, it is Holmes's intervention to have her exchanged for another spy rather than imprisoned that will allow her to take on an assignment that will kill her. Through his brother Mycroft, Holmes learns that on this assignment her undercover name was Mrs. Ashdown, revealing that the attraction was mutual, and having Holmes again seek consolation through cocaine.

The attributes of Holmes the artist (as well as the detective) are boredom, loneliness, and isolation. No great challenges seem to exist for him any more, and in the adventure he does get involved in, technocrats like his brother Mycroft have the upper hand (although Mycroft, as Holmes observes, is in the end also undone by a woman, as the Queen dislikes the kind of warfare he is planning). London, the capital of an empire on which the sun never sets, is depicted as a sunless, suffocating place, what with the fog, the dust on Holmes's manuscripts, and the smoke-infested Baker Street flat where he conducts his tobacco ash experiments. Trauner's sets recreate a Victorian age cluttered with the bric-a-brac of an era that has gone on for too long. The shots of the flat show a comfortable but restrictive space, with the camera never allowed inside Holmes's private room, always only peeking in. Washed-out sepia-tinted colors recall the faded photographs which we see emerging from the strongbox at the film's beginning. The trip to Scotland provides a powerful contrast to this suffocating place—lush green landscapes and rugged castles where the tourists Holmes and Valladon ride on a tandem and enjoy a picnic by the lake—but it is only a temporary one. The English government is the true owner of an abandoned Scottish castle, and the Loch Ness monster is a mere concoction, perhaps suggesting the same for Sherlock Holmes, the other world-famous mythical creature of Great Britain.

One gains the sense that the film not only depicts a time now long past but that the coming end of that era pervades the film itself and is registered

with varying degrees by the different characters. Queen Victoria, as noted above, is out of step with the times, Holmes is bored by them, von Hoffmannsthal falls victim to them in the preparations for the impending war, while the great dancer Petrova has to retire from her profession due to her age, husbandless and without a successor (only jolly Watson seems oblivious to the coming changes). As has been observed, Petrova's proposal to Holmes recalls *Sunset Boulevard*: the aging star, through the help of her slave-like assistant, hopes to become immortal by having a child with her attributes, but can only achieve this through the help of a younger man. But what has gone unnoticed is that Holmes, unlike Gillis, is himself subject to the process of aging, having arrived at the height of his fame but finding himself with nowhere to go. Like Norma Desmond and Fedora, Holmes too suffers from the obligation of having to live up to an image created by others. This predicament may have well been Wilder's own, who by 1970, after a series of commercially and critically disappointing features, had to face the question whether the six-time Academy Award winner still had it in him. In the four films that would follow—*Avanti!*; *The Front Page*; *Fedora*; and *Buddy Buddy*—the question of ageing (in connection with suicide) would continue to take center stage.

With a budget of about \$10 million, a shooting schedule of over six months, and a script of over 260 pages, *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* was Wilder's most ambitious project to date, and followed his last film after more than four years, the longest gap between films since he had begun directing. The final film was envisioned as a three-hour roadshow extravaganza with only two shows a day, following the successful example of some other films of the 1960s presented this way, including *Dr. Zhivago*, *My Fair Lady*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, and *The Sound of Music*. Yet a number of sensational flops of lavish Hollywood productions toward the end of the decade cautioned United Artists to take a more conservative approach toward marketing the film, and to demand that the Mirisch Company and Wilder pare down the running time to something suitable for a normal theatrical release. Even though Wilder had the last word over the final cut, he agreed to drastic changes rather than not see his film distributed at all. It premiered at New York's Radio City Music Hall on 29 October 1970 and was met with considerably less public interest than anticipated and very mixed reviews. Originally intended as a blockbuster for the holiday season, it was withdrawn from Radio City Music Hall before Thanksgiving and had an abbreviated national run that recovered only \$1.5 million, a mere fraction of the overall cost—a financial failure that doomed Wilder's last decade as a director.

Contemporaries saw Wilder's failure as symptomatic for an aging director in a rapidly changing world of filmmaking in which he no longer belonged, but in some ways Wilder proved to be *ahead* of his time. In the 1970s and 1980s there followed a series of commercially highly successful book and film adaptations of the Holmes adventures for which Wilder can claim

to have paved the way. The year of the film's release saw a novelization by devout Holmesians Michael and Mollie Hardwick that closely followed the released version of Diamond and Wilder's script and had considerable international success.³³ Even more successful was the 1974 novel *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* by Nicholas Meyer, a runaway bestseller which revolves around Holmes's cocaine addiction and has the famous detective seek therapy with Dr. Sigmund Freud (made into a film by Herbert Ross in 1976).³⁴ Michael Dibdin's *The Last Sherlock Holmes Story* (1978) and Janyang Norbu's *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes: The Missing Years* (2000) are two ambitious novels that like Wilder's film "uncover" hitherto unknown episodes in the detective's life. Among the many Holmes films that followed, Gene Wilder's comedy *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes's Smarter Brother* (1975, starring Gene Wilder in the title role) and the Spielberg-produced *Young Sherlock Holmes* (1985, directed by Barry Levinson) stand out. Most recently, Julian Barnes's novel *Arthur and George* (2005) reflects on the life of Conan Doyle in a historically documented encounter with a young victim of a miscarriage of justice that has Doyle himself turn into a detective.

The lack of success of *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* certainly meant something far more serious for Wilder than "the occasional failure" which according to Holmes we all experience now and then. *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* is the only commercial failure Wilder was never able to leave behind, the only film about which he regretted having been forced into making changes. Yet in the long run the film has recovered in cultural capital what it failed to secure at the box office at the time of its release. For many of Wilder's critics, the film counts today among his most accomplished achievements, combining an elegiac and romantic tone never seen before. Andrew Sarris has called it a "mellow masterpiece,"³⁵ while Stephen Farber similarly praised its "mellow, autumnal mood, unusual for Wilder."³⁶ Kevin Lally has claimed that the film may visually be "the most handsome film of Wilder's career,"³⁷ and Leland Poague has written that it "has grace and style beyond all power of description."³⁸ Sinyard and Turner, who can still claim to be the most astute critics of this particular film, conclude their insightful analysis by calling it, "the very essence of a mature masterpiece. Breathing a serenity without sloppiness, a melancholy without rancor, a mellowness without sentimentality, its very defiance of modishness makes it one of the most beautiful of modern films."³⁹

Several of Wilder's films are famous for scenes that were shot but not included (most notably *Double Indemnity* and *Sunset Boulevard*), but in these cases the cuts were the director's choice, who felt the film would be stronger in the shorter version. Indeed no other Wilder film has been as seriously mutilated by the studio as *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (clearly also a sign of his diminishing authority), and there is no film about which Wilder has felt greater disappointment for not having been able to show it the way he had planned. In his conversation with Cameron

Crowe, Wilder, who is usually not one to dwell on commercial failures, was uncharacteristically candid about the film's lack of success, reminiscing that it was "a very, very well-done picture. It was the most elegant picture I've ever shot"—only immediately to fall back into character by adding, "I don't shoot elegant pictures. Mr. Vincente Minnelli, *he* shot elegant pictures."⁴⁰ What a pity indeed, then, that the one film Wilder considered worthy of that praise did not survive in the form the director had planned.

