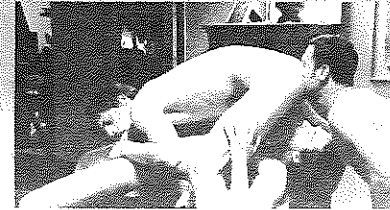




LINDA WILLIAMS

Screening Sex



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are more or less expected to play with is ourselves. Masturbation before a moving image or virtual orgies, in which couples have sex with one another as well as “with” the bodies on the home screen, now becomes a possible practice of sex. In a new media era the point of pornography has become, more than ever, the expectation that we will “have” sex with ourselves through the image on the screen. Through a look at several key examples of cyberporn this final chapter comes to grips with what is new and what remains the same about screening sex in a new media era.

Obviously these chapters do not constitute anything like a complete history of screening sex. I have sacrificed general coverage for close looks at a few films in each era—works that have seemed to me to be either groundbreaking or symptomatic of given periods of moving-image history. Whether or not they were great cinema, these were films that we often went to see out of simple curiosity for sexual knowledge. Though this book is in no way an account of my own sexual autobiography through movies, I have sometimes found it useful to tell the story of my own, necessarily limited, experiences as a longtime avid moviegoer alongside what I have gleaned from critical reception and scholarship. The films discussed in this book are thus those that have literally and figuratively “made sense” to me as forms of carnal knowledge. In evoking and analyzing them I have tried to capture some of what it meant to have been there, in the dark, since the sixties when sex ceased to be a fundamentally illicit, screened out experience and began instead to be heard and seen on/scene. If I have distinct memories of screening a film, I try to recall them and to discuss the context of my historically situated reactions as a white, heterosexual, American woman who would have liked to have been a cosmopolitan sophisticate but who, apart from her experience of movies, often remained naive and provincial at the core. As my most crucial form of sex education I hope this study of screening sex captures something of the excitement of that learning. Yet beyond the early chapters, which correspond to my own learning about sex and coming to sexual maturity, this is not a story of growing maturity. If anything, as the later chapter on primal scenes suggests, it is a story whose plot keeps thickening as carnal knowledge proves not to be a simple progress toward explicit knowledge but rather, an enigmatic and elusive “event.”

Wrestling awkwardly with her across the bed . . . I realized I was . . . reconnecting with subterranean fountains of juvenile lust that I thought had long since run dry. But no, they were there, as effervescent as ever, the obsessive and utterly unreal images of desire the movies implant in the adolescent mind. The beauty that never fades, the kiss that never ends, the night of passion that swells to crescendo on a Max Steiner theme and ends the film balanced forever on a pinnacle of undying intensity.

—THEODORE ROSZAK, *Flicker*

1

of kisses and ellipses

The Long Adolescence of American

Movies (1896–1963)

Movie kisses were the first sex acts I ever screened. Before I had my romantic first kiss, I already knew, from movies, that one needed to tilt the head a little to avoid bumping noses, but that if both kissers tilted the same way they would still bump noses, so a complex choreography of bodies had to be worked out in this simple act. I learned this from the big screen, where kisses were greatly magnified in the garish Technicolor kisses of Rock Hudson and Doris Day. But I also learned some things from the little black-and-white screen before which my mother and I sat watching TV movies on warm summer nights when I could stay up late. I remember myself at fourteen in 1960 sprawled on the rug directly under the television screen, my mother across the room in her big armchair, both of us riveted to a repertoire of Hollywood kisses performed by luminous stars.

To a barely kissed teenage girl, the extreme close-ups, swelling music, and mysterious fade-outs offered compel-

ling promises of a grand communion to come. If I could not exactly touch, taste, and smell as the kissers themselves could do, I could sense, through sights and sounds that seemed to creep across my skin, penetrate my entire body, and generate my own sympathetic puckers, how it might feel to kiss and be kissed. I remember these kisses today through a haze of nostalgia, much like that displayed in the finale of *Cinema Paradiso* (dir. Giuseppe Tornatore, 1988) when the hero reviews the screen kisses and embraces of the films of his youth. This Oscar winner for best foreign film concluded with a grand montage of all the kisses and embraces that had once been snipped by censorious priests from movies shown in a provincial Italian village after the Second World War. Like the graying hero of that film, I too sit mesmerized in the present by the gift of the old-fashioned movie kiss. And like that hero I register the double sense of the verb, *to screen*, as both a projection that reveals and a censorship that elides.

Now that it is not only possible but almost obligatory for American movies to show the sex acts that follow them, kisses have lost some of their allure. They have become mere foreplay, one sex act among many. Though they still punctuate movies and remain dramatically significant as the inauguration of sexual contacts, they no longer carry the burden—or the enormous electrical charge—of being the whole of sex that can be seen. The movie kisses of the era before the 1960s sexual revolution were both more infantile and more adolescent than the kisses of today—in-
fantile in their orality and adolescent in their way of being permanently poised on the brink of carnal knowledge.¹

This chapter begins with the cinema's first kiss: Thomas Edison's *The Kiss*, a silent fifteen-second film made in 1896. It ends with Andy Warhol's *Kiss*, a silent fifty-eight-minute answer to Edison from 1963. In between these two exemplars of screen kisses, I will address examples from the era of the Hollywood Production Code,² as well as from the pre-Code era. My primary goal is to taxonomize the filmic mode of the screen's first sex act. What is its role as textual punctuation—as period, comma, question mark, and, most important, as the dot, dot, dot of ellipsis? What can we observe about the tension and excitement generated by these reciprocal acts of oral pleasure?

1896: The Forty-Two-Foot Kiss

In the late 1890s Thomas Edison had begun to film short sequences of action for exhibition in his newly developed Kinetoscope—a peephole de-

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vice for screening short segments of moving images. A popular New York musical play, *The Widow Jones*, had included a kiss between the widow and her suitor. In April 1896 Edison brought the two stars of the play into his Black Maria studio and filmed just their kiss. The fifteen-second film has been variously called *The Kiss* and, after the stage actors who performed it, *The May Irwin–John Rice Kiss*, and simply *The May Irwin Kiss* (suggesting that women held greater importance than men as either kissers or kissees).³ It was filmed only two days before Edison had his first public projection of films, though it was not included in that first show. Charles Musser shows that the film's making was actually a publicity stunt for a newspaper, the *New York World*, which reported in a Sunday edition on the making of the film: "For the first time in the history of the world it is possible to see what a kiss looks like. . . . Such pictures were never before made. In the forty-two feet of kiss recorded by the kinetoscope every phase is shown with startling distinctness. . . . The real kiss is a revelation. The idea of a kinetoscopic kiss has unlimited possibilities."⁴

As this review suggests, these "possibilities" are caught up in the new viewing machine's ability to deliver increments of knowledge about moving bodies that, not accidentally, happen to be in the form of the cinema's first sex act. The title of this long news feature is "The Anatomy of a Kiss," and the opportunity for an anatomization of the forty-two-foot sequence seems to have been paramount. As Musser notes, the kiss may or may not have been the actual highlight of the play (the final act in which it occurred has not been found), but when finally projected in early May of 1896, it immediately became the most popular of the many short films shown.⁵ Though it is possible to assume that a famous kiss in a play simply became a famous kiss in the new medium of projected film, it seems more likely that the existence of the film retroactively made the kiss important in all subsequent performances of the play.⁶ The forging of the possibilities of an emerging medium thus took place through the close-up anatomization of a sex act that existed in the play but that did not necessarily constitute its highlight. It is significant, therefore, that the new technology of projection onto a screen in a darkened theater distinguished itself especially through the particular act of the kiss. As in so many other examples of "new media"—print, lithography, photography, video, and now digital technologies—the excitement of new technologies of vision went hand in hand with the excitement around newly mediated revelations of sex.

The film consists of a single, chest-up shot of Rice on the left and Irwin on the right mouthing what seem to be a few lines of dialogue from the play. Touching cheeks, coming close to the position of a kiss, but continu-

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3 and 4:
Thomas Edison,
The Kiss (1896)



ing to speak out of the sides of their mouths, they abruptly pull apart and prepare for a theatrical smooch. Rice's preparation includes the familiar but now archaic gesture of lifting the mustache away from his lip—associated today with villains in melodramas (figure 3). He then cups his hands on the side of Irwin's cheeks, leans in, and plants a few pecks on the side of her firmly closed mouth. Irwin, for her part, leans up to meet him, but her hands, in contrast, remain at her side (figure 4). Toward the end, Rice's pecks briefly turn into little nibbles, and the film ends in medias kiss. Throughout the scene, owing to Rice's big mustache, we see more of Irwin's mouth and lips than of his.

A stage kiss if ever there was one, this kiss shares the former's divided attention: the partners must face one another to kiss and must face front to make the contact visible to the audience. Something of this divided

attention persists in all movie representations of sex acts, torn as they are between the necessary close contact between bodies and the requirement to make that contact visible.⁷ Indeed, this early kiss introduces many of the features that will prove emblematic of subsequent screened sex acts, not just kisses: first and foremost is the close-up that makes the osculation visible; second comes the mouthed dialogue that precedes the sexual contact, in this case drawing our attention to the kissers' lips—we cannot know what this couple says, although it is likely that the conversation negotiates the terms of the kiss; third is the convention that the man initiates contact and the woman receives it, even though she may well have orchestrated it all along.

This kiss is also noteworthy because it is so radically severed from the rest of the play's action, becoming what critics of graphic sex and violence might call gratuitous—a sex act that is there just for sex's sake, with no other narrative or dramatic purpose. As we have already seen, these terms are often deployed, especially in legal arguments about obscenity, to identify the so-called prurient sex that supposedly does not belong on any screen. I will argue, however, that once a culture decides that sex matters—and the fame and popularity of *The Kiss* certainly formed part of such a decision—sex for sex's sake is never really gratuitous. Indeed, it becomes one of the important reasons for screening moving pictures.

Of course, there is nothing sexy to us today about the brief osculations of two plump, middle-aged actors mugging for the camera. We tend to laugh, and audiences in the day seemed to laugh. The *Boston Herald* wrote of the Vitascope program when it showed in Boston: "Of the 10 pictures included in yesterday's programmes . . . there is no shadow of a doubt as to which created the most laughter. That kissing scene in the 'Widow Jones,' taken part in by May Irwin and John C. Rice, was reproduced in the screen, and the very evident delight of the actor and the undisguised pleasure of the actress were absolutely 'too funny' for anything."⁸

What does it mean that *The Kiss* was "too funny"? Does it necessarily mean that it was also not shocking? Laughter can be an expression of genuine amusement, or it can be a nervous release covering over shock. In this case it may have been a little of both. The little nibbles that follow the primary smooch are comic in two ways. First, like a great many sex acts, they have a mechanical, repetitive quality in themselves. Second, shown over and over in the repeated loops that comprised the primary way of projecting early cinema, they are literal forms of mechanized repetition.⁹ Audiences could be amused or, as in the response articulated in the Chicago literary magazine the *Chap Book*, they could be offended: "Within a

natural scale, such things [as kisses] are sufficiently bestial. Monstrously enlarged and shown repeatedly, they become positively disgusting."¹⁰ What, precisely, did this author, the young painter John Sloan, find so disgusting? Was it possibly the middle-aged plumpness of the widow herself, and the less-than-imposing figure of her suitor? None of the criticism of the stage play makes such a suggestion. Was it simply the unseemly intimacy of *any* kiss so "monstrously enlarged"? Clearly this kiss agitated in a way that the kiss appearing onstage, or as a small image in the Kinetoscope, had not.

Siegfried Kracauer has noted that "huge images of small material phenomena" become in cinema "disclosures of new aspects of physical reality." Though Kracauer's preferred example of cinematic magnification is the famous close-up of Mae Marsh's twisting hands in the courtroom episode of the modern story of *Intolerance* (dir. D. W. Griffith, 1916), his description of these hands, "isolated from the rest of the body and greatly enlarged . . . quivering with a life of their own," is even more applicable to screen kisses, which especially quiver with a sexual life of their own.¹¹ Kisses, when stylized and elaborated by the Hollywood narrative cinema, would eventually become synecdoches for the whole sex act. Here, however, a kiss constitutes an unnarrativized attraction amounting to a revelation of the physical act to one critic, and a disgusting monstrosity to another.

