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## Post-classical Hollywood

Peter Kramer

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Since the 1980s critical debates within film studies and related disciplines such as cultural studies have increasingly been concerned with the identification, description, explanation, and evaluation of epochal shifts. The proliferation of the prefix 'post' is the most visible sign of this widespread concern with a set of fundamental transformations in the socio-economic organization and forms of cultural expression prevalent in the United States and Western Europe. Post-feminism and postmodernism have featured prominently in discussions of contemporary American cinema (Modleski 1991; Denzin 1991; Corrigan 1991). In recent years 'post-classicism' has emerged as a closely linked third term signalling an epochal shift in Hollywood cinema (Jenkins 1995; Rowe 1995; Neale and Smith, forthcoming). At the most basic level, this critical term is used to mark the end of the classical period in American film history, that is the disintegration or displacement of classical narration and of the studio system as the dominant forms of aesthetic and institutional organization within mainstream American cinema. Post-classicism does not refer to a complete break in American film history; rather the term is meant to highlight the fact that, despite overriding stylistic and institutional continuities, Hollywood has undergone a set of fundamental changes which deserve critical attention. In contrast to the relative aesthetic and institutional homogeneity and stability of classical Hollywood which has been described most authoritatively by

David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson (1985) and Thomas Schatz (1988), the post-classical period is seen to be characterized by differing and frequently changing approaches to the unchanging main objective of the American film industry, which is to make money by telling entertaining stories to paying audiences (Jenkins 1995).

This basic description of post-classicism raises a number of important questions. When does the classical period end and the post-classical era begin? What are the most important stylistic and thematic innovations introduced during the post-classical period? What is their relationship to changes in the organization of the film industry? And why did these changes occur in the first place? By necessity, the concept of post-classicism also gives rise to concerns about the notion of classical Hollywood cinema. What are the characteristic features and the historical boundaries of this dominant mode of film practice? The critical debate about most of these issues is still in its early stages, as the concept of post-classicism is not yet established as an obligatory reference-point in discussions of contemporary American cinema. However, some of these questions about the conceptualization of historical developments in American cinema have been discussed extensively with reference to other periodizing terms, such as 'postmodernism' (Corrigan 1991; Denzin 1991), New Hollywood (Tasker 1996; Schatz 1983, 1993; Hillier 1993; Neale 1976), and,

most generally, the era following the Second World War. In fact, while the 1960s are usually regarded as the decade which saw the rise of the New Hollywood and the beginning of post-classicism, most accounts of these developments explain them with reference to a series of crucial events in the immediate post-war period (between 1946 and 1953) such as the antitrust action against the major Hollywood studios, the decline of cinema attendances, and the rise of television. Furthermore, it was during this same period that the concept of classicism was first introduced into film criticism in a sustained and rigorous fashion. Arguably, the very act of identifying Hollywood classicism already implied a certain historical distance from it, a vantage-point from which classicism could be seen as a stage in the development of American cinema. The first decade after the end of the Second World War, then, provides an appropriate starting-point for a historical investigation of the various attempts which film critics and film scholars have made to conceptualize the history of Hollywood beyond its classical period.

### André Bazin, classicism, and changes in the Hollywood aesthetic

Schatz (1988: 8) and Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson (1985: 3) point to André Bazin as the most important source for the basic assumptions underpinning their respective projects: that the Hollywood aesthetic can be understood as a form of 'classicism', and that this classical film aesthetic is in turn dependent on a particular 'system' of production. Bazin developed this approach to American cinema between 1945 and 1958, in the context of a massive influx of Hollywood films into France and of new trends in European filmmaking, most notably neo-realism (Andrew 1978, chs. 4–7). Bazin's use of the term 'classical' was double-edged. On the one hand, it derived from his enthusiasm for American cinema, which contrasted sharply with the disdain for Hollywood shown by many of his contemporaries amongst established French critics. By labelling Hollywood cinema a 'classical art', he elevated it, setting it up as an artistic practice worthy of serious consideration. On the other hand, right from the start, Bazin rejected the limitations that the rules of classicism imposed on filmmaking, in particular on the more 'realistic' practices that he championed, such as long takes, deep-focus cinematography, and staging

in depth. Both his admiration and his critique of classical Hollywood are brought into sharp focus in an oft-quoted passage from his 1957 essay 'On the *politique des auteurs*': 'Paradoxically, the supporters of the *politique des auteurs* admire the American cinema, where the restrictions of production are heavier than anywhere else. . . . The American cinema is a classical art, but why not then admire in it what is most admirable, i.e. not only the talent of this or that film-maker, but the genius of the system, the richness of its ever-vigorous tradition, and its fertility when it comes into contact with new elements' (Bazin 1985: 257–8).

A closer look at Bazin's writing reveals that the classicism of American cinema provided him with a backdrop against which he could define and promote the qualities of a new kind of realist cinema which was emerging in Europe and in the United States in the 1940s, exemplified most strikingly by *Paisa* (Italy, 1946) and *Citizen Kane* (USA, 1941). 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema' is arguably Bazin's most famous and influential essay, an early version of which appeared in the first issue of *Cahiers du cinéma* in April 1951. In this essay, Bazin proposed a periodization of the history of cinema. Despite the gap between silent cinema and talking film, the years from 1920 to 1939 constituted a unified period characterized by the world-wide diffusion of 'a common form of cinematic language . . . originating largely in the United States' and based on the principles of continuity editing (1967: 28–31). By 1939 this cinema 'had reached a level of classical perfection' in Hollywood and elsewhere, yet it was also on the verge of a 'revolution in the language of the screen' (30, 37). In Hollywood, directors such as Orson Welles and William Wyler participated in the international 'regeneration of realism in storytelling' which insisted on 'bringing together real time, in which things exist, along with the duration of the action, for which classical editing had insidiously substituted mental and abstract time' (39). This would seem to suggest that Hollywood's classicism of the 1930s was superseded, or at least partially displaced, by a new aesthetic in the 1940s, which could be called 'post-classical'.

In the essay 'The Evolution of the Western' Bazin discussed this epochal shift with respect to what he had called 'the American film par excellence' (1971: 140). Again the years 1939–40 marked 'a point beyond which some new development seemed inevitable' because with *Stagecoach* (USA, 1939) the western had achieved 'the maturity of a style brought to classi-

In effect, Bazin again presented the outlines of a 'post-classical' American cinema which is described as an impure, less rigorous, highly flexible cinema, characterized by the coexistence of contradictory aesthetic strategies (classical editing, expressionism, realism) rather than a strict and exclusive adherence to the continuity system; by the extension, embellishment, playfulness, and mixing of its genres rather than by generic purity; and by an engagement with topical issues and controversial subject-matter even in its most conventional generic offerings.

cal perfection' (149). Referring to 'the famous law of successive aesthetic periods', which posits the inevitable displacement of classicism by 'the baroque', Bazin observed the emergence of a new kind of western in the 1940s: 'The superwestern is a western that would be ashamed to be just itself, and looks for some additional interest to justify its existence—an aesthetic, sociological, moral, psychological, political, or erotic interest' (150–1). In effect, Bazin again presented the outlines of a 'post-classical' American cinema which is described as an impure, less rigorous, highly flexible cinema, characterized by the coexistence of contradictory aesthetic strategies (classical editing, expressionism, realism) rather than a strict and exclusive adherence to the continuity system; by the extension, embellishment, playfulness, and mixing of its genres rather than by generic purity; and by an engagement with topical issues and controversial subject-matter even in its most conventional generic offerings.

### American critical responses to post-war changes in the Hollywood aesthetic and the end of the studio system

Bazin explained changes in the Hollywood aesthetic in the 1940s and 1950s in terms of an internal logic of

artistic developments inevitably moving through a series of stages. In his teleological view, the result of such developments in the medium of film was an ever more realistic representation of the world. When American critics considered changes in Hollywood filmmaking in the post-war period, they also addressed questions of realism, yet they were more likely to focus these questions on the issue of Hollywood's 'maturity' or lack thereof, and to draw on a wide range of social, cultural, and industrial determinants to explain the complex developments they observed. While the terms 'classical cinema' and 'studio system' were not used, what critics engaged with was in fact the dismantling of the system of production, distribution, and exhibition and of the classical aesthetic which had underpinned Hollywood's operations in preceding decades. In sharp contrast with Bazin's belief in the 'genius' of the Hollywood system, American critics took a largely negative view of American film culture, and responded to its fundamental transformation in the late 1940s and the 1950s with more scepticism than hope.