Notes

1. Wilder quoted in Charlotte Chandler, *Nobody's Perfect*, 268.
2. Among Doyle scholars and aficionados, there is some debate how many times Watson was actually married. The stories themselves do not differentiate between the first and subsequent marriages.
3. Wilder has commented that a certain sexual ambiguity also surrounded actor Robert Stephens: "I was never quite sure if he was homosexual." (*Conversations with Wilder*, 301.) In his autobiography, Stephens states with some distress that he has heard of viewers who think "the implied homosexuality ... between Holmes and Watson is meant seriously." Robert Stephens, *Knight Errand: Memoirs of a Vagabond Actor* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), 99. Overall, Stephens experienced working with Billy Wilder as a very trying time during which he overdosed on alcohol and sleeping pills, understood by many as a suicide attempt.
4. For a sampling of the films inspired by Conan Doyle see Chris Steinbrunner and Norman Michaels, *The Films of Sherlock Holmes* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadell, 1978); Robert W. Pohle and Douglas C. Hart, *Sherlock Holmes on the Screen* (London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1977); and Gordon E. Kelley, *Sherlock Holmes Screen and Sound Guide* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994).
5. See Brian Gallagher, "'I Love You Too': Sexual Warfare and Homoeroticism in Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 15.4 (1987): 237–246.
6. *On Sunset Boulevard*, 548.
7. Eve Kosofsky Segdwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 3.
8. *Billy Wilder Interviews* 61.
9. Watson is correct in defending himself by saying, "That's not my doing—blame it on the illustrator" (of *Strand Magazine*), for these trademarks of Holmes are nowhere to be found in the original novels and stories.
10. Already in *Five Graves to Cairo* a parasol is used by a woman to relate secret messages. Significantly, Valladon's parasol proves far more effective than Holmes's walking stick which hides a saw and a chisel.
11. A similar diversion from Doyle's narrative strategy is also evident in the opening credits. When the relics of Watson and Holmes are taken out of the safe deposit box, we are shown Holmes's pocket watch, which is adorned with a photograph of Ilse von Hoffmannsthal, a clear sign of his affection only to be developed much later in the film, as well as a hint at her true identity. The use of foreshadowing or any anticipatory remarks are completely absent from Watson's accounts.
12. Heide Schlüppmann, *Ein Detektiv des Kinos: Studien zu Siegfried Kracauers Filmtheorie* (Basel: Stroemfeld, 1998), 22.
13. Siegfried Kracauer, "Der Detektiv-Roman," *Schriften 1* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 105. The essay was published posthumously in 1971.

14. As Wilder commented: "I've loved the stories from boyhood, and the last thing I would want to do is parody them in any way." (Quoted in *The Films of Sherlock Holmes*, 216.)
15. See the respective chapters in Poague and Sinyard and Turner; see also Charles Higham, *The Adventures of Conan Doyle: The Life of the Creator of Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Norton, 1976), as well as the books on the filmic adaptations of Doyle's fiction cited earlier.
16. As Holmes fans have been quick to point out, Diamond and Wilder's script is not without a few factual mistakes; thus *Strand Magazine* did not begin publication until 1891, four years after the events taking place described in the film, while *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, of which Mme. Petrova is a fan, was not published until 1902, and only much later in Russian translation. Such mistakes, however, are in keeping with Watson's own occasional memory lapses.
17. *Journey Down Sunset Boulevard*, 264.
18. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories* (London: Bantam, 1986), volume 1, 209.
19. The detectives among viewers will certainly establish a connection between name, portrait, and music early on in the film: the sheet music is a concerto dedicated to "Ilse von H" and composed by Sherlock Holmes; it is taken out of the strong box just before the pocket watch which contains a photograph of a woman we now understand to be the mysterious Ilse von H; furthermore, the nondiegetic music that underscores the scene is in fact the sheet music we see, (which in reality was composed by Miklós Rózsa, whose creditline is placed next to von H's portrait), and which from that point on Holmes will play when thinking of Ilse.
20. *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories*, volume 1, 209.
21. For a reading of the Brauner films, and particularly Lee as Holmes, see Tim Bergfelder, *International Adventures: German Popular Cinema and European Co-Productions in the 1960s* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2005).
22. A copy of the memo from United Artists Corporation/Publicity Department (dated 2-12-1970) is found at the BFI archive in London.
23. The only other period film that resembles the remoteness of *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* is *The Emperor Waltz*. Set in Austria in 1901, it is however a film that very much looks forward to the twentieth century, what Henry Luce would later dub the American century, without undertones of nostalgia. As the Emperor tells the American Virgil Smith (played by an energetic, highstrung Bing Crosby): "You Americans are simpler, you are stronger. Ultimately the world will be yours," to which Virgil, without losing a beat, replies: "You bet it will!"
24. As a reviewer in the *London Times* wrote, Wilder's adaptation "should offend no one, not even the most dedicated members of the Sherlock Holmes Society" (11 December 1970). Ironically, such a member was actually included in the original opening sequence at the bank, where a managing director identifies himself as a serious Holmes fan and scholar and laments the current James Bond craze ("that secret service chap—the one with the hairy chest—it's all trash") as a sign of how the art of detective fiction has declined.
25. Zolotow, *Billy Wilder in Hollywood*, 322.
26. References to Doyle's stories are found in several of Wilder's films. In *Ace in the Hole*, journalist Chuck Tatum speaks about reporting on the Loch Ness monster, while Lord X in *Irma la Douce* claims to possess a hound of the Baskervilles as a pet. The original plans for adapting Doyle first included a musical, then a film musical, and finally became a film. Apart from Diamond, a series of cowriters were temporarily involved in the project.
27. According to Robert W. Pohle and Douglas C. Hart, the original version also gave more room to Petrova and Rogozhin, "the latter evidently having been troubled with some sort of peculiarly delicate personal problems of his own." (*Sherlock Holmes on the Screen*, 222.) I could not find any evidence for this claim elsewhere.
28. Apparently yet another coda was planned in which Lestrade comes to visit Holmes, asking for help with solving the murder of several prostitutes in Whitechapel by a killer

- the newspapers call Jack the Ripper, but Holmes is too heartbroken after Ilse von Hoffmannsthal's death to accept the assignment.
29. Wilder quoted in Bernard Cohen, "Wilder, Billy (Tournage)," *Positif* 109 (1969): 49–50; here 49.
 30. Rózsa makes a brief cameo in the film as conductor of the Swan Lake ballet, a rare honor also accorded to Alexander Trauner, who played an artist in *Irma La Douce*.
 31. *The Hollywood Professionals: Wilder and McCarey*, 138.
 32. *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories*, volume 1, 12. It is worth noting in this context that Robert Stephens had played another artist, the troubled art teacher Teddy Lloyd, in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Ronald Neame, 1969), which Wilder had seen.
 33. Michael and Mollie Hardwick, *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (New York Bantam, 1970).
 34. Meyer himself lauded Wilder's film for "the stunning production design by the incomparable Alexander Trauner," but did not elaborate on it as a possible influence on his own novel. See Nicholas Meyer, "Sherlock Holmes on Film: A Personal View," in Charles Putney et al, ed., *Sherlock Holmes: From Victorian Sleuth to Modern Hero* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1996) 2–10; here 3.
 35. Andrew Sarris, "Billy Wilder and the Holocaust," *Village Voice* 4 May 1984.
 36. Stephen Farber, "The Films of Billy Wilder," *Film Comment* 7.4 (1977): 8–22; here 9.
 37. *Wilder Times*, 372.
 38. *The Hollywood Professionals: Wilder and McCarey*, 125.
 39. *Journey Down Sunset Boulevard*, 304. Along the same lines, John Powers has prophetically described the film as "one of the most sublime comedies ever filmed. Beneath its surface, however, this autumnal tale is suffused with an overpowering sense of sadness and loss, a painful awareness of passing time and mortality. Exquisitely produced and photographed, it's a film whose reputation will grow and grow." Quoted in *Billy Wilder: The Fourteenth Annual American Film Institute Life Achievement Award* (March 6, 1986), 67.
 40. *Conversations with Wilder*, 98.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1906 Born as Samuel Wilder in Sucha, Galicia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
- 1909 The family moves to Krakow where the father opens the “Hotel City.”
- 1914 The assassination of Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo leads to the outbreak of World War I.
- 1916 The family flees to Vienna from fear of invasion by Russian troops. In November, ten-year-old Billie—as his mother calls him—witnesses the funeral of Kaiser Franz Joseph, which signals the coming end of the monarchy.
- 1918 The end of the war brings political turmoil to Vienna and an increasing polarization between nationalist and socialist parties. As Eastern Jews from the province, the Wilders experience the rise of anti-Semitism.
- 1919 With the demise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Wilders, as residents of the former Galicia (now part of Poland), have the choice to apply for Austrian citizenship, but they are turned down because they “fail to prove to belong by race and language to the German majority of Austria.”
- 1924 Billie Wilder graduates from high school. Defying his father’s wishes that he study law, he becomes a reporter for the yellow press tabloid *Die Stunde*, and later also *Die Bühne*.
- 1926 Serving as tour guide for the American Jazz band leader Paul Whiteman, Wilder leaves for Berlin where for the next seven years he will work as a freelance journalist for the *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, *Nachtausgabe*, *Tempo*, and *BZ am Mittag*, as well as ghost writer and later credited writer for numerous scripts.
- 1929 The stock market crash on Wall Street touches off a worldwide economic crisis and the withdrawal of U.S. loans from Germany. Wilder receives his first writing credit for *Der Teufelsreporter*.
- 1930 *Menschen am Sonntag*, based on Wilder’s script, is premiered and becomes a surprise success with Berlin audiences. Wilder is subsequently offered a contract by Ufa.