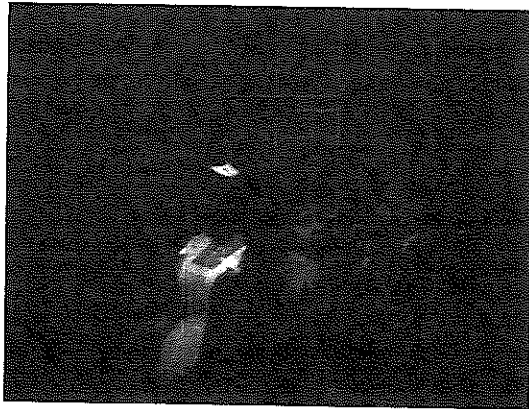
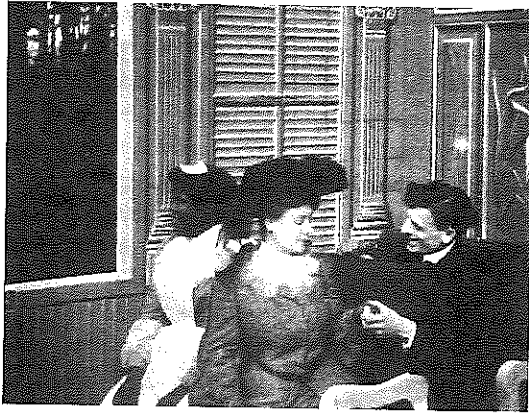
In either case, what seems to be at stake is a visceral attraction or repulsion on the part of viewers. Fragmentation, repetition, and magnification make possible an anatomization that turns the kiss of *The Widow Jones* stage play into a culturally new combination of prurience and pedagogy. The psychoanalyst Adam Phillips has written that although conventions governing the giving and getting of kisses clearly exist in literature and life, "It is really only from films that we can learn what the contemporary conventions might be for kissing itself."¹² This 1896 film constituted America's first such lesson. It is a quintessential example of what Tom Gunning has called the "cinema of attractions."¹³ The Lumière brothers' *Arrival of a Train* (1895)—the main attraction of the first public screening of a film in France—may be emblematic of a certain dynamism of the machine age, and Robert Paul's *Rough Sea at Dover* (1895), the British attraction at the first American public screening of projected films, may be emblematic of cinema's ability to capture the tumult of nature, but Edison's *The Kiss* is emblematic of a new kind of sexual voyeurism unleashed by moving pictures. Screening sex, learning how to do it through repeated and magnified anatomization, would henceforth become a major function of movies.

But there was another important kiss in early cinema, one that I want to take up here as a counterpoint to all the dazzlingly white, luminous, romantic kisses that would eventually be fabricated by Hollywood. Though it attracted considerably less commentary in its own day than Edison's *The Kiss*, Edwin S. Porter's *What Happened in the Tunnel* (1903) has recently garnered considerable discussion as an exhibition of the "miscegenation" that would eventually be officially forbidden in the Hollywood Production Code.¹⁴ What happened in the tunnel? A white woman and her African American maid sit side by side on a train. A white man sits behind the white woman who is reading. When she drops her handkerchief, he picks it up and uses the occasion to flirt, take her hand, and come close (figure 5). The screen suddenly goes black for a prolonged period (figure 6). When the darkness finally ends, and the train has presumably emerged from the tunnel, we see that the white man has leaned over into the space of the two women. But the maid and mistress have changed positions, and we find him kissing not the mistress, but the maid (figure 7). As soon as light illuminates this kiss, he pulls back in horror and tries to hide behind his newspaper as the maid and mistress laugh.

In contrast to the May Irwin-John Rice kiss, this one is not displayed in close-up and cannot therefore be "anatomized." If the Edison piece is kiss as revelation, screening as the projection of something to see, the Porter scenario is screening as mostly concealment of what *could* be given to see but is not. For this kiss is almost entirely screened out—as so many aspects of sex, and certainly most interracial aspects of it, would eventually be for many decades under the Hollywood Production Code.

What Happened in the Tunnel is also less likely to elicit contemporary amusement. Even if the supposed joke is *on* the man and *between* the two women, it is premised on a racial devaluation of the black woman and her lack of appeal to the kisser.¹⁵ The film theorist and historian Jane Gaines notes that the predominantly white audiences who paid to see this less-than-one-minute film did not really want to know what happened in the tunnel.¹⁶ They were not interested in the visible anatomy of *this* kiss, but in the social embarrassment of the man punished for taking liberties with a white woman by the presumed unpleasure of kissing a black one. What happened in the tunnel for the man was the presumably pleasurable touch and taste of a kiss that he thought was of white skin. This man does not discover his unpleasure until sight informs him that he should not have enjoyed the sexual contact in which he engaged. Only when his kiss becomes visible does he cease to enjoy it. What the kiss is to the black woman is harder to imagine.¹⁷

5, 6, and 7:
Edwin S. Porter,
*What Happened in
the Tunnel* (1903)



Kisses, as we shall learn, are both public visual displays and acts of mutual touch and taste grounded in a proximity that, at the limit, precludes visibility both to the kissers themselves and to the audience (which cannot see lips, for example, covered by other lips). These kinds of discrepancies between sight and touch go to the heart of a great many cinematic sex acts. In the case of *What Happened in the Tunnel*, the camera's distance from the kiss, compared to Edison's, along with the occlusion of all but the very end of its "action," elides the usual movements of a kisser *toward* the kissed and keeps only the movement of this particular kisser *away* from the kissed.

We do well to keep in mind, however, how much this "comic" occlusion of the interracial kiss between the white man and the black woman finds its horrific mirror reversal in the decidedly noncomic threat of visible sexual contact between a white woman and a black man. This not-quite-seen interracial kiss structures countless scenarios of early cinema. It especially structures the landmark film *The Birth of a Nation* (dir. D. W. Griffith, 1915), where a threatened kiss offers a synecdoche of the genital sex act—the proverbial "fate worse than death"—for the sexually and racially endangered white woman.¹⁸ Hollywood would soon proscribe any representation of black/white interracial sex acts—comic or melodramatic—but we should note how interracial lusts sit uneasily around the edges of what would become the Hollywood mainstream.

"A Kiss Is Just a Kiss"

If audiences today do not see much romance or eroticism in the screen's first kiss, they immediately recognize both these qualities in the surprisingly brief, but erotically charged, kisses of the Code era. Even though these later kisses do not chronologically follow Edison's, it seems best to turn to a few of them next, because they represent the kiss in its most rule-driven, codified form.

In the era of the Hollywood Production Code—roughly from 1934, when the Code began actually to be enforced, through 1966, when Code approval had become increasingly irrelevant, and a new ratings system was on the horizon—it was prohibited for any movie to "infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing."¹⁹ By "low forms of sex" the framers of the Code intended any "scenes of passion" that might be likely to "stimulate the lower and baser element." This lan-

guage emphatically links physically “lower down” portions of the anatomy with lower classes. “Excessive and lustful kissing” is linked to other, worse, taboos: “seduction or rape,” “sex perversion,” “scenes of childbirth,” “venereal diseases,” or the exposure of the “sexual organs of children.” In addition, in the section called “Costume,” “complete nudity” and “indecent or undue exposure” are also forbidden.

The Code’s prohibitions explicitly spell out societal taboos against displays of sex that were already familiar but that had never before been made so clear. However, it was not just the lower classes, the unmarried, the criminal, the homosexual, or the colored whose sexual contacts were made taboo by the Code, but also those of married, reproductive heterosexuals whose pregnancies, births, and sexual relations also became unrepresentable. Of course, long before the crafting of the Code, kisses were already the only visible sexual contacts possible at the movies. However, it was only after the Code’s stricter enforcement in 1934 that unofficial rules about the duration and context (“excessive and lustful”) of kissing came powerfully into play. From the origin of film through the late sixties, then, a kiss of variable length had to do the job of suggesting all the excitement and pleasure of intimate sexual contacts.

I will not argue in this chapter for the good old days of the Code, when eroticism flourished precisely because of the extreme constraints imposed on the display of sex, but it is important to realize how some of these restraints, absurd as they may seem today, could enhance the eroticism of a kiss. Eroticism, as Georges Bataille teaches, can be surprisingly complicit with the law, or the morals, that prohibit it. The fascinating story of the travails of the Production Code Administration’s conflicts with producers, directors, and writers of the studio era, detailed in several recent books on film censorship, reveals an ongoing tension between what Bataille calls “respect for the law and violation of the law.”²⁰ The Code that forbids carnal representation, lustful kissing, and the “attractive presentation” of “adultery and illicit sex” goes hand in hand with the excitement generated when hints of lust, adultery, and illicit sex nevertheless emerge.

According to a 1992 Gallup Poll the third sexiest movie kiss of all time—right behind Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh’s in *Gone with the Wind* (dir. David Selznick, 1939) and Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr’s in *From Here to Eternity* (dir. Fred Zinneman, 1953)—is that between Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman in *Casablanca* (dir. Michael Curtiz, 1942). This well-loved classic is about an exiled American saloon owner, Rick Blaine, who, like his native country, belatedly becomes involved in World War II. The cost of his involvement will be to lose, for the second time,

the woman he loves. As if in compensation for his noble sacrifice, the film offers several memorable kisses, each a little more forbidden than the last. I will discuss the three most dramatic of these.

In *Casablanca*’s first major kiss, Rick asks Ilsa who she is and if she has loved before. “Only one answer can take care of all our questions,” says Ilsa, and that answer is . . . a kiss cued to the song, “As Time Goes By,” which swells on the soundtrack. This kiss perfectly obeys the strictures of the Hollywood Production Code: it is short (less than three seconds); it displays no open mouths; it contains nothing “excessive or lustful.” The Code reads that “adultery and illicit sex, sometimes necessary plot material, must not be explicitly treated or justified, or presented attractively.” Even this prohibition is technically obeyed since neither kisser knows at this moment that he or she is committing adultery. And should we happen to suspect that a further sexual act follows from this kiss, the film is careful not to help us imagine it. Of course we will eventually come to believe that the affair in Paris that begins with this kiss was a great love, but that impression is not yet present in this first kiss. Also, like a great many Hollywood kisses of the Production Code era, this kiss occurs at the end of the scene and is not itself seen to end. Without even the pause of a fade-out and a fade-in, an abrupt cut to the German advance on Paris cuts short the kiss. This will be the pattern for the whole of the film as war and kisses duel.

“You must remember this / A kiss is just a kiss, a sigh is just a sigh / The fundamental things apply / As time goes by”: Dooley Wilson as Sam sings the words to this famous song before Rick and Ilsa clinch in the film’s second big dramatic kiss. The three of them drink champagne in the bar of Rick’s hotel in Paris after Sam has sung a few verses of the song, originally written in 1931 for a different era. The full version of the song makes a case for the simplicity of certain facts of life—“kisses” and “sighs,” “moonlight and love songs”—that are “fundamental” in a world of rapid change.²¹ In the part Sam sings, kisses and sighs are meant to represent eternal verities, “as time goes by.” On closer examination, however, these verities prove rather enigmatic.

Rick will kiss Ilsa three times in this scene. Each time the couple will suddenly exist in its own hermetic world, and Sam will momentarily disappear. In the first kiss, the couple stands at a window speaking of their past lives as the sounds of war draw near. Rick kisses Ilsa, but the back of Ilsa’s head blocks our view of their mouths. The kiss is punctuated by the boom of cannons. Attention is drawn away from the unseen lips to the threatening sound of war. Afterward, Ilsa will ask: “Was that cannon fire

8: *Casablanca*
(dir. Michael Curtiz,
1942), the gentle
kiss



or only my heart pounding?" Next the couple moves to a table to drink champagne with the again present Sam. Rick proposes, but Ilsa is worried and evasive. She strokes Rick's chin with the back of her hand (a gesture we will soon see Bergman repeat in a later postwar kiss with Cary Grant) and then begins the kind of avowal-of-love speech that seems designed to be interrupted by a kiss: "If you shouldn't get away, I mean, if, if something should keep us apart, wherever they put you and wherever I'll be, I want you to know that I . . ." As she breaks off, her mouth invitingly open in the pronunciation of "I," Rick puts his hand on her cheek and kisses her. In profile this time, we can finally see their lips come together (figure 8).