In the aftermath of the Second World War critics looked for signs of Hollywood's social and artistic maturation. In his bi-weekly column in *The Nation*, James Agee identified and welcomed an important trend towards 'journalistic, semi-documentary, and "social-minded"' films in Hollywood in 1946 and 1947 (1963: 289). Celebrating *The Best Years of our Lives* (USA, 1946) as an outstanding example of this trend, Agee related Hollywood's 'new maturity' to the war experiences of filmmakers such as Wyler and John Huston (237). He also noted the increasing influence of European imports, most notably *Roma, città aperta* (Italy, 1945), which exemplified 'the best general direction movies might take' with its passionate commitment to, and intimate understanding of, a topical and realistic story 'worthy of such knowledge and passion . . . made on relatively little money, as much at least by gifted amateurs as by professionals, in actual rather than imitated places' (236). In 1949 Parker Tyler discussed Hollywood's move, particularly in crime films such as *The Naked City* (USA, 1948), towards 'quasi-documentary', that is the employment of 'documentary devices' such as location shooting and references to a wealth of factual material (1949/1960: 29–35). He also pointed out that Hollywood had produced a series of commercially successful 'problem pictures', most notably *Gentleman's Agreement* (USA, 1947) and *Pinky* (USA, 1949), which dealt with 'such large issues as social prejudices against Negroes and Jews' (107).

However, in the light of Hollywood's commercialism and political conservatism, Agee and Tyler did not expect that these mature trends could make a lasting impact on American film culture.

In 1950 Gilbert Seldes linked the issue of Hollywood's continuing immaturity to the decline of cinema attendances in his comprehensive analysis of mass media in post-war America, *The Great Audience*. Unlike other American critics, Seldes did not object to the profit motive guiding the operations of the film and broadcast industries, but he argued that instead of 'creating genuinely democratic entertainment', they catered only 'to a sizable minority which they pretend is the mass of the people' (1950: 6). Making use of audience statistics, Seldes demonstrated not only that cinema attendance had been declining dramatically since 1946, but also that this decline reinforced Hollywood's tendency to cater primarily to young audiences, most notably adolescents. By the late 1940s it was clear that people over 30 largely stopped going to the cinema, while people in their twenties went regularly but infrequently, so that '[t]he movies live on children from the ages of ten to nineteen, who go steadily and frequently and almost automatically to the pictures' (12). Seldes argued that in the context of recent developments such as the end of block-booking, the divorce of the major producer-distributors from their theatre chains, the temporary closing-off of important foreign markets, and the competition provided by the free domestic entertainment of television, 'the recapture of the adult audience will be an absolute necessity for survival' (22). Unlike European films, however, Hollywood's output had concentrated on 'a small group of myths' concerning heroism, passion, and success that were appropriate for adolescents, especially during courtship, but lost their relevance and appeal when these young people started their working lives, married, and set up their own households (22–4). Seldes urged the film industry to bring its products more in line with mature audiences' everyday experiences by ensuring that story-lines were 'logical', situations and actions 'credible', characters individualized, and their motivations 'understandable' (37).

Seldes warned against a misconception of 'mature' filmmaking which was shared by 'both Hollywood producers and intellectual critics': 'Maturity does not necessarily imply either a tragic sense of life or an excessive sophistication' (36). With reference to the socially conscious films discussed by Agee and Tyler, Seldes demonstrated that Hollywood was able to pro-

duce mature films which were entertaining and commercially successful. He expected that the newly fragmented theatrical market and the growing ability of television to deliver 'routine' entertainment free of charge would encourage studios to reduce their output and concentrate on 'making fewer pictures for longer runs', 'attracting fresh audiences' to the movie theatres rather than merely catering for the regulars (41–2). Seldes hoped that studios would take their cue from the rapidly increasing number of so-called 'art theatres', which provided further evidence that there was an audience for mature films (42). The growing number of 'independent producing companies' set up by 'men of talent [who] wished to produce movies without interference from the front office' were particularly suited to deliver such films (48). Despite these possibilities, Seldes's analysis of post-war Hollywood ended on a cautious note. Political pressures, best exemplified by the Hollywood hearings of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, in combination with the rigid Production Code regulating the content of Hollywood's output, prevented studios from producing films which dealt with the realities of contemporary life. In conclusion, Seldes reiterated the social relevance of Hollywood's influence on 'popular emotion' in a 'postwar world [which] has not yet built its foundations' (102).

The remainder of the decade saw a reorientation of critical debates about Hollywood, away from the sense of urgency and the position of high-minded seriousness exemplified by Seldes's study and towards an acknowledgement of the very limited role moviegoing was going to play in American life from then on. With films being ever more explicitly addressed to minority interests rather than to the American public as a whole, the cinema lost its centrality in debates about mass media and American society. Questions of Hollywood's maturity or lack thereof were now discussed with specific reference to the two groups singled out by critics as the most influential target audiences for the post-war film industry—educated people and male youth. Hollywood's attempts to cater to these audiences were received with considerable criticism.

In 1952 Manny Farber launched a sustained critique of the pretensions of the film industry's current output, highlighting in particular its foregrounding of style and message ('overacting, overscoring, overlighting, overmoralizing') and its emphasis on the specialness and artistic merit of individual films (1971: 54–7). Farber contrasted 'smartly tooled art works' such as *Sunset*

*Boulevard* (USA, 1950) with 'the unspectacular, unpolished "B" (movies)' which 'capture the unworked-over immediacy of life before it has been cooled by "Art"' (55). Drawing on the thematic concerns and stylistic richness of sophisticated and 'highbrow' works in the American cinema (such as *Citizen Kane*) and, more importantly, in other arts, a number of post-war films departed from the basic objectives of traditional Hollywood filmmaking, which were 'to present some intelligible, structured image of reality . . . to tell a story and to entertain' (72). Instead they presented themselves as symbolic acts of communication between 'a brave, intransigent artist' and a discerning audience, in which story, character, and the reproduction of the sounds and images of reality merely served as vehicles for 'hidden content', and film viewing turned into an act of interpretation (73–5). Farber linked the rise of this kind of 'New Movie' to the emergence of a new generation of filmmakers, such as Elia Kazan (director of *Gentleman's Agreement* and *Pinky*), who had been shaped by the political activism of the Depression years and by their 'higher . . . education' in the New York theatre (82).

By 1957 Farber had broadened his attack by situating a second wave of artistically minded and socially conscious writers and directors, most of whom had previously worked in live television drama and who started to make an impact on the film industry with the release of *Marty* (USA, 1955), in the context of a 'revolution' in American arts (1971: 113–24). In the cinema, music, painting, and literature, Farber saw 'the whole idea of "felt", committed art' under attack from an intellectualized, heavily rhetorical, and excessively technical approach to creative production 'known as advanced, radical, experimental, progressive, or, simply, avant-garde art' (113). The films arising from this movement were characterized by the foregrounding of meaningful detail and a despairing mood, by staginess, unsympathetic characterization, and 'masochistic acting, which is usually in the hands of Strasberg-influenced performers' (118). Farber rejected these films as exercises in self-promotion for their makers appealing to the snobbishness of their educated audiences, and again contrasted the new 'hard-sell cinema' with the transparency of traditional Hollywood entertainment: 'it differs from old-fashioned Hollywood direction in that the style parades in front of the film instead of tunneling under a seminauralistic surface' (120). Farber argued that the 'male action film', which best exemplified the virtues of tradi-

tional Hollywood entertainment, was rapidly disappearing: 'the action directors are in decline, many of them having abandoned the dry, economic, life-worn movie style that made their observations of the American he-man so rewarding' (12). Directors such as Howard Hawks had flourished in 'a factory of unpretentious picture-making', that is a production system geared towards 'continuous flow of quality' rather than 'momentary novelties' (12–14). With the disappearance of this production system and the closing of action-oriented neighbourhood theatres in the 1950s, these filmmakers and their preferred genres such as the western were pushed towards artistic self-consciousness, thematic seriousness, and big-budget spectacle, creating what Bazin had called the 'super-western'.

At the same time, Hollywood abandoned the traditional image of the American male as mature, active, efficient, graceful, and stoic, and instead concentrated on a new type of masculinity, represented by Montgomery Clift, Marlon Brando, and James Dean. Writing in the mid-1950s, both Parker Tyler (1960: 127–8) and Pauline Kael (1966b: 44–62) linked the rise of these new male stars to a generational shift in post-war American culture. Dissatisfied with the political and material achievements of the parent generation, young people, who clearly dominated the cinema audience in the 1950s, began to question traditional values and lifestyles and through their actions gave rise to 'the social problem of juvenile delinquency', which was quickly taken up by Hollywood, with Brando and Dean being 'selected to illustrate the neurotic types that make up rebellion in the young' (Tyler 1960: 127). In sharp contrast to traditional images of masculinity, Tyler described these stars as 'naturally infantile types', intuitive, undisciplined, and heavily reliant on their 'babyish' good looks (128). Kael noted their ability to provoke 'violent audience reactions' in movie theatres and described the new character type as 'a complete negation of previous conceptions of heroism: the hero is not responsible for his actions—the crazy, mixed-up kid becomes a romantic hero by being treated on an infantile level' (1966b: 57, 60).

