

Introduction

THE CULTURAL BIOGRAPHY OF A FILM

THE MUSIC BOX'S SCREENING OF *Casablanca* (1942) in February 2017 was sold out. The five hundred people attending were there to see a special Valentine's Day event, "Sweetheart Sing-Along *Casablanca*," popularly staged for years at this Chicago repertory theater. Unlike other films reissued as sing-along experiences, such as *The Sound of Music* (1965), the interactive dimension did not materialize during the film with audiences performing its musical numbers with its characters. Instead, before *Casablanca* began, attendees crooned vintage love songs like "Let Me Call You Sweetheart," "Moon River," and "As Time Goes By"—the only tune from the film itself—with lyrics posted on the screen and live organ accompaniment by Dennis Scott. After the musical interlude, the host for the evening, Joe Savino, introduced *Casablanca*, identifying it as one of cinema's greatest romances, a perfect fit for this holiday celebration.

At first glance, the Music Box's eventizing of *Casablanca* for Valentine's Day might appear as nothing more than an ephemeral screening featuring a famous old movie with a live-performance twist to lure contemporary audiences. But the event points to a routine aspect of filmic existence that, despite its ubiquity, remains underexplored in film and media studies: numerous films are screened after their theatrical premieres in diverse exhibition forums, potentially achieving an extensive historical life that far surpasses their moments of origin. Typically, film history concentrates on the synchronic moments of a film's existence as they define its original production and exhibition. Its diachronic reappearances, if mentioned in such accounts, tend to be treated as epilogues to the main story of origins or, when its textual longevity is especially pronounced, as evidence of its greatness—that it has stood the test of time because of its stellar features.

In this book, I want to think more precisely and robustly about the factors involved in a film's diachronic journey, particularly how they change our understanding of a film's relationship to history, meaning, aesthetics, and the notion of endurance itself. To do so, I will examine postpremiere modes of film exhibition across media that present rereleased films to the public, thereby grounding and informing their history of circulation. Glossing Igor Kopytoff's work on the cultural biography of things, I will investigate a film's biography, its "career" of dissemination in exhibition venues that mark the periods of its life or lifecycle.¹ Rather than appraising a film's internal elements as responsible for its lasting transit through time, I argue that endurance relies on its construction by social and historical entities that endow it with meaning and continually adjust its aesthetic and cultural standing. By studying the diachronic flow of movies over different exhibition channels, I hope to expose the changing industrial, technological, aesthetic, and cultural forces involved in a film's biography, raising questions about how these forces contribute to its shifting value and how, ultimately, their impact defines cinema itself as an enduring medium.

After a film's premiere, what role do developments in film and media industries, new media, and exhibition play in sustaining its visibility in the public eye decades after its first splash? How do so-called ancillary exhibition markets for films—television, repertory theaters, video—repackage them for new audiences, affecting their presentation, meaning, and value? Addressing different exhibition contexts over time also inspires exploration of film aesthetics and of cinema more generally. How does a film's journey, in which it must mutate to suit the specifications of diverse exhibition venues as a very condition of its endurance, affect our concept of the text? What can an exhibition history that recognizes the essential contributions other media make to a film's circulation tell us about cinema's presumed specificity and autonomy as a medium? How does the phenomenon of longevity illuminate the object we study as film?

To pursue these questions, I turn to *Casablanca*, produced by Warner Bros., directed by Michael Curtiz, and starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. In a US context, *Casablanca* belongs to a species of classical-era Hollywood films—films produced by studios roughly between 1917 and 1960—that have enjoyed a particularly sustained and visible public presence since their theatrical debuts. I refer to such films as *popular immortals*, known in the trade as "evergreens" or "perennials." Hollywood regularly resurrects these films because they have reliable "extended revenue streams" and continued audience appeal over the course of their histories, a fate that

distinguishes them as exceptionally, even excessively, available in comparison to films with more modest distribution.² Other vintage popular immortals include *King Kong* (1933), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Citizen Kane* (1941), *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), and, on the classical era's temporal fringes, *The Sound of Music*.³

Although there is no single formula for achieving popular immortality, this standing depends not only on patterns of bountiful rerelease but also on extensive recognition across several fronts. These films have earned, among generations of viewers, critical regard as classics, mainstream cult adoration, and otherwise widespread fame as legendary works. Vintage popular immortals thus esteemed have amalgamated identities as classic and cult, a complicated disposition that has given them remarkable commercial viability and cultural staying power. As fixtures of the cinematic lexicon for decades, such texts provide the opportunity to investigate a film's afterlife and the intricacies of textual longevity. These films are also ideally positioned, as long-term survivors in the mediascape, to invite analysis of how meaning, value, and canonical status are generated for texts as they travel across media and historical epochs, lending volatility to what is often presumed to be their inherent value.

While other vintage popular immortals will come into play in this study, my focus on *Casablanca* is inspired by its reputation as a premiere Hollywood cult film and crowd-pleasing, quintessential classic of the studio era, so quintessential, in fact, that it is regarded as an embodiment of cinema itself. With this broader resonance, it offers an exemplary case for investigating both the complex identities a film may accrue through exhibition across time and the phenomenon of endurance as it applies not only to films but also to cinema as a medium. Through my preference for the sobriquet *popular immortals* over other existing labels, I want to emphasize the critical importance of studying what this phenomenon means to individual films and the medium alike. Readers should note that this book is not a celebration of *Casablanca's* immortality but an exploration of the industrial, cultural, and historical terms by which it has attained this status, a very different undertaking.