- 1931 Five million are unemployed in Germany.
- 1932 July elections see the Nazis victorious with 37.8 per cent of the vote. Hitler demands to be named chancellor. In the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt wins his first term.
- 1933 Von Schleicher resigns as chancellor and Hindenburg names Adolf Hitler new chancellor. One day after the Reichstag fire, on 27 February, Wilder flees to Paris.
- 1934 Together with Alexander Esway, Wilder directs his first feature, *Mauvaise graine*, during his exile in Paris. Through the help of Joe May, he lands a contract with Columbia Pictures and is able to travel to Hollywood. After his visitor visa expires, Wilder stays for a while in Mexicali, Mexico, before he can reenter the United States on a permanent visa.
- 1936 Wilder signs a contract with Paramount, changes his first name to Billy, and begins his longterm collaboration with Charles Brackett, which will result in thirteen cowritten scripts. Wilder marries Judith Coppicus Iribe.
- 1938 "Anschluss" of Austria to Nazi Germany. During the "Reichskristallnacht," Synagogues and Jewish stores are burnt all over the German Reich.
- 1939 Germany invades Poland. Wilder becomes a US citizen.
- 1941 After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the US enters the war.
- 1942 Wilder's directorial debut in Hollywood with *The Major and the Minor*.
- 1944 *Double Indemnity*, cowritten with Raymond Chandler, opens to positive reviews, but is overlooked at the Academy Awards.
- 1945 As a colonel for the Psychological Warfare Division of the U.S. Army, Wilder is back in Germany for the first time since the beginning of the war. There he oversees the editing of *Die Todesmühlen/ The Death Mills*, a documentary about the concentration camps. The Red Army liberates Auschwitz where Wilder's mother, stepfather, and grandmother have been killed.
- 1946 Wilder wins Academy Awards for director and best screenplay (with Charles Brackett) for *The Lost Weekend*.
- 1947 The Wilders divorce.
- 1948 In the so-called Paramount decision, the Federal Court rules in favor of the dismantling of the corporate structure of the studio and its movie theaters. The deregulation initiates the end of the classic studio era.
- 1949 Wilder marries Audrey Young.

- 1951 Wilder and Brackett win an Academy Award for best screenplay for *Sunset Boulevard*.
- 1954 Wilder leaves Paramount and freelances.
- 1957 With *Love in the Afternoon* Wilder begins collaboration with I. A. L. Diamond that will result in twelve scripts.
- 1960 Wilder wins three Academy Awards in one year—for producer, director, and screenplay (with Diamond)—for *The Apartment*.
- 1968 Court cases in the United States lead to the replacement of the Production Code with the Code of Self-Regulation.
- 1969 Charles Brackett dies.
- 1973 Wilder is signed by Universal to direct *The Front Page*.
- 1977 Wilder leaves Universal; makes *Fedora* with German tax-shelter money.
- 1981 Wilder's last film, *Buddy Buddy*, is released through MGM.
- 1988 I.A.L. Diamond dies.
- 1989 The auctioning of Wilder's art collection fetches \$32.6 million in New York City.
- 2002 On 27 March, Billy Wilder dies at the age of 95 in Beverly Hills.

FILMOGRAPHY

DER TEUFELSREPORTER: IM NEBEL DER GROSSSTADT

Director: Ernst Laemmle; screenplay: Billie Wilder; camera: Charles J. Stumar. Cast: Eddie Polo (Eddie, the reporter); Maria Forescu (Madame Lourdier); Jonas Garrison (Jonas); Fred Grosser (Maxe); Gritta Ley (Bessie).

65 minutes.

Premiered: Hamburg, 19 July 1929.

MENSCHEN AM SONNTAG

Director: Robert Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer; screenplay: Billie Wilder, after a story by Curt Siodmak; camera: Eugen Schüfftan; camera assistant: Fred Zinnemann; producer: Filmstudio 1929. Cast: Brigitte Borchert (Brigitta, a salesgirl); Christl Ehlers (Christl, a would-be actress); Annie Schreyer (Annie, the girl who stays home); Erwin Spletstößer (Erwin, a cab driver); Wolfgang von Waltershausen (Wolfgang, a wine salesman); as well as Kurt Gerron, Valeska Gert, and Ernst Verebes. 74 minutes.

Premiered: Berlin, 4 February 1930.

EIN BURSCHENLIED AUS HEIDELBERG

Director: Karl Hartl; screenplay: Ernst Neubach, Heinz Wilhelm, Billie Wilder; camera: Carl Hoffmann; editor: Karl Hartl; music: Hans May; lyrics: Ernst Neubach; sets: Robert Herlth, Walter Röhrig; producer: Günter Stapenhorst, Ufa. Cast: Ernst Stahl-Nachbaur (John Miller); Betty Bird (Elinor Miller, his daughter); Willi Forst (Robert Dahlberg, a student); Albert Paulig (Borneman, senior); Hans Brausewetter (Borneman, junior); as well as Wolfgang Zilzer, Ludwig Stoessel, Erik Ode. 79 minutes.

Premiered: Berlin, 28 August 1930.

DER MANN, DER SEINEN MÖRDER SUCHT [aka JIM, DER MANN MIT DER NARBE]

Director: Robert Siodmak; screenplay: Billie Wilder, Kurt Siodmak, Ludwig Hirschfeld, Robert Siodmak (uncredited), based on the play "Jim, der Mann mit der Narbe" by Ernst Neubach and the novel *Les tribulations d'un Chinois en Chine*, by Jules Verne; camera: Otto Baecker and Konstantin Irmen-Tschet; editor: Viktor Gertler; music: Friedrich Hollaender and Franz Wachsmann; lyrics: Billie Wilder; sets: Robert Herlth; producer: Erich Pommer, Ufa. Cast: Heinz Rühmann (Hans Herfort); Lien Deyers (Kitty); Raimund Janitschek (Otto Kuttlapp, burglar); Hermann Speelmans (Jim); Gerhard Bienert (policeman); Friedrich Hollaender (president of the club 'Weiße Weste'). 98 minutes.

Premiered: Berlin, 5 February 1931.

IHRE HOHEIT BEFIEHLT

Director: Hanns Schwarz; screenplay: Paul Frank, Robert Liebmann, Billie Wilder; camera: Konstantin Irmen-Tschet and Günther Rittau; editor: Willy Zeyn, Jr; music: Werner Richard Heymann; lyrics: Ernst Neubach and Robert Gilbert; sets: Erich Kettelhut; producer: Ufa.

Cast: Willy Fritsch (Lieut. Carl von Conradi); Käthe von Nagy (Princess Marie-Christine); Paul Hörbiger (Detective Pipac); Reinhold Schünzel (Count Herlitz, Minister of State); Paul Heidemann (Count von Leuchtenstein). 96 minutes.

Premiered: Mannheim, 3 March 1931.

Note: A French version, *Princesse à vos ordres*, starring Lilian Harvey, was released in 1931. *Ihre Hoheit befiehlt* was remade by Fox as *Adorable* in 1933, directed by William Dieterle and starring Janet Gaynor. Wilder received story credit for both films.

