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The aesthetic of connection, this aesthetic of familiarity, this popular aesthetic operated in Hollywood movies. And I want to expand a bit on this idea by talking about more explicitly what might be called an anthropological view of this matter, what could be called the cultural work of movies.

One way I can make you think about the larger and more significant implications of what the movies are, of how to think about the movies, is to ask you to think about the true implications of certain words that we just take for granted. For example, take the word entertainment or the verb entertain, to entertain. We think of it as-- we think of it as a relatively straightforward term, as it is. And we think of entertainment as some form of diversion that takes us away from the serious things in life.

But I want to suggest to you that if we look closely, even if we look at sort of the root of the word and the way the word is used, and the variations on the kinds of meanings that are associated with the word entertainment or the verb to entertain, we can see deeper implications. For one thing, for example, let's just take a standard dictionary definition. There are three different senses in which almost all dictionaries in English would identify-- would define the verb to entertain. They would say, to hold the attention of someone is to entertain them.

A second meaning would be to extend hospitality to someone. That makes sense, right? But think when you extend hospitality-- you're engaged in a communal, in a hospitable act, right? It's an act of generosity, an act of inclusion, right? So forms of entertainment are potentially community creating, gestures towards a community, acts of hosting, right? And they also, of course, are a bid for your attention.

And then there's a third meaning, which is the most interesting. To entertain, almost all dictionaries will tell you also means, to hold in the mind. I'm entertaining this idea. I'm entertaining this thought. I'm entertaining this possibility. In other words, the word entertain-- the verb to entertain means to meditate, to think, to speculate, to consider possibilities, right?

And when you attend an entertainment in a certain sense, that's exactly what happens. Exactly because the space of entertainment is marked out by the society, by social convention, as a place of diversion, as a place of relaxation, as a place that is theoretically not a place of work. Certain things are licensed or permitted because of that, or encouraged. Because you know you're kicking back, it's not a serious place, what is likely to happen? You're allowed, or at least by implication, or permitted to entertainment possibilities that in actuality might be scary or disturbing or unacceptable.

So that one of the ironies of entertainment is that it can become a space, especially public forms of entertainment in cultures, like Shakespeare's public theater or likely public theater of the American movie system in the studio era, these public spaces can become spaces in which the body politic, the political and social community, entertains ideas about its own nature. Entertains, considers, speculates, holds in its mind accounts of its origins, stories of its values, right? And what we can say, then, is that the space of entertainment becomes from, in a certain angle, in virtually all societies, a space of discourse, a space in which exactly because it's a space recognized as not real, as make believe, is therefore licensed or allowed to explore possibilities that might be too dangerous or too disturbing to explore in other ways.

And we can see that certain features of the entertainment systems of most countries and of most societies, and certainly the entertainment system we're calling the Hollywood studio movie, are systems in which other features of the-- other features of the formats and organizational principles of the films reinforce this idea that you're escaping into a space that is also a space of exploration and discovery. That you're not escaping and running away exactly into forms of diversion and hiding from the world, but in fact, you're escaping into a space of freedom in which you can consider possibilities that might otherwise be too disturbing to think about.

And one way you can see how the formats encourage that comes back to the argument I was making about genres and stars. Because think about, one of the most fundamental things about the conventions of genre are that audiences understand not only sort of the costumes and the setting and so forth, but also usually understand the basic-- what do we call it-- the basic segments, a story force, the segmentation of the story, the stages through which the story is likely to go.

And they're likely, in many cases, to have a pretty good idea about the nature of the ending of a particular genre form. They may not be absolutely certain about the details of how it will work

out, but they have some pretty good ideas about-- for example, the notion is that various forms of comedy end on some sort of an affirming or a happy note, even if the difficulties that are dramatized in the text from the beginning are very serious and troubling, right? Not that every single comedy ends on a totally happy note, but that's the expectation you have when you come to see a comedy. You expect an adventure with many difficulties that are-- that will finally be resolved in some form.

And in fact, traditionally, one of the most fundamental ways in which comic narratives and comic dramas are resolved is in the act of marriage. Because of course, marriage is a kind of reconciliation of potential opposites. It is a space of celebration in which different families and different groups and, in many forms of comedy, different social classes are brought together. So that the marriage itself becomes a social space that replicates, if it's dramatized on stage or in the movie, it replicates in some sense the communal space of sharing that the audience is engaged in when it's watching the text, right?

So you have expectations about the characters, about the plots, about the basic formats, and especially about the endings of genre forms. Now what follows from the fact that you know that genre forms usually end happily? And indeed, that most-- that most Hollywood movies, leave aside the question of comedy, will end on a reassuring, or if not a happy, at least a reassuring or a positive note. You simply know that going in. Even though that rule is sometimes violated, it's not usually violated. And when it's violated, it's often violated in ways that are instructive and interesting. But you have that expectation.