Because *Casablanca's* biography is so extensive, parameters for my study are necessary. I will concentrate on its rerelease in commercial, mass media exhibition venues in the United States, specifically on broadcasting, theatrical, and video platforms.⁴ Although outside my project's scope, I mention other facets of its circulation, including an array of spun-off materials that range from ads, production stills, and soundtrack albums to variations produced by live stage performances, remakes, and parodies.⁵ Furthermore, since

my book centers on *Casablanca*'s national mass-mediatised exhibition, it does not examine the history of its interpretation in academe or its global distribution and reception, both areas deserving of their own studies.⁶

As we will see, *Casablanca*'s trajectory in exhibition has its own specificity, yet it also reveals modes of recycling that have more generally defined classical-era films' travel through time. Numerous films from this era have been, like *Casablanca*, adapted into radio dramas, reissued in theaters, rerun on television, and editioned via different video formats during their exhibition histories. The story of a popular immortal's circulation is, then, a blend of the unique and the general—a special case within normative practices that provides an optic on the exhibition histories of fellow classical-era films that have publicly survived monumental technological, industrial, and cultural changes.⁷

High points that distinguish *Casablanca*'s particular route toward popular immortality include the visibility afforded it by its Academy Award for the Best Picture of 1943, ascension into the cult ranks through Bogart's stardom in and beyond the 1950s, frequent replay in postwar repertory houses and on broadcast TV, rechristening in the video era as both a Valentine's Day cult film and a classic, and its ranking as one of the best films ever made by major industry organs like the American Film Institute (AFI) in the 1990s and 2000s. Throughout the film's life, mass audiences, cinephiles, cultists, scholars, critics, and industry bodies have embraced it, giving it a mix of official and mass-cultural recognition that has allowed it to flourish during its eighty years of existence. As will become clear, Bogart's stardom looms large over much of *Casablanca*'s reception, far outstripping the attention received by accomplished costars like Bergman.

To approach *Casablanca*'s historical circulation, I engage several areas of study in media theory, criticism, and history as particularly central to my research: medium specificity, especially its link to "death" of cinema arguments; exhibition and platform studies; adaptation studies; and the canon, including classic and cult canons. Since I see these areas as interrelated and mutually informing, I am interested in challenging and pushing each beyond its current formulation to uncover the conceptual infrastructure necessary for writing a film's cultural biography. Individual chapters will reveal that investigating this biography as it is shaped by film exhibition across media platforms also involves radio and sound studies, film studies, television studies, video studies, and digital and new media studies—a convergence of fields essential to examining the convergence of media defining film circulation.⁸ Throughout, issues of gender and race figure prominently in my understand-

ing of how a film from the 1940s became meaningful within a succession of new social circumstances surrounding its exhibition.

APPROACHES

Medium Specificity

For years, scholarly publications, newspaper articles, and film industry sources have debated the state of cinema in the digital era. For some, the digital revolution, as it altered film production and postproduction from celluloid and analog image and sound to computer-generated codes and files, has thrown cinema's continuing existence into question. Additional concerns, such as the shift in studio productions from adult-oriented quality dramas to the 2000s' CGI-heavy comic book franchises and economically driven "sequelitis," as well as the decentralizing of moviegoing from the dedicated movie theater to multiple smaller screens in the home, have fueled this anxiety. More recently, theater closings due to the pandemic and the success of streaming as an alternative delivery system for movies have elicited numerous meditations on the end of cinema—a concern amplified by WarnerMedia's announcement that it would release its 2021 slate of films simultaneously in theaters and on its streaming service, HBO Max. These and other anxieties about cinema's future as a medium and as an experience have permeated popular culture and informed debates in the field.⁹

I consider these expressions of disquiet as part of cyclical panics about cinema's future, fueled by the threat that changing paradigms of the film business, filmmaking, and moviegoing, elicited by industrial shifts and new technologies and media, represent to prized notions of the cinematic arts. These notions are rooted in a sense of cinematic essentialism based on assumptions about the centrality of celluloid and motion picture theaters to cinema's identity. By contrast, like others questioning this premise, I regard technological and other changes as having always been a part of cinema's basic existential state and history as a medium, seeing arguments about its impending doom as overdrawn. As Caetlin Benson-Allott writes, claims about cinema's "ontological stability [are] historically indefensible" and ignore "the history of cinema's collusion with allegedly competing media."¹⁰ Relatedly, I conceive of cinema's endurance as a medium and a body of films as arising not despite but because of the appearance of new media and the forms of exhibition they represent.¹¹

My research historicizes cinema's interrelation with new media to argue that the former has been subject to different kinds of remediation during its history and that such relationships constitute what we understand and experience as cinema—the TV rerun, the video version. Since the exhibition platforms involved in a film's reappearance usually require its conversion into a new format suitable for display, film rereleases embody this process of remediation. Old media are not displaced by new media but are altered in their physicality, function, and status.¹² When placed in historical flow, cinema's accommodation of change, here encapsulated by the rerelease, appears as fundamental to its continuation.

Lisa Gitelman offers a theory of media history that defines media as more flexible and capacious in their definitions and, hence, as less vulnerable to demise in the face of technological, industrial, and cultural developments. She argues that media history charts not only a procession of emergent technologies but also the shifting “structures of communication” and “associated protocols” that surround media enveloped in change. Rooted in “social, economic, and material relationships,” these protocols involve clusters of norms and standards that inform the identity, dissemination, and use of specific media over time; as such, protocols are not somehow extraneous to the medium but integral to it and to understanding its history.¹³ In fact, mediums continue to flourish precisely because they adapt to profound technological and other shifts that remake the terms of their cultural presence and usage. Enormous differences define cinematic protocols involved in, say, going to a movie theater in 1940 or streaming movies in 2020, but both venues offer feature films and are critical to grasping what constitutes cinema at given moments during its history. The medium of cinema thus encompasses methods of delivery, presentation, and reception.¹⁴

For more than a century of its history, cinema's complex journey from kinetoscopes to iPhones has involved radical transformations in its materiality as a medium, the film industry, relationships to new media, modes and sites of exhibition, rituals of moviegoing, film cultures, and sociohistorical contexts. Yet cinema, like music and television, remains identifiable as a medium of expression and consumption, while gatekeeping organizations like film festivals, awards organizations, and streaming companies maintain distinctions among mediums as a basic part of their operations. Modifications inevitably govern a medium's continuity through time, making its adaptability to new media climates a prime feature of its historicity.