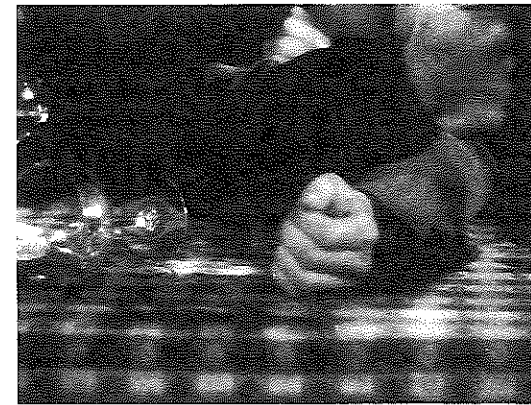
The couple about to kiss in a Hollywood film before the late sixties is usually bathed in a glow of "romantic" light. The conventional Hollywood three-point lighting scheme of key (usually slightly from above), fill (a light that evens out shadows), and back (the "halo" effect that comes from behind the head) is the basic formula that creates this glow, but especially on the (white) woman, who is almost universally more luminous than anyone else on the screen. The whiter she looks, the purer she seems, even though her presence in the film may also evoke carnal desire. As Richard Dyer writes, "Idealised white women are bathed in and permeated by light. It streams through them and falls on to them from above. In short, they glow."²² It is not surprising that the Nordic Ingrid Bergman, the object and subject of illicit carnal desire in many of the kisses explored here and below, glows relative to the servile Sam,²³ whose blackness can only shine, not glow. She also glows relative to the darker skin tones of Bogart's Rick in this particular kiss. Though there is a little light on the top of his forehead, most of his face, and especially his hand, appear several shades



Casablanca

9: "as if it were the
last time"

10: Interruption:
spilled cham-
pagne



darker. Indeed, all white women in Hollywood films glow with a light that works to purify the darker lusts their kisses may evoke.²⁴

Once again, cannon fire punctuates the kiss and "As Time Goes By" surges. But the kiss itself, described as "gentle" in the script, remains relatively undramatic. Under the impression that they will soon leave Paris together, Rick does not have the same urgency as Ilsa. All the more reason, then, Code notwithstanding, for Ilsa to demand a more dramatic, less "gentle," more "final" kiss. This time she even orders it: "Kiss me. Kiss me as if it were the last time." The relatively short Bogart rises high in his seat in order to take into his mouth the upper lip of the relatively tall Bergman—in profile. Hard bodily pressure, which Ilsa returns, signaled by her placement of her own hand over his, constitutes the essence of this "big kiss" (figure 9). As we have already seen, the logistics of filming two faces with

mouths pressed tightly against one another often preclude seeing much of what transpires once lips are locked. This is especially true of the kisses of the Hollywood Code era. The best one can do is to observe where one set of lips is positioned before it encounters another, and, if one is lucky enough to experience the full duration of the kiss, to observe where they are located at the end.

But, of course, we are usually not so lucky to see a kiss all the way to its end. Here, for example, just as we begin to take it in, a quick camera tilt down averts our gaze from the lovers' faces to Ilsa's hand as it accidentally knocks over her glass (figure 10). Music, sounding like cannon fire, pounds ominously. We now notice that because Ilsa had never drunk to Rick's previous "here's looking at you, kid" toast, her champagne spills. Like the earlier scene's quick cut to the German invasion, this interruption also gives us no time to enjoy the kiss's full passion. Indeed, it casts an ominous shadow on its carnal pleasure.²⁵

We might dub the frequent practice of the interruption of Code-era kisses *osculum interruptum*. Since any kiss that lingered was in danger of seeming "excessive and lustful," interruptions were frequent. On the whole, during the Code era, the mark of excess could be anything longer than three seconds. *Interruptum* could then be accomplished by fade-outs or by cutting away to a new scene or by interrupting our view internally within the same shot, as in this camera tilt down to the spilled champagne. Ironically, the tradition of interruption—of looking elsewhere while the kiss itself may continue—can give rise to the illusion that kisses might actually endure, but just out of sight.

The last big kiss in *Casablanca* offers yet another variation of *osculum interruptum* in the form of an ellipsis.²⁶ Ilsa sneaks into Rick's room above his café late at night. She is desperate to obtain the letters of transit for her husband, Victor Laszlo, to leave Casablanca. When Rick arrives, she first asks him to put his feelings aside and to aid the resistance hero. When he refuses, she pulls a gun. Rick welcomes it, "Go ahead shoot me, you'd be doing me a favor." She then weeps and turns away. Rick hesitates a moment, then quickly comes up behind her, and Ilsa collapses in his arms.

Getting ready for the kiss, we are learning, is often more dramatic and more teasingly erotic than the kiss itself. If we think of the kiss as the synecdoche of the whole sex act, then this part standing in for the whole has its very own form of foreplay. As in Edison's *The Kiss*, it often consists of two faces held close together, on the verge of touching. When two people are seen in profile looking at one another at close range, their eyes cannot take in the whole of the face at which they gaze without a certain survey-

38 of kisses and ellipses



11: *Casablanca*,
prekiss: "If you
knew how much I
loved you"

ing movement up and down or from side to side. This movement, which cannot be captured in stills and which Bergman performs magnificently here, seems to hover on the brink between looking and touching. Silhouetted in profile, face to face, the couple's mouths and noses almost touching, the music surges once again as Ilsa says "If you knew how much I loved you, how much I still love you. . . ." Again, her words are interrupted by a kiss initiated by Bogart (figure 11). As usual, the music of "As Time Goes By" soars, but in a minor key, reaching no concluding chord. The image dissolves, in medias kiss, replaced by a long shot of a searchlight. Why, we ask, are we looking at a searchlight when we could be still looking at what is, after all, the *big kiss* of the film? Have we again cut to the next scene as with the kiss that was interrupted by the German invasion?

Not quite. After holding on the tower and searchlight a while, we see Rick in the following shot, dressed exactly as before, still in his apartment, gazing at the searchlight tower. It is as if the film has blinked and looked away momentarily, but it has not left the scene entirely. Time has passed, we do not know exactly how much, but Rick's next line, "And then . . .," spoken to Ilsa discovered seated across the room, indicates that the dramatic scene between them continues, but that the full action of the kiss—and whatever may have been its aftermath—has been elided. We cannot tell what has transpired in the ellipsis between the time of the kiss and the time of Rick gazing at the searchlight. What we do know is that the couple's conversation still centers on the same topic that initiated the kiss—Ilsa's continuing love for Rick.

An ellipsis is a rhetorical figure of speech in which a word or words required by strict grammatical rules are omitted. In conventions of printing

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or writing, an ellipsis is a literal gap indicated by three sequential dots that omit words that could, by the logic of what comes before or after, be present. In both instances, the missing words are implied by the context. The context, in the case of *Casablanca*, is the kiss—indeed all the kisses—begun and never seen to be completed by Ilsa and Rick throughout the film.²⁷ Ellipses happen all the time in movies, frequently within the same scene, usually accomplished by single cuts from shot to shot. But ellipses are especially frequent and felt *as* ellipses—noticed as dot, dot, dot—when they elide sex acts. An ellipsis that occurs in the middle of a kiss, and returns to the couple in the same space and at an unspecified later time, is as close as a Code film can get to the suggestion of otherwise unmentionable sexual contacts. What do we infer in this case? How, for example, do Ilsa and Rick now behave toward one another?

Certainly they are now relaxed. Rick is unmussed, but he is smoking and contemplative as he gets the story of Laszlo's unexpected return from Ilsa while standing at the window. In the process of this story we learn that Ilsa had been married to Laszlo only a short time before he was sent to the concentration camp, that they had kept the marriage secret to protect her from similar persecution, and that the nature of her relation to Laszlo was more hero worship than carnal desire. Respect and affection, not passion, mark the relations of the licit couple. (At one point we see him kiss Ilsa with fatherly affection.) Ilsa, too, is now relaxed, and she nestles (postcoitally?) in Rick's arms as she tells him, infamously, to do the "thinking for all of us." Later Rick will explain to Laszlo that Ilsa came to his apartment to get the letters of transit, pretending she still loved him: "I let her pretend."

Is this what the Production Code calls an "attractive presentation" of "adultery and illicit sex"? Obviously a lot depends on how one interprets the ellipsis and Rick's "I let her pretend." Film critic Richard Maltby argues that the film neither confirms nor denies Rick and Ilsa's affair, thus "refusing to take responsibility for the story some viewers may choose to construct."²⁸ Code enforcers let it go, probably because it does not lead, in the end, to the union of the adulterous couple. Maltby cites a letter from the Code administrator Joseph Breen to Jack Warner in which he observes that the scene in Rick's apartment "seems to contain a suggestion of a sexual affair. . . . We believe this could possibly be corrected by replacing the fade out . . . with a dissolve, and shooting the succeeding scene without any sign of a bed or couch, or anything whatever suggestive of a sex affair."²⁹ In other words, Breen believed that the dissolve to a later moment could allow the filmmakers to ever so discreetly deny what

they were simultaneously indicating. The fact that Rick will ultimately decide that their little affair (whether construed as possible or actual) does not amount to a "hill of beans" when weighed against the larger world struggle, plus the fact that Laszlo ultimately "gets the girl," even if she does not love him, means that a physical relation can be suggested as long as it is also possible to deny it.

Sexual desire ultimately exists in this and many other Code-era films so that it may be sublimated to a more purified, ideological, and aesthetic "good"—whether the good of the family or, in this case, the good of the American and European struggle against fascism. Desire and sexual pleasure as positive values in themselves have no legitimate, acknowledged place in the era of the Code, though they certainly sneak in around the edges. This, of course, is the special, perverse pleasure of watching sex in movies of this period: sex can never be indulged in for itself, and for this reason it must remain exquisitely ambiguous what exactly transpires between Rick and Ilsa.

It is easy to ridicule a Code that works so hard to keep us from inferring what its very obfuscations and interruptions cause us to suspect. But this is how eroticism works in the Code era. It is no accident that the most erotic of the kisses in which Rick and Ilsa engage is the one most fully adulterous (by this time they *both* know that Laszlo lives). This may also be why the two other movie kisses—that in *From Here to Eternity* and that in *Gone with the Wind*—have also been deemed among the sexiest. They, too, are structured on internal conflicts between illicit sexual desires and the demands of war, whether the Civil War or World War II. Code kisses are memorable, it seems, not because they are necessarily performed by sexy men and sexy women (has Humphrey Bogart, with his perpetually wet lower lip, ever been, objectively speaking, sexy?), but because they are intrinsically structured around conflicts between sexual pleasure and taboo.

It is not necessary, however, for the desire-enhancing taboo to consist of strict patriarchal laws such as the one forbidding adultery, nor that the taboo be one actually written into the Production Code. The kiss that will often seem the most erotic need only be placed in tension with an internal resistance to its pleasures. Remarkably, the male actor of the Code era who has most often embodied these internal resistances, and who thus often participated in the most erotic (and neurotic) kisses, is the superficially wholesome, middle-American James Stewart. Stewart's most famous kiss is certainly the virtuoso 360-degree slowly encircled one performed with Kim Novak in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958).³⁰ A less acknowledged

erotic kiss, however—and one not yet overtly rebelling against Code limits—occurs in Frank Capra's well-loved family melodrama *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946).³¹

Here Stewart's George Bailey reluctantly pays a call to his former sweetheart Mary (Donna Reed). They are obviously drawn to one another, but George's goals in life are college and travel, and he knows that Mary is capable of mirroring him in the sort of small-town family life his adventurous goals vehemently resist—and that Capra's film ultimately celebrates. When George "happens by" Mary's parlor one summer night, he rudely begrudges her the visit, and Mary ironically taunts her nosy, interfering mother with the claim, very far from the truth, that George "is making violent love" to her. But when an old beau of Mary's phones her from New York, the call provides an occasion for George and Mary to put their heads together before the mouthpiece and receiver of an old-fashioned telephone. In the conversation, George's nose and mouth touch Mary's hair (figure 12). As he senses her presence, he becomes simultaneously aroused and enraged, fearing the entanglement she represents and desiring her all the more for that fear. He eventually drops the phone mid-conversation and faces Mary directly: "I don't want . . . to get married. I want to do what I want to do!" Violently shaking her, George gradually transforms the shake into an embrace, and the embrace into a tight kiss that proves Mary's comment to her mother correct: he *is* making violent love to her (figure 13). Moreover, the kiss is exceedingly long, or at least we infer that it is since a cut to Mary's mother, who had been spying on the pair, scurrying upstairs at this naked display of passion, keeps us from seeing much. This shot is followed, in a radical ellipsis, by Mary and George emerging from a church, married. A kiss between sweethearts that leads directly to marriage can hardly be called taboo. However, George's internal resistance to Mary's charms enacts the violent tension between fear and desire that renders this kiss, so little of which is actually seen, one of the most erotic of the entire Code era.

Orality

Physically, a kiss is the "juxtaposition of two orbicularis oris muscles in a stage of contraction." *Orbicularis oris* is the "sphincter muscle" around the mouth that shapes and controls the size of the mouth opening.³² Used for talking and facial expressions, and capable of four distinct types of movement, this muscle is also central to kissing. As we have already seen

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It's a Wonderful Life
(dir. Frank Capra,
1946)

12: George's
nose and mouth
touch Mary's hair
as they share the
phone



13: George
and Mary do
make "violent"
love

in the previous examples of kisses, every bit as exciting as the muscular locking of lips is the dramatic moment of transition from distant to more proximate forms of communication: from, say, talking face to face, where the muscles have one function, as George and Mary do through the device of the telephone mouthpiece, to, at the opposite extreme, "locking lips" or "sucking face."

The original function of these sphincterlike muscles, before they were employed to talk or to kiss, was to sustain life by sucking milk. In silent films, where pantomime often takes the place of spoken words, and mouths take on an allure far beyond their function in speech, we are often dramatically reminded of the mouth's originary, nonspeaking function. The fact that silent cinema existed in the era before the Hollywood Production Code outlawed "lustful," "excessive," and "adulterous" kisses means

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that silent films often allow us to watch the anatomy of whole kisses and to better observe the rather blatant oral pleasures of these uninterrupted osculations.