While Hollywood's new heroes were targeted specifically at a young male audience, and its artistic 'New Movies' appealed primarily to educated audiences, the film industry also continued to pursue an undifferentiated mass audience with big-budget widescreen spectacles. These films attempted to redefine and revitalize the cinematic experience itself by turning it

into an innovative and unique technological and cultural event for a mass audience which had grown out of the moviegoing habit and had transferred its habitual consumption of audiovisual entertainment to television. Reviewing a wide range of widescreen and 3-D processes (typically supported by stereophonic sound and colour), Tyler argued in 1953 that the film industry was effectively relaunching the cinema itself by foregrounding its technological basis and its ability to transform the audience's experience of themselves and their surroundings: 'Television is centripetal in relation to its spectator, drawing the world into his domestic space, while 3-D movies are centrifugal in relation to their spectator's axis, drawing him out, collectively, into the world's space' (1960: 121).

In his second study of mass media in post-war America, Gilbert Seldes described the widescreen revolution in equally epochal terms, referring to the temptation 'to write a second obituary for the movies' in 1952–3, so as to register the death of a certain kind of 'flat' cinema in the same way that twenty-five years earlier 'silent' cinema had died with the coming of sound (1956: 17). Seldes was considerably more optimistic than in his earlier book about the possibility that American cinema might be revitalized: 'we have the exciting prospect of experiencing, for the third time in our lives, a new art of the movies' (60). This new art would combine the power of widescreen technologies to envelop, overwhelm, astonish, and unsettle the cinema audience with Hollywood's traditional storylines and characterization and its careful guiding of viewer attention through shot composition and continuity editing. In contrast to his earlier condemnation of Hollywood's immaturity, Seldes now argued that, despite the cinema's 'appeal to our most infantile desires' and its avoidance of 'the realities of existence', the formal and stylistic rigour and elegance of filmic storytelling constituted 'a separate gratification, as legitimate in its essence as that of any other art' (13). Seldes was willing to accept the mythical structure of Hollywood movies precisely because movies had been displaced from the centre of American culture by television's provision of entertainment as 'a free and continuous and integrated part of the daily home life of an entire nation' (1).

Also writing in 1956, Pauline Kael judged Hollywood's increasing reliance on 'big' pictures much more negatively (1966a). She argued that the inflated budgets, epic length, and wide screens of Hollywood's big pictures allowed them to become a massive 'com-

pendium' of exotic locations, stock situations, realistic details, recognizable characters, and spectacular views that were not fused into a coherent whole but served mainly to celebrate the 'glamour' and 'magic' of 'bloated production methods' and thus of Hollywood's apparently limitless resources (52, 54). Kael predicted that this approach to filmmaking, which displaced the delineation of story events with the attempt to turn the production and release of the film into a major event, would soon lose its appeal and Hollywood would thus again lose favour with the general public: 'Spectacles will cease to be events, and audiences can be more comfortably bored at home' (64).

Building on these critical interventions in the 1950s, the early 1960s saw the appearance of book-length studies offering a broad historical evaluation of the fundamental changes in Hollywood's theatrical market and its production strategies in the immediate post-war period. In 1961 Ezra Goodman announced 'the end of Hollywood' (1961: 438). With television now serving as the primary outlet for audiovisual entertainment, the major studios' traditional concern with the production of films for the theatrical market was no longer economically viable. The major studios sold off their back catalogues of movies to television and their real estate to development companies, they transferred the efficiency and tight control characteristic of traditional studio operations to telefilm production, or they merged with television companies. The studios' reduced output of theatrical films had to compete with 'the good Hollywood movies, mostly those made up to the latish Thirties', which were available to audiences free of charge on the domestic television screen (447). Thus, theatrical production had effectively become an anachronism: 'Today, in the television ice age, the motion picture has already taken on an archaeological tinge' (p. x).

Richard Dyer MacCann saw the future of American cinema more optimistically, as is indicated by the title of his 1962 study *Hollywood in Transition*. MacCann argued that, far from being obsolete, films made for theatrical release had been given 'a new position' (p. x). Liberated from the 'tyranny' of self-censored, studio-controlled, assembly-line-like film production (p. xii), the production of a major theatrical feature had turned into a complex, infinitely variable, and highly volatile enterprise, a time-consuming, labour- and capital-intensive high-risk business venture whose only certainty was 'sudden change' and whose main aim was to create 'a special event' (3, 108). Apart from encour-

aging technological innovation, adaptations of Broadway hits and bestselling novels, and sensationalist films dealing with taboo subject-matter, this new situation also created opportunities for innovative, realistic, and socially conscious filmmaking. MacCann suggested that a new generation of filmmakers might be able to realize this potential, and that an increased emphasis on the preservation, study, and revival of the classics of American cinema, and on the training and promotion of young creative personnel and executives, would provide a good basis for the regeneration of American film culture. The model for such a more 'intellectual' approach to filmmaking could be found in France, where 'thirty or forty new young directors . . . have been fortified by a decade of talk and criticism [and] . . . fed with motion picture history at the film showings of the Cinématèque in Paris', resulting in an explosion of cinematic creativity (64).

Thus, between the late 1940s and early 1960s critics debated the disappearance of many of the certainties of American film culture of preceding decades. The stability and continuity of the studio system, the undifferentiated mass audience, the dominance of traditional storytelling and transparent entertainment, and the centrality of cinema in American life were all things of the past. Critics agreed that in the 1950s American cinema in its traditional form had come to an end, and the widescreen revolution and Hollywood's big pictures had failed to restore the movies to their previous key position in American popular culture. It was not clear what shape Hollywood might take in the future, nor was there a lot of confidence that an improvement on the old studio system could be expected. It was understood, however, that European film culture would have an important influence on the 'new' Hollywood that was eventually going to emerge from this period of transition.

### **New waves, new schools of Anglo-American film criticism, and the New Hollywood**

In the early 1960s it became a critical commonplace to celebrate an artistic renaissance in world cinema, which was said to have begun in 1956 and to include the work of individual directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni and of movements and schools such as the French Nouvelle Vague (Houston 1963: 182–95).

Anglo-American critics tended to agree that Hollywood's contribution to this renaissance was minimal. Hollis Alpert declared in 1960 that in sharp contrast with the traditional 'belief that Americans were pre-eminent in the motion picture field', Hollywood was now 'losing such world-wide respect as it once had' (1960/1971a: 253), and in 1966 Dwight MacDonald stated categorically: 'None of the important postwar schools or directors have been American' (1966/1969: 38). In this critical climate, 'newness' became an important category in discussions of American cinema. At the low-budget and experimental end of American film production, critics engaged with a self-declared 'New American Cinema' exemplified by the work of writers and directors such as Jonas Mekas, Kenneth Anger, and John Cassavetes, certain aspects of which constituted, according to David Bordwell, a conscious 'modernist' break with Hollywood classicism (Houston 1963: 185–8; MacDonald 1966/1969: 39; Bordwell 1989: 54–8). Even at the centre of Hollywood production, a group of former television directors including Sidney Lumet and Arthur Penn, who had been much vilified by Manny Farber in the 1950s, could now be celebrated as a 'new breed', combining 'greater interest in social questions' with stylistic experimentation and improvisation, thus arguably constituting 'America's "new wave"' (Hart 1965; Jenkins 1995: 115).

However, this concern with, and positive evaluation of, newness was not characteristic of the bulk of Hollywood criticism in the 1960s, which concentrated on the systematic critical re-evaluation and close analysis of the work of a small group of Hollywood directors, most of whom had received their training and directed many of their important films during the studio era of the 1930s and 1940s, working mainly in well-established genres such as the western. Following on from Manny Farber's celebration of Hawks and the 'male action film' and from the *politique des auteurs* of *Cahiers du cinéma* with its similar emphasis on Hollywood directors such as Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock, Anglo-American 'auteurist' criticism in the 1960s elevated the films of certain genre directors to the status of art (Bordwell 1989: 42–53; Caughie 1981: 9–67). These critics rejected the self-consciously artistic and socially relevant films of the new generation of theatre- and television-trained directors joining Hollywood in the 1950s, and engaged with contemporary cinema mostly in terms of the latest works of old masters (Gillet 1971; Sarris 1963/1968).