Rather than conceiving of cinema as a discrete medium defined by films with tidy borders, then, my book regards film as essentially protean and generative—easily “unbound” and remixed by the media involved in circulation. Understanding the specificity of these remixes, I contend, is central to understanding cinema itself as a historically mobile medium. Once cinema is understood as fluid and versatile, new developments, including digital media, appear less as ruptures in its history and more as significant chapters in a lengthy narrative of its associations with media technologies and exhibition platforms. Cinema is thus not “broken” by challenges from other media; rather, it enters into a mutually transformative and sustaining association with them, the exact coordinates of which require study. As we will see, the interventions of other media have not only refashioned films; they have also historically enhanced the medium’s vitality and popularity, furnishing increased access to it and expanding its influence.

Ultimately, in a paradox worth exploring, cinematic immortality does not signify immutability; it consists in change through the interventions of other media crucial to sustaining films over considerable expanses of time. Reckoning with enduring films through this lens invites us to examine the notion of the essential cinematic versus remediating cinema, the stability versus the instability of the film text, and the primacy of first-run motion picture theaters versus postpremiere venues. We must also consider the kind of film history and aesthetics best suited to studying cinema’s emphatic diachrony—the movement of films through time and space.

Since exhibition reveals cinema as a mobile and variable medium defined by diverse affiliations with other media through time, film’s postpremiere circulation in what is often called the aftermarket deserves more scrutiny.

Exhibition and Platform Studies

In the 2000s, the “new cinema history,” developed by Richard Maltby et al., defined a movement in scholarship that departs from film history’s more traditional focus on films, film production, and authorship to study film “circulation and consumption” in relation to theaters as sites of “social and cultural exchange.”¹⁵ Researchers define film distribution and exhibition as influential dimensions of film history, central to understanding, in specific social contexts, the medium’s cultural importance and public life, the audience’s experience as moviegoers, and the dynamics of reception. Work in

this vein also examines the importance of nontheatrical settings like art museums and homes to film exhibition.¹⁶

In considering film exhibition as critical to film study, my book has a kinship with new cinema histories. I engage areas of inquiry, however, that have thus far been less developed in this approach. Most exhibition histories regard movie theaters as the epicenters of film presentation and a film's original moments of circulation as the focus of research. If histories move beyond theaters to other exhibition sites, these original moments of public exposure still figure prominently in analysis. By contrast, my work conceives of exhibition as not just a synchronic but also a diachronic affair that exceeds the boundaries of theatrical premieres to spill over into numerous other venues responsible for film circulation over time. As Charles Acland phrases it, "film texts *grow old elsewhere*" through exhibition windows that are "major industry sectors in their own right."¹⁷ This aging process necessarily involves the media aftermarket, the "elsewhere" exhibition zone in which films rematerialize postpremiere in forms as diverse as theatrical reissues, TV reruns, and video editions. A film's durability over time owes to its rerelease via a broad network of media industries, platforms, and screens making up the aftermarket. In fact, titles from any medium that travel historically—a movie, song, TV program, or other expressive form—rely on the aftermarket. Postpremiere circulation is the most influential circuit of continued public visibility, representing a mode of textual existence that surpasses the financial motivations behind a rerelease to shape a title's meaning, aesthetics, and place in the canon. As one sign of this impact, the exhibition practices informing the later circulation of media texts eventually sell many of them as "classics," a category freighted with a mixture of nostalgia and canonicity.

Film scholars have examined the aftermarket as an economic, legal, and technological dimension of the film business rather than as a dynamic historical reality rich in implications for theorizing cinema. When aesthetics enters the discussion, especially in the pre-DVD, pre-HDTV eras, major denizens of the aftermarket like televised movie reruns fare badly with critics. Because rerun films are often interrupted by ads and cut to suit programming slots and censorship requirements, critics judge these versions as "mutilations."¹⁸ Such judgments expose the problems inherent in assessing the aftermarket in traditional aesthetic terms. If we uncouple film history from traditional aesthetics, from decisions about savory and unsavory rereleases, scholarship on the aftermarket can approach issues of value through what I call an *aesthetics of circulation* better equipped to explore the film reissue's

place in the field. This alternative approach identifies the architectures of transformation that refashion films according to the requirements of new exhibition contexts over time. The changes that occur in these contexts are wide-ranging, affecting the film's materiality, narrative, style, genre, meaning, reception, and canonical status.

An aesthetics of circulation, then, questions traditional judgments that distinguish between "good" and "bad" reissues to analyze, instead, how films are resurrected and modified during the course of their lifecycles. In doing so, this concept obliges cinema's deessentialization. That is, a film's afterlife as it materializes in the aftermarket foregrounds the centrality of cinema's relationships to other media as a defining aspect of its existence and endurance. As Acland asserts, rereleases of popular films "initiate a long intermedia life span" that can be "truly gauged only via cross-media scrutiny."¹⁹

Studying a film's afterlife provides the opportunity to analyze the nature of cinema's inherent relationship to other media—the different industrial, aesthetic, and cultural forces affecting its translation into new spaces and times—as well as its more expansive implications for theorizing and historicizing cinema. For instance, the radio adaptations of films that proliferated in the 1930s and 1940s, including several of *Casablanca* in 1943 and 1944, presented truncated sound-only versions of their narratives to listeners. If assessed for fidelity, these versions would fall short. Yet radio accounted for the first "viral" spread of movies in another recorded mass medium, its adaptations appearing in homes well before TV reruns of movies began to circulate in this space. Moreover, radio placed Hollywood films firmly within the vibrant sonic landscapes of the time. In trying to ascertain radio's effects on movies outside of the parameters of fidelity, we can address the impact that its sonic renditions of films had on their material broadcast form and how these renditions resonated with the period's sound cultures. Far from destroying the cinematic object, these new iterations extended its territories and influences.