Consider, for example, the kisses of two of the most famous lovers both on and off the silent American screen: Greta Garbo and John Gilbert in *Flesh and the Devil* (dir. Clarence Brown, 1927). When Gilbert's dashing, young Austrian officer and Garbo's sophisticated (and unbeknownst to Gilbert, married) baroness first find themselves alone in a moonlit garden at a glamorous Old World ball, their romance is literally and figuratively kindled by a match intended to light a cigarette. In their secluded spot, already drawn close and framed in a tight shot, Gilbert's Count Leo speaks: "You are very beautiful." "You are very young," Garbo's ironically named Felicitas replies, protruding slightly parted lips. Should we wish to consider such things in a silent film in which words are seen but not heard, it is possible that the "realistic" motivation for this first protrusion of her parted lips is the pronunciation of the unheard word *you* (figure 14). But, of course, the beauty of silent films is that the realistic motivation for any gesture is often beside the point. We are in a realm of mute eloquence. Garbo's lips part and protrude because she is the seductive vamp, and vamps are oral beings who thrive on sucking the lifeblood of those they seduce. Unlike many a previous silent-screen vamp, however, she does not merely seek to destroy her prey. She, too, is caught up in the fleshy pleasures by which the devil tempts.

Any kiss requires that the kissers first face one another.³³ One of the reasons smoking has been somewhat slower to fade from the American screen than from public life may well have to do with its usefulness in creating the proximity for kissing. The cigarette, moreover, offers an eloquent prefiguration, as well as an occasional upstaging, of the kiss to come. Holding one up to her face, Garbo awaits the light for which the awestruck Gilbert fumbles. She places the cigarette dead center between puckered, proffered lips, as if teaching him with it what he might later do with his tongue (figure 15). Then, while still awaiting the light, she suddenly removes the cigarette from her mouth and places it in his. Gilbert's whole body responds to the oral intrusion, drawing erect and slightly back as he recognizes her bold invitation. Already probed by the moist cigarette that Garbo herself has "kissed," Gilbert nevertheless proceeds with the increasingly unnecessary business of lighting the match. Its purpose, when lit, is to dramatically illuminate their faces. But this illumination is more for us than for them. They themselves have moved beyond the stage in which sight matters to the more proximate senses of smell, taste, and



Flesh and the Devil (dir. Clarence Brown, 1927)

14: Garbo's lips protrude on the unheard word *you*.



15: Garbo places the cigarette, as if teaching Gilbert what he might later do with his tongue

touch. To signal this, Garbo blows out the unnecessary match, and Gilbert finally gets the point: "You know," he says, "when you blow out the match that's an invitation to kiss?"

Once again, in this silent film, we do not bother to think about how Gilbert could have spoken these words with a cigarette planted dead center in his mouth. We have been transported to a realm of suspended sexual anticipation that has already forgotten about mouths as organs of speech. We have also forgotten about cigarettes as objects for smoking. Gilbert discards the still unlit cigarette and finally takes Garbo in his arms. The kiss that follows is cast in the shadow and shows only their silhouetted forms pressing together. It is not the kind of kiss that shows us exactly what the mouth and lips do, but this is not because any Code prohibits it. Indeed, everything that has gone before has conspired to make us believe

that these two glamorous beings face each other, as Code era kissers cannot, with parted lips.

Itching and Scratching

"No one who has seen a baby sinking back satiated from the breast and falling asleep with flushed cheeks and a blissful smile can escape the reflection that this picture persists as a prototype of the expression of sexual satisfaction in later life"³⁴: Sigmund Freud's once shocking thesis that infantile sexuality is observable first, in the child sucking at the breast and second, in the substitute gesture of "thumb-sucking (or sensual sucking)" can help us ponder some of the perverse pleasures of screen kisses.

According to Freud, the mouth is the first of the child's erotogenic zones to be activated. Thumb, lip, or toe sucking is a sensual, autoerotic pleasure that excites the mucous membrane of the mouth similar to the way the lips and mouth were once stimulated by the warm flow of milk.³⁵ Repetitive sensual sucking of a part of the child's own body thus becomes detached from the satisfaction of original nourishment to become a "labial zone" of pleasure in its own right.³⁶ The kiss is an act of sexual intimacy in which the mouths prefigure the later joining of other body parts. In this teleological way of thinking, a kiss anticipates, but does not yet arrive at, a more advanced, adult stage of genital sex. But it is also an act of intimacy that recalls the earlier act of maternal breast-feeding in which one erotogenic zone—the mother's nipple, her milk—excites another—the infant's mouth.³⁷ Sucking at the breast, and the more frequently ignored maternal side of this equation, giving-to-suck, are thus arguably at the origin of all sexual pleasures to come.³⁸

But how exactly do we understand this sexual pleasure to come? Freud often asserts that the goal of sexuality—its defining instance—is a release in genital discharge. This is the "end pleasure." Freud defines perversion as any sexual activities that either "extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union" or "linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim."³⁹ Freud's terms are inadequate, both to his own discussion of sexuality—since he fully realizes that a kiss might be "lingered" on a little longer than absolutely necessary to achieve "discharge" in copulation—and for our examination of movie kisses, since all movies before the late sixties must censor any

reference to "normal" sexual acts and (perversely) substitute kisses in their place.⁴⁰

Motives of decorum and decency dictated that movies of the kiss era necessarily fixate on the infantile and perverse orality of kisses. Kissing too long, kissing posited as the sole visible sexual act, necessarily becomes, as Freud says of pathological symptoms, obsessive and repetitive.⁴¹ In the love scene that follows Garbo and Gilbert's first kiss, for example, languorous kissing soon becomes dangerously vampiric. It lingers. The excess of the affair is measured in what may be one of the silent screen's longest kisses (nearly twenty seconds). Its carnal pleasure for the viewer is complicated, however, by several factors: First, the viewer's knowledge that a man we soon learn to be Garbo's husband, the Baron Von Rhadan, may be approaching; second, a sudden cut to black that seems to interrupt the kiss, but which actually proves to be a new point of view as the baron's hand slowly opens the bedroom door and then clenches into a fist when the space opened discloses the ongoing kiss; finally, as the long osculation continues, we resume something like our original view, but this time subtly reframed so as to make Garbo's already dominant pose more obviously vampiric as she "drinks" from Gilbert's lips while turning her eyes to encounter the baron.

In identifying the "perversity" of oral stimulations that have no further issue in a film, I do not mean to suggest that these films *should* "progress" to genital stimulation, that it is perverse that they do not. Rather, I want to stress the paradox of an era in which supposedly innocent kisses must constitute the be-all and end-all of sexual pleasure. In pre-Code era kisses this means that adults must sometimes behave as if they were orally fixated. Consider a moment, late in this same film, when Garbo, ever the seductress, having used a variation of the earlier light-my-cigarette trick to seduce Gilbert's best friend, now finds herself married to him but still lusting after Gilbert. The three friends are taking communion from a pastor who suspects Garbo and Gilbert's adulterous intentions. As the communion wine passes from person to person, the pastor turns the cup slightly so that the new drinker's lips will not touch the place where the previous lips have lingered. But when the pastor passes the cup from Gilbert to Garbo, to the shock and outrage of the pastor, she boldly turns it back so that her lips will touch where his have. In this orally fixated film, even the Old Testament pastor smokes a pipe adorned with the ceramic figurine of a seductive woman. Of course, Garbo's defiance of the forbidding pastor will seal her fate as a willful sinner who deserves her ultimate death

by drowning. But before this end, we have run the gamut of the perverse pleasures of the mouth.

The point is not to accuse kiss-era films of their perverse orality, but to see this perversion as a model for understanding sexual pleasure *tout court*. For example, Leo Bersani, in a discussion of Freud, argues that often the “pleasurable unpleasurable tension of sexual stimulation seeks not to be released, but to be increased.”⁴² Thus a model of tension and release is complicated by the existence of sexual excitations that augment pleasure in ways quite distinct from simple “discharge.” Pleasure, in other words, is not the same thing as satisfaction and may rely on a certain “unpleasure” that prolongs excitement. Bersani beautifully describes Freud’s two forms of sexual pleasure as, on one hand, an itch that can be satisfied by a scratch, and, on the other, an itch that does not seek to be scratched, that “seeks nothing better than its own prolongation, even its own intensification.”⁴³

The itch (augmentation of excitement) and scratch (satisfaction in discharge) models of sexual pleasure operate in all forms of sexual contact. It would therefore be a mistake to view the kiss as the itch and genital sex as the scratch. We shall see in chapter 5, for example, how one of the most genitally oriented of all graphic art films, *In the Realm of the Senses*, is predicated entirely on an itch model of sexual excitement, while some of the kisses examined here function, for all the kiss’s usual role as foreplay, as concluding scratches. Indeed, in the extremely limited repertoire of sexual acts permitted in the era of the kiss, kisses positioned at “the end” function as scratches, while kisses such as those we have examined in *Casablanca* and *Flesh and the Devil* function as itches. The itchier kisses, however, seem to teach us the most about a sexual excitement that, as the montage of kisses and embraces that concludes *Cinema Paradiso* shows, does not teleologically lead to “end pleasure” but may be, as Bersani suggests, a circle leading back to the polymorphously perverse sucking child.⁴⁴

Reciprocity

The kiss is a relatively late form of oral eroticism—what Adam Phillips calls a “craving for other mouths”—that is central to adolescence but that also returns us to the “primary sensuous experience” of smelling and tasting another person first learned at the breast.⁴⁵ What is remarkable about the kiss, however, is that it can be simultaneously given and received. Unlike so many other sex acts that depend on penetration—one convex

organ fitting into another concave one—the kiss is a contact in which one can touch the other with the *same* body parts—lips, tongue, mucous membrane—with which one is touched oneself. It is thus unique among sex acts in its great potential for reciprocity.⁴⁶ D. W. Winnicott stresses the mother’s sensitive adaptation to the infant’s needs and her ability to provide the “illusion that her breast is part of the infant;”⁴⁷ while Jean Laplanche stresses the interpenetration of the “vital (lifegiving) order” with the “sexual (pleasure-giving) order” to stress the mother’s reaction, an activity that he describes, at the limit, as a kind of maternal seduction.⁴⁸ But even allowing for a nongenital maternal “seduction” in the nursing situation, the incommensurability of the “partners,” the absolute dependency of the infant, and the dissimilarity of the organs—mouth and breast—mitigates against anything like egalitarian reciprocity in the nursing situation.

In the adolescent or adult kiss, however, each mouth is equipped with the same parts: receptive mucous membrane of the lips and a tongue that can retract or probe, not to mention saliva and, unlike in the baby, teeth. Unlike heterosexual intercourse, mouths and tongues can interpenetrate in a potentially mutual give-and-take.⁴⁹ This may be one reason why women are the great connoisseurs of romantic kisses—not, as has sometimes been suggested, because of an innate female predilection for soft-core, soft-focus romanticism, but because kisses are so potentially egalitarian.⁵⁰ There are few other (equipmentless) sexual acts in which a woman can be both penetrator and penetrated.

This is not to say that all kisses are fully reciprocal sexual acts. One could say, for example, that Gilbert “kisses” Garbo before the fade-out in *Flesh and the Devil*, for it is true that Gilbert, the man, in the end takes Garbo, the woman, in his arms, though all the rest of the kisses in this film offer the spectacle of the woman as the dominant kisser. In a certain heterosexual orthodoxy very much at work in American screen kisses all the way through the sixties, it may be the patriarchal job of men to initiate kisses, but it is frequently the job of the woman to teach, invite, or even order the man to kiss (“Kiss me, kiss me as if it was the last time”).⁵¹

A kiss takes place in time; the probe of a mouth or tongue can lead to a later answering probe—or not. A kiss is both a sex act in itself and, as Phillips puts it, a “performed allusion” to one.⁵² Such is the dilemma, and the glory, of the adolescent era of the kiss as the be-all and end-all of movie sex before the sixties. For even in Garbo and Gilbert’s example of a pre-Code, “lustful,” open-mouthed kiss—the sort that would be banned after 1934—even in a kiss that serves as a prelude to what is clearly meant

to be seen as a torrid and destructive love affair, all that we will ever see of this affair will be . . . more kisses. To be sure, these kisses will be in horizontal positions, take place in what is obviously a boudoir, and manifest a mood of postcoital familiarity. Even so these kisses remain all we see.⁵³

Consider the very next love scene in *Flesh and the Devil*, which follows immediately on the fade-out from the first kiss. After an intertitle proclaims, "No one had ever loved before . . . Leo was sure of it," the film fades into what seems to be Garbo's boudoir. She reclines languorously on a divan while Gilbert lounges on a rug with his head resting first on her lap, later on her breast. He smokes in undisguised postcoital relaxation (his cigarette finally lit!). It could be days or only a few hours since their first kiss; the ellipsis that separates the two scenes does not allow us to tell exactly. The couple is fully dressed, but Gilbert's high and tight military collar is undone, and the couple is intimately reveling in the kind of feet-off-the-floor reclining position that would, six years hence, become taboo in all American films. Long past the stage of needing an oral toy to bring them together, they now kiss freely and deeply. Garbo's luminous Felicitas has only to direct her lips down, and Gilbert's Leo only to direct his up, for them to meet (figure 16). Nor does obscure lighting this time prevent us from seeing the position of their parted lips. Later they will be discovered in flagrante delicto by Garbo's husband as she watches him enter the room (figure 17). Though it is obvious that in between the first kiss and these more intimate ones, something has transpired, both the fade-out that ends the first kiss and the fade-in that begins this next series of kisses elide these further acts.