SEITENSPRÜNGE

Director: Stefan Székely; screenplay: Ludwig Biró, Bobby E. Luthge, and Karl Noti, from an idea by Billie Wilder; camera: Walter Robert Lach; music and lyrics: Karl M. May, Fritz German, and Karl Brull; sets: Gustav A. Knauer, Hans Minzloff; producer: Joe Pasternak, Cicero-Film. Cast: Oskar Sima (Robert Burkhardt); Gerda Maurus (Annemarie Burkhardt); Paul Vincenti (Carlo); Jarmila Marton (Lupita), Otto Wallburg (Onkel Emil), Adele Sandrock (Anne), Paul Kemp (Anton Schiller). 81 minutes.

Premiered: Berlin, 19 March 1931.

DER FALSCH EHEMANN

Director: Johannes Guter; screenplay: Paul Frank and Billie Wilder; camera: Carl Hoffmann, Bernhard Wenzel; editor: Konstantin Mick; music: Norbert Glanzberg; lyrics: Gert Karlick; sets: Robert Herlth and Walter Röhrig; producer: Bruno Duday, Ufa. Cast: Johannes Riemann (Peter and Paul Hanneman); Maria Paudler (Ruth Hannemann); Tibor von Halmay (Maxim Tartakoff, violin virtuoso); Fritz Strehlen (Maharaja); Jessie Vihrog (Ines, his daughter); Martha Ziegler (Fräulein Schulze), Comedian Harmonists. 85 minutes.

Premiered: 27 March 1931.

EMIL UND DIE DETEKTIVE

Director: Gerhard Lamprecht; screenplay: Billie Wilder, Paul Frank (uncredited), based on the novel by Erich Kästner and an outline by Kästner and Emmerich Pressburger; story consultant: Carl Mayer (uncredited); camera: Werner Brandes; music: Allan Gray; sets: Werner Schlichting; producer: Günther Stapenhorst, Ufa. Cast: Rolf Wenkhaus (Emil); Käthe Haack (Emil's mother); Fritz Rasp (Grundeis); Rudolf Biebrach (policeman Jeschke); Olga Engl (Emil's grandmother); Inge Landgut (Pony Hütchen); Hans Joachim Schaufuß (Gustav with the horn); Hubert Schmitz (professor); as well as Hans Richter, Hans Löhr, Ernst-Eberhard Reling, and Waldemar Kupczyk. 75 minutes.

Premiered: Berlin, 2 December 1931.

Note: *Emil und die Detektive* was remade by Gaumont-British Picture Corporation as *Emil and the Detectives* (1935), directed by Milton Rosmer; Wilder received credit for writing the original screenplay.

ES WAR EINMAL EIN WALZER

Director: Victor Janson; screenplay: Billie Wilder; camera: Heinrich Gärtner, Hugo von Kaweczynski; editor: Ladislav Vajda, Jr.; music: Franz Lehár; lyrics: Fritz Rotter and Armin Robinson; producer: Gabriel Levy, Aafa Film. Cast: Marta Eggerth (Steffi Pirzinger); Rolf von Goth (Rudi Möbius); Hermann Blaß (Attorney Sauerwein); Paul Hörbiger (Franz Pirzinger, Steffi's father); Albert Paulig (Pfennig); Ernst Verebes (Gustl Linzer); Ida Wüst (Mrs. Weidling); Lizzi Natzler (Lucie Weidling, her daughter); Fritz Greiner (coachman). 79 minutes.

Premiered: Berlin, 14 April 1932.

Note: *Es war einmal ein Walzer* was remade in 1932 by British Lion as *Where is this Lady?* directed by Laslo Vajda and Victor Hambury; Wilder received story credit.

EIN BLONDER TRAUM

Director: Paul Martin; screenplay: Walter Reisch and Billie Wilder; camera: Otto Baecker, Konstantin Irmen-Tschet, and Günther Rittau; editor: Willy Zeyn, Jr.; music: Werner Richard Heymann and Gérard Jacobson; lyrics: Robert Gilbert, Walter Reisch; sets: Erich Kettelhut; producer: Erich Pommer, Ufa. Cast: Willy Fritsch (Willy 1); Willi Forst (Willy 2); Lilian Harvey (Jou-Jou); Paul Hörbiger (Scarecrow); C. Hooper Trask (Mr. Merryman, film producer); Hans Deppe (secretary); Trude Hesterberg (Ilse, newspaper vendor). 95 minutes.

Premiered: Berlin, 23 September 1932.

Note: A French version, *Un rêve blonde*, and an English version, *Happy Ever After*, were produced simultaneously, both starring Lilian Harvey; Wilder received story credit for both films.

SCAMPOLO, EIN KIND DER STRASSE [aka UM EINEN GROSCHEN LIEBE]

Director: Hans Steinhoff; screenplay: Max Kolpe and Billie Wilder, based on the play by Dario Niccodemi; camera: Hans Androschin and Curt Courant; editor: Ella Ensink; music: Franz Wachsmann and Artur Guttman; lyrics: Max Kolpe; sets: Hans Sohnle, Otto Erdmann, and Emil Stepanek; producer: Anatol Potok, Lothar-Stark-Film. Cast: Dolly Haas (Scampolo); Karl Ludwig Diehl (Maximillian); Paul Hörbiger (Gabriel); Hedwig Bleibtreu (Mrs. Schmidt, the laundry woman); Oskar Sima (Philipps, the banker). 86 minutes.

Premiered: Vienna, 22 October 1932.

Note: A French version, *Un peu d'amour*, was produced simultaneously; Wilder received story credit.

DAS BLAUE VOM HIMMEL

Director: Victor Janson; screenplay: Max Kolpe and Billie Wilder; camera: Heinrich Gärtner; music: Paul Abraham; lyrics: Fritz Rotter and Max Kolpe; sets: Jacek Rotmil; producer: Rudolf Walther-Fein and Gabriel Levy, Aafa-Film. Cast: Marta Eggerth (Anni Müller); Hermann Thimig (Hans Meier); Jakob Tiedtke (U-Papa); Ernst Verebes (Hugo); Fritz Kampers (Tobias); Hans Richter (Tommy); Margarete Schlegel (Zigaretten-Cilly); Walter Steinbeck (Piper). 77 minutes.

Premiered: Berlin, 20 December 1932.

MADAME WÜNSCHT KEINE KINDER

Director: Hans Steinhoff; screenplay: Max Kolpe and Billie Wilder, based on the novel *Madame ne veut pas d'enfants* by Clément Vautel; camera: Willy Goldberger and Hans Androschin; editor: Ella Ensink; music: Bronislau Kaper and Walter Jurmann; lyrics: Fritz Rotter and Max Kolpe; producer: Anatol Potok, Lothar-Stark-Film. Cast: Georg Alexander (Dr. Felix Rainer); Liane Haid (Madelaine Wengert, his wife-to-be); Erika Glässner (Frau Wengert, his mother-in-law); Lucie Mannheim (Luise, his former girlfriend); Hans Moser (train conductor); Otto Wallburg (Herr Balsam). 86 minutes.

Premiered: Vienna, 6 January 1933.

Note: A French version, *Madame ne veut pas d'enfants*, was produced simultaneously; Wilder received story credit.

WAS FRAUEN TRÄUMEN

Director: Géza von Bolváry; screenplay: Franz Schulz and Billie Wilder, after a novel by Franz Schulz; camera: Willy Goldberger; editor: Käthe Kopitzke; music: Robert Stolz; lyrics: Robert Gilbert; producer: Julius Haimann, Super-Film. Cast: Nora Gregor (Rina Korff); Gustav Fröhlich (Walter König); Peter Lorre (Füssli), Kurt Horwitz (Levassor, alias John Constantinescu); with Kurt Lilien, Hilde Maroff, Erik Ode, Eric Steinbeck, and Otto Wallburg. 81 minutes.

Premiered: Berlin, 20 April 1933.

Note: *Was Frauen träumen* was remade by Universal as *One Exciting Adventure* (1934), directed by Ernst Frank; Wilder received story credit.