Well, the expectation that when you get into the story, the expectation you have as an audience member when you enter the story, knowing that you are going to come to a happy ending, what does that do? It's a form of reassurance before you start. There are theorists of folk tales and fairy tales who argue that that's one of the functions of fairy tales. That when a folktale or a fairytale begins, once upon a time, many, many years ago, in a land far away, and the story ends, and they all lived happily ever after, what are the-- those are ritualized or conventional beginnings and endings.

What do they contain? They may contain terror. They may contain Little Red Riding Hood being raped or eaten alive, right? But it's OK in a certain sense, because when you come to the ending, you know that you'll be reassured. So because you know that the ending will reassure you, it enables an exploration of stuff that would be scary and frightening. There are child psychologists, for example, who say that one of the important aspects of storytelling to

children is precisely this. That the ritualized reassurance of once upon a time and they all lived happily ever after are enabling conditions that permit the exploration, that permit the story to go into territories that would otherwise be frightening and terrifying.

What I'm suggesting to you is that that's a way of understanding adult entertainment as well. And over and over again, the Hollywood film will prove this principle out. It will explore disturbing and frightening materials, but in ways that are some sense legitimated or permitted by the very fact that it belongs in an entertainment space, by the very fact that it marks itself as something that is a diversion, a mere entertainment. But I'd like to eliminate the word mere because it's an inadequate and derogatory way of describing an experience that often can be among the most creative and valuable that people in a society can have, right?

So one way then of crystallizing all of this is to say that the Hollywood film for me, in the studio era especially, represents a particular form of what I would call consensus narrative. What I mean by this term is something rather elaborate, but I think very helpful. What I mean by the term is this, that in most societies-- perhaps not in all, but in most societies-- all societies have many different sites of storytelling, right? People tell jokes to each other. We go to the opera. We watch-- we play video games that are deep forms of narrative today, right? So that's the coming-- probably the new form of narrative that's emerging in our society today, are video games.

We hear stories in theaters. We can hear stories in popular songs. We read stories in novels, right? There are stories all over. And in fact, we get non-fictional stories out of our newspapers and from our politicians. These are usually even more outlandish, ridiculous, and false than the fictional stories that we're fed, although we often don't recognize that, right? So we live in a sea, an ocean of narratives, right? All societies have many different sites of it.

But in many societies, if not all, there usually is a single site that by general acceptance or consent is recognized as the space in which the stories that are being told are intended for everyone, right? The difference between what goes on in a wrestling match or in a baseball game, also forms of narrative in a way, or in an opera or in a theatrical piece and a movie of the Hollywood era, or a television program in the great era of television before, say, 2000 when new systems so atomized and divided the television system that it began to-- it began to imitate what happened to its ancestors, the films, a generation earlier, losing its hold on the majority of the population-- the idea is then that the idea of a consensus story is the story-- it's the story form or the story system that the culture recognizes as the one that reaches the

largest number of people.

And that by common agreement or consent-- not by law, but by something much richer and larger than that, by a kind of communal agreement, this space is recognized as the place in which the stories that are told are meant to appeal to the largest number of people, cutting across social class, cutting cross age and gender differences, cutting across ethnic differences. Virtually all societies have some space in which some story system of one kind or another that wants to appeal to virtually everyone exists.

Now it's important to understand that I don't mean it's a real consensus, an authentic one. That is to say, I don't mean that the stories that are told there really embody the values universally of everyone in the society. Not at all. Because these societies are limited in certain ways. They have exclusions. They have caste structures, and so on. So the consensus narrative in 1920 was a consensus narrative that sort of saw African Americans as second class citizens, right? There was a lot of prejudice then. Or it certainly was a patriarchal consensus, which assumed that women belonged in the home, and so forth.

I don't mean that the consensus is universally embraced by everyone. What I do mean, though, is that everyone in the society recognizes that this is the consensus. And even the people who descend from it recognize that this is the space in which the central values of the society are articulated, dramatized, and diffused. And what makes this space-- these spaces-- so that another example, I mentioned one earlier, in Shakespeare's day, the public theater of Shakespeare's time was the equivalent of what I'm saying Hollywood was in the studio era.

In the Middle Ages, it would be the Bible, right? The central story promulgated through all-- virtually everyone in the society had-- not only had access to the Bible, when they went to church, they received further discussion and elaborate propaganda about how important and central the Bible was to their life. So the consensus narrative system was the one the church sustained in the Middle Ages, right? In fact, one of the interesting things is to watch in Western culture the way in which the consensus story becomes more and more secularized. And not only secularized, not only freed from religious dispensation, but also freed, in some sense, in many societies from government control. Right?

So in some societies, there is no such freedom. So for example, the consensus narrative in the Soviet Union was the story that was approved by the government. It was-- and in fact, probably the majority of the population dissented from that consensus, right?

So the consensus I'm talking about is always a constructed one, right? But that construction is still interesting. And this is one of the exam-- one of the reasons, for example, that today people will still scream bloody murder if they see that on television, the representation of minorities or women is prejudicial. But you don't see anybody complaining about the fact that there are such representations in books or in theater any longer. And the reason for that is that it's the consensus system that matters to people. It's the consensus space in which it is assumed the values of the society can be challenged or discussed, OK?