The context of this ellipsis, unlike those of *Casablanca*, thus allows us to presume that genital sexual acts have transpired. Though the camera has, again, looked away, this particular postcoital aftermath does not preclude the possibility of all sorts of intimate, adulterous relations, for very soon Gilbert will learn, just as Bogart did in the Code-era film, that he is an unwitting adulterer. Indeed, the main difference between pre-Code and Code kisses, besides their obvious duration and the position of mouths and bodies, is how much further sex can be presumed to have taken place in the ellipses. Pre-Code ellipses are more likely, as in *Flesh and the Devil*, to build a long sexual affair into the fade-out/fade-in. Alternatively, they might punctuate the elided sex with a rhetorical flourish, as the train whistle that follows Marlene Dietrich and Clive Brooks's first kiss in *Shanghai Express* (dir. Josef von Sternberg, 1932). In this film, the whistle does the affective work of the missing coitus, literally letting off steam.

A particularly interesting example of the use of ellipsis as a rhetorical



Flesh and the Devil

16: Garbo need only direct her lips down



17: Garbo's long vampiric kiss while she discovers her husband at the door

flourish in the pre-Code era to point lasciviously to the beyond-the-kiss that we do not see occurs in Mervin Le Roy's romantic comedy *Tonight or Never* (1931) with Gloria Swanson and Melvin Douglas.⁵⁴ Like *Shanghai Express* this film occupies the fascinating transition period between the institution of the Code (first promulgated in 1930) and its gradual enforcement by 1934. Swanson plays a glamorous opera singer whose performances have been accused of lacking passion. To remedy this lack she determines to have an affair, choosing a handsome man who has been following her. This man (Douglas) is a famous American opera impresario whom she mistakes for a gigolo. Maneuvering her way into his apartment, she is prepared to be seduced by him for the sake of her art. When he discovers her belief that he is a gigolo, he acts the part, locking her in the room and passionately kissing her. This first kiss is rough and fast: Douglas

Tonight or Never
(dir. Mervin
Le Roy, 1931)

18: Swanson
points to bruises
and demands a
more tender kind
of kiss

19: The kiss for
which Swanson
has asked



leans over the diminutive Swanson and pushes down hard; the camera tracks in fast to a close-up, the camera movement, as much as the kiss itself, conveying the roughness. Afterward, he holds her at arm's length to scrutinize her reaction and throws her roughly down onto the divan. However, he is also somewhat relieved to see that she is scandalized by his roughness. Lying back on the divan, she invites a new kind of attention by pointing to potential bruises on her arms (figure 18), providing his cue to employ a more tender kind of kiss to make better her hurts.

Throughout the rest of the scene, Swanson alternately invites and repulses Douglas: "Let me get up . . . I really don't want to get up. I don't want to love a man . . . that is I do." He forces the issue with the eponymous ultimatum: "Tonight or never," giving her three minutes, until the clock on the

mantel chimes ten, to make up her mind. If she remains in his apartment after three minutes pass, she will "have to take the consequences." After further verbal sparring that neatly devours three minutes in this rather talky adaptation of a Broadway play, she begs, in yet another example of the woman inviting and/or instructing the kiss: "Before I go, please kiss me just once, sweetly, tenderly, as if we really belonged to each other." They do kiss as if they really belonged (figure 19). But whereas the camera plunged forward into their first, rough, quick kiss, this time it coyly pans right to the clock on the mantel as it chimes ten. Almost immediately Swanson, offscreen, is heard to say, "Please call a taxi," and Douglas is heard to answer, teasingly, "It's too late!" Fade out.

Again, the look away from the kiss is a major cliché of so-called classic American movies that hints at what cannot be shown. Before the Code was fully enforced, such hints were stronger (compare this dialogue, which clearly suggests that Swanson *will* spend the night, to the cut to the searchlight in *Casablanca*, which leaves us wondering). However, both types are limited to the display of oral pleasures that become more perverse the more they are asked to substitute for a "normal" progression to heterosexual genital acts.

Eating the Other

We have seen that all screen kisses share a connection to infantile sexuality born of hunger and derived from the original oral gratification of sucking, in effect, of eating (or drinking) the other. Some of the most memorable kisses seem to understand that a primal hunger lies at the root of these oral pleasures. Phillips writes, "When we kiss we devour the object by caressing it; we eat it, in a sense, but sustain its presence."⁵⁵ The difference between the adolescent kiss and infantile sucking, then, is that the kiss is a kind of "aim-inhibited" eating. Like a gum-chewer, the kisser never swallows what he or she craves—although Garbo's vampiric kiss and sexualized communion come perilously close.⁵⁶ Some of the most arresting-screen kisses are thus not surprisingly related to eating.⁵⁷ To return then to some of the quicker kisses from the era of the Production Code, when this devouring dimension was necessarily tempered by specific prohibitions against open-mouthed, "lustful," and "excessive" kisses, let us consider a kiss between Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman in Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946). Famous for the ingenious way in which

20: *Notorious* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1946), Bergman and Grant begin the scene with a big, full-bodied kiss on the balcony



Hitchcock circumnavigates the length restrictions that had developed to counter the possibility of supposed excess, this film systematically mixes its kisses with hunger and thirst.

On assignment in Rio to spy on a ring of Nazis, Bergman's Alicia and Grant's Devlin begin to fall in love. She is eager, but he is cautious because of her disreputable past. Everything in the following scene seems to run in reverse. It begins with a big kiss on the balcony of Alicia's hotel. The kiss is full, lengthy (about four seconds), and uninterrupted (figure 20). It is very much the kind of big crescendo kiss that one might expect as the finale of a love scene or even, unfinished, as a film's final clinch. Indeed, it is as if Hitchcock has chosen to reverse the usual way Code-era films build up to the big moment of the scene-ending kiss, thus proceeding to a scene of separation that will leave the kissers still hungry for one another. After this kiss, still holding one another close in a long, continuous embrace, they begin to discuss dinner. Nibbling on Devlin's cheek, fondling his earlobe with the back of her fingers,⁵⁸ Alicia resists going out to eat. Devlin, more practical, says, "We have to eat." In answer, Alicia describes the chicken she will cook for him as their mouths and noses taste and smell each other. The decision to stay in and eat is coded as a decision to have an affair. (So of course it will have to be interrupted. But Hitchcock cleverly gets around some of the usual features of the *osculum interruptum*.)

With the big kiss already performed—hanging there as an invitation to eat more—the scene proceeds to perform dozens of small kisses and nibbles of the sort that would, more typically, lead up to the big one. No other Hollywood director of the Code era, to my knowledge, has managed to get away with so much kissing for so long. From the balcony the-

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Notorious

21: Still kissing, Grant slowly extricates himself

22: Devlin pulls away from the last kiss, leaving Alicia at the door hungry for more



twined couple moves into the living room of Alicia's hotel, where Devlin makes a phone call and picks up a message to report to the office for their espionage assignment. They neck all the way from the phone to the door where Devlin pauses for a last kiss, all the while subtly pulling away (figure 21). The consummation of either meal—the sexual one they are already tasting, and the chicken one they are discussing—is deferred. The genius of the scene is to make the kisses do double duty: they both advance the plot and prolong the itch, even while beginning with the kind of long, fulfilling kiss that might otherwise count as a scratch.⁵⁹ Devlin's exit is a master touch: he pulls away from the last possible kiss, leaving Alicia alone at the door, still hungry for more (figure 22).

When Devlin eventually returns with the news that their assignment will be for Alicia to seduce the Nazi villain, both lose appetite. Alicia sub-

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stitutes the lesser oral satisfaction of a drink for Devlin. They will not get to kiss again until the film's climax, when Devlin rescues Alicia from the villain who has been slowly poisoning her. The couple thus remains hungry—Alicia quite literally must starve herself to resist poisoning by the Nazi husband who discovers her espionage—until the very end, when Devlin escorts Alicia from what is meant to be her deathbed, and they resume their mutual nibbles. Just as a child sucks greedily at its mother's breast, so these two grown movie stars inhale, suck, and taste one another, sustaining each other as objects of mutual oral desire.⁶⁰

The Senses, Close and at a Distance

Film viewing offers a vicarious pleasure in which senses perceived "at a distance"—sight and hearing—are substituted for more proximate senses of contact—touch, taste, smell.⁶¹ When I engage in a kiss, I ultimately give up this distance for proximity as the face of the person I kiss comes closer. Siegfried Kracauer cites Marcel Proust's famous description of a kiss from *The Guermantes Way* to show how perspective changes as we move into close-ups: skin surfaces become like aerial photography, eyes become like lakes or volcano craters, and the "prison of conventional reality" is broken apart to reveal new possibilities.⁶² Proust's kiss points to some of the more disturbing qualities of the close-up's magnified view. In a many-paged description of his narrator's kiss of Albertine, the girl of his dreams, we encounter this description:

In this brief passage of my lips towards her cheek it was ten Albertines that I saw; this single girl being like a goddess with several heads, that which I had last seen, if I tried to approach it, gave place to another. At least so long as I had not touched it, that head, I could still see it, a faint perfume reached me from it. But alas—for in this matter of kissing our nostrils and eyes are as ill placed as our lips are shaped—suddenly my eyes ceased to see; next, my nose, crushed by the collision, no longer perceived any fragrance, and without thereby gaining any clearer idea of the taste of the rose of my desire, I learned, from these unpleasant signs, that at last I was in the act of kissing Albertine's cheek.⁶³

As he approaches the pink cheek he has so longed to smell and taste, the narrator discovers to his dismay that the entity that had been the visual Albertine breaks up into fragments. Where his sense of sight had been in need of a certain distance, the more proximate senses give only parts;

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some are even foiled by proximity itself, and for Proust's narrator, who clearly wants to see as much as he feels, the anticipated possession of the girl never quite materializes.

The lesson for the movie kiss, however, is not quite the same as for Proust's narrator. Indeed, though the camera brings us close to the two kissing faces, so that the eyes may seem, as Kracauer notes, like lakes or craters, we never arrive at the point where nostrils and eyes seem "ill placed" because *our* eyes never cease to see, *our* nose is not "crushed." For the viewers of the movie kiss, the integrity of the kissed object never breaks up, even in close-ups as tight as the one held on Montgomery Clift and Elizabeth Taylor in *A Place in the Sun* (dir. George Stevens, 1951). From our vantage point looking on from outside the kiss, we see how the two faces fit together to become one—a view that eluded Proust's kisser. Indeed, this narrator is so focused on the imagined visual possession of Albertine that he seems not to realize that the pleasure of a kiss resides in this shift to another register of sensation in which "having at a distance" is no longer possible. In the magnified moving-image close-up of the kiss, what the person who watches lacks in the senses of touch, smell, and taste is gained, in a compensatory way, in the close vision that falls short of the breakup experienced by Proust. In other words, the film kiss partially satisfies, for its viewer, the desire of Proust's narrator to hold onto some semblance of the picture of the whole of the face that he kisses. This visual pleasure taken in an act that is inherently about other senses gradually becomes institutionalized in film history as kisses become the key punctuation marks of narrative films.

Kisses thus allow us to cop a look, so to speak, at those who cop a feel. But this does not mean that we vicariously kiss even if, as I have maintained, we learn a great deal about kissing from screening these sex acts. In the introduction I noted Vivian Sobchack's argument that to understand movies we must literally "make sense" of relations of embodiment, by which she means that cinema consists of modes of seeing and hearing, as well as of physical and reflective movement that constitute the very foundation of its expressiveness.⁶⁴ In other words, our own sense of touch is invoked when we watch touching on the screen. But our touch, as I also argue in the introduction, does not simply mimic what we see on the screen. My mouth may pucker, my tongue may move, but I do not myself kiss. Rather, one bodily sense translates into another, energies transmute, and I experience a diffuse sensuality. Proust's narrator may experience the loss of sight as he moves closer to Albertine, and he passes that frustrated sense on to his readers. But Sobchack suggests that spectators who watch

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the mediated sexual encounter of embodied beings are, unlike Proust's hapless narrator, able to feel with their other senses what only seems intrusive to Proust. Sight commutes to touch, not literal touch, but our own senses make sense of the vision of touch in our own flesh in haptic ways that cannot be reduced to sight alone.