Once we regard the aftermarket as more than an economic zone or place of aesthetic danger for films, a title's iterations—whether they have the patina of a restoration or the disreputable aura of an awkwardly cut print—emerge as essential parts of its history. Denuded of traditional associations with art and authenticity, an aesthetics of circulation focuses on the expansive worlds of cinema's material existence as a disseminated entity, an existence marked by its incorporation into other venues with their own industrial, technological, and medium-specific standards. By directing attention to the principles

of film circulation and survival, the concept offers the keys to a more robust understanding of film history that takes stock of cinema's intermedia affiliations as part of its fundamental script. Iteration, in the form of successive rereleases, emerges as a vigorous industrial and cultural force that offers insight into cinema's history as an intermedial enterprise.

The persistence of rereleased films across exhibition forums ultimately raises questions about their protean nature and that of cinema itself. Like other media, film is a shifting prospect in its production, distribution, exhibition, and reception. In this sense, the aftermarket is not really a separate sphere from first-run production and exhibition. It is, rather, part of a continuum that marks cinema as iterable and changeable from the start; postpremiere circulation simply makes this state of affairs strikingly visible.²⁰ But the aftermarket is distinct from the film's initial moment of exhibition owing to its historical reach and function; it represents a potentially vast and influential network of iterations responsible for the continued dissemination of movies. As cinema's life support system, it is the only dimension of exhibition capable of sustaining or, conversely, marginalizing a film's claim on public attention over time. Aftermarkets provide the conditions necessary for films to become memorable or to be forgotten, to rise or fall in canonical rank, to find or lose audiences, to persist in or disappear from the mediascape.

To consider cinema's historical circulation in diverse modes of exhibition, I adopt the term *platform*. Nick Montfort and Ian Bogost originally used the term to refer to the technological intricacies of computer systems.²¹ Industry parlance today regards platforms more generally as digital "pipes" that shape content and media experience, from streaming companies that deliver legacy media like film to social media like Meta (née Facebook). Marc Steinberg contends that this more recent expansive application means that *platform* is becoming "a stand-in term for any media or device after the digital shift"; consequently, platforms are seemingly "everywhere." While maintaining the term's association with digital media ecologies, he notes that some use it retroactively to describe past sites of media distribution, such as brick-and-mortar bookstores.²²

Although applying contemporary media terms to the past can be problematic, I want to explore *platform*'s productiveness as a retroactive tool for examining film exhibition. Considering film exhibition venues such as movie theaters and streaming both as platforms allows us to recognize connections between different modes of delivering films to viewers that have materialized over time. This more inclusive sense of exhibition windows as platforms

recontextualizes the motion picture theater as well. By regarding the movie theater as one platform among others rather than the venue most closely identified with cinema, alternate venues, such as the small-screen experiences of film on post-WWII broadcast television or the iPhone today, emerge less as threats and more as dynamic interfaces for the medium, its films, and its audiences. The movie house thus assumes its place in a series of platforms, while cinema materializes as nimbler and less fragile in the face of inevitable industrial, technological, and cultural change.

Furthermore, as Tarleton Gillespie contends, platforms are not simply delivery mechanisms; they also “afford opportunities to communicate, interact, or sell.”²³ Pursuing this observation about the generativity of platforms, I regard those involved in film rereleases like movie theaters, television, and video as industrial nodes of film circulation that, in specific cultural and historical circumstances, deliver and sell films to audiences, negotiate audiences’ relationships to films, elicit larger cultural practices and reactions to reissued movies (from film reviews to film cults), and participate in creating or confirming taste formations and canons. Platforms are sites of active discursive confluence with a broad cultural reach.²⁴

In *Casablanca*’s case, its aftermarket demonstrates that the proliferation of a title across platforms is not solely a contemporary phenomenon. Additionally, the film’s postpremiere circulation shows that it relied absolutely on other media for its continued visibility and that its highly mediated afterlife required textual change and cultural resituating. To fully engage an aesthetics of circulation with respect to these changes, I regard the refashioned films that emerge on media platforms as adaptations.

Adaptation Studies

With its Darwinian drift, the dictionary definition of *adaptation*—“modification of an organism or its parts that makes it more fit for existence under the conditions of its environment”—helps to illuminate the principles governing a film’s transit through time.²⁵ This definition, when reoriented toward texts, suggests that the alterations films undergo in their afterlife to suit new exhibition environments are essential to their survival. Such a general sense of adaptation addresses the historical movement of films by analyzing the mutations they experience over time as key to their continued viability in the mediascape. These mutations, in turn, are central to grasping the aesthetic terms of their circulation.