So what I want to suggest, then, is we might think-- so we can think of the Hollywood film then, all Hollywood movies, as belonging-- as participating in the creation of what we can call the consensus story, the most widely shared story about American society. And it has many sides, right? Part of the story has to do with how you define masculinity, right? And some of that burden is carried in every film, but there are certain movies like war movies or Westerns in which masculinity, tough guy-ness is the main issue. And then there's some-- then we could say the norms about family life. Where do they come in? Well, more often in comedies and in melodramas that focus on families, right?

In other words, different parts of the consensus are dramatized more fully in different genres. But all the films together can be said broadly to participate in a process whereby the central values and assumptions of the society are rehearsed and repeated and tested. The central fact about this process is that it's never finished, just like culture itself. Culture's never a fixed, finished thing.

This is one of the deep insights of modern sociology and anthropology. I attribute it primarily-- specifically to the great English sociologist and historian Raymond Williams from whom I'm borrowing some of the ideas on-- although the word consensus narrative is mine, not his-- many of these ideas are drawn from Raymond Williams' account of culture. What he says is essentially that culture is constantly making and remaking itself.

That every time you watch-- think about-- some of you can see this example more fully with television than with movies. Remember, the argument of the course is that at a certain point, sometime in the 1950s or early '60s, television supplanted the movies as the central form of narrative in the American society. Took over the job of being the consensus, the purveyor of the consensus, the purveyor of the culture's central values. And in many ways, that was a liberating moment for the movies. Our course dramatizes that.

This week, we're looking at two screwball comedies from inside the studio era. Hereafter when we juxtapose two films, one will be from the studio era. One will be from the era after the movies no longer carry the consensus, the responsibility to be the consensus medium. That's been taken over by TV. And the differences are dramatic.

The differences are stark and exciting. Both forms are interesting. The post-consensus forms have great claims on us because they're much freer. They're not limited or constrained by what we might call the central pieties of the culture. The most obvious way you could see this is in nudity, right? They can show-- attitudes-- and dirty language, right? Think about-- you can see the stupidity and the arbitrariness of these systems if you think about how television worked today.

If you put on an American network show, even a late night show by 10:00, 11 o'clock, at 9:00 or 10:00 a night, what you will get on those shows-- you might get things very different from what you would have gotten 10 or 15 years ago, but you still won't get full frontal nudity. You won't get women taking off their clothes. You won't see sexual activity. You won't see very much dirty language. You used to see none of it.

But if you click the channel one over and you go to HBO, you could see the most disgraceful pornography that you can ever imagine, right? And you could hear people using the F word so often that it runs out of your ears, right? And they're right next to each other on the dial. What explains the difference? HBO doesn't belong to the consensus system. The networks are still a vestigial survival of the old consensus system. And if you think about the difference between network television, even today, and the movies or network television and what's on HBO or Showtime, you will see this distinction with great clarity, right?

So one of the things that this means is that these systems of consensus narrative have a tremendous claim on our attention. They're more important, in some sense, in a sociological or anthropological sense than other forms that don't bear the burden of having to tell the story, the consensus story of the society. You remember I said culture's unfinished. So are these stories, right? The great thing about them is that they change, right? That over time, they'll alter.

I'll come back to this question next time when we talk about the Western. We talk about how the Western alters over time in ways that are tremendously responsive to problems in the outer society. A very clear example of the way in which genre constraints can enable an

exploration of serious subjects. So we'll return to that next time.

For our purposes tonight, the primary point is this. What the advantage of these consensus-- one of the advantages of these consensus systems is that they can review a great deal to us about the societies they serve. We can say in a certain sense that the work or the job, the anthropological function of these consensus systems is to help the society figure out what it is. So that one of the things that happens in these stories is that-- and here I'm borrowing directly on Raymond Williams-- we can think of a consensus narrative as a discourse space, as a space for conversation, right?

Thinking of also remembering that genre, in one way or another, could be thought to carry some sub-category or some sub-element of the larger consensus. So masculinity and warrior behavior, and certain forms of honor and courage are dramatized in war movies and Westerns. But certain aspects of family life and of the relation between siblings and of the relationship between parents and children are dramatized in forms of melodrama and comedy, right? And detective stories sometimes explore the social and political implications of particular societies more systematically and fully than other forms.

But so take it all together. The different genre forms may be said to lay different emphases on the consensus, but they all contribute to the consensus. And one way they contribute is by constantly showing us fissures and disagreements. They don't all tell the same story. What they tend to-- and this helps to explain why movies are often either incoherent or partly contradictory, right?

Movies are not simple, stable, unitary things at all. One reason is they're made by so many people, right? There's no single author. There's a director, a writer, actors. There's an army of subsidiary people who help. Films are profoundly collaborative form. And one of the effects of this is that in some forms, the director's control may be imperfect, and the star may distort the film in some way, or take it-- or in some films, the writer may be so powerful and so imaginative, and the director's relatively weak that a different kind of movie emerges, right? So movies are different in that way.