Andy Warhol's Kiss

The films of Andy Warhol stand outside the mainstream of silent and sound, Code and pre-Code films we have so far examined. But because many of his early, silent, avant-garde films so single-mindedly anatomize specific sex acts, whether those actually seen—as in *Kiss*, or *Couch*, or *Blue Movie*—or those placed just off the scene—as in *Blow Job*—they offer a fascinating commentary on the more conventional Hollywood, as well as the more conventional pornographic, representations of these acts. Nowhere is this more the case than in his 1963 film *Kiss*, his first film to be publicly projected in a theater.

In this compendium of thirteen kisses, each one is longer than any of the kisses—Code and pre-Code—that had come before in mainstream movies. The film adds up to fifty-eight minutes when projected at the designated, silent speed of sixteen frames per second.⁶⁵ Though this film's length does not approach the truly epic proportions of some of Warhol's other early films, it is undeniably the one irrefutable epic of kisses.⁶⁶ *Kiss*'s quasi-slowed-down effect and concentration on the sole action of kissing makes possible an abundance of the sort of detailed anatomizing that appeared so striking to the first critics of Edison's *The Kiss*. Whether or not Warhol actually based his film on an archival viewing of Edison's film,⁶⁷ he intuitively returned to Edison's basics: the oral attraction of the kiss itself, bypassing the long history of Hollywood kisses that required so much laborious plotting. Indeed, as originally projected at the Gramercy Arts Theatre—an underground New York theater—the film resembled Edison's original even more: Each one of the original one hundred-foot camera rolls of a kiss was shown individually, thus over time constituting a kind of serial. Only later were thirteen of these more numerous kisses spliced together and projected as a single film, yet leaving all the rough beginnings and ends of each roll. By returning to the roots of the screen kiss and Edison's waist-up close-ups, Warhol's film offers a glorious epitaph to the era of the kiss.

Each kiss is already in progress as its respective black-and-white roll

begins. Warhol adopts a tight two-shot close-up, holds on it for as long as the one hundred-foot roll of film lasts (approximately three minutes for his motor-powered 16mm Bolex). Only in one instance does the kiss end before the film runs out and white leader obscures our view. If the rule against excess in the Code-era meant that no kiss could last very long, and that most would conclude a scene followed by an ellipsis, then Warhol's strategy is to give us the long middles that strictures against excess had prohibited. In addition, his sixteen-frames-per-second speed institutes what Stephen Koch calls a *ritardando*—not exactly slow motion but a marked slowing down that lends both fascination and extra time to anatomize.⁶⁸ No ellipses, discreet lookings away, or fade-outs mar our fixed regard, but only a technological limit.

Without preliminary credits or title, the initial reel simply begins, first as blank white leader, then followed by a black-and-white, contrasty, and very close close-up of an ordinary man with a mustache, wire-rimmed glasses, well-groomed, longish hair, and tie.⁶⁹ He occupies the upper right-hand side of the frame, bearing down in three-quarter profile in an open-mouthed kiss on a slightly younger, attractive woman with long hair and a headband, leaning back into the lower left side of the frame. The man pushes down in rhythmic motions; the woman receives the kiss and pushes back up (figure 23). The kiss itself is almost constant; that is, the "juxtaposition of two orbicularis oris muscles in a state of contraction" is continuous throughout the hundred feet of film at least until the very end. Yet within this one long kiss there are lots of little ones—small gives and takes, tensions and relaxations, suggestions of drinking and being drunk from as we see neck muscles swallowing what must be mingled saliva (figure 24). In and out, up and down they move in a dreamy routine that is uncannily defamiliarized by the slight slowing of the action. In this kiss alone—a kiss in which the man's bristly mustache may offer homage to Edison's John C. Rice—the action is broken off before the camera roll ends: the woman pulls back, smiles, and shows teeth.

The second kiss appears a little less clearly focused at first. It repeats the man-on-right (super), woman-on-left (supra) positions, and the woman looks quite a bit like the woman from the first kiss (it is in fact Naomi Levine, Warhol's star kisser). But this new man is almost comically active. His left hand strokes the side of the woman's face and her ear, and he seems not too particular about where his kisses land—on both sides of her mouth, above her upper lip, below her chin. Even more shocking by Hollywood standards is that his tongue is visible (figure 25). At one point he takes the woman's entire chin into his mouth; at another point he rubs



Kiss (dir. Andy Warhol, 1963)

23: The man pushes down, the woman pushes back



24: Neck muscles are visible swallowing

25: Visible tongue

26: The man rubs his chin into the cleft between the woman's mouth and chin



his chin into the cleft between her mouth and chin (figure 26). His voracious enthusiasm exaggerates the orality that we have seen Freud isolate as the original pleasure of kisses and in Garbo's vampiric "drinking" of Gilbert. But Warhol's orality is crude: without the glamorous lighting, it is both more real and, due to the effect of the *ritardando*, uncanny.

The first two kisses offer up a new messiness and *longueur*, reminding us not only that kisses are fundamentally oral pleasures but also of Freud's other point that mouths are the entrance to the digestive tract. Saliva must be swallowed, tongues are visible and active, even teeth—those unmentionables of the Hollywood kiss—are on display. The third kiss offers a contrast in mood: Even though the kissers' relative positions are the same, with the woman on the left leaning way back, the man on top leaning way down, this kiss, despite the conventional attractiveness of its couple, is a study in inertia and boredom. Although hands stroke and lips kiss, nothing else seems to happen between the kissers.

The fourth kiss breaks the pattern in a number of ways: by occurring between two men, by offering a camera position that shows us more of the couch on which all couples sit, by revealing a painting of Jackie Kennedy on the wall behind. The kissers are two slender, shirtless youths, one quite adolescent and fair, the other a little older and dark. In strong contrast to the boredom of the previous couple, they avidly rub against each other. The darker, older youth occupies the top right, the younger, fairer youth the lower left, and he might initially be mistaken for a woman given the context thus far of heterosexual kisses and his long hair (figure 27). But even before the camera dramatically pulls back to reveal both naked torsos stripped to their jeans, we suspect that they are males.⁷⁰ They have Adam's apples, and the young man on the left has his eyes open, as most of the women in Warhol's kisses, and indeed in most of the kisses we have discussed, do not (figure 28).⁷¹ There is an activity on the part of both kissers that marks them, in contrast to Hollywood's depictions of relatively active male kissers and relatively passive female receivers of kisses, as men. (In a later kiss another two men, both with their shirts on this time, will face off in remarkably erect, egalitarian positions, kissing straight up, neither one leaning back, neither one giving more than he receives in intense, muscular kisses of absolute reciprocity concentrated on the lips alone.)

In *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, Warhol writes: "Sex is more exciting on the screen and between the pages than between the sheets anyway."⁷² His *Kiss* pays homage to this idea by sustaining a fascinated look that is also cool and analytical. His real interest, like that of the audience in the

Kiss

27: Two young men kiss



28: Pull out on two very active male kissers, one with eyes open



era of the kiss, is not in seeing, like actual voyeurs, what happens between kissers in real life, but in seeing what happens on the screen when these acts are projected. (Warhol himself was rarely in the room when his films were shot.) By slowing down, by skipping the beginning and the ends, by taking Edison's original fixed close-up and just holding it there, Warhol bypasses all the coy business—dialogue, twirling mustaches, telephones, cigarettes—used to motivate the oral relation. Instead he lingers on the perverse essence of the kiss's orality, the fixation on mucous membranes designed for digestion, showing neither beginning nor ending. Yet despite all the rule-breaking of Warhol's long, sometimes lustful, sometimes comic, always perverse kisses, it is also as if he decided to respect the formal rules of what I have been calling the long adolescence of American movies before the breakdown of the Production Code and before the

inevitable effects of the sexual revolution made the kiss just one of many possible sex acts.

None of Warhol's kisses looks exactly like any of the Hollywood kisses that appear after the end of American cinema's long adolescence,⁷³ but they anticipate them. Yet, they are kisses that we know *could* lead to further sex acts. But if there is a privileging of the surplus perversion of a proto-gay kiss, there is also a respect for the rules of the era of the kiss in limiting action to just a kiss.

Like so much else in Warhol's art, *Kiss* portrays both limit and transgression. The kissers kiss as if they have bodies, not just mouths. Even though we do not generally see much of the rest of the bodies, we know by the rhythms of the movements, the abandonment of concern about whether the kiss even lands on the mouth, the voracious openness of the mouth as one orifice among many, that there is a whole body attached. And in this respect *Kiss* most defamiliarizes us from the conventions of the kiss era, making us wonder, over fifty-eight long and absorbing minutes, what on earth we are doing—and what we have ever been doing—sitting in the dark, screening kisses. By beginning after the beginning and ending before the end, Warhol's kisses offer a fitting epitaph to and celebration of a time when the kiss was all the sex that could be seen.

Conclusion: "Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang"

I have been arguing that ever since Edison filmed and screened a kiss, viewers have responded viscerally, though not necessarily imitatively, to what they see. I have also suggested that this response is not the same as experiencing a kiss itself. Rather, "on the rebound" my body is "moved" and "touched" by other bodies whom I watch tasting and touching one another. Of course, a fight, a blow, a stab, an explosion—any of the various forms of mayhem and violence to the body that the screen can convey—will also synesthetically solicit our bodies.

The late great film critic Pauline Kael wonderfully encapsulated these two major sensations of the movies in the title of her second anthology of film criticism, *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang*.⁷⁴ Sex and violence, kiss and bang, are the primary attractions that draw us to, or repel us from, popular movies. But they have occupied very different positions in American cinema history. Consider, for example, another Edison film made one year before *The Kiss*. *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots* (1895) was also based on a well-known Broadway play, and it also depicts a small fragment of its

play's sensational action. However, instead of bringing into closer view an act that had already been seen on the stage, it showed an act of violence that the stage play had not: Mary's beheading by an ax.⁷⁵ The play had ended with the curtain descending as the ax was raised above Mary's head. The film begins with Mary being blindfolded and ends with the executioner brandishing her severed head. Through the miracle of stop-action photography, which substituted a dummy for the male actor who played Mary, we see the Scottish queen lose her head.

In this first American example of the special effects of violence, there was significantly no equivalent to John Sloan's objection to the sensational display, the prototype of so many cinematic acts of violence to come. One reason may be that *The Execution* was photographed in long shot and only exhibited in Edison's Kinetoscope. Thus no effect of "monstrous" magnification permitted the same kind of "anatomizing" of the act of beheading that occurred with the stages of the kiss.⁷⁶ But even though they are parallel sensationalisms addressing the carnal being of spectators, both arising at the very origin of cinema, kisses and bangs have occupied very different positions in American moving-image history. The Hollywood Production Code would formulate strict prohibitions on the display of both that would more or less endure until replaced by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) ratings system in 1968, and both sensationalisms became more graphic with the lifting of the Code. When the Code ended (officially in 1968, though it was slowly dying throughout the decade) and mainstream American films began to exploit both of these formerly suppressed sensations, violence almost immediately developed, with great flourish and style, into one of the country's most popular export items. Violence became, as H. Rap Brown once put it, "as American as cherry pie."⁷⁷

Sex, on the other hand, while it came insistently on/scene at about the same time, has never seemed quite so American. As we shall see in the following chapters, it was more often an import item. Unlike violence, always faked in fiction film, sex bifurcated into two radically different forms: hard core (explicit, unsimulated) and soft core (simulated, faked). Not until the early seventies would hard-core sexual displays become familiar viewing to large numbers of Americans, male and female alike. Another way of looking at this difference between the status of sex and the status of violence is to say that a certain spectacle of violence revealing the aggression to or penetration of one body by another—in the form of various kinds of fights, along with displays of blood, wounds, and even inner organs—has become a normal part of the movies. However, the mainstream has not

as easily absorbed a similar spectacle of sex—also often a penetration of bodies—even though in its own exclusive form, cordoned off as the separate genre of pornography, it is arguably the most enduring and popular of all moving-image forms.

With Edison's *The Kiss* and *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots*, we thus see the inauguration of a double standard between mediated sex and mediated violence. The great realist film theorist and critic André Bazin has pondered the paradox of this double standard in the following consideration of the limit cases of both sex and violence: "If you can show me on the screen a man and woman whose dress and position are such that at least the beginnings of sexual consummation undoubtedly accompanied the action, then I would have the right to demand, in a crime film, that you really kill the victim—or at least wound him pretty badly."⁷⁸

Bazin's point is the similar pornographic impulse of each act. To go all the way in the depiction of sex—not just the kiss but the consummation to which the kiss tends—would also require going all the way in the depiction of violence: not using the dummy's head, but, for consistency's sake, a real decapitation. To Bazin, these are true obscenities that the cinema simply should not show. Interestingly, he goes on to link them as related orgasms: "Here death is the negative equivalent of sexual pleasure, which is sometimes called, not without reason, 'the little death.'"⁷⁹ This French *petite mort* links the involuntary shudder of pleasure to the involuntary shudder of death—both are spasms of the ecstatic body "beside itself."