While neither exhibition nor film reissues—the engine of and forms assumed by these mutations—is customarily seen as related to adaptation, recent developments in the field make their inclusion less surprising. Theorists have recognized media beyond literature as involved in adaptation, the numerous networks of intertextuality generated by a text’s reappearance, and the insufficiency of fidelity-driven comparisons of source and adaptation for addressing these more complex situations, resulting in a stronger commitment to postfidelity approaches.²⁶

To advance such new directions, Simone Murray proposes a “*materializing* of adaptation theory” in her study of book-to-film adaptations. She envisions the text as a material object produced not only by authors but also by “institutions, agents, and material forces,” from book publishers, book fairs, and reviewers to movie producers and screenwriters. All are engaged in a “complex literary economy [that] governs the production and dissemination of books from their earliest phases” while cultivating readers and viewers.²⁷ By considering the text as a material entity operated on by invested parties, adaptation studies challenge the idea of its discrete boundaries and self-enclosed universe. As Murray writes, “Attention to texts and audiences cannot of itself explain how these adaptations come to be available for popular and critical consumption, nor the intricate production circuits through which they move on their way to audiences, nor the mechanisms of elevation in which the adaptation culture industry—and hence adaptation scholars—is fundamentally complicit.”²⁸ Although she emphasizes the sphere of production, I see exhibition—the site of interface between media industries and audiences—as similarly central to conceiving texts as material objects acted on by a circuit of forces.

Exhibition in a film’s afterlife obliges its reissue or rerelease in some form.²⁹ The new version may appear suspect as a textual form in its own right. When considering the reissue as an alternate version of a film, Thomas Elsaesser contends that we must choose between conceiving of the film as a “mutating strange torso”—a volatile foundation destined to be altered—or a fixed original entity marred by “mutilated changelings” or ruined imposters.³⁰ The theory of adaptation that informs my book endorses the former perspective, seeing mutations as essential aspects of a film’s historicity. Pursuing film history over the long haul foregrounds the inherent changeability of the film body, affirming both the textual validity and historical importance of the aftermarket version as an appropriation with substantial effects on a film’s meaning and cultural place. Reissues allow us to grasp the architectures of

transformation necessary for textual survival, in which the text becomes fit for existence on television, in repertory movie theaters, and at other locales. Without addressing the filmic shape-shifting that occurs across platforms, a film's history is incomplete, its intimate place in its audience's lives over time difficult to fathom.

Clearly, reissues have a dominant place in the media business and the pleasures of cultural consumption today. But as Eric Hoyt has shown, they have been important to the film business since its origins, making them historically significant forms of film iteration.³¹ Over time, classical-era Hollywood reissues have found new homes on radio and broadcast TV, repertory houses and other public screening venues, cable and satellite TV, video formats from VHS to 4K Blu-ray, and streaming sites. While the reissue has not been analyzed as a type of adaptation, it echoes other kinds of texts the field has recently addressed. Reissues assume a place among textual extensions in media culture that include traditional adaptations (i.e., book-to-film), remakes, sequels, reboots, and reimaginings, making them part of a larger catalog of textual "redoings." If, as James Naremore contends, "the study of adaptation needs to be joined with the study of recycling, remaking, and every other form of retelling in the age of mechanical reproduction and electronic communication," placing reissues into this mix brings adaptation studies closer to becoming "a general theory of repetition."³² Film reissues—the broadcast version, the video version, and so on—represent a type of remaking that joins other modes of textual iteration in illuminating a mass culture dedicated to the serial repetition and viral travel of its artifacts.

As a form of adaptation, the reissue presents a version of the film that assumes the characteristics of its "host environment," including "the media platforms that it traverses."³³ These versions, as they are recycled through time, are adapted on new platforms that remediate the film and enable its continued viability in mass culture. But, as Gillespie's idea of the generativity of platforms suggests, platform adaptation does not simply mean converting a film physically into a different form according to the requirements of the platform itself. A film's resuscitation through the decades also involves it in new industry practices, including changing exhibition practices, and new intertextual networks that affect its meaning, from film releases that accompany its reentrance into the market to reviews and commentaries.

At the same time, classical-era films in reissue interact with the mores of the new cultural, historical, and ideological contexts in which they find themselves. The reissue of these films means the recycling of their cultural beliefs,

from segregationist Jim Crow tenets to patriarchal and heteronormative depictions of gender and sexuality. Classical cinema's white heterosexual couples, closeted gay performers, and stereotypical roles for people of color thus bring its racial, gender, and sexual prejudices and prohibitions into new eras. Historically, vintage films' adaptation across platforms has entailed the mediation of these ideologies in later social settings, where the old order might be embraced, renegotiated, critically examined, or rejected. Studying these mediations provides insight into the ongoing impact vintage movies have on the increasingly contemporary contexts that supervise their circulation.

Rather than study *Casablanca* as a self-contained authoritative source in this process of platform adaptation, then, I proceed through a postfidelity lens that deploys a broad sense of platforming as influenced by industry forces, intertextual networks, and social mores that have animated the film's formal features in different ways during its historical rerelease. As I will show, the film's journey across platforms demonstrates how environments involved in its circulation materially excorporated it, remaking the meaning of its textual characteristics for new circumstances of exhibition and reception.

An aesthetics of circulation approach examines such changes without short-circuiting their implications through traditional aesthetic judgments. But circulation deeply involves such judgments as intimate parts of a film's afterlife. The kind of insistent reissue popular immortals have received has kept them in the public eye, providing an opportunity for them to become cultural touchstones and to be otherwise evaluated and remembered. While the tastemaking activities of officially sanctioned institutions like the AFI are important, the more ordinary practices of mainstream exhibition platforms also figure significantly into the formation of value for films. Reflecting on a film's historical platforming means recalibrating notions of the canon beyond sanctioned institutions to include industry discourses and popular modes of reception involved in recycling. *Casablanca*'s platforming over time has been indebted to both elite and mass-cultural tastemakers—taste understood, according to Pierre Bourdieu, as produced by cultural practices rather than by inherent properties of the object itself³⁴—that have determined, shifted, and perpetuated the film's value and place in the canon.