And then, of course, they're also different because they occur at different moments in time. And those moments-- when they occur in different moments in time, even if they belong to a particular genre, they may be responsive to later problems in the society from ones that differ from the problems that may have been the case 10 years earlier when the genre-- when a

different version of the same genre story would handle the characters or the story in a somewhat different way.

So what we can say, among other things, is there's a tremendous value to the idea, to the recognition that not only is culture always unfinished or always sort of struggling to figure out certain kinds of conflicts and difficulties, but that our consensus narrative systems are also a space that accommodates that kind of disagreement. And one way to conceptualize this is to see that in almost all films, and certainly the whole system, could be said to dramatize or give voice to three different strains or perspectives on society.

One is what might be called a traditional voice. That is to say, these are old-fashioned ideas that are still powerful, but they really belong to an older era. The second kind of voice you hear is what we could call the dominant voice. That is to say, the central values that the majority of the people in the society now believe, right? A little different from traditional voices that are more old-fashioned that are becoming vestigial.

And then on the other side, emergent voices, right? New ideas, new attitudes that are coming through. And you can feel this in every film. You can feel this in every television program. If you look at American television from the 1950s to the 19-- say '90s-- let's say you've restricted yourself to situation comedy. What do you think you would see? You would see a drama in which the American family undergoes profound change. What happens?

Women become more important, patriarchal values become less and less powerful, children become more respected, are treated less like appendages to the family. And by the '80s and '90s, sometimes the children have more dominant roles than the adults and are often even shown to be wiser than their parents. Something that would have been impossible in the early 1950s, a more patriarchal era, when the classic television program about families was called *Father Knows Best*, right? Whereas in later episodes, the father not only knows-- doesn't know best, he knows least. Or sometimes he's completely gone, and it's women who are raising the children, right?

Well, what's going on in that process has to do with the way in which the feminist movement and a reconfiguration of our idea of gender, our ideas of gender and family-- what's happening is the situation comedy is the space in which those problems are being dramatized over time. And if you juxtapose a sitcom from the '50s and a sitcom from the '60s, and a sitcom from the '70s and one from the '80s, you can actually see that drama being enacted in tremendously

powerful ways.

I choose examples from television because I want to choose examples more of you are likely to have your own experience with. But I could offer such instances from the history of movies as well. But almost none of you would have sufficient experience with the movies to understand the examples. So that's why I've chosen examples from television. I hope some of you at least-- well, I know many of you can't, because you didn't grow up on American television either. But some of you at least can get the idea that I'm talking about here.

So the notion that-- so this is a way of explaining, for beyond what the intentions of any particular movie maker or producer would have, it's a way of explaining and clarifying the profound historical and anthropological importance of the movies in American society. And by implication, in other societies as well because the argument applies in different ways to those societies as well. The notion is not that movies are unimportant today. But they occupy a different niche in our consciousness and in our daily lives than they did in the Hollywood era, in the era of the Hollywood studios. OK.

Capra and Hawks can be said to be two characteristic instances, two characteristic examples of really journeyman directors from the studio era. I had intended-- let's put up the other-- I actually had intended and had planned to give you a much more elaborate, sort of brief biographical accounts of each director. But I don't have time to do that. And what I'm putting up instead here are just a list of some of their films.

You can see what a journeyman Hawks was. He made very important screwball comedies. Probably the dominant figure in screwball comedy. Classic Westerns. I've listed some of them there. And he was also be a great director in other genres. He worked-- it was very interesting that he could work across genres in this way. He may be the most diverse of all the classic Hollywood journeyman professional directors because he worked so well across so many categories. There are recurring themes that show up across genre in Howard Hawks' work. And I'll mentioned some of them in a little while when I try to introduce *His Girl Friday*, one of his great screwball comedies.

Capra operated in a slightly more-- a slightly narrower range. But like Hawks, he was an immensely successful, immensely popular director during an era when the studios were essentially operating like gigantic factories in which the studio heads where the primary bosses, and in which each studio, especially the five major studios as well as many of the

smaller ones, were essentially small cities, small factory cities for the manufacture of movies, right?

Not just that they employed dozens, if not hundreds of-- well, they employed hundreds, even thousands of workers of different-- but they employed dozens of writers and dozens of directors, and they had dozens of stars and actors on contract, and they owned great lots. And of course, they had an army of technicians, of grips and best boys and camera people, and post-production people and publicity people, and various other factotums who took care of people. And they probably had a more elaborate encyclopedia of gophers than any other industry in history.

But the point is, in a sense that each studio was a kind of manufacturing hub, was like a great factory, the equivalent of General Motors or Chrysler. But instead of making automobiles or toasters, they were making these things that infiltrate our dreams. A product I think much more powerful, disturbing, and interesting, even than the most remarkable automobile or toaster.

Two other things I should mention about both Capra and Hawks, because they share this quality, and they share it with Hitchcock as well. They began their careers in the silent era. They made a transition to the sound era. Capra was a more successful silent director than Hawks, but both had experience in the silent era. Unlike some directors, were able to make a very successful transition, along-- as Hitchcock also did, and became major directors in the sound era.