The general critical shift towards a re-evaluation of



the studio era provided the context for one of the earliest uses of the term 'new Hollywood'. In a 1959 *Esquire* article entitled 'Elegy for Wonderland' veteran screenwriter Ben Hecht wrote that while 'the good old Hollywood' in which writers had been used and abused by powerful producers was 'dead', the 'new Hollywood . . . has in a measure solved the writer problem . . . [by] making movies so full of horses, bonfires, collapsing temples, Indian uprisings, wild beasts and uncovered breasts . . . that a writer would actually be in the way' (1971: 356, 362). Unlike his outright condemnation of contemporary Hollywood, Hecht's attitude towards the 'old' Hollywood was a mixture of contempt and nostalgia, a grudging acknowledgement that an industrial system inimical to art could nevertheless produce 'beauty and fine drama': 'The great Hollywood factories were interested only in turning out a standard product for mass consumption. But talent, brought to heel, did speak in this mass product' (363).

In Andrew Sarris's polemical reformulation of these ideas, the very restrictions imposed on directors working in Hollywood studios, especially in the 1930s and 1940s, were a pre-condition for the kind of qualities auteurist critics looked for: 'The auteur theory values the personality of a director precisely because of the barriers to its expression' (1968: 31). The 'modern' cinema of the post-war period, mainly in Europe but also in the United States, tended to elevate the director, giving him more control over the production process, valuing his personal experience and originality, and thus encouraging him to depart from traditional modes of filmic communication and indulge his idiosyncrasies: 'Paradoxically, however, the personalities of modern directors are often more obscure than those of classical directors who were encumbered with all sorts of narrative and dramatic machinery' (32). In Sarris's view, the art of cinema was based on the precarious balance of, on the one hand, commercial imperatives, collaborative work procedures, and stylistic and generic conventions, and, on the other hand, the unique vision and powerful personality of a director, capable of 'a sublimity of expression almost miraculously extracted from his money-oriented environment' (37). Idiosyncratic self-expression was thus kept in check by the overriding objective to tell meaningful and entertaining stories to a mass audience: 'The classical cinema was more functional than the modern cinema. It knew its audience and their expectations' (32).

Although Pauline Kael attacked Sarris and other auteurist critics for what she perceived as their logical

inconsistencies, their 'narcissistic male fantasies', and their critical elevation of 'trash' films to the status of 'true film art' (1966: 319), she shared their concern with coherent storytelling as the basis for successful filmmaking. In her 1964 survey of contemporary filmmaking, she stated that 'processes of structural disintegration are at work in all types of movies', ranging from the experimental works of the New American Cinema and recent art-house favourites such as *Last Year at Marienbad* (France, 1961) to Hollywood's big pictures such as *Cleopatra* (USA, 1963) which included 'incomprehensible sections' or were simply 'incoherent' (1966: 8–9, 14). Echoing Manny Farber's critical outbursts in the 1950s, Kael saw the disintegration of filmic narrative as a symptom of the disintegration of traditional film culture in general. She lamented the rejection of 'craftsmanship as well as meaning' and 'critical standards' in the films and manifestos of the New American Cinema (18–19). Similarly, an emphasis on 'technique', 'purely visual content', and the possibility of open-ended 'elaborate interpretations' meant that '[t]he art-house audience accepts lack of clarity as complexity, accepts clumsiness and confusion as "ambiguity" and as style' (15, 20–1). While experimental filmmaking and art cinema were thus transforming film into an élitist and excessively intellectual cultural form, Kael was equally critical of the experiences facilitated by Hollywood's mainstream releases. The lack of concern for coherent storytelling on the part of producers and directors in charge of the volatile and overblown process of filmmaking was matched by the audience's enthusiastic response to spectacular attractions and shock effects, irrespective of their degree of narrative motivation.

Kael tentatively explained the change in audience expectations with reference to 'modern life and the sense of urgency it produces', which was exemplified by television: 'It's possible that television viewing, with all its breaks and cuts, and the inattention, except for action, and spinning the dial to find some action, is partly responsible for the destruction of narrative sense . . . it may be that audiences don't have much more than a TV span of attention left' (9–10). Kael contrasted this set of expectations with the audience response characteristic of an earlier period (the 'classical cinema' in Sarris's terminology): 'audiences used to have an almost rational passion for getting the story straight . . . A movie had to tell some kind of story that held together: a plot to parse' (9). On the basis of this plot, traditional Hollywood films could develop the simple

qualities that Kael, much like Farber and Sarris, was holding up as the foundation of a truly popular American cinema, now that this cinema largely seemed to have disappeared: 'energy', 'excitement', 'honest vulgarity', 'vitality' (24, 26).

For Kael and other critics, Hollywood's long-awaited renaissance finally occurred when the traditional qualities of American filmmaking were combined with the intellectual sophistication and stylistic innovations of the new directors and new waves of European cinema in films addressing contemporary and specifically American subject-matter. It is clear, both from critical responses at the time and from later retrospective accounts, that the film which most clearly marked the beginning of this renaissance was *Bonnie and Clyde* (USA, 1967). The film was a substantial hit, establishing the commercial viability of a new kind of Hollywood movie, and it was also the subject of enormous critical controversy (Cawelti 1973). In her review Pauline Kael declared *Bonnie and Clyde* to be 'the most excitingly American American movie' in half a decade, making 'a different kind of contact with an American audience from the kind that is made by European films, however contemporary' (1967/1970: 47). Kael argued that the film, which had originally been developed by scriptwriters Robert Benton and David Newman for François Truffaut and had then been offered to Jean-Luc Godard before it was finally directed by Arthur Penn, echoed the enthusiasm of French film critics and film-

makers for 'the poetry of crime in American life' and the 'fast action, laconic speech, plain gestures' of traditional Hollywood entertainment (54). In line with the 'romanticism' of the Hollywood tradition, *Bonnie and Clyde* celebrated 'the cynical tough guy's independence', yet it did so in a 'specifically modern' fashion (47–9). It kept an ironic distance from its protagonists and their story and created 'a kind of eager, nervous imbalance' in the spectators, who oscillated between a serious engagement with the events on the screen and comic distanciation from it (49). The film offered neither a 'secure basis for identification' with the protagonists, nor a clear-cut moral framework for judging their behaviour, and it articulated contemporary concerns, especially with the role of violence in American society, through a 'nostalgia for the thirties' (51, 53).

In December 1967 *Time* magazine officially announced a 'renaissance' in American film culture exemplified by *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967/1971: 333). Echoing many of the critical debates of the 1950s and early 1960s, the magazine's cover story outlined a 'new cinema', which had originated in Europe and which 'Hollywood has at long last become part of' (323). This new cinema was characterized by narrative complexity, the foregrounding of cinematic devices, generic hybrids, and taboo subject-matter. According to the article, American audiences had been 'prepared for change and experiment both by life and art', in particular by 'the questioning of moral traditions, the demythologizing of ideals, the pulverizing of esthetic principles' in painting, music, and literature, and also by the familiarity with complex forms of audiovisual communication engendered by television (325). Reversing earlier negative judgements on the influence of television, Hollis Alpert argued that 'the visual training and orientation the young viewers received' through television had created a cinema audience seeking out 'the visually dynamic film, the more "cinematic" kind of film experience' that was 'principally espoused by younger directors, many of them trained in television' (1968a/1971b: 337). In the wake of the excitement about *Bonnie and Clyde* and the spectacular box office returns of Mike Nichols's *The Graduate* (USA, 1967), Alpert declared an end to the 'star system', with its emphasis on the personalities of performers on and off the screen (336). Instead of an interest in stars, the response of young movie audiences was more likely to be informed by an intense identification with characters and by a close attention to stylistic devices, symbolic messages, and thematic

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The Hollywood renaissance—Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)

ambiguities in the film: the viewers returning to see *The Graduate* several times 'cultishly attach all sorts of significance to the most minor of details' (1968b/1971c: 405). For Steven Farber, the most significant aspect of Hollywood's new youth-oriented films was their frequent display of spectacular violence, which best expressed the films' fundamental 'antagonism toward authority', their 'anti-social bias', and their 'disillusionment with the normal life choices and life styles of American cinema' (1968/1971: 287).