The Canon

Casablanca is a clear example of a canonical film. Since its premiere, major institutions have confirmed its peerless virtues through awards and other

accolades. At the 1944 Oscars ceremony, it received eight Academy Award nominations from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), winning Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Screenplay for 1943. In 1989, the Library of Congress selected it as one of the first twenty-five entries in the National Film Registry, an honor recognizing titles deemed aesthetically, culturally, or historically important; its firstness here suggests its preeminence among titles deserving of preservation for US heritage. Additionally, the AFI's 1998 list of the "100 greatest American films of all time" ranked *Casablanca* second, after *Citizen Kane*.³⁵ Along with industry and government stamps of approval, *Casablanca* has received substantial academic and critical attention. Scholars have analyzed it as a model classical Hollywood film and, in the work of Umberto Eco and others, a model of cult cinema.³⁶ In popular culture as well, *Casablanca* has enjoyed a reputation as a classic and a cult film, while viewers have praised it, along with the Bible and William Shakespeare's works, as among the three most quoted sources in everyday life.³⁷ These diverse forms of recognition have contributed to *Casablanca*'s reputation as one of the most notable films in US film history.

Casablanca is, then, associated with at least two major variations of the film canon—classic and cult cinemas. Although I will examine theories of cult cinema as they apply to it in the chapters that follow, these theories are generally open to considering postpremiere forces outside the text as creating cult identity.³⁸ With notable exceptions, those discussing the film as a classic are less amenable to this recognition, seeing its internal features as responsible for its vaunted status.³⁹ Since *Casablanca*'s place in both cult and classic canons is pervasively underwritten by its classic standing, I want to interrogate this term and its implications for my study here.

The terms *classic* and *classical* originally referred to art created during Greek and Roman antiquity. The classical represents an influential period and style devoted to creating formal unity with a regard for tradition; the classic artwork exemplifies these verities. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* bears traces of this terminological ancestry.⁴⁰ The authors use this nomenclature to define a coherent filmmaking aesthetic produced by the Hollywood studio system during its growth and decline from 1917 to 1960. The classical embodies the "distinct aesthetic qualities (elegance, unity, rule-governed craftsmanship)" that characterized Hollywood productions during this period. Films like *Casablanca* observed these aesthetic norms, while manifesting their possibilities for ingenuity.⁴¹ *Classic* here, then, exemplifies a text's contribution to

thriving in-house traditions, a different inflection from its customary association with enduring value.

This association has inspired debates that tend to split into two lines of thought. The first, tethered to traditional ideas of the canon argued for perhaps most pointedly in the 1980s and 1990s by Allan Bloom and Harold Bloom, invests in the qualities of a text as an explanation of its greatness.⁴² Scholars define classics as texts that are formative in the history of the art in question and foundational to fields of study and to cultural literacies. As touchstones in Western and other civilizations, the classic is also a work of genius, a paragon of perfection that contributes to national and international heritages, while communicating a universal truth still relevant to the present.⁴³ Classics thus represent standards of excellence that authorize their place at the top of textual hierarchies and support their endurance over sometimes vast stretches of time. In this sense, classics establish a common aesthetic ground that offers “continuity . . . and the transmission of tradition,”⁴⁴ with the classic’s endurance propelled by transcendent textual qualities that give it timeless relevance. Hans-Georg Gadamer writes, for instance, that the classic is responsible for its own successful trajectory through time. It is “self-significant” and “self-interpretive,” able to raise itself “above the vicissitudes of changing times and changing tastes” through an immediate accessibility indebted to “something enduring . . . independent of all the circumstances of time.”⁴⁵ Universal in its appeal and inherently fecund in its possibilities for interpretation over time, “the classic renews itself continuously to pose as a perpetual contemporary: it is a living entity, open to endless intervention in successive acts of reading and interpretation.”⁴⁶ This kind of aesthetic theory sees the classic’s self-determining and self-renewing powers as able to masterfully navigate historical change.

The attribution of *Casablanca*’s status falls within this first, textcentric position. Its reputation is grounded in the period and style of the classical Hollywood studio system. But its standing as a classic exceeds any neutral or normative place in this system because it is prized as one of the most distinguished films the studios ever produced and one of the greatest films of all time. As I outlined in my preface, and will elaborate in more detail in chapter 5, its stature tends to rest on a number of its features, from its wartime love story and stars to its script and deployment of studio style. On this foundation, *Casablanca* emerges as a classic film that testifies to Hollywood’s brilliant alchemy of business and art, cinema’s capabilities as an expressive form, and American film’s rightful place in the nation’s history and heritage.

Although canons and the classics they embrace change, the potent virtues of a film like *Casablanca* ensure its perpetuation across time.

In the second line of thought, scholars have mounted counterarguments to the textualist view of the classic's value. In one of the most cogent of these, Barbara Herrnstein Smith holds that the classic's self-determination is an aura produced by the terms of its circulation. That is, its privileged identity arises from an extensive history of having been "thoroughly mediated—evaluated as well as interpreted—for us by the very culture and cultural institutions" that have preserved it and shaped our perceptions of it. Hence, an orthodoxy of interpretation and evaluation arising from the cultural reproduction of value penetrates the classic's reception, providing the guise of a stable, enduring canonical identity. In fact, endurance is constituted by "a series of continuous interactions among a variably constituted object, emergent conditions, and mechanisms of cultural selection and transmission." The classic's status as such is indebted, then, to the shifting terms of its continuous circulation, defined by the activities of organizations and people that operate according to certain evaluative standards in historical context.⁴⁷ The more the classic continues to circulate, the more its inclusion in the canon seems preordained, justified, as Howard Becker observes, by "common sense and collective experience," by appeals to what "everyone knows."⁴⁸ The perpetual presence of a classic in the canon can thus become a self-fulfilling prophecy. As Herrnstein Smith notes, "Nothing endures like endurance."⁴⁹