The other significant thing to mention about both of them, they both spent time in the Army. They both kicked around. They were not sure they were-- it wasn't as if when they were born they said, I want to be a movie maker. They had all kinds of uncertainty in their lives. They almost fell into movie making.

But there's one thing I think all of you will find interesting. And I love to mention this to my MIT students. Both Capra and Howard Hawks studied engineering. And Capra, in fact, got an engineering degree from the University of Southern California. When he couldn't get work as a mechanical engineer, he began to cast around for other things, and he ended up in the movies.

Howard Hawks didn't graduate, but he studied engineering at Cornell. I think he never graduated from Cornell. But he studied engineering seriously. And I don't think it's an accident that these directors had engineering experience. Because there's an organizational

intelligence, a practical intelligence, even genius that every good director-- not to say great director needs-- that is very well served by an engineering education. So I encourage all of you, when you finish your degrees, to go to Hollywood and become directors. I won't say more about Capra and Hawks now except to say again that they represented a certain sense, the center of what a Hollywood director could represent in the era of the studios, in the era when the movies were the dominant form of entertainment in American society.

I want to say a couple of things about each of the movies that you're seeing tonight, the two different screwball comedies. One by Hawks, one by Capra, each representing a characteristic tone of each director. As I said earlier, you can think of Capra as a slightly more-- as a somewhat more sentimental and optimistic director. If you want a quintessential-- a scene that sort of distills this sentimental populism-- a sentimental populism is a good way of describing much of Capra's work-- there's a scene in *It Happened One Night* that captures this quality in him. You can feel that-- you can feel its optimism and perhaps its fakery. But you want it to be true, even though you know he may be imagining a nicer humanity than actually exists.

There's a scene on a bus in *It Happened One Night*. A good deal of the film or a good part of the film takes place as people are traveling. It's a road film, in a certain way. And there's a scene on a bus, a number of scenes on the bus. But there's one very powerful scene in which all of a sudden, after a certain dialogue occurs, the people on the bus sort of rise up and begin to sort of create a little musical number themselves. Watch how it happens. And it's almost as if these strangers suddenly become members of a musical troupe, and they begin to interact with each other. It's a fantasy of community that has all kinds of sentimental, affectionate assumptions in it that is no doubt an exaggeration, but it tells us something about the sentimental populism that's at the heart of Frank Capra's vision of life.

Let me say quickly a couple of words about each film now. *It Happened One Night* is not the first screwball comedy, but is the film that established screwball comedy as a dominant genre. There are films going back probably to 1930, if not earlier, that could be identified as screwball comedies. And there are certainly films-- full screwball comedies that existed before *It Happened One Night*. But the success of *It Happened One Night* nailed the genre, made the genre a popular one.

And I want to mention a couple of production notes that are kind of interesting. One of them is this. Both the stars in *It Happened One Night*, Claudette Colbert and Clark Gable, had had significant careers before they came to make *It Happened One Night*. Gable had been in

movies for over a decade. He'd been in a whole number of films.

But he was a second rate-- a secondary player. And he was a difficult man. He was resisting assignments that he was being-- he was under contract to the MGM Studio, which was the most elaborate and wealthy of all the studios. And the head of MGM, Samuel Goldwyn, was annoyed with Gable, because he was uncooperative. They were sending him scripts he didn't want to do, even though he was under contract to them and theoretically had to do what they told him.

And because he annoyed Goldwyn, Goldwyn decided to discipline him. And the way he disciplined him is we said, all right. I'm assigning you to Frank Capra who works for Columbia Studios. You have to make a film that he's working on. You have no choice. You're under contract to me.

Gable was incredibly angry about this. One of the reasons is Columbia was not a major studio. It was a low-budget studio. Capra was not yet a widely known director, even though he had been directing since the silent era. Gable felt that he was being imposed upon. He was very reluctant and angry about the job.

The star, the female star, Claudette Colbert, was also reluctant to take the job. She had been in-- she was a stage star, and she had been successful on Broadway. But she'd had a checkered career in the movies, some bad luck in the movies. She'd made a film that was panned. She was very reluctant to make any more movies. And when she was asked, she resisted. And she finally agreed only when they doubled her fee. She normally would get \$25,000 for a film. This time she got \$50,000.

But even when she accepted this, she still was reluctant. She said, OK. I will do this, but I have to be free to go to spend Christmas with my friends and family in Palm Beach. The shooting has to stop no-- I will not work late-- longer than December 23. And so they had four very intense weeks of shooting in which they-- in which they did their best to finish the film. And they didn't quite finish it. But Claudette walked off the set and said, I'm done. My contract-- I fulfilled my contract, and she left. Capra hadn't yet filmed the final scene of the film.

When you watch the brilliant final scene of the film, which Capra had to do without his stars because Colbert had walked off the set, you will see a magnificent example of what we might call necessity being the mother of invention. Because it's a brilliant, rich scene, but he had to

do it because he didn't have his actress there in order to make the scene. So watch for it when you come to it.