In linking the spasm of sexual orgasm, which Bazin, rather like Freud, sees as the telos toward which sex acts tend, with death—the telos toward which violence tends—Bazin stresses the limit case of cinematic realism. A realist theorist who in every other way celebrates the ability of cinema to directly present life as it is, without the intervention of language codes or the hand of the artist, Bazin here acknowledges, as does the title of Kael's book, the sensational power of a medium that deals in the extremes of sex and violence. His ultimate fear is that "real sex," like "real death," will lead audiences back to the abuses of the Roman circus. His theoretical point is that cinema is founded on just such an illicit glimpse of real bodies and real objects of the world. In the cinema a nude woman can be "openly desired" and "actually caressed" in a way she cannot be in a theater because, he writes, "the cinema unreels in an imaginary space which demands participation and identification. The actor winning the woman gratifies me by proxy. His seductiveness, his good looks, his daring do not compete with my desires—they fulfill them."⁸⁰

Yet if the sex scene *does* gratify by proxy (if not exactly in the male/sub-

ject, female/object teleological progress to orgasm that Bazin suggests, but in the more diffuse and rebounded way I have been indicating), we are seemingly plunged into pornography, a realm Bazin abhors. The liberal realist who admires the documentary quality of narrative cinema in many ways and who believes "there are no sex situations—moral or immoral, shocking or banal, normal or pathological—whose expression is *a priori* prohibited on the screen," nevertheless argues that as far as sex goes, the "cinema can say everything, but not show everything." If we wish to remain on the level of art, "we must stay in the realm of imagination."⁸¹

The problem, of course, is that every kiss in every film is already a kind of documentary of that particular, intimate, and yet still publicly acceptable sex act in a way that an act of violence, which is usually faked, is not. In or out of character, two people must really kiss in a film close-up. The kiss or caress has, as Bazin notes, the potential to "gratify by proxy." But everything is organized in scenes of violence so that actors, even though they may touch in a relatively intimate fight, do not really hit, knife, or shoot one another the way they are expected to kiss and caress. Bazin recognizes and is embarrassed by the inconsistency of his argument. Writing in 1956 in direct response to the provocations of Roger Vadim's Brigitte Bardot vehicle, *And God Created Woman*, which (following reluctantly in the tradition of John Sloan) he calls a "detestable film," he realizes that his remarks have also brushed off a good part of the contemporary Swedish cinema. His only recourse is to claim, weakly, that the "masterpieces of eroticism" do not cross a certain line. But as Bazin clearly foresaw, times were changing: the sixties were about to happen, and the argument that masterpieces never go too far sexually already rang hollow as movies would take on the challenge of "going all the way." Many so-called novelistic masterpieces had already described a great deal about sex, not leaving it to the imagination. And Bazin honestly admits at the end of his essay that the situation of the writer may not differ all that much from that of directors and actors. So he concludes simply: "To grant the novel the privilege of evoking everything, and yet to deny the cinema, which is so similar, the right of showing everything, is a critical contradiction I note without resolving."⁸²

These are the honest and intelligent words of a great film critic grappling with the unprecedented realism of the new media form of the twentieth century and its special relation to both sex and violence. These words tell us that cinema is capable of delivering new forms of violence and forms of intimacy that were just beginning in the late fifties. In Bazin's time, no less than in our own, filmmakers, critics, and society have not agreed on the

correct place of sex acts mediated by moving images. Since Bazin wrote this essay the kinds of images that worried him have increased exponentially, and his frank examination no longer satisfies. But it must constitute the necessary starting point of any observations about screening sex, even just a kiss.

lation, a "shifting between distance and closeness" that overcomes the kind of distance that operates in the purely ocular relation.

Chapter 1: Of Kisses and Ellipses

1 Richard Alapack writes that a kiss is a transcendence of self through the connection to an other whom one both "faces" and "tastes" for the first time. Alapack, "Adolescent First Kiss," 63.

2 I recognize that there are difficulties with the terms *Code era* (e.g., era of the Hollywood Production Code's enforcement) and *pre-Code* (the whole of American mainstream cinema history until that enforcement became somewhat effective), but it will prove necessary in this discussion of kisses. The Hollywood Production Code was created in 1930 as a way for the film industry to regulate itself so as to avoid controversial subjects that might alienate the general audience. It was authored by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America and contained a list of "General Principles" (e.g., "No picture shall . . . lower the moral standards of those who see it") and particular applications, including nine points about the sorts of sex scenes or acts that were forbidden. Although written in 1930, it was by many accounts not enforced until 1934, when the Catholic Legion of Decency threatened to boycott films if the Code was not enforced and Joseph Breen was brought in to do the enforcing. However, it is not strictly true that pre-Code films went entirely unregulated, as Lea Jacobs, Tino Balio, and Richard Maltby have shown. Nor am I interested in this chapter in establishing a strict dividing line between the two eras, or in arguing that the pre-Code era was a wild period of freedom and the Code era one of strict regulation. However, as far as kisses are concerned, films from the time before about 1933 and from the time of the Code's greater enforcement do differ. The kisses that interest me most in the pre-Code era will not be those of the transition period, but those that precede the transition in the silent era. See Maltby, "More Sinned Against than Sinning"; Balio, *Grand Design*; and Jacobs, *Wages of Sin*.

3 For reasons consonant with my topic, I will continue to call it *The Kiss*. Charles Musser, for reasons consonant with his topic, may prefer to call it *The May Irwin Kiss*. See Musser, "The May Irwin Kiss," 97.

4 Musser, *Thomas A. Edison*, 199.

5 Charles Musser has unearthed a number of important facts about this kiss in relation to the beginnings of projected cinema as we know it. Most striking among these is the relation between other stage kisses and this film and the possibility that the fifteen-second *The Kiss* may have included more action. Musser, "The May Irwin Kiss." Musser's forthcoming book on the kiss will discuss further mysteries about this fascinating film, including possible missing footage.

6 Musser also notes that while the Irwin-Rice stage kiss itself was not controversial, Olga Nethersole's extended multiple kisses in *Carmen* had been extremely

so the previous year. The film kiss may thus have been referring in general to the controversy about the propriety of prolonged stage kisses, as Nethersole's apparently were. See Musser, "The May Irwin Kiss," 99–104.

7 Jane Gaines calls it "an awkward two-shot, two faces pressed quickly together, both facing out-toward the camera." Gaines, *Fire and Desire*, 88. Writing about the conflicts between sexual show and sexual event in the genre of moving-image pornography, I have argued that the compulsion to display the maximum visibility of sexual acts often results in a tension between the exhibitionistic display of sex and the often less visible event. This first screen kiss perfectly manifests this tension. Linda Williams, *Hard Core*, 60–72.

8 Qtd. in Musser, "The May Irwin Kiss," 103.

9 Musser tells us that short films of this era were looped. He also notes, citing Henri Bergson, that repetition itself can be considered funny. On a deeper level a potentially comic repetition might humorously clash with the quasi-scientific analytical observation that made reference to, but did not itself imitate, the presumably more torrid scandal of other stage kisses. *Ibid.*, 104.

10 For these remarks themselves, see Lenne, *Sex on the Screen*, 151; and Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hard Core*, 86. The remarks have often been attributed to the editor of the *Chap Book*, Herbert Stone, but they were actually written by the then young painter John Sloan. According to the memory of his second wife, Sloan wrote the unsigned review in the 15 July 1896 issue of *Chap Book*. It is all the more interesting that an artist whose own paintings would later capture the social mix and vitality of audiences at the nickelodeon would object so strenuously here to the monstrosity of exactly the sorts of risqué movie scenes he would later depict himself. See Zurier, "City, Stage, and Screen," 179.

11 Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 48.

12 Phillips, *On Kissing*, 97.

13 See Gunning, "Cinema of Attractions"; and, "Aesthetic of Astonishment."

14 See Mayne, "Uncovering the Female Body," 66; Gaines, *Fire and Desire*, 87–90; Courtney, *Hollywood's Fantasy of Miscegenation*, 24; Best, *Fugitive's Properties*, 228–37; Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*, 81–84.

15 Susan Courtney shows that a great many films of early cinema "openly flirted with miscegenation" and that almost all of them offered variations on a similar gag in which a white man is punished for lusting after a white woman with the unintended kiss or touch of a black woman. A variation on this gag includes that of the substituting of black babies for white. Courtney, *Hollywood's Fantasy of Miscegenation*, 24.

16 Gaines, *Fire and Desire*, 90.

17 Jacqueline Stewart, following Miriam Hansen, suggests that the joke may even have been played by the black woman on the white man, in collusion with the mistress. Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*, 82.

18 *Birth* is especially remarkable, despite the elision of interracial kisses, in its suggestive gyrations of the hips of its "mulatto" villain, Silas Lynch, when sexually

threatening the white virgin, Elsie Stoneman. It is precisely this kind of lustful genital allusion that would soon disappear from American screens even in pre-Code Hollywood. See my *Playing the Race Card*, 96–135.

19 Leff and Simmons, *Dame in the Kimono*, 287.

20 Bataille, *Eroticism*, 36. For work on Production Code Administration (PCA) censorship, see especially Jacobs, *Wages of Sin*; and Leff and Simmons, *Dame in the Kimono*.

21 In the now-forgotten introductory verse it is Einstein, “new invention,” and “fourth dimension” that represent this change; in the context of *Casablanca*’s narrative, it is World War II. The songwriter is Herman Hupfeld.

22 Dyer, *White*, 122.

23 Sam is important to the narrative not only for the music he provides but also as proof of Rick’s democratic spirit. That spirit is not consistent, however. At one moment Sam drinks with the couple, while at another moment he is servile and attends to their needs, and sometimes he simply disappears.

24 Richard Dyer writes that it is not “just a matter of a different disposition of light on women and men, but the way the light constructs the relationship between them. The sense of the man being illuminated by the woman is a widespread convention, established in classic Hollywood cinema . . . but still current today.” Dyer, *White*, 134.

25 Part of the guilt derives from the fact that we do not know, at this point in the movie, whom Ilsa “really loves.” Indeed, as Umberto Eco stresses in his fascinating study of the film, Ilsa is a kind of token and intermediary in the platonic love of the two men: “She herself does not bear any positive value (except, obviously, Beauty),” and she basically does what she is told to do. Eco, “Casablanca,” 208.

26 This ellipsis is discussed at length by Maltby in *Hollywood Cinema*, 344–51.

27 Some kisses do conclude, but they tend not to be the big, dramatic ones.

28 Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, 349.

29 Qtd. in *ibid.*, 350.

30 This kiss offers a blatantly perverse tension between fear and desire because of its suggestion of necrophilia—Stewart believes Novak to be dead. There is also the remarkable, slightly slow-motion kiss with Grace Kelly in *Rear Window* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1954) that awakens Stewart like a sleeping beauty.

31 This film’s unerotic credentials would seem to be confirmed by the fact that it has long screened on television each Christmas season, making it, rather like *The Wizard of Oz*, a perennial family favorite.

32 William Cane describes the *orbicularis oris* muscle as responsible for four distinct movements of the lips, usually described in relation to speech, but equally important in kissing: pressing together, tightening and thinning, rolling inward between the teeth, and, for more “lascivious kisses” thrusting forward. Cane, “*Orbicularis Oris of the Face and Mouth*.”

33 Eve Babitz writes: “In more ways than one, taste is everything in kissing.” Babitz, “Sex, Love, and Kissing,” 160.

34 Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 48.

35 *Ibid.*, 45–46.

36 *Ibid.*, 50.

37 Nursing, the giving and taking of nurture, is the prototype of many of the sex acts we will examine in this book, especially kissing and fellatio, since both recall the pleasure of the child’s oral groping, tasting, and sucking as a crucial originary moment of satisfaction.

38 For an excellent discussion of the two-way street of this satisfaction and excitation, see St. John, “Mammy Fantasy.”

39 Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 16.

40 Freud acknowledges, for example, that the kiss is well recognized as an example of certain “intermediate relations to the sexual object . . . which lie on the road towards copulation and are recognized as being preliminary sexual aims.” He recognizes that such a relation is in itself pleasurable and that it works to intensify the excitation, “which should persist until the final sexual aim is attained.” Pointing out that “contact between the mucous membranes” is held in high esteem by some of “the most highly civilized” nations of the world, he nevertheless emphasizes that these membranes do not actually form a part of the sexual apparatus, but “constitute the entrance to the digestive tract.” *Ibid.*, 16.