In this book, I pursue the implications of such counterarguments on the classic canon for theorizing *Casablanca's* value, departing from conventional wisdom about the film's reputation, in which its outstanding internal elements and circumstances of original production establish the timeless terms of its later regard and enduring appeal. This emphasis has resulted in a fixed identity for the film, diminishing the role its historical journey has played in generating its value. If we can only render texts "timeless by suppressing their temporality," restoring time to a theory of the classic is necessary to fully explore the historicity of texts labeled as such. This means regarding *classic* as a designation that is "historically constituted . . . by identifiable historical forces and within a specific historical context" rather than as a transcendent, universal artifact "independent of all the circumstances of time."⁵⁰ My priority with respect to this area of research is to investigate how the institutions and practices involved in *Casablanca's* movement in and across exhibition platforms created, altered, and sustained its laureled status. Since the film belongs to the traditional film canon, and traditional canons across the arts

have been associated with the privileging of white male artists, this priority also means rethinking the identity politics that have shaped the classical Hollywood film's place in film canons.⁵¹

As a site that registers the converging forces involved in resurrecting films, exhibition is an area of activity worth studying in this regard. Media industries and exhibition platforms that have curated *Casablanca* for the public since the 1940s are invested for financial reasons in establishing value for their products. But this investment resonates far beyond profit motivations into the cultural sphere, requiring attention to the “conditions under which economic objects circulate in different *regimes of value* in space and time.”⁵² As Erika Balsom contends, the idea that a “strict separation [exists] between the lofty ideals of art and the more earthy concerns of the market is patently false.” While these two spheres are not identical, the “financial valorization of art and the cultural and symbolic valorization of art are inextricably tied together.”⁵³ Furthermore, canonization, as Laura Mayne points out, is itself an “ongoing process of negotiation between notions of commercial and cultural value.”⁵⁴ Exploring aftermarket exhibition illuminates the industrial and cultural factors that treat films as commodities and esteemed objects alike, negotiating their value and meaning across historical periods. Although *Casablanca's* classic standing either explicitly or implicitly informs its appraisals over time, it was not valued in the same manner in the course of its circulation. We will see that exhibition platforms over time defined its meaning, as well as its classic and cult credentials, differently, revealing its reputation and status as historically changeable entities.

A historical perspective on the classic draws attention to what Janet Staiger refers to as the “politics of canons.” Far from being neutral, canons are inflected by the judgments of tastemakers, as well as by ideological agendas that enter into the rituals of selection and its corollary of omission.⁵⁵ As Lisa Dombrowski remarks, this selectivity is enormously influential, determining which films “merit recognition, exhibition, and analysis,” as well as those “chosen for preservation, and restoration,” and a continuing spot in “public consciousness.”⁵⁶ The dynamic of inclusion/exclusion urges us to consider the canon not as a verity—a list of films judged evermore as cinema's best—but as a mobile construction of status influenced by individuals, institutions, and cultural developments. *Casablanca* has long enjoyed visibility as a member of the orthodox canon as determined by the AFI and numerous other organizations. By examining the agents involved in establishing and perpetuating the film's reputation, I will raise questions about the politics of canons that operate in relation to popular

immortals, especially as their inclusion in the canon has excluded other kinds of films from the top ranks, such as those by and for diverse constituencies.

The case of an enduring film from the distant past also invokes a concept that, while further treating the canon as a constructed entity, expressly theorizes the canonizing of older titles: *retrospective cultural consecration*. This term is indebted to Bourdieu's work on cultural consecration, wherein certain objects are given a sacred quality, an "ontological promotion akin to transubstantiation." Bourdieu maintains that aesthetic judgments, in assigning "cultural value to cultural producers and products," consecrate some texts in their original circulation as more "worthy of admiration and respect" than others.⁵⁷ Michael Patrick Allen and Anne E. Lincoln identify retrospective cultural consecration, in which films from the past are validated well after their initial play, as a significant variation of the kind of consecration bestowed on films that enjoy immediate success. Older films, given their datedness, potential failure to suit contemporary aesthetic standards and tastes, and need to compete in an ever-expanding field of media choices, are precariously balanced on the knife's edge of being forgotten. With this in mind, Allen and Lincoln propose that when films are retrospectively consecrated, they possess greater legitimacy than newly consecrated texts because these liabilities have been overcome—the oldies have beaten the odds. Since forgetting is such a powerful option, what is selected and remembered attains special value.⁵⁸ Moreover, such texts benefit from the claims that surround enduring texts. Their special status relies on the common assumption, in dispute here, that "great art is 'what lasts,'" that "only the most legitimate cultural producers and cultural products survive the 'test of time.'"⁵⁹

Allen and Lincoln examine social processes and agents that confer value on old films, especially institutions like AMPAS and the AFI, "recognized for their authority in granting cultural distinction to films." They identify factors that influence retrospective consecration, from professional and critical recognition through awards and honors to popular registers of approval in box office receipts and audience feedback. Such forces act as "reputational entrepreneurs," invested both in validating a field of cultural production like cinema "by identifying [its] most exemplary achievements" and in securing their own enterprises as authoritative sources of value. Bourdieu calls this reciprocal relationship "consecration through contagion."⁶⁰ That is, the activity of creating or endorsing textual value mutually enshrines text, medium, and institution—an activity that we will see at work in the infrastructure defining *Casablanca's* exhibition.

If films achieve retrospective consecration, they often do so in continuity with their original consecration—*Casablanca*'s Academy Awards in top categories began its veneration in this respect. But they may also be belatedly glorified like *Vertigo* (1958), unappreciated when it was first released and then rapturously received on its rerelease in the 1980s. Longevity can spur less felicitous forms of revisionism, wherein films lose their consecrated status or exist in tension with it, as in the case of D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), a film once sanctified through auteurism and then, because of its overt racism, radically revised in its reputation through Black activism and scholarship. These last two films indicate that retrospective cultural consecration is an ongoing phenomenon as a canonizing force, even for films that, like *Casablanca*, were laureled early in their biographies.⁶¹ Once established, a title's consecration must be further developed and rigorously maintained if it is to endure. This fact separates *Casablanca* from some other Academy Award Best Picture winners; for instance, *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937), another Warner Bros. production, does not enjoy a similar public profile. Maintaining value, even if that value is negotiated differently through time, is one of the reputational entrepreneurs' primary tasks and an essential feature of how classic, cult, and otherwise canonized texts survive. A sense of value is both what sells the film and what makes it meaningful to the public.