Another point about-- when Colbert left the film, she was said to say to friends, I've just completed-- I've just finished the worst movie of my life. This is a horrible film. Gable was angry about the film, and thought it was a piece of garbage. In the advent, the film was the first film to win Academy Awards in every major category. It won for best film. It won for best actor, best actress, best director, best screenplay. It was the first film to notch all five victories, right? Like, it's better than a hat trick in hockey, right? Like a perfect game for a pitcher, right? The best-- very few films have ever done this.

And it turned every one of the major participants in the film into major Hollywood players. After this film, Gable became what-- came to be known as the King of Hollywood. And for a decade and a half, he was the top-grossing actor in Hollywood. And all of his great work follows after this film. He was in a series of classic Hollywood films to the very end of his life in his last film with Marilyn Monroe. Anyone know what it-- written by Arthur Miller? A film called *The Misfits*, his very last film. He was dying when he was making that film. It's very moving film. You can see that he's dying of cancer in the film if you look closely. But he had a magnificent career. He was one of the characteristic, central, iconic actors of the studio era. And this is the film that made him.

There's a moment in the film when you see Gable and Colbert discussing-- they're forced to share a motel room, and this is very risqué in the 1930s. Man and woman together, unmarried in the same room. And in fact, they have separate beds, but it's a very small room. And she's nervous about it. And one of the things he does is he puts up a line across the room of, like, a clothesline, throws a blanket over it, and he says, OK. We'll stay on either side of the wall of Jericho. And you'll see how the wall of Jericho works out in the final scene when it comes down.

And there are moments where you could see the Colbert character very nervous about the fact that she's alone with a strange man in a motel room, and she's at his mercy, in some sense. And there is a kind of [INAUDIBLE] about this. And there's a moment where we see them getting ready for bed. Gable takes off his shirt, and he's not wearing an undershirt. He's only wearing an outer shirt. And it is said-- it has been said so often I can't resist mentioning this to you, even though I can't confirm it absolutely. But it's mentioned so often in the scholarship that I want it to be true. It is said that the sales of undershirts in the United States

plummeted after it was discovered that this actor wasn't wearing an undershirt. (GRUFF VOICE) Because that's what men do, OK?

But there is a larger context for the film. The film takes place during the Depression. And even though it's a comic film about two apparently mismatched creatures who will come together in the end-- can you guess from the scene in *Ball of Fire* what's going to happen to Gary Cooper and that sexy woman by the end of the film? Of course you know, don't you?

Why do you know it without ever having seen the film? Because that's what comedy does, right? The conventions of comedy do that. And part of the pleasure in watching that is to say, look how different they are. Look how frightened he is. Look how aggressive she is. How could they ever get together? But of course you know that they will. And part of the pleasure in watching the film is watching them get over those barriers.

Well, the same thing happens, as you'll see, in tonight's film. But the gap between the Gable character and the Colbert character is not just gender male and female. It's also a class difference. She belongs to the upper classes. She has no experience with the outer world at all. She's lived an incredibly protected life. So that when she comes to terms with Gable, she's coming to terms not only with certain inherited forms of class prejudice. She's also overcoming a certain kind of innocence and naivete about her relationship to men, and her relationship maybe even to her own sexuality.

So the film is a bildungsroman. You know that word? Novel about growing up? About this woman who lived a very-- lives a very sheltered life. She's a very spoiled rich girl. And the drama of the film is she becomes, in a certain sense, begins to discover her own real nature, begins to discover something about her own-- about her own character and about her own capacity to judge the outer world. She's very limited and foolish earlier.

The context of the film, then, is a dramatization of this relationship. But the background of the film is the Depression. And as you'll see, this sexual and marital adventure, this comedy of marriage, or eventual marriage, takes place against a backdrop of suffering and unhappiness and misery. And it imparts a resonance and an importance to the film that it wouldn't otherwise have. Because there are scenes in these trailer homes where the Colbert character, completely unused to having to live a life like that of ordinary people, is suddenly forced to confront what such lives are-- what such a life is like, and it's part of her education. So the context of the Depression is important.

A second fundamental thing, as I've already implied by my anecdote about the undershirt, is that the Gable character came to stand for an ideal of American masculinity. In the scene where he is first introduced, he's half drunk. And it's important for you to understand the context here, because it's not exactly celebrating drunkenness. Although it partly is, I mean, he's a man's man, right? We see him get drunk and talk on the telephone to his editor boss, who fires him, right? And he staggers out of the phone booth, and he's talking to his friends, and he says, I'm the king. This is where the word-- where the term the King of Hollywood originates, in the lines that you see in the film.

But it's important for you to understand that part of what's going on here-- it's 1934. Prohibition has just been lifted, right? And what's being dramatized there, it's illegal for him to drink for the first time in whatever it is, a decade. And the film is partly celebrating that, right? So you're not supposed to think of him as some ridiculous roustabout drunkard. You're supposed to recognize that what's partly being dramatized there is the new freedom that has emerged in American society now that Prohibition has been repealed.