MAUVAISE GRAINE

Directors: Billie Wilder and Alexander Esway; screenplay: Billie Wilder, Max Kolpe, Hans G. Lustig, after an idea by Billy Wilder; camera: Paul Cotteret and Maurice Delattre; music: Allan Gray and Franz Wachsmann; sets: Robert Gys; producers: Edouard Corniglion-Molinier, Compagnie Nouvelle Commerciale. Cast: Danielle Darrieux (Jeanette); Pierre Mingand (Henri Pasquier); Raimond Galle (Jean la Cravate); Paul Escoffier (Dr. Pasquier); Michel Duran (the Boss); Jean Wall (Zebra); Marcel Maupi (man in panama hat); Paul Velsa (man with peanuts); Gaby Heritier (Gaby). 86 minutes.

Premiered: Paris, 1 July 1934.

MUSIC IN THE AIR

Director: Joe May; screenplay: Robert Liebmann, Billie Wilder, and Howard Irving Young, based on the musical by Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern; camera: Ernest Palmer; music: Jerome Kern; musical adaptation: Franz Waxman; sets: William Darling; costumes: René Hubert; producer: Erich Pommer, Fox Film. Cast: Gloria Swanson (Frieda); John Boles (Bruno Mahler); June Lang (Sieglinde Lessing); Al Shean (Dr. Walter Lessing); Reginald Owen (Weber). 85 minutes.

Premiered: New York, 13 December 1934.

UNDER PRESSURE

Director: Raoul Walsh; screenplay: Borden Chase, Noel Pierce, and Lester Cole, with revisions and additional dialogue by Billie Wilder, based on the novel *East River* by Borden Chase and Edward Doherty; cameras: Hal Mohr and L. W. O'Connell; art direction: Jack Otterson; costumes: William Lambert. Cast: Edmund Lowe (Shocker); Victor McLaglen (Jumbo); Florence Rice (Pat); Charles Bickford (Nipper); Ward Bond (fighter); Sig Rumann (doctor). 70 minutes.

Premiered: February 1935.

LOTTERY LOVER

Director: Wilhelm Thiele; screenplay: Franz Schulz, Billie Wilder, based on a story by Siegfried M. Herzig and Maurice Hanline; camera: Bert Glennon; editor: Dorothy Spencer; sets: William Darling; costumes: René Hubert; music: Jay Gorney; lyrics: Don Hartman; producer: Al Rocket, Fox Film Corporation. Cast: Lew Ayres (Frank Harrington); Pat Paterson (Patty); Peggy Fears (Gaby Aimée); Reginald Denny (Capt. Payne); Sterling Holloway (Harold Stump). 82 minutes.

Premiered: 5 February 1935.

CHAMPAGNE WALTZ

Director: A. Edward Sutherland; screenplay: Frank Butler and Don Hartman, from a story by Billy Wilder and H. S. Kraft; camera: William C. Mellor; editor: Paul Weatherwax; costumes: Travis Banton; music: Victor Young; producer: Harlan Thompson, Paramount. Cast: Gladys Swarthout (Elsa Strauss); Fred MacMurray (Buzzy Bellew); Herman Bing (Max Snellinek); Jack Oakie (Happy Gallagher); Fritz Leiber (Franz Strauss); Rudolph Anders (Franz Joseph); Stanley Price (Johann Strauss). 85 minutes.

Premiered: New York, 19 January 1937.

BLUEBEARD'S EIGHTH WIFE

Director: Ernst Lubitsch; screenplay: Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, based on the play by Alfred Savoir; camera: Leo Tover, Eric Locke; music: Werner R. Heymann and Friedrich Hol-

laender; costumes: Travis Banton; editor: William Shea; art directors: Hans Dreier and Robert Usher; producer: Ernst Lubitsch, Paramount. Cast: Claudette Colbert (Nicole de Loiseau); Gary Cooper (Michael Brandon); Edward Everett Horton (Marquis de Loiseau); David Niven (Albert de Regnier); Elizabeth Patterson (Aunt Hedwige); Herman Bing (Monsieur Pepinard); Warren Hymer (Kid Mulligan); Franklin Pangborn (hotel manager); Rolfe Sedan (floorwalker); Lawrence Grant (Prof. Urganzeff); Lionel Pape (M. Potin); Tyler Brooke (clerk). 80 minutes. Premiered: New York, 23 March 1938.

THAT CERTAIN AGE

Director: Edward Ludwig; screenplay: Bruce Manning, from a story by F. Hugh Herbert, with uncredited contributions by Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder; camera: Joseph A. Valentine; music: Harold Adamson and Jimmy McHugh; costumes: Vera West; editor: Bernard W. Burton; art director: Jack Otterson; producer: Joe Pasternak, Universal. Cast: Deanna Durbin (Alice Fullerton); Melvyn Douglas (Vincent Bullitt); Jackie Cooper (Ken); Irene Rich (Mrs. Fullerton); Nancy Carroll (Grace Bristow). 95 minutes.

Premiered: 7 October 1938.

MIDNIGHT

Director: Mitchell Leisen; screenplay: Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, from a story by Edwin Justus Mayer and Franz Schulz; camera: Charles B. Lang; music: Friedrich Hollaender; art directors: Hans Dreier and Robert Usher; editor: Doane Harrison; special effects: Farcot Edouart; producer: Arthur Hornblow Jr., Paramount. Cast: Claudette Colbert (Eve Peabody); Don Ameche (Tibor Czerny); John Barrymore (Georges Flammarion); Francis Lederer (Jacques Picot); Mary Astor (Hélène Flammarion); Elaine Barrie (Simone); Hedda Hopper (Stephanie); Rex O'Malley (Marcel); Monty Woolley (Judge). 94 minutes.

Premiered: 15 March 1939.

WHAT A LIFE

Director: Jay Theodore Reed; screenplay: Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, based on the play by Clifford Goldsmith; camera: Victor Milner; editor: William Shea; art directors: Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; producer: Jay Theodore Reed, Paramount. Cast: Jackie Cooper (Henry Aldrich); Betty Field (Barbara Pearson); James Corner (George Bigelow); Hedda Hopper (Mrs. Aldrich); John Howard (Mr. Nelson); Janice Logan (Miss Shea); Dorothy Stickney (Miss Wheeler); Lionel Stander (Ferguson). 75 minutes.

Premiered: 6 October 1939.

NINOTCHKA

Director: Ernst Lubitsch; screenplay: Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder, and Walter Reisch, from a story by Melchior Lengyel; camera: William H. Daniels; music: Werner R. Heymann; art director: Cedric Gibbons and Randall Duell; costumes: Adrian; editor: Gene Ruggiero; producer: Ernst Lubitsch, Loews Incorporated (MGM). Cast: Greta Garbo (Ninotchka); Melvyn Douglas (Count Leon d'Algot); Ina Claire (Grand Duchess Swana); Bela Lugosi (Commissar Razinin); Sig Rumann (Iranoff); Felix Bressart (Buljanoff); Alexander Granach (Kopalski); Gregory Gaye (Rakonin); Rolfe Sedan (hotel manager); Edwin Maxwell (Mercier); Richard Carle (Gaston); Mary Forbes (Lady Lavenham); Peggy Moran (French maid); George Tobias (Russian visa officer). 110 minutes.

Premiered: Los Angeles, 6 October 1939.

RHYTHM ON THE RIVER

Director: Victor Schertzinger; screenplay: Dwight Taylor, from a story by Jacques Théry and Billy Wilder; camera: Ted Tetzlaff; music and lyrics: James V. Monaco and Victor Schertzinger, Johnny Burke, and John Scott Trotter; costumes: Edith Head; editor: Hugh Bennett;

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art directors: Hans Dreier and Ernst Fegté; producer: William LeBaron, Paramount. Cast: Bing Crosby (Bob Sommers); Mary Martin (Cherry Lane); Basil Rathbone (Oliver Courtney); Oscar Levant (Billy Starbuck); Oscar Shaw (Charlie Goodrich); Charley Grapewin (Uncle Caleb); Lillian Cornell (Millie Starling); Jeanne Cagney (country cousin); John Scott Trotter (himself). 92 minutes.

Premiered: 6 September 1940.