Consecration is not strictly an elite enterprise, however, but a heterogeneous cultural activity. Multiple canons coexist at any given time, with multiple agents involved in the process. For cinema, numerous parties, including industry organizations, scholars, archivists, festival programmers, newspapers, and fandoms forge canons.⁶² Although I will consider the role of high-profile industry organizations and scholars in value-creation, my book is mainly concerned with lower-profile forces that participate in what I call *banal canonization*. This term does not indicate the insignificance of such forces; to the contrary, it signals their crucial activity in the everyday construction of value. Among other sources, industry trade journals, general circulation newspapers and magazines, TV guides, platform advertising and programming practices, and video special-edition supplements produce discourses that reveal the mass-cultural machinery supporting the routine and prolific dimensions of retrospective consecration.

These four areas—medium specificity, film history and exhibition, adaptation studies, and the film canon—mark the major contours of my inquiry. As I have mentioned and as we will continue to see, *Casablanca*'s biography, as it materializes through exhibition venues over time, cuts across

numerous areas in film and media studies, raising other issues relevant to my inquiry.

ORGANIZATION

In each chapter I analyze an individual exhibition platform in the aftermarket, approaching them in rough chronological order, depending on when *Casablanca* initially appeared in that venue (see also appendix 1). The first three chapters concentrate on the film's earliest forms of postpremiere circulation in the WWII and postwar years (the 1940s through the 1970s), starting with radio adaptations in the early 1940s and then moving to the beginning of theatrical reissues in the late 1940s and TV reruns in the 1950s. Although these platforms' inaugural programming of *Casablanca* occurred between 1943 and 1957, theaters and television continued to show the film well after this period, giving it a decades-long presence in the mediascape on two highly influential platforms. The last two chapters and the epilogue concern *Casablanca*'s voluminous history of exhibition on different video formats from VHS to streaming, bringing its biography into the present. The film was released for the first time on home video in 1972 and has since seen dozens of video editions on VHS, laser disc, DVD, and Blu-ray, the latest, as of this writing, in 2018, the year after it also first appeared on subscription-video-on-demand services (SVOD).

Chapter 1, "Listening to *Casablanca*: Radio Adaptations and Sonic Hollywood," examines how the concept of an aesthetics of circulation operates in practice, a necessary theoretical and critical foundation for the chapters that follow. I discuss the film's multiple adaptations by different radio programs between 1943 and 1944, when broadcast radio, a major storyteller in its own right, was the first ancillary platform to recirculate Hollywood's feature films. Like all film-to-radio adaptations, these shows required substantial textual transformations.⁶³ Radio converted an audiovisual medium into a sound-only medium, while abridging film narratives to fit programming slots. This process condensed *Casablanca*'s story elements, handling what remained through dialogue, sound effects, and music. Radio versions also did not always use performers from the film, making recasting another central component of change. These versions positioned *Casablanca* within a 1940s sound culture that gave its narrative and soundtrack new life, defined the transmedia stardom of its actors, and articulated issues of nationalism,

race, and gender in accord with radio's ideological tendencies. By revealing the intricacies of *Casablanca's* mutation, radio provides a starting point for probing classical Hollywood cinema's reformulation for other media, media markets, and audiences as a constituent part of its social life. Radio did not determine the film's trajectory as a popular immortal but served as the first instance of its influential circulation on and adaptation by an aftermarket platform that kept it in the public eye.

Chapter 2, "Back in Theaters: Postwar Repertory Houses and Cult Cinema," examines the impact of exhibition on reception, with theaters part of a circulatory aesthetic that reshaped films according to where, when, and to whom they were shown. After WWII, conditions in the industry led to the rise of reissues from older catalogs, a development that coincided with the rise of postwar repertory theaters. Repertory movie houses became the center of gravity for the nationwide Bogart cult, a cult formation that deeply affected *Casablanca's* status. My case study—the Brattle Theatre, in Cambridge, Massachusetts—was one of the earliest and most consequential of these. The theater played a significant role in inaugurating and maintaining this cult, screening *Casablanca* and other Bogart films for Harvard University and Radcliffe College students, as well as for other viewers. Programming Bogart films into annual festivals scheduled during final exam periods, the Brattle created a ritual wherein students interacted with *Casablanca*, engaging in cosplay and quoting dialogue. Between the 1960s and 1970s, students saw the film as the apotheosis of Bogart's persona, the best expression of the actor's "cool" masculinity. This aspect of his persona not only appealed to both men and women but also shaped their navigation of turbulent countercultural times. The Brattle's exhibition of *Casablanca* indicates how transformative reception—informed here by programming, theater and other cultic spaces, and surrounding social environments—was to the film's reputation and cultural stakes.

Chapter 3, "Everyday Films: Broadcast Television, Reruns, and Canonizing Old Hollywood," researches post-WWII television as another prolific early venue of recycling for classical Hollywood. My focus here shifts even more explicitly to the issue of programming as an element of platform adaptation that established and circulated the value of classical Hollywood films and negotiated the terms of their consumption. Despite television's reputation as a low-quality site of film exhibition, multiple forces, from TV stations' rerun programming strategies, including film festivals, to television documentaries extolling old Hollywood, were central to creating canonical status and a