And in that scene you can see something-- because his half drunkenness, we do see some of his inhibitions. You can see something of his true nature there. And what you discover is-- and you can see this come out elsewhere in the film too-- something that the Colbert character at first can't recognize. That he has a heart of gold, that he's a decent, admirable person, that he would never treat anyone badly. But he's also very self-reliant, and no one can push them around.

He's a particular kind of-- represents a particular kind of masculine ideal, right? He can't be intimidated, but he'll never mistreat someone. He has a kind of moral compass that guides his behavior, even though it's implicit, right? He's a bit vulgar. He's suspicious of wealth and pretension. The Gable character came to stand for a particular kind of American masculinity that was celebrated over and over again in American movies, a kind of-- a type of the American male.

I've already said that one of the things the film does also is dramatize a romance across social class. And you might want to think about the way in which the-- in almost all comedy, and certainly comedies that involve-- comedies about marriage, comedies about men and women, almost all such comedies involve some notion of barriers of some sort that are placed in the way of the consummation in which the text wants to end, right? And those barriers can take many forms. But one of the most fundamental forms they take over and over again is the

barrier of class. And one of the things that the Colbert character and the Gable character both have to do is get over their prejudices, get over their blind spots about the social classes they have less understanding of.

One of the most moving and powerful aspects of the film, and I think you'll see this really powerfully, is the way in which the audience comes to have an understanding of the characters that exceeds that of the characters. And that there are many moments-- there are many moments in the film in which you will understand how the characters are feeling before they are able to acknowledge it themselves. You can see them falling in love, for example, without them being able to admit it to themselves.

And it's immensely-- think of what an immensely subtle trick that is, to put the viewer in possession of information or knowledge that the characters themselves don't have, and what a rich kind of knowledge and ironic perspective-- a rich kind of irony that generates for the viewing of the film. "A marriage of true minds" is a famous sonnet by Shakespeare that begins, "let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments." The impediments to the marriage of true minds in this film have to do with the characters-- the Colbert character's naivete with the prejudices and self-reliance of the Gable character, with the social realities of the Depression. And these barriers have to be overcome.

But "a marriage of true minds," what could the phrase mean? A marriage of equals, a marriage of people who are not different. The deepest thing I love about this movie, and the reason that I've come-- that I treasure this film, even though there are many old-fashioned qualities in it that make it feel old and distant, in some sense, from contemporary society is its understanding of-- it's the implicit, idealized understanding of marriage.

Because what the film really wants to suggest is not that-- first of all, it suggests that these people are drawn to each other sexually. It's not embarrassed by the fact that they're both physically beautiful people and that they feel attraction for each other that they can't themselves fully acknowledge or deal with. But the second kind of attraction they have is a mental attraction. They realize that they're both deeply intelligent people, that they're both people who are deeply verbal, that they both have improvisatory powers, intellectual powers, that distinguish them from other people. That they're made for each other, essentially.

There's one scene that shows this. Before they realize it, we realize it. It's a wonderful scene. They're hiding out in a motel. And at a certain point, she's on the run. Her rich father is

searching for her. And the Gable character's a reporter. Says, I'll protect you and help you if you give me your-- if you let me have an exclusive story, because she's such a rich heiress that she's big news. So she agrees, and he's escorting her north, hiding from the people who are searching for her, right?

And at a certain point, they're in a motel. Some private cops knock on the door of the hotel, and they come in, and they're searching for her. And watch what happens. What Gable and the Colbert character do is they immediate-- Gable says, follow my lead. And then when they come in, they begin to play husband and wife having a tremendous quarrel. And you can watch-- you can see that they're improvising it. And you can see they're enjoying it. And you can see how well they play with each other. So in other words, it's a moment in which you can see that it is a marriage of true minds, long before the characters themselves fully recognize how they are meant for each other.

That's a wonderful moment in which their intimacy and their appropriateness for each other is dramatized. It's not only a physical or a sexual thing. It's also an intellectual and a moral and mental thing, a psychological thing. They are-- it will be a marriage of true minds if they can come together.

I want to end-- just finally mention-- I've mentioned the ending already. And I'll just say one more time that, watch how the ending works out. And you'll see a magnificent example of a director dealing with contingencies he could not possibly have anticipated. And it's a wonderful example of a kind of inventiveness. Seems to me, the film ends as well as it could end. And it's better that the actors aren't there. But he certainly-- when this happened, I'm sure that Capra thought it was the end of his film and that he was-- didn't know what he was going to do to try to finish his film without his star actress.

I have to be even briefer about *His Girl Friday*, but I think it's a more straightforward film in some respects. It's a much less sentimental film, and I hope you'll recognize how deeply-- how much more deeply, unsentimental, even cynical, or at least deeply tough minded and suspicious, skeptical Howard Hawks is about all of the operations of the world. Not only about individual human motives, but about all human institutions.

Virtually everyone in *His Girl Friday* is a cynical, self-seeking creep. Even the primary characters, the Ros Russell character and the Cary Grant character have intriguing, manipulative elements in their natures. And you can see especially that the Cary Grant

character is, in some respects, a very nasty piece of work. He does terrible, terrible things to poor Ralph Bellamy, the man that Ros Russell is supposed to marry, her fiance. He plays a sort of straight, sweet, straightforward kind of person, very much in love with his girlfriend, but completely-- how can we put it? But he's a dummy. He's stupid. And even though he's very nice, you don't really like him. You think he's a jerk.