41 “If a perversion, instead of appearing merely *alongside* the normal sexual aim and object . . . ousts them completely and takes their place in *all* circumstances—if, in short, a perversion has the characteristics of exclusiveness and fixation—then we shall usually be justified in regarding it as a pathological symptom.” *Ibid.*, 27.

42 Bersani, *Freudian Body*, 34.

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Ibid.*, 36.

45 Phillips, *On Kissing*, 96.

46 Of course, for the child, sensual sucking is hardly a one-way street: the mother is a partner in the intimate relation. D. W. Winnicott stresses the mother’s sensitive adaptation to the infant’s needs and her ability to provide the “illusion that her breast is part of the infant.” Winnicott, “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena,” 11.

47 Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 11.

48 Laplanche, *Jean Laplanche*, 190.

49 As Adam Phillips writes, “Kissing on the mouth can have a mutuality that blurs the distinctions between giving and taking.” Phillips, *On Kissing*, 97. See also Coward, *Female Desires*, 97; and Gaines, *Fire and Desire*, 87.

50 Rosalind Coward writes: “Kissing is a voracious activity, an act of mutual penetration. Kissing offers women the chance actively to penetrate. . . . Kissing is

probably for women the most sensational activity, representing the height of erotic involvement. Precisely because of its transgressive nature, crossing boundaries between people, engaging sensations usually kept at bay, kissing clearly produces 'excitement.'" Coward, *Female Desires*, 97. And just as clearly, it is an excitement that women, more than men, enjoy. I doubt that I would ever have stayed up late on a summer night to watch movies with romantic kisses with my father!

51 It would also certainly be a mistake to presume, just because a cigarette is a potentially phallic object, that the cigarette in this instance serves as a phallic marker of sexual difference. For even if one wanted to note its phallic shape, it is clear that as soon as this object has done its work of opening up two similar mouths to one another, it has no further value and is thrown away. The pleasures of kisses, and the pleasures of screening kisses, thus do not seem to be those of diametrically opposed penetrator and penetrated.

52 Phillips, *On Kissing*, 97.

53 Buster Keaton's two-reeler, *The Paleface* (1922), offers an ingenious gag based on just this limitation in the representation of sex acts. In a brilliant parody of a final clinch, Buster takes the pretty "Indian Squaw" in his arms and kisses her in the classic position of the man leaning over an extremely leaned-back woman. An intertitle reads "Two years later," but we see the same couple in the exact same position. As the gag well understands, there is nothing else that can be officially depicted!

54 Heartfelt thanks to Yuri Tsivian for pointing out this film, and its kiss, to me.

55 Phillips, *On Kissing*, 97.

56 And, of course, all film vampires, from *Nosferatu* (dir. F. W. Murnau, 1922) on, cross this line between sustaining and actually consuming what they kiss.

57 I am excluding a long list of films, many of them post-Code, in which eating blatantly stands in for sex acts: *Tom Jones* (dir. Tony Richardson, 1963), *La Grande Bouffe* (dir. Marco Ferreri, 1973), *Tampopo* (dir. Juzo Itami, 1985), and so on.

58 This is a gesture we saw Bergman use on Bogart in *Casablanca* as well.

59 The same is true of a later kiss performed by Grant's Devlin on Bergman's Alicia. The kiss is offered as a decoy to make Alicia's ex-Nazi husband, Alex (Claude Rains), believe that Devlin is in love with Alicia rather than hot on the trail of the nefarious uranium hidden in the wine bottles. However, the kiss is also real in the sense that it expresses the passion of both kissers.

60 *A Place in the Sun* (dir. George Stevens, 1951) is another Code-era film that powerfully connects sexual hunger, class hunger, and the oral drive. Elizabeth Taylor, a sexually alluring young socialite, and Montgomery Clift, a sexually and materially hungry factory worker, dance at a formal party in a crowded room in a set piece culminating in one of the most memorable of fifties' screen kisses, an era in which an overt Freudianism had permeated American cinema. On the dance floor, Clift blurts a sudden confession of love. Taylor, suddenly terrified of being seen, pulls him to a more private terrace, where she too confesses love. Little beads of

sweat become visible on Clift's brow as he explains how much he loves her, and how much he wishes that he could "tell all." These beads of sweat are eloquent signs that the sex both of them hunger for is primal and dangerous. Indeed, the "all" that he cannot tell is his responsibility toward another woman of his own class whom he has made pregnant. Taylor does not understand what this "all" means, but she responds to the intensity of his desire in a striking line that invites his kiss: "Tell mama, tell mama all." By inviting confession in this eroticized yet maternal way, Taylor turns Clift into an abject infant longing for the maternal breast. It is for this kiss, and all the oral satisfaction it promises in these mammary-obsessed fifties, that Clift's George will soon plot to kill his unwanted girlfriend and for which he will ultimately die. Most of the time Clift's shoulder blocks the view of their mouths, rendering moot the issue of whether they are open or closed. However, the shot is framed so tightly that when Taylor pulls away from the kiss we see that it is open in the beginning fade-out. We are left with the distinct impression that sexual hunger has sealed a forbidden and fateful union.

61 Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes seeing as "to have at a distance." Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 166.

62 Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 48.

63 Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 77.

64 See Sobchack's *Address of the Eye and Carnal Thoughts*.

65 The usual projection speed for sound film is twenty-four frames per second. Thus Warhol shoots at a normal speed and slows the image down slightly in the projection.

66 Though it is not as epic as the six-hour *Sleep* (1963) or the eight-hour *Empire* (1964), *Kiss* is eminently more watchable.

67 Tony Rayns admits that this may only be a legend, but he adds, "There is no doubt that Warhol's earliest films were materially governed by the technical limitations of the equipment in use, much as Edison's pioneering experiments in cinematography had been. Warhol started out with a hand-wound 16mm Bolex camera, which takes 100-foot rolls of film (approximately 2 3/4 minutes when projected at 24 frames-per-second). . . . He then added a motor, which enabled him to run 100 feet of film continuously." Rayns, "Death at Work," 164.

68 Koch, *Stargazer*, 43.

69 It is possible to know who many of these kissers are through information given in various filmographies. I will not dwell on this information, even when known, since for my purposes the kissers' fame or lack of it does not seem crucial to our reception of the film. It is worth knowing, however, that Naomi Levine is the woman in the first two kisses, as well as in kisses 7 and 13. All of the kisses of Naomi Levine were screened together at the Gramercy Arts Theatre in September 1963 under the title *Andy Warhol Serial*. The man in this first kiss is not known. Apra, *Andy Warhol*, 37-38.

70 Wayne Koestenbaum argues, in his fine short book on Warhol, that we do not know the gender of these kissers until the camera pulls out. While it is true

that we might not recognize that both are male given the pattern of heterosexual kisses thus far, I did suspect it on initial viewing and imagine that others do as well. Koestenbaum, *Andy Warhol*, 81.

71 Unlike Proust's narrator, women seem to more willingly relinquish the compulsion to see and touch at the same time.

72 Warhol, *Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 44.

73 Though they do rather resemble the beginning of Larry Clark's *Kids* (1995).

74 Kael explains that these words, which she saw on an Italian movie poster, "are perhaps the briefest statement imaginable of the basic appeal of movies. This appeal is what attracts us, and ultimately what makes us despair when we begin to understand how seldom movies are more than this." Kael, *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang*.

75 The stage direction reads: "The Queen lays her head on the block, supporting herself with her hands. The Executioners on each side bend down and remove the hands. The axe is raised amid general weeping, and the curtain falls. THE END." Blake, *Mary Queen of Scots*. Thanks to Scott Combs for this reference.

76 Recall that *The Kiss* was shown in both the small-image, peephole Kinetoscope and by the projecting Vitascope. Only the latter projection aroused interest and scandal.

77 It is frequently claimed that Brown said, "Violence is as American as apple pie," although this is a misquote. On 27 July 1963, in the wake of urban rioting, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed the Kerner Commission, charged with assessing the causes of the violence. That same day, Brown, the former head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, held a news conference in Washington, DC, in which he urged local blacks to arm themselves, saying, "Violence is necessary. It is as American as cherry pie."

78 Bazin, "Marginal Notes," 173.

79 *Ibid.*, 173.

80 *Ibid.*, 174. We must note Bazin's automatic assumption that woman is the sexual object, and man both the caresser and the spectator—all conventions we see upheld in Edison's *The Kiss* and countless sex scenes to come.

81 *Ibid.*, 174.

82 *Ibid.*, 175.

Chapter 2: Going All the Way

1 For example, Jeanne Moreau's exquisite facial performance of orgasm in Louis Malle's *Les Amants* (1958) as her lover's head descends below the frame for an unseen genital kiss.

2 Freud's useful term *screen memory* describes a particularly vivid childhood memory whose analysis covers a compromise formation made up of the mix of indelible real experiences and childhood fantasies. Struck by the way screen memo-

ries both evoke and screen out possibly repressed memories, Freud argues that such memories constitute important records not so much of the real past but of retroactively projected fantasies whose shape and form offer significant keys to the past. I invoke Freud's term here mostly for the value of considering how the memory of one image can block out a more powerful one. Freud, "Seven Memories," *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, 307.

3 In his study of the "Wolf Man," for example, Freud first suggests that the child understands the act of coitus as the father's aggression on the mother; then he suggests that the scene may be cause for the child's excitation and, since the child is always male to Freud, incite fears of castration. Finally, presuming the (male) child's sexual ignorance, he suggests that the child presumes the coitus to be anal. See Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis." See also Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 335.

4 Laplanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," 16.

5 Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, 42.

6 Wilhelm Reich's book *The Sexual Struggle of Youth* introduced the term during an era of social reform in Germany in the twenties. The English title, when published in 1945 in the United States, was *The Sexual Revolution: Toward a Self-Governing Character Structure*. See Allyn, *Make Love Not War*, 4–5.

7 I borrow this term from the subtitle of Niklas Luhmann's *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*. Luhmann's book examines how the semantics of literary expressions of love evolved from the courtly love of the Middle Ages through the Romantic era to contemporary notions of intimacy that require neither an idealization of the object nor ascetic postponements of the sex act. In this evolution, the old semantic content of "romantic" and Romanticism have been clandestinely replaced by ideas of sexual performance or the notion of simply "being there for one another" (159). The intimacy whose codification Luhmann traces thus evolves from a highly idealized *amour passion* to a contemporary situation in which sexual relations have become the key to intimacy itself. Through a slow process of the "revaluation of sexuality" Luhmann shows how European culture moved from sublimation of sexual emotions that did not necessarily revolve around intimate knowledge of the love object to increasing valuations of intimacy as good in themselves. Intimacy is thus fundamentally a process of "interpersonal interpenetration" that includes the sexual (158). The Victorian age, having lost the battle to negate sexuality, is replaced by a "barely conscious, but all the more manifest semantics of sport": sex becomes a matter of performing and of improving performance. The capacity for improvement in turn requires effort and attentiveness and, as several of the films discussed in this chapter will demonstrate, "training." Luhmann adds, "As in sport, resorting to a form of physical behavior that is socially defined as meaningful makes it possible to evade the uncertainties of meaning in all other domains of life" (161). He argues that passion thus comes to an end and idealization of the love object no longer battles with the paradoxical existence of animal sexuality. Intimacy becomes less a fusion into a unity than a finding of meaning in

and whose actions and settings I can choose, *VirtuallyJenna* gives me very precise control over all aspects of the sexual scene. In this game, I do not so much fuck Jenna through an avatar as move into and all around the fantasy scene of sex like a kind of exalted film director. I can, for example, choose to move a disembodied hand to stroke her body when she is alone or with the avatar.

76 This is what one of the Virtual Vixens of the earlier CD-ROM game says of herself: "I know I'm not a real woman. I'm just a pleasure matrix, a piece of ass in a software package." Qtd. in Linda Williams, *Hard Core*, 309.

77 Schauer, *Law of Obscenity*, 81.

78 Schauer, *Free Speech*, 181.

79 Ibid.

80 For example, one short-lived CD-ROM product, *The Virtual Sex Machine*, advertised in 2003, offered the experience of watching girls perform on the screen with the added attraction of a "Penis Stimulator Chamber" whose vibration and suction would presumably mimic the movements of the performer you choose on the screen. The salon.com reporter who described its effects noted, "Like a Godzilla movie where the Japanese mouths aren't quite in sync with the English words, the vsm wasn't quite in sync with [the woman's action] on the screen. She zipped, it zagged" (Mike Phillips, "My Date with the Virtual Sex Machine," archive.salon.com-sex/feature/2003/02/05/vsm/index_np.html, accessed 11 May 2007).

81 Manovich, *Language of New Media*, 110.

82 Manovich, *Language of New Media*, 115.

83 Juffer, *At Home with Pornography*, 51.

84 Linda Williams, *Hard Core*, 313.

85 Ibid.

86 Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 126–27.

87 Keenan, "Windows of Vulnerability," 133–34.

88 Ibid, 133.

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