The fundamental reorientation of the American film industry in the late 1960s, which was further solidified by the explicit counter-cultural concerns of popular films such as *Easy Rider* (USA, 1969), led to a more sustained engagement with contemporary Hollywood by auteurist critics. Unlike previous Anglo-American critics publishing books and articles in newspapers and magazines addressed to a general audience, many auteurist writers now addressed themselves to a much more specialized academic readership in film magazines such as *Movie* and *Monogram*, rearticulating key issues and observations in previous debates about Hollywood cinema in increasingly theoretical language (Maltby with Craven 1995: 421–6). *Monogram* writers highlighted the concept of a 'new Hollywood' to describe the transformation of mainstream American cinema in the late 1960s, and they also gave the concept of 'classic' or 'classical' Hollywood a new meaning, which was both broader in its historical application and more specifically tied to a particular type of narrative than earlier usage had suggested (Lloyd 1971; Elsaesser 1971, 1975).

In Bazin's periodization, the year 1939 had been both a high point and a turning-point for Hollywood classicism, marking the beginning of the Hollywood 'baroque' in the 1940s. Anglo-American critics from Seldes to Sarris had used the studio era of the 1930s and 1940s (which Sarris was mainly referring to when he used the label 'classical') as the main reference-point in their discussions of American film history, characterizing the following decades as a period of transition. For *Monogram* writers Thomas Elsaesser and Peter Lloyd, however, Hollywood's classical period lasted from the 1910s to the mid-1960s. During this period 'the filmic language evolved by Griffith, Stroheim and Murnau . . . retained its validity as the syntactical basis, whatever its modifications in terms of sound-effects, montage and camera-movements' (Elsaesser 1971: 5), and the long careers of key directors such as John Ford and Raoul Walsh produced 'the

component parts of this essential classicism' (Lloyd 1971: 11). Although both writers acknowledged substantial changes in Hollywood's mode of production and in the cinema's status in American culture during this period, in their view classical Hollywood was unified by a fairly stable system of genre conventions, by the centrality of a basic narrative formula focusing on goal-oriented characters who had to learn to balance individual desire and communal values, and by a particular stylistic approach to filmic storytelling characterized by 'efficiency, formal elegance and lucid simplicity' (Elsaesser 1971: 8).

In the late 1960s television-trained directors, '[o]wing perhaps to the harmful influence of the auteur theory', increasingly departed from these fundamental qualities of classicism to 'indulge in a kind of baroque and ornate elaboration of basically simple plots, without there being so much as a shred of dramatic or thematic necessity for their stylistic grand-guignol' (Elsaesser 1971: 8). The single most important 'aesthetic feature' marking the difference between classical and modern American cinema was 'the increasingly dislocated emotional identity of the central protagonist, and the almost total absence of the central drive and its dramatic mechanisms' (10). Without clearly defined goals and 'clearly identifiable moral and social objectives', the actions of the heroes of modern cinema frequently revolved around 'outbursts of unmotivated and wholly irrational violence' (10). Modern films thus signalled 'the gradual collapse of the efficacy of the heroic individual', and, instead of hinging on decisive action which brought about clear results, the films tended to move towards an 'ambiguous, open-ended situation' (Lloyd 1971: 12).

By 1975 the modern trend in Hollywood cinema had produced a substantial body of work by a group of high-profile directors which Elsaesser referred to as 'the new Hollywood of Altman, Pollack, Boorman, of Rafelson, Hellman, Spielberg or Ashby' (1975: 13). While classical Hollywood cinema expressed 'a fundamentally affirmative attitude to the world it depicts', key films of the new Hollywood had a 'liberal outlook' which led them to 'reject affirmation' and instead to project 'a radical scepticism . . . about the American virtues of ambition, vision, drive' (14–15). This shift had partly been caused by the changing status of cinema and the changing composition of its audiences. While television now catered for the mass audience previously served by classical Hollywood cinema, the new Hollywood had to address itself to 'ideologically

less representative' segments of the population, and it did so by reflecting 'stances of dissent typical among minority groups' (14). The 'liberal' response to this challenge, which had become the focus of discussions of the new Hollywood, was exemplified by road movies. These combined 'the unmotivated hero and the motif of the journey', which largely functioned as an end in itself rather than getting the hero anywhere, thus expressing his disillusionment or cynicism (13). However, there was also a 'conservative' response exemplified by the 'cop thriller', which featured 'over-determined heroes' and 'moralized violence' (15). Further responses included the disaster movie, the critical examination of classical genres in the form of 'pastiche' and 'parody', and the celebration of 'an affirmative, innocent past' in the 'nostalgia movie' (14, 18). Elsaesser noted that even the most radical formal and ideological departures from classical storytelling in the liberal films of the new Hollywood, which reflected the 'fading confidence in being able to tell a story' so characteristic of the work of leading European directors, nevertheless remained true to the basic objective of Hollywood cinema to engage audiences emotionally in its stories (13). Unlike many recent European films, the new Hollywood 'remains an audience-oriented cinema that permits no explicitly intellectual narrative construction' and operates by 'shifting and modifying traditional genres and themes, while never quite shedding their support' (18).

Also in 1975 *Movie* published a discussion amongst its main contributors about contemporary Hollywood which confirmed many of the observations and insights put forward by Elsaesser and Lloyd, although, in more traditional auteurist fashion, the magazine judged recent developments in Hollywood much more negatively (Cameron *et al.* 1975). In response to the persistent claims made by these and other publications (Madsen 1975) about a fundamental shift in Hollywood cinema, in 1976 the leading scholarly film magazine *Screen* finally took note of what was now officially known as the 'New Hollywood Cinema'. Steve Neale listed a variety of 'formal and thematic changes' which had been identified by auteurist critics. These ranged from '[t]he use of devices such as the zoom and telephoto lenses, slow-motion and split-screen [which] destroyed the dramatic and spatio-temporal unity that founded classical *mise-en-scène* with its economy, density and "subtlety" of signification', to the breakdown of genre conventions (1976: 117–18). Neale also reviewed the various 'socio-cultural factors which have

been seen to some extent as determinants' for the above changes, including 'the breakdown of censorship codes' (which had been finalized when the Production Code was replaced with a ratings system in 1968) and 'the breakdown of confidence in traditional American values' (118). Echoing Elsaesser's argument, Neale argued that in the 1950s television had taken over cinema's role as 'the main vector of ideology in the mass media', being able to fulfil it much more effectively due to its 'presence in the home, continuous transmission, (and) relative cheapness' (118). This allowed cinema 'to diversify its appeal and, therefore, its product', responding in particular to 'the rise of the youth movement and the struggles for liberation of both blacks and women: the growth of counter-cultures and ideologies generally, some of which could be sought and appealed to as a potential audience which was not catered for by television' (1991). For Neale, Hollywood here acted as a safety-valve, giving in to ideological pressure only to recuperate oppositional stances. Despite changes in its mode of production and, in its narrative strategies, Hollywood continued to operate successfully as a capitalist enterprise and did not disrupt the fundamental operations of the 'classical text' with its 'ordering meta-discourse' aimed at eliminating ideological contradictions and thus creating an imaginary 'unity of position' for the spectator (120–1). In Neale's view, contemporary Hollywood continued the hegemonic project of classical cinema.