ARISE, MY LOVE

Director: Mitchell Leisen; screenplay: Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, from a story by Benjamin Glazer and John S. Toldy; camera: Charles Lang; music: Victor Young; art directors: Hans Dreier and Robert Usher; costumes: Irene; editor: Doane Harrison; producer: Arthur Hornblow, Jr, Paramount. Cast: Claudette Colbert (Augusta Nash); Ray Milland (Tom Martin); Dennis O'Keefe (Shep); Walter Abel (Mr. Phillips); Dick Purcell (Pinky O'Connor); George Zucco (prison governor); Frank Puglia (Father Jacinto). 110 minutes.

Premiered: 17 October 1940.

HOLD BACK THE DAWN

Director: Mitchell Leisen; screenplay: Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, based on a novel by Ketti Frings; camera: Leo Tover; music: Victor Young; art directors: Hans Dreier and Robert Usher; costumes: Edith Head; editor: Doane Harrison; producer: Arthur Hornblow Jr., Paramount. Cast: Charles Boyer (Georges Iscovescu); Olivia de Havilland (Emmy Brown); Paulette Goddard (Anita); Victor Francen (Prof. Van Den Luecken); Walter Abel (Inspector Hammock); Curt Bois (Bonbois); Mitchell Leisen (Mr. Saxon); Brian Donlevy (movie actor); Veronica Lake (movie actress); 115 minutes.

Premiered: 31 July 1941.

BALL OF FIRE

Director: Howard Hawks; screenplay: Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, based on the story "From A to Z" by Billy Wilder and Thomas Monroe; camera: Gregg Toland; music: Alfred Newman; costumes: Edith Head; editor: Daniel Mandell; art director: Perry Ferguson, McLure Capps; producer: Samuel Goldwyn Productions. Cast: Gary Cooper (Prof. Bertram Potts); Barbara Stanwyck (Sugarpudd O'Shea); Oskar Homolka (Prof. Gurkakoff); Henry Travers (Prof. Jerome); S. Z. Sakall (Prof. Magenbruch); Tully Marshall (Prof. Robinson); Leonid Kinskey (Prof. Quintana); Richard Haydn (Prof. Oddly); Aubrey Mather (Prof. Peagram); Allen Jenkins (garbage man); Dana Andrews (Joe Lilac); Dan Duryea (Pastrami); Ralph Peters (Asthma); Kathleen Howard (Miss Bragg); Mary Field (Miss Totten); Gene Krupa (himself). 111 minutes.

Premiered: December 1941.

Note: *Ball of Fire* was remade in 1948 as the musical *A Song Is Born*, directed by Howard Hawks; Wilder received story credit.

THE MAJOR AND THE MINOR

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, based on the story "Sunny Goes Home" by Fanny Kilbourne and the play *Connie Goes Home* by Edward Childs Carpenter; camera: Leo Tover; music: Robert Emmett Dolan; art directors: Roland Anderson and Hans Dreier; costumes: Edith Head; editor: Doane Harrison; producer: Arthur Hornblow Jr., Paramount. Cast: Ginger Rogers (Susan Applegate); Ray Milland (Major Philip Kirby); Rita Johnson (Pamela Hill); Robert Benchley (Mr. Osborne); Diana Lynn (Lucy Hill); Edward Fielding (Colonel Hill); Frankie Thomas (Cadet Osborne); Raymond Roe (Cadet Wigton); Charles Smith (Cadet Korner); Larry Nunn (Cadet Babcock); Billy Dawson (Cadet Miller); Lela Rogers (Mrs. Applegate). 110 minutes.

Premiered: September 1942.

FIVE GRAVES TO CAIRO

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, based on the play *Hotel Imperial* by Lajos Bíró; camera: John F. Seitz; music: Miklós Rózsa; costumes: Edith Head; editor: Doane Harrison; art directors: Hans Dreier and Ernst Fegté; producer: Charles Brackett, Paramount. Cast: Franchot Tone (John J. Bramble); Anne Baxter (Mouche); Erich von Stroheim (Field Marshal Erwin Rommel); Akim Tamiroff (Farid); Fortunio Bonanova (General Sebastiano); Peter Van Eyck (Lieutenant Schwegler). 96 minutes.

Premiered: 4 May 1943.

DOUBLE INDEMNITY

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Raymond Chandler and Billy Wilder, based on the novel by James M. Cain; camera: John F. Seitz; music: Miklós Rózsa; costumes: Edith Head; editor: Doane Harrison; art directors: Hans Dreier and Hal Pereira; producer: Joseph Sistrom, Paramount. Cast: Fred MacMurray (Walter Neff); Barbara Stanwyck (Phyllis Dietrichson); Edward G. Robinson (Barton Keyes); Porter Hall (Mr. Jackson); Jean Heather (Lola Dietrichson); Tom Powers (Mr. Dietrichson); Byron Barr (Nino Zachette); Richard Gaines (Mr. Norton); Fortunio Bonanova (Sam Gorlopolis); Sam McDaniel (Charlie). 107 minutes.

Premiered: 1 May 1944

DIE TODESMÜHLEN

Director: Hanuš Burger; screenplay: Hanuš Burger; commentary: Oskar Seidlin; voiceover: Anton Reimer; editor: Sam Inston, under the direction of Billy Wilder; producer: Office of Military Government for Germany/United States. 22 minutes.

Premiered: October 1945.

THE LOST WEEKEND

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, based on the novel by Charles R. Jackson; camera: John F. Seitz; music: Miklós Rózsa; costumes: Edith Head; editor: Doane Harrison; art directors: Hans Dreier and A. Earl Hedrick; producer: Charles Brackett, Paramount. Cast: Ray Milland (Don Birnam); Jane Wyman (Helen St. James); Phillip Terry (Wick Birnam); Howard Da Silva (Nat); Doris Dowling (Gloria); Frank Faylen (Bim Nolan); Mary Young (Mrs. Deveridge); Anita Sharp-Bolster (Mrs. Foley). 101 minutes.

Premiered: 16 November 1945

THE BISHOP'S WIFE

Director: Henry Koster; screenplay: Robert E. Sherwood, Leonrad Bercovici, as well as Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder (both uncredited), after the novel by Robert Nathan; camera: Gregg Toland; editor: Monica Collingwood; music: Hugo Friedhofer; artistic director: George Jenkins, Perry Ferguson; costumes: Irene Sharadd; producer Samuel Goldwyn Productions. Cast: Cary Grant (Dudley); Loretta Young (Julia Brougham); David Niven (Henry Brougham); Monty Wooley (Prof. Wutheridge); James Gleason (Sylvester); Elsa Lanchester (Matilda). 109 minutes.

Premiered: New York, 9 December 1947.

THE EMPEROR WALTZ

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder; camera: George Barnes; music and lyrics: Johnny Burke and Victor Young; costumes: Edith Head and Gile Steele; editor: Doane Harrison; art directors: Hans Dreier and Franz Bachelin; art directors: Hans Dreier and Franz Bachelin; producer: Charles Brackett, Paramount. Cast: Bing Crosby (Virgil Smith); Joan Fontaine (Johanna Augusta Franziska von Stoltzenberg-Stoltzenberg); Roland Culver (Baron Holenia); Lucile Watson (Princess Bitotska); Richard Haydn (Emperor Franz

Joseph); Harold Vermilyea (chamberlain); Sig Rumann (Dr. Zwieback); Norbert Schiller (Andreas, Dr. Zwieback's assistant); Julia Dean (Archduchess Stephanie); Doris Dowling (Tyrolean girl). 106 minutes.

Premiered: London, 30 April 1948.

A FOREIGN AFFAIR

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder, and Richard L. Breen, based on a story by David Shaw and Robert Harari; camera: Charles Lang; music: Friedrich Hollaender; art directors: Hans Dreier and Walter H. Tyler; costumes: Edith Head; editor: Doane Harrison; producer: Charles Brackett, Paramount. Cast: Jean Arthur (Phoebe Frost); Marlene Dietrich (Erika von Schlütow); John Lund (Capt. John Pringle); Millard Mitchell (Col. Rufus J. Plummer); Peter von Zerneck (Hans Otto Birgel); Stanley Prager (Mike); Raymond Bond (Pennecot). 116 minutes.

Premiered: New York, 7 July 1948.