The film makes you mean or nasty, in some sense, because it makes you-- it makes you see things from the perspective of the Cary Grant character. It encourages you to be tough minded and skeptical. And you do come away from the film thinking, oh, gee. I've participated in the humiliation of this poor, decent guy. But anyway, he's deserved it. He's such a stupid mark, right? You can't-- you almost can't help that kind of reaction.

The film is based on what had been a very successful play on Broadway, some generation earlier. And that play was made into a film in 1930 that was quite successful, directed by Lewis Milestone.

But the Hawks film is the classic version of it. And Hawks does one thing that's very important, that changes the original, changes the play in a fundamental way. In the original play, the character played by the Rosalind Russell figure in the movie is a male character. And the great discovery or the great transformation that was wrought in the film by Howard Hawks was his decision to turn that character, a guy named Johnson, from a male Johnson into Hildegard Johnson. Hildy, Johnson, the character played by Rosalind Russell. And as soon as he turned her into a woman, he created his screwball comedy. He created a wonderful kind of antagonist for the Cary Grant character.

I've already indicated to you how many films in different genres Hawks directed. Remember that list I put up there was not a complete list at all. It was a selected list. But it was some of the most important films by each director.

And one of the things that's really interesting about Hawks is that he directs Westerns and screwball comedies and private eye films and war movies, and a range of other lesser, sort of no-genre films as well. And yet in all of them, there are certain throughlines. You can recognize certain recurring themes across these radically different films.

And one of the most fun-- and one of the way-- one the most fundamental impulses in a Hawks film, whether it's a Western or a war movie or a screwball comedy, is an impulse to slow things-- well, not to slow things down exactly, because his dialogue is so rapid-fire. But to

sort of stop the plot, to interrupt the story with a scene of argument. He loves scenes of quarrel. He loves scenes of discussion, of talk. He loves talk. And especially, he loves intelligent people quarreling with each other. And there's never been a director better at eliciting from his actors quick, rapid-fire dialogue.

In fact, he developed a strategy for doing this. He used to sit right next to the camera. He didn't stand behind the camera. He had a cameraman. But he sat right next to the camera, and he had his actors play to him, only sometimes very close to him as they were acting. And if you watch, especially some of the scenes in this film, you will see what astonishingly realistic performances he got from his actors by this strategy.

He even encouraged certain forms of improvisation. He would run through rehearsals first, and then he would encourage, when he began to film, scenes-- he would encourage his actors to improvise and to improvise to his face. And he creates a kind of electric authenticity in his dialogue scenes that has a tremendous authority.

So the character plot I'm talking about is this impulse to slow the plot down or to stop the plot for scenes of argument and conversation. And what constantly happens, whether he's making a Western or a screwball comedy, is his characters stop the action and say, oh, what do you think is going to happen next? If I do this, what will happen then? As if the films begin to generate a kind of meta-commentary about their own nature, right? So they're incredibly talky films, and the dialogue is fundamental to your-- the rapidity of the dialogue is fundamental to your understanding of the characters and to your understanding of the larger film.

So his central scene then is a scene of quarreling intimacy. You feel that they're quarreling, but you also feel that no people could quarrel exactly in this way if they weren't also intimate with each other. And you'll see fully how it works out when you see the film itself.

So finally, I want to say at least a word to remind you how it actually-- although he's tremendously entertaining line by line and scene by scene. And never calls-- such a professional. He never calls attention to his camera. He's a very quiet filmmaker in that sense. A real journeyman, a real professional. He doesn't want you to think about him or his camera. He wants you to think about what you're seeing. There are limits to this strategy, and we'll talk about what the limits are when we look at certain other directors who behave in other ways. But there are also great strengths to this, as you'll see when you watch tonight's film.

And something of his complexity is embedded here. Because what you can find is he creates

scenes of immense comic energy, really generates real laughter. But beneath the laughter, there's a deep layer, a deep substrate of cynicism, of skepticism, about human motives, about the virtue of human institutions, about the capacity of human institutions and individual human beings for corruption and misdirection. There's a kind of deep political and social cynicism in the film that doubles the comedy or complicates or deepens or roughens the comedy, sours the comedy, in a way that makes for a particular kind of complexity.

It's possible to argue, which some critics have, that this film, more than any other that Hawks made, combines laughter and cynicism in unique measures. And I think together, these two films and these two directors can mark at least a certain pole, certain poles in the tradition of Hollywood filmmaking, and especially in the tradition of screwball comedy. You can feel the pull toward a kind of sentimental, affirming impulse in Frank Capra, and the pull toward a kind of cynical, distanced, complex, psychologically deep, politically informed laughter, even mockery in Howard Hawks. And they represent two aspects, two elements, almost poles within the larger story of the Hollywood studio film. Enjoy the films.