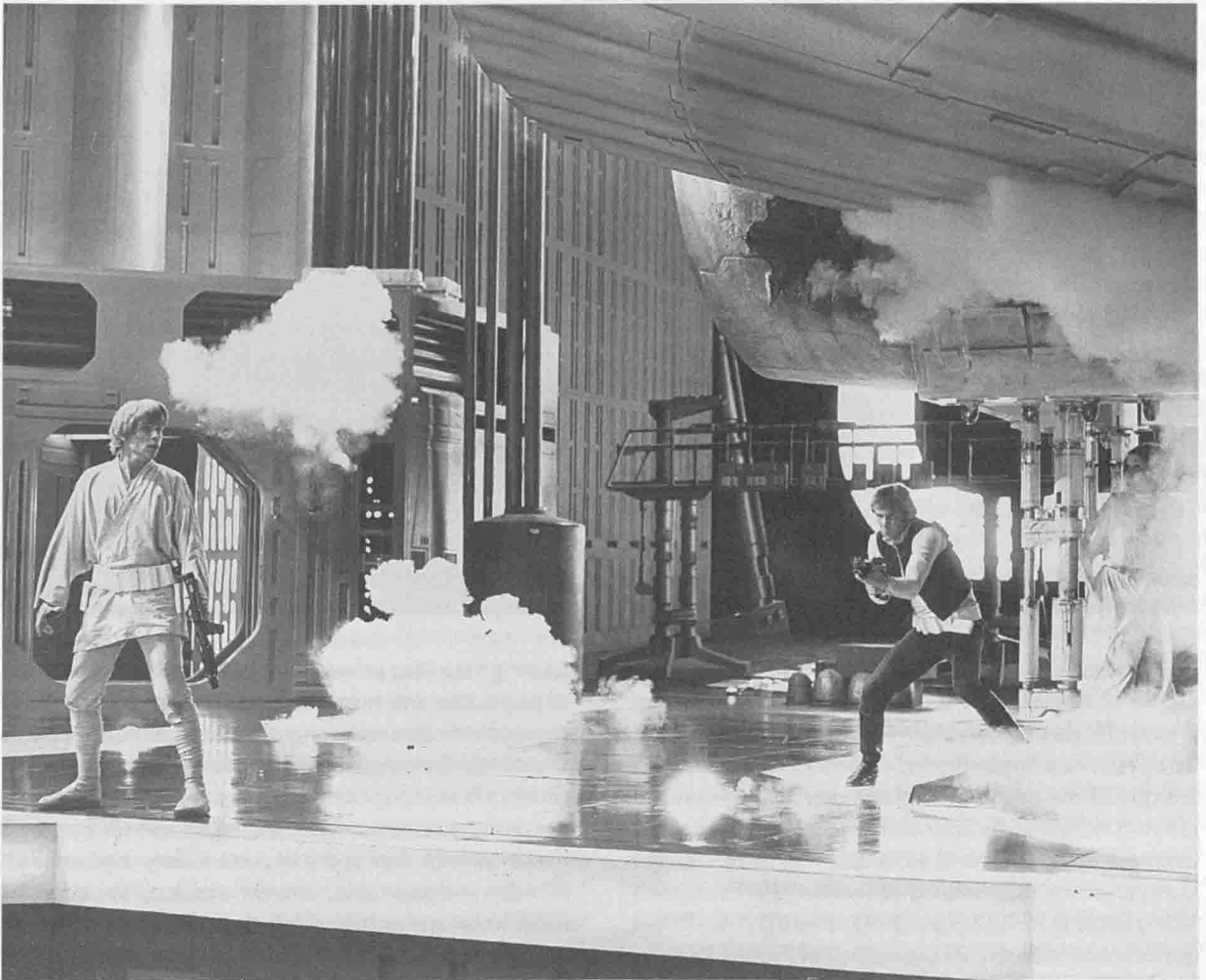
The theoretically sophisticated discussions of the 1970s about recent developments in Hollywood cinema had two major results. On the one hand, 'New Hollywood' became firmly established as an important concept in critical debates, referring to American mainstream cinema since 1967 and, more specifically, to the stylistic, narrative, and thematic innovations characteristic of the films of certain directors and of certain 'liberal' cycles. On the other hand, the concept of 'classical Hollywood' was applied to a dramatically extended period in American film history which lasted from the 1910s to the 1960s, and the notion of a 'classical text' went even further by also incorporating the films of the New Hollywood. In this way, academic discourse effectively erased previous critical debates about complex changes in the Hollywood aesthetic and about the multiplicity of social, cultural, and industrial factors shaping these changes that had been conducted between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s. Hollywood's 'transitional' post-war

period was of interest only in so far as it paved the way for the emergence of the New Hollywood from 1967 onwards.

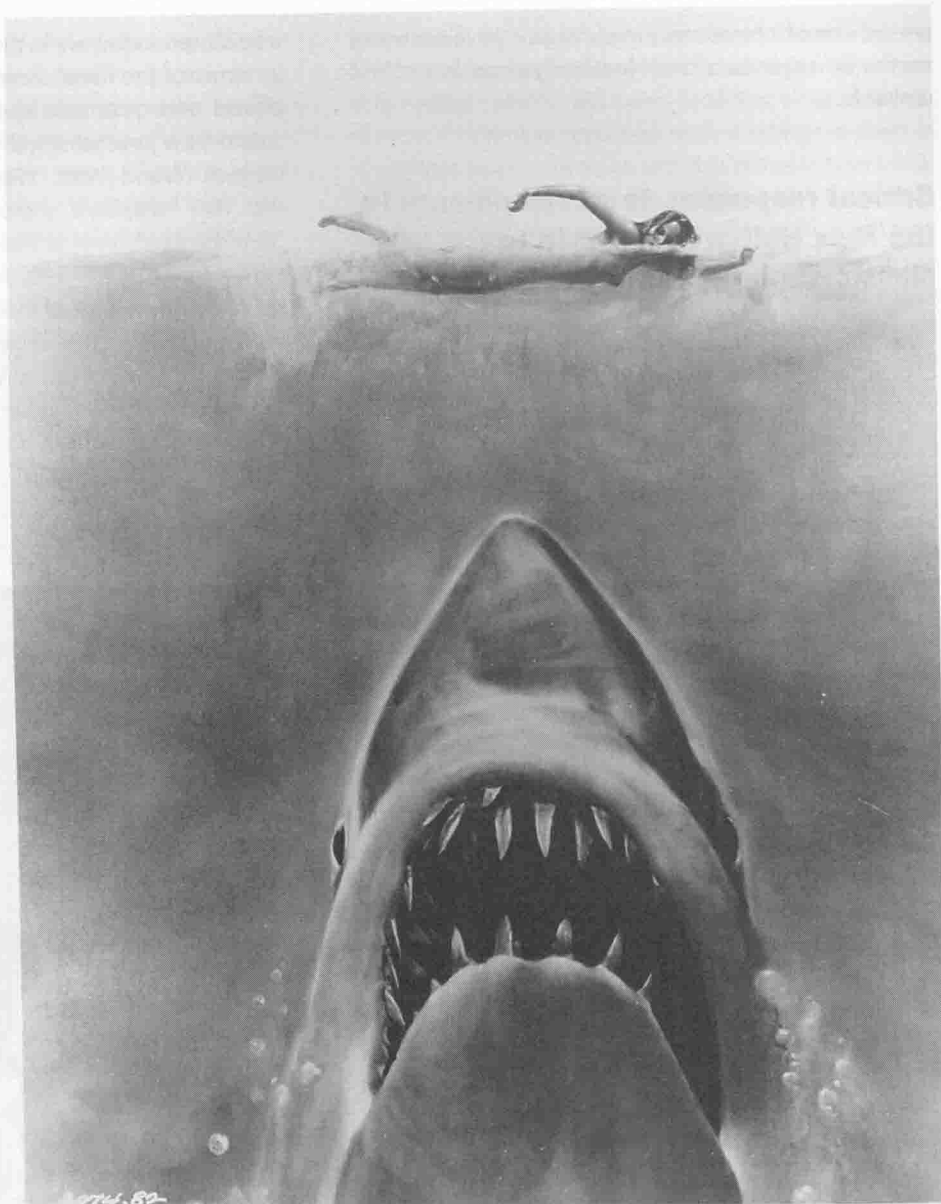
### Critical responses to developments in the New Hollywood: movie brats, neo-classicism, and post-modernism

When 'New Hollywood' became firmly established as a critical term in film studies in the mid-1970s, Hollywood itself was in the midst of an aesthetic, cultural, and industrial reorientation, which was signalled most dramatically by the unprecedented box-office successes of *Jaws* (USA, 1975) and *Star Wars* (USA, 1977). In subsequent years critics described Holly-

wood's reorientation in the second half of the 1970s in terms of the films' increasing emphasis on special effects and cinematic spectacle (Neale 1980), their return to a psychologically and politically regressive outlook (Wood 1985, 1986, ch. 8; Britton 1986) and the film industry's increasingly narrow focus on 'blockbusters', that is heavily promoted big-budget films (Monaco 1979, chs. 1–3). In retrospect, the original New Hollywood of the years 1967–75 came to be seen as a brief and exceptional period in American film history in which artistically ambitious and politically progressive filmmaking had been commercially viable, competing successfully for a while with conservative film cycles (Maltby 1983, ch. 10; Ray 1985, chs. 8–9; Ryan and Kellner 1988, chs. 1–3). Auteurist critics have continued to explore and evaluate the achievements



An unprecedented box-office success—*Star Wars* (1977)



Spielberg's first blockbuster, *Jaws* (1975)

of the small group of directors who had been at the centre of Hollywood's short-lived artistic renaissance (Pye and Myles 1979; Kolker 1980, 1988). Other critics, however, have concentrated on a general outline and critique of the aesthetic and commercial logic underpinning Hollywood's operations since the 1960s, best exemplified by *Jaws* and subsequent films by George Lucas and Steven Spielberg (Monaco 1979; Thompson 1981; Biskind 1990; Schatz 1993; Wyatt 1994). These critics emphasize the incorporation of Hollywood studios into giant industrial conglomerates since the mid-1960s, the proliferation of delivery systems for films

gaining momentum with the successful introduction of pay-cable and home video in the mid-1970s, and the multi-media marketing of movies, which connects their theatrical release with the launching of a whole product line of popular cultural artefacts (ranging from pop songs to computer games), while also using a film's theatrical exposure as the key to ancillary markets such as video and pay-cable, where the bulk of film revenues have been generated since the mid-1980s. Confusingly, this second group of critics frequently employs the term 'New Hollywood' to refer to the much longer period they are dealing with, and, in particular, to the

years after 1975. Thus, in different critical contexts 'New Hollywood' may refer to the period 1967–75 as well as to the post-1975 period, to the aesthetic and political progressivism of the liberal cycles of the earlier period as well as to the regressiveness of the blockbusters of the later period (Tasker 1996).