SUNSET BOULEVARD

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder, and D.M. Marshman Jr.; camera: John F. Seitz; music: Franz Waxman; costumes: Edith Head; editors: Doane Harrison and Arthur P. Schmidt; art director: Hans Dreier; producer: Charles Brackett, Paramount. Cast: William Holden (Joe Gillis); Gloria Swanson (Norma Desmond); Erich von Stroheim (Max von Mayerling); Nancy Olson (Betty Schaefer); Fred Clark (Sheldrake); Lloyd Gough (Morino); Jack Webb (Artie Green); Franklyn Farnum (mortician); Larry J. Blake (repo man); Charles Dayton (repo man); Cecil B. DeMille (himself); Hedda Hopper (herself); Buster Keaton (himself); Anna Q. Nilsson (herself); H. B. Warner (himself); Ray Evans (himself); Jay Livingston (himself). 110 minutes.

Premiered: New York, 10 August 1950.

ACE IN THE HOLE [aka THE BIG CARNIVAL]

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder, Walter Newman, and Lesser Samuels; camera: Charles B. Lang; music: Hugo Friedhofer; costumes: Edith Head; editors: Doane Harrison and Arthur P. Schmidt; art directors: Hal Pereira and A. Earl Hedrick; producer: Billy Wilder, Paramount. Cast: Kirk Douglas (Chuck Tatum); Jan Sterling (Lorraine); Robert Arthur (Herbie Cook); Porter Hall (Jacob Q. Boot); Frank Cady (Mr. Federber); Richard Benedict (Leo Minosa); Ray Teal (sheriff). 111 minutes.

Premiered: July 1951.

STALAG 17

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and Edwin Blum, based on the play by Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski; camera: Ernest Laszlo; editor: George Tomasini; music: Franz Waxman; art directors: Franz Bachelin and Hal Pereira; set decorators: Sam Comer and Ray Moyer; producer: Billy Wilder, Paramount. Cast: William Holden (Sefton); Don Taylor (Lieut. Dunbar); Otto Preminger (von Scherbach); Robert Strauss (Stosh "Animal" Krusawa); Harvey Lembeck (Harry Shapiro); Richard Erdman (Hoffy); Peter Graves (Price); Neville Brand (Duke); Sig Rumann (Schulz); Michael Moore (Manfredi); Peter Baldwin (Johnson); Robinson Stone (Joey); Robert Shawley (Blondie); William Pearson (Marko); Gil Stratton, Jr. (Cookie); Jay Lawrence (Bagradian); Erwin Kalsner (Geneva man). 120 minutes.

Premiered: London, 29 May 1953.

SABRINA

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder, Samuel A. Taylor, Ernest Lehman, based on the play *Sabrina Fair* by Taylor; camera: Charles Lang; music: Friedrich Hollaender; costumes:

Edith Head; editor: Arthur P. Schmidt; art directors: Hal Peirera and Arthur Schmidt; producer: Billy Wilder, Paramount. Cast: Humphrey Bogart (Linus Larrabee); Audrey Hepburn (Sabrina Fairchild); William Holden (David Larrabee); Walter Hampden (Oliver Larrabee); John Williams (Thomas Fairchild); Martha Hyer (Elizabeth Tyson); Joan Vohs (Gretchen Van Horn); Marcel Dalio (Baron St. Fontanel); Marcel Hillaire (professor); Nella Walker (Maude Larrabee); Francis X. Bushman (Mr. Tyson). 113 minutes.

Premiered: 2 August 1954.

THE SEVEN YEAR ITCH

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and George Axelrod, based on the play by Axelrod; camera: Milton Krasner; music: Alfred Newman; costumes: Travilla; editor: Hugh S. Fowler; art directors: George W. Davis and Lyle R. Wheeler; producers: Charles K. Feldman and Billy Wilder, Twentieth Century Fox. Cast: Marilyn Monroe (The Girl); Tom Ewell (Richard Sherman); Evelyn Keyes (Helen Sherman); Sonny Tufts (Tom MacKenzie); Robert Strauss (Mr. Kruhulik); Oskar Homolka (Dr. Brubaker); Marguerite Chapman (Miss Morris); Victor Moore (plumber). 105 minutes.

Premiered: 1 June 1955.

THE SPIRIT OF ST. LOUIS

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder, Wendell Mayes, and Charles Lederer, based on the book by Charles A. Lindbergh; camera: Robert Burks and J. Peverell Marley; music: Franz Waxman; editor: Arthur P. Schmidt; producer: Leland Hayward and Billy Wilder, Warner Bros.. Cast: James Stewart (Charles Lindbergh); Murray Hamilton (Bud Gurney); Patricia Smith (girl with mirror); Bartlett Robinson (B. F. Mahoney); Marc Connelly (Father Hussman) Arthur Space (Donald Hall); Charles Watts (O. W. Schultz). 135 minutes.

Premiered: 20 July 1957.

LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond, based on the novel *Ariane* by Claude Anet; camera: William C. Mellor; music: Franz Waxman; art director: Alexander Trauner; editor: Leonide Azar; producer: Billy Wilder, Allied Artists. Cast: Gary Cooper (Frank Flannagan); Audrey Hepburn (Ariane Chavasse); Maurice Chevalier (Claude Chavasse); Van Doude (Michel); John McGiver (Monsieur X); Lise Bourdin (Madame X); Bonifas (commissioner of police); Claude Ariel (existentialist); Olivia Chevalier (child in garden); Alexander Trauner (artist); Audrey Wilder (brunette). 130 minutes.

Premiered: 30 June 1957.

WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and Harry Kurnitz, based on the play by Agatha Christie; camera: Russell Harlan; art director: Alexander Trauner; music: Matty Malneck and Ernest Gold; costumes: Edith Head and Joe King; editor: Daniel Mandell; producers: Arthur Hornblow Jr., Theme Pictures. Cast: Tyrone Power (Leonard Vole); Marlene Dietrich (Christine Vole); Charles Laughton (Sir Wilfrid Robarts); Elsa Lanchester (Miss Plimsoll); John Williams (Brogan Moore); Henry Daniell (Mayhew); Ian Wolfe (Carter); Torin Thatcher (Mr. Myers); Norma Varden (Mrs. French); Una O'Connor (Janet McKenzie); Francis Compton (judge); Philip Tonge (Inspector Hearne); Norbert Schiller (spotlight operator). 116 minutes.

Premiered: London, 30 January 1958.

SOME LIKE IT HOT

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond, based on the film *Fanfare des Liebe*, written by Michael Logan, Heinz Pauck, and Robert Thoeren; camera: Charles

Lang; music: Adolph Deutsch; art director: Ted Haworth; costumes: Orry-Kelly; editor: Arthur P. Schmidt; producer: Billy Wilder, Mirisch Company, and Ashton Productions. Cast: Marilyn Monroe (Sugar Kane); Tony Curtis (Joe); Jack Lemmon (Jerry); George Raft (Spats); Pat O'Brien (Mulligan); Joe E. Brown (Osgood Fielding); Nehemiah Persoff (Little Bonaparte); Joan Shawlee (Sweet Sue); Billy Gray (Sid Poliakoff); George E. Stone (Toothpick Charlie); Dave Barry (Beinstock); Mike Mazurki (henchman); Harry Wilson (henchman); Beverly Hills (Dolores); Barbara Drew (Nellie); Edward G. Robinson, Jr. (Johnny Paradise). 119 minutes.

Premiered: 17 September 1959.

THE APARTMENT

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond; camera: Joseph LaShelle; art director: Alexander Trauner; music score: Adolph Deutsch; editor: Daniel Mandell; producer: Billy Wilder, Mirisch Company. Cast: Jack Lemmon (C. C. "Bud" Baxter); Shirley MacLaine (Fran Kubelik); Fred MacMurray (J. D. Sheldrake); Jack Kruschen (Dr. Dreyfuss); Ray Walston (Joe Dobisch); Frances Weintraub Lax (Mrs. Lieberman); Hope Holiday (Margie MacDougall); Johnny Seven (Karl Matuschka); Naomi Stevens (Mrs. Dreyfuss); Willard Waterman (Mr. Vanderhof); Joan Shawlee (Sylvia); Edie Adams (Miss Olsen); David Lewis (Mr. Kirkeby); David White (Mr. Eichelberger); Hal Smith (Santa Claus); Joyce Jameson (blonde). 125 minutes.