As if that was not confusing enough, critical discourses about the New Hollywood often revolve around the very same issues that concerned critics writing about Hollywood's transitional period between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s. For example, European influences, stylistic innovations, taboo subject-matter, new cinematic conceptions of heroism and masculinity, and critical awareness of social realities had already been hotly debated with respect to key Hollywood films and cycles of the late 1940s and the 1950s, long before they became identified with the Hollywood renaissance after 1967. Juvenilization, the technological renewal of the cinematic experience, the trend towards big event pictures, and the displacement of narrative by spectacle had all been the subject of critical debates in the 1950s, long before the new breed of blockbusters in the 1970s and 1980s provoked strong critical reactions along these lines. Such continuities in critical debates and in Hollywood's aesthetic and commercial logic often go unacknowledged. Consequently, recent critical discourses about the New Hollywood (in both its restricted and its general meaning) have tended to exaggerate its newness, instead of situating the New Hollywood in relation to long-term trends in the post-war period.

To complicate matters further, since the 1980s critics have made concerted efforts to apply the concepts of modernism and postmodernism to developments in post-war American cinema. These concepts are used both to demarcate historical periods and to characterize particular film cycles. They may be used primarily with reference to aesthetic issues, or more generally with reference to the totality of a cultural formation, comprising cultural artefacts as well as media industries, forms of social organization, and ideologies. In the light of the wide-ranging and varying applications of these concepts in film criticism, it is difficult to map them onto the established periodizations of post-war Hollywood which take the concept of classicism as their starting-point. For example, studies of the emergence and development of postmodern culture in the United States tend to refer broadly to the post-war period, identifying the 1960s as a decade of crucial cultural transformations in the arts, yet locating the

key examples of postmodern cinema such as *Blade Runner* (USA, 1982), *Blue Velvet* (USA, 1984), and *Batman* (USA, 1989) in more recent years (Denzin 1991; Jameson 1991; Corrigan 1991). In this view, then, despite the late appearance of exemplary postmodern films, the whole period since the Second World War is overshadowed by postmodernism. In sharp contrast, an analysis using a narrow Bazinian definition of Hollywood classicism, which sees the year 1939 as a crucial historical turning-point, would identify *Citizen Kane* as the beginning of a modernist trend in American cinema which gained momentum with the self-consciously artistic New Movie of the 1950s and the experiments of the New American Cinema in the early 1960s, and culminated in the artistic renaissance of the New Hollywood between 1967 and 1975. Alternatively, using *Monogram's* definition of classicism as the dominant Hollywood aesthetic between the 1910s and the mid-1960s, only the sustained attack on the fundamental principles of Hollywood storytelling in the liberal cycles of the New Hollywood qualifies as a genuinely modernist intervention into mainstream American cinema. In both cases, the post-1975 period may be characterized either as a turn towards postmodernism or as a return to the principles of classicism.

These periodizations intersect with the standard auteurist account of developments in Hollywood since the late 1960s, which concentrates on the impact of the so-called 'film school generation' or 'movie-brats' (Belton 1994, ch. 14; Hillier 1993). In their highly influential 1979 book *The Movie Brats*, Michael Pye and Lynda Myles discussed the work of a closely knit group of filmmakers born in the 1940s (with the exception of Francis Ford Coppola, who was born in 1939). The group, consisting of Coppola, Scorsese, George Lucas, Brian De Palma, John Milius, and Steven Spielberg and also including some of their frequent collaborators such as Gary Kurtz, represented 'a ciné-literate generation of filmmakers' (1979, p. vii). They had become thoroughly familiar with Hollywood's history through television broadcasts of old movies, had learnt about European film movements in art-houses, and had had the opportunity (which many of them took) to learn their profession at film school and to gain practical experience in the exploitation sector, most notably with Roger Corman's New World Pictures, before they moved into regular feature production from the late 1960s onwards, writing scripts and acting as producers as well as working as directors, and often giving support to, or working with, each other.



According to Pye and Myles, this new generation of filmmakers was detached from, and often critical of, the Hollywood establishment, and approached mainstream filmmaking in an analytical and self-conscious fashion, producing a new kind of movie which combined the powerful storytelling of classical Hollywood with the transgressive subject-matter of exploitation cinema and the stylistic innovations of European new waves.

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Pye and Myles's account of Hollywood cinema since the late 1960s identified a crucial generational shift in the film industry, although it largely ignored the parallels to, and connections with, earlier waves of Hollywood outsiders making a strong impact on the industry (such as the theatre- and television-trained writers and directors of the 1950s and 1960s). Their account emphasized the transformation of the 1960s outsiders into the Hollywood establishment of the 1970s. Due to a string of box-office hits, from Coppola's *The Godfather* (USA, 1972) to Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (USA, 1977), the six key filmmakers and their associates 'at the end of 1977, stood unchallenged as the powers within a new Hollywood. They inherited the power of the moguls to make films for a mass audience' (7). Thus, in effect Pye and Myles argued that, following three decades of aesthetic and economic crisis and flux, the late 1970s saw a return to the stability, popularity, and high standards of the studio era. In this neo-classical Hollywood, auteurs had taken over the executive role of the moguls.

Robert Phillip Kolker approached the crucial shift in late 1970s Hollywood with reference to the concepts of modernism and postmodernism. In his 1980 study *A Cinema of Loneliness*, Kolker explored 'the growth of modernism' in mainstream American cinema of the 1960s and 1970s (1980: 16), grouping older directors such as Arthur Penn, Robert Altman, and Stanley Kubrick together with movie brats Coppola and Scorsese. In Kolker's view, the work of these filmmakers balanced entertainment values with a critical investigation of 'the nature of their medium, its history, its methods and effects' (p. viii). Their self-conscious approach to filmic storytelling, 'refusing the classical American approach to film, which is to make the formal structure of a work erase itself as it creates its content', demanded an equally self-conscious spectator: 'These directors delight in making us aware of the fact that it is film we are watching, an artifice, something made in special ways, to be perceived in special ways' (9). In the revised edition of his book, Kolker declares that, as far as mainstream American cinema is concerned, '[t]he modernist project . . . is over', with '[p]ostmodern American film . . . returning with a vengeance to a linear illusionist style' (1988, p. xi). Kolker dates this transition in the second half of the 1970s, and sees Steven Spielberg as its key figure, who best exemplifies contemporary Hollywood's 'increased ability. . . to use images and narratives to manipulate response' and to subject the viewer to 'great imaginary structures of displaced yearning, misplaced heroism, and forced amelioration' (p. xi). Schatz gives a similar account, discussing *Annie Hall* (USA, 1977) as an exemplary modernist film, and situating it in the context of a commercial cinema still 'dominated by classical narratives that are technically more proficient. . . than products of the Old Hollywood but otherwise rely on the same principles of construction and methods of viewer engagement' (1983: 223). He goes as far as saying that in particular the films of Lucas and Spielberg 'are even "more classical" than traditional Hollywood movies because of the narrative and technical expertise of their creators' (223).

Noel Carroll (1982) argues that both Hollywood's modernism and its (postmodern or neo-classical) revisionism participate in a culture of allusion. In the 1970s the outlook of large segments of the cinema audience as well as many directors had been shaped by the comprehensive education in film history they had received through television, art-houses, college courses, film societies, film criticism, and film schools

while growing up in the 1950s and 1960s. Film history became an important reference-point in the artistic communication between filmmakers and their audiences. By alluding to the cinema's past in their films, directors created complex texts which engaged and thus rewarded the audience's film-historical knowledge. Instead of distancing spectators from the textual operations of their films, directors employed allusions as 'expressive devices: they are a means for projecting and reinforcing the themes and the emotive and aesthetic qualities of the new films' (Carroll 1982: 53). The culture of allusion embraced a wide variety of practices, 'including quotations, the memorialization of past genres, the reworking of past genres, homages, and the recreation of "classic" scenes, shots, plot motifs, lines of dialogue, themes, gestures, and so forth from film history' (52). While allusions might be used critically by filmmakers such as Robert Altman in a challenge to the ideas and values underpinning traditional genres and the contemporary social order, they were equally in evidence in the revisionist genre films that gained dominance in the second half of the 1970s, addressing themselves both to an older film-educated audience and to a much less knowledgeable 'adolescent clientele' (56). Filmmakers developed 'a two-tiered system of communication which sends an action/drama/fantasy-packed message to one segment of the audience and an additional hermetic, camouflaged, and recondite one to another' (56).

Since the mid-1970s, then, critical debates about the New Hollywood have been characterized by a confusing proliferation of contradictory and shifting definitions of the term, and by different attempts to conceptualize the development of mainstream American cinema in the post-war era with reference to modernism and postmodernism. Yvonne Tasker's (1996) review of these debates indicates that, while there is still no agreement about proper definitions and mappings, there is perhaps a general direction in which these definitions and mappings develop. The original association of the term 'New Hollywood' with the artistic renaissance of the late 1960s and early 1970s has largely been displaced by its identification with the post-1975 period. Furthermore, the critical analysis of the stylistic and thematic innovations introduced by a new generation of auteurs has given way to a concern with the corporate strategies of media conglomerates, with blockbusters and multi-media marketing, and with new forms of film consumption. Indeed, Tasker suggests that changes in the wider cultural and media

landscape may be the best way to separate New Hollywood from classical American cinema and to situate it in relation to postmodernism: 'The newness of the new Hollywood stems from the rapidly changing entertainment world in which it exists. In this context an analysis of film style in the new Hollywood might be most usefully approached through an awareness of the interaction between film and other media and the proliferation of cultural commodities, rather than exclusively in terms of a relationship to the cinematic past' (1996: 226-7). Hence, New Hollywood may be defined not so much in terms of stylistic and thematic changes in filmmaking, clearly separating the contemporary period from a previous modernist moment in American film history as well as from Hollywood's classicism, but in terms of a postmodern multi-media world which undermines the very notion of 'film as a distinct medium' (Tasker 1996: 226). Postmodern New Hollywood, then, is American filmmaking in the age of a fully integrated multi-media culture which originated in the 1960s and consolidated itself in the 1970s and 1980s.

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### The historical poetics of classicism and post-classicism

In her discussion of the New Hollywood, Yvonne Tasker employs the term 'post-classical' to refer primarily and

specifically to stylistic changes in mainstream American filmmaking since the 1960s (1996: 220–1). She refers to Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson's monumental study *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985) as the most comprehensive account of the normative stylistic system, which the innovations of post-classicism need to be defined against. In doing so, Tasker follows the model of other recent critics such as Justin Wyatt (1994: 7–8, 15–16, 60–4), Henry Jenkins (1995: 113–17), and Richard Maltby and Ian Craven (1995: 217–21), all of whom have identified significant departures from classical storytelling, as described in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, in certain film cycles since 1960, although they acknowledge that the majority of American films stay firmly within the classical tradition. While the term 'post-classical' may also be used more loosely to refer to other aspects of contemporary American cinema (Rowe 1995; Neale and Smith, forthcoming), its value as a critical tool would seem to depend on its precise application to the form of stylistic analysis exemplified by Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson's study.

Bordwell has called this form of analysis 'historical poetics of the cinema', and defined it as 'the study of how, in determinate circumstances, films are put together, serve specific functions, and achieve specific effects' (1989: 266–7). While historical poetics proceeds from the stylistic analysis of individual films and sees any film as 'the result of deliberate and founding choices' made by filmmakers, '[t]he poetician aims to analyze the conceptual and empirical factors—norms, traditions, habits—that govern a practice and its products' (269). To establish the norms and traditions governing a mode of film practice such as classical Hollywood, it is necessary to analyse a large number of films and to ensure that these films constitute a representative sample of the vast corpus they are meant to exemplify. The idiosyncracies of individual films are thus discussed systematically in relation to the norms embodied in a larger body of texts. Similarly, the use of particular devices in any given film is analysed in relation to the stylistic system of the film as a whole. Furthermore, film analysis is typically complemented by an investigation into the concrete work procedures of filmmaking and the system of production which organizes them. This investigation can make use of a variety of sources ranging from written codifications of rules and norms (e.g. manuals) to interviews with participants. Finally, historical poetics aims to identify stylistic developments within particular film

practices, by tracing the diffusion of new stylistic devices such as, for example, zooms, split screens, and freeze frames across the overall corpus of films, and by identifying changes in the normative stylistic system which, in any given film, assigns individual devices a particular function, in Hollywood usually for the purpose of storytelling.

An example of a systemic stylistic change in classical Hollywood filmmaking would be the introduction of aimless protagonists, the loosening of causal connections between narrative events, the foregrounding of stylistic devices in their own right, which serves to demonstrate the filmmakers' artistic presence and intentions, and the refusal of unambiguous narrative closure, which invites audiences to speculate about the film's significance. According to Bordwell, these are some of the key narrational strategies of European art cinema that were absorbed by the filmmakers of the New Hollywood in the late 1960s. While *Monogram* had argued that this absorption constituted a decisive break in the development of mainstream American filmmaking, Bordwell writes: 'these new films do not constitute a sharply distinct style, but can better be explained by that process of stylistic assimilation we have seen at work throughout Hollywood's history' (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985: 373). Bordwell uses the penultimate chapter of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, entitled 'Since 1960: The Persistence of a Mode of Film Practice', to argue, in effect, that all stylistic innovations in American filmmaking in recent decades 'remain within classical boundaries' (377), and that the date 1960 is a fairly arbitrary cut-off point for their study, which is by no means meant to indicate the end of the classical epoch. By analysing narrational strategies in a sample of recent Hollywood films and their codification in contemporary script-writing manuals in comparison with practices in early American feature filmmaking in the mid-1910s, Kristin Thompson (1995) has also argued forcefully for the overall continuity of the classical Hollywood up to the present.

Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson's work has been criticized (much like *Screen's* concept of the classical text) for its tendency to play down or erase the differences between individual Hollywood films and between particular *œuvres*, cycles, and periods, and to describe the basic tenets of classical Hollywood style in such general terms that any form of mainstream filmmaking would appear to fit into this model (Britton 1988–9; Williams 1994). Henry Jenkins (1995), how-

ever, argues that *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* and its underlying methodology allow for a more dynamic account of stylistic differences and developments than they are sometimes given credit for. At the centre of Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson's study and of the project of historical poetics in general are, after all, processes of stylistic change, brought about, for example, by the introduction of new technologies such as synchronized sound or by the encounter with alternative stylistic systems such as European art cinema. Jenkins finds the description and explanation of such stylistic changes offered by Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 'essentially correct', although he would prefer to shift the critical focus of the investigation from the ultimate assimilation of new stylistic elements into the established system, to the early stages of that process, that is the 'periods of transition and experimentation before the system can fully stabilize itself around these changes' (1995: 114, 104). During these usually very brief periods, new stylistic elements are perceived by filmmakers and audiences alike as a disruption of the normative stylistic system or as a welcome novelty. The force of this perception is easily underestimated when such innovations are analysed in retrospect from a position which has already witnessed their complete assimilation.

While numerous examples of the process of defamiliarization and assimilation can be found in Hollywood between the 1910s and the 1940s, Jenkins suggests that the post-war period is characterized by the dramatic intensification of stylistic change: 'Since the breakdown of the studio system, Hollywood has entered a period of prolonged and consistent formal experimentation and institutional flux with a media-savvy audience demanding . . . aesthetic novelty and difference. As a result, stylistic changes which might have unfolded over several decades under the studio system have occurred in a matter of a few years in contemporary Hollywood' (114). It is this increased speed and intensity of stylistic change which the concept of post-classicism is meant to describe. While Jenkins's examples are mainly from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (the movie brats, 'high-concept' films, MTV aesthetics), his analysis would also seem to apply to the immediate post-war period, during which critics, and presumably American filmmakers and audiences as well, responded very strongly to a wide variety of stylistic developments which included: the increasing use of long takes, deep-focus cinematography and staging in depth; the move towards quasi-documentary; the

self-conscious artistry of the New Movie; the wide-screen revolution; and the big picture.

Some of these developments in the post-war period have been covered in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. Yet, in general, critical debates about developments in post-war American cinema have dealt with stylistic change only in a cursory, abstract, and unspecific fashion, quickly moving from observations about individual film examples to claims about fundamental shifts in the overall aesthetic and industrial system. In this situation, the conceptual debate about Old Hollywood and New Hollywood, modernism and post-modernism, classicism and post-classicism, is perhaps less urgent and productive than the kind of careful, systematic, and complex stylistic analysis which historical poetics demands.

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