Premiered: 19 May 1960.

ONE, TWO, THREE

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond, based on the play *Egy, kettő, három* by Franz Molnar; camera: Daniel L. Fapp; art director: Alexander Trauner; music: André Previn; editor: Daniel Mandell; producer: Billy Wilder, Mirisch Company, and Mirisch Productions. Cast: James Cagney (MacNamara); Horst Buchholz (Otto Ludwig Piff); Pamela Tiffin (Scarlett Hazeltine); Arlene Francis (Phyllis MacNamara); Howard St. John (Mr. Hazeltine); Hanns Lothar (Schlemmer); Leon Askin (Peripetchikoff); Ralf Wolter (Borodenko); Peter Capell (Mishkin); Karl Lieffen (Fritz); Hubert von Meyerinck (Count von Droste-Schattenburg); Lois Bolton (Mrs. Hazeltine); Til Kiwe (reporter); Henning Schluter (Dr. Bauer); Lilo Pulver (Ingeborg); Christine Allen (Cindy MacNamara); John Allen (Tommy MacNamara); Ivan Arnold (M.P.); Friedrich Hollaender (conductor and singer in the Hotel Potemkin). 115 minutes.

Premiered: Los Angeles, 15 December 1961.

IRMA LA DOUCE

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond, based on the musical by Alexandre Breffort and Marguerite Monot; camera: Joseph LaShelle; art director: Alexander Trauner; music: André Previn; costumes: Orry-Kelly; editor: Daniel Mandell; producer: Billy Wilder, Mirisch Company, and Phalance Productions. Cast: Jack Lemmon (Nestor Patou); Shirley MacLaine (Irma); Lou Jacobi (Moustache); Bruce Yarnell (Hippolyte); Herschel Bernardi (Inspector Lefèvre); Hope Holiday (Lolita); Joan Shawlee (Amazon Annie); Grace Lee Whitney (Kiki the Cossack); Paul Dubov (André); Howard McNear (concierge); Cliff Osmund (police sergeant). 147 minutes.

Premiered: New York, 5 June 1963.

KISS ME, STUPID

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond, based on the play *L'Ora della Fantasia* by Anna Bonacci; camera: Joseph LaShelle; music: André Previn; art director: Alexander Trauner; costumes: Wesley Jeffries; editor: Daniel Mandell; producer: Billy Wilder, Mirisch Productions, Claude Productions and Phalanx Productions. Cast: Dean Martin (Dino); Kim Novak (Polly the Pistol); Ray Walston (Orville J. Spooner); Felicia Farr

(Zelda Spooner); Cliff Osmond (Barney Milsap); Barbara Pepper (Big Bertha); James Ward (milkman); Doro Merande (Mrs. Pettibone); Howard McNear (Mr. Pettibone); Bobo Lewis (waitress); Tommy Nolan (Johnnie Mulligan); Mel Blanc (Dr. Sheldrake). 124 minutes.

Premiered: Los Angeles, 16 December 1964.

THE FORTUNE COOKIE

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and I. A. L. Diamond; camera: Joseph La-Shelle; musical score: Andre Previn; costumes: Chuck Arrico and Paula Giokaris; editor: Daniel Mandell; art director: Robert Luthardt; producer: Billy Wilder, Mirisch Production, Phalanx and Jalem Productions. Cast: Jack Lemmon (Harry Hinkle); Walter Matthau (Willie Gingrich); Ron Rich (Luther "Boom Boom" Jackson); Judi West (Sandy); Cliff Osmond (Purkey); Lurene Tuttle (Mother Hinkle); Harry Holcombe (O'Brien); Les Tremayne (Thompson); Lauren Gilbert (Kincaid); Marge Redmond (Charlotte Gingrich); Sig Rumann (Prof. Winterhalter). 125 minutes.

Premiered: New York, 19 October 1966.

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond, based on characters created by Arthur Conan Doyle; camera: Christopher Challis; music: Miklós Rózsa; art director: Alexander Trauner; costumes: Julie Harris; editor: Ernest Walter; producer: Billy Wilder, Mirisch Productions, Phalanx Productions, and Sir Nigel Films. Cast: Robert Stephens (Sherlock Holmes); Colin Blakely (Dr. John Watson); Geneviève Page (Gabrielle Valladon); Christopher Lee (Mycroft Holmes); Tamara Toumanova (Petrova); Clive Revill (Rogozhin); Irene Handl (Mrs. Hudson); Mollie Maureen (Queen Victoria); Stanley Holloway (gravedigger); Catherine Lacey (old woman); Peter Madden (Von Tirpitz); Miklós Rózsa (conductor). 125 minutes.

Premiered: New York, 29 October 1970.

AVANTI!

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond, with contributions by Luciano Vincenzoni, based on the play by Samuel A. Taylor; camera: Luigi Kuveiller; music: Carlo Rustichelli; art director: Ferdinando Scarfiotti; costumes: Lino Coletta; editor: Ralph E. Winters; producer: Billy Wilder, Mirisch Corporation, Studio City, Phalanx and Jalem Productions. Cast: Jack Lemmon (Wendell Armbruster); Juliet Mills (Pamela Piggott); Clive Revill (Carlo Carlucci); Edward Andrews (J. J. Blodgett); Gianfranco Barra (Bruno); Francesco Angrisano (Arnoldo Trotta); Pippo Franco (Matarazzo); Harry Ray (Dr. Fleischmann). 144 minutes.

Premiered: December 1972.

THE FRONT PAGE

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and I. A. L. Diamond, based on the play by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur; camera: Jordan Cronenweth; music: Billy May; costumes: Burton Miller; editor: Ralph E. Winters; art director: Henry Bumstead; producer: Paul Monash, Universal. Cast: Walter Matthau (Walter Burns); Jack Lemmon (Hildy Johnson); Susan Sarandon (Peggy Grant); David Wayne (Bensinger); Carol Burnett (Mollie Malloy); Austin Pendleton (Earl Williams); Vincent Gardenia (sheriff); Allen Garfield (Krugler); Herb Edelman (Schwartz); Charles Durning (Murphy); Martin Gabel (Dr. Eggelhofer). 105 minutes.

Premiered: December 1974.

FEDORA

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond, based on the story by Tom Tryon; camera: Gerry Fisher; music: Miklós Rózsa; art director: Alexander Trauner; cos-

tumes: Charlotte Flemming; editors: Stefan Arnsten and Fredric Steinkamp; producer: Billy Wilder, N.F. Geria Film, and Société Française de Production. Cast: William Holden (Barry "Dutch" Detweiler); Marthe Keller (Fedora); Hildegard Knef (Countess Sobryanski); Jose Ferrer (Dr. Vando); Frances Sternhagen (Miss Balfour); Mario Adorf (hotel manager); Stephen Collins (young Barry); Henry Fonda (president of the Academy); Michael York (himself); Hans Jaray (Count Sobryanski); Gottfried John (Kritos). 113 minutes.

Premiered: Cannes, 30 May 1978.

BUDDY BUDDY

Director: Billy Wilder; screenplay: Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond, based on the film *L'Emmerdeur* by Francis Veber; camera: Harry Stradling, Jr.; music: Lalo Schifrin; art director: Daniel A. Lomino; editor: Argyle Nelson; producer: Jay Weston, MGM. Cast: Jack Lemmon (Victor Clooney); Walter Matthau (Trabucco); Paula Prentiss (Celia Clooney); Klaus Kinski (Dr. Zuckerbrot); Dana Elcar (Hubris); Miles Chapin (Eddie, the bellhop), Michael Ensign (assistant manager); Joan Shawlee (receptionist); Fil Formicola (Rudy "Disco" Gambola); C. J. Hunt (Kowalski); Bette Raya (maid); Ronnie Sperling (husband); Suzie Galler (wife); John Schubeck (newscaster); Ed Begley Jr. (policeman); Frank Farmer (policeman). 96 minutes.

Premiered: 11 December 1981.

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