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A new paradigm in contemporary cinema

The existence or not of a post-classical cinema has been a highly contested issue among film theorists for a very long time. This paper uses historical poetics as a method and conceptual artillery to delineate the basic principles of a new historical mode of narration that justifies the use of the term 'post-classical'. With the help of the close textual analysis of a number of contemporary films from the USA, Europe and Asia, it constructs a paradigm of specific rules that govern the post-classical narration and differentiates it from the other long-standing narrative models, and particularly from the classical Hollywood tradition.

For more than two decades, several scholars have struggled to grasp the changes that took place in the cinematic landscape as we, allegedly, entered the era of postmodernity. The introduction of the terms 'postmodernism' and 'post-classicism', along with other 'posts', in the various debates was justified by a growing concern for conceptualizing the changes in American and international cinema from the 1970s onwards and for identifying an important epochal shift. Key theorists like Fredric Jameson, Linda Hutcheon, Jim Collins and Christopher Sharrett—to name only a few—have been arguing about the emergence of postmodern cinema, which employs nostalgia, parody or eclectic irony and endorses the breakdown of hierarchies and binary oppositions by mixing popular culture with High Art and traditional values with modernist practices (Jameson 1983; Hutcheon 1988; Sharrett 1990; Collins 1993). This checklist of postmodern elements was tirelessly reiterated in numerous books and articles, leading to a rather spacious and often tautological definition of postmodern cinema, which allows putting under the same umbrella films as disparate as *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Blade Runner* (1982), *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), *Terrorizer* (1986) and *Hitler, A Film from Germany* (1977).

On the other hand, a prominent film theorist, David Bordwell, who has worked extensively within the tradition of historical poetics and concentrates almost exclusively on issues of style and narration, has repeatedly contended that

there is no such thing as postmodern cinema at the formal level. During the last 20 years, Bordwell has become almost legendary for his strong objection to the postmodern discourses and his firm belief that the close textual analysis cannot substantiate the existence of 'something new' in contemporary cinema. More specifically, his standard argument claims that American films, as well as a large portion of international cinema, continue to depend on the narrative model that was epitomized in the classical Hollywood of the studio era. All the elements that look new to us, such as fast-cutting or flashy cinematography, are easily assimilated by the solid structures of the classical paradigm that endure over time (Bordwell *et al.* 1985; Bordwell 2002).

From the time he published the co-authored volume *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985), together with Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, to his latest book *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (2006), Bordwell has remained adamant about the persistence of the classical norms even after the demise of the studio system and the dominance of the classical narration in contemporary American and international filmmaking. He surely recognizes some innovative elements, such as intensified continuity, but then he is prompt to employ the notion of 'stylistic assimilation' to explain how these elements are not enough to validate the existence of a post-classical mode of narration. And, indeed, in most cases he is right. The majority of films that come out of the big Hollywood studios nowadays seem to serve Bordwell's goal to keep the classical model alive. Their overall narrative structure still complies with the classical conventions, while the new stylistic techniques like free-ranging camera movements or fast-speed motion cannot convince anyone that there has been a major paradigm shift.

But what happens if we look at another group of contemporary films that do not fit comfortably in the classical mould and go a step further in their narrative experimentation? What happens for instance with films like *Moulin Rouge* (2001), *Chungking Express* (1994), *Europa* (1991), *Fight Club* (1999), *Amélie* (2001), *Arizona Dream* (1991), *Lola Rennt* (1998), *Magnolia* (1999), *Million Dollar Hotel* (2000), *Natural Born Killers* (1994), *Requiem for a Dream* (2000) and *Trainspotting* (1996)? Shall we stretch the limits of the classical mode to squeeze them in too or could we perhaps begin to consider the emergence of a new *post-classical* mode that can be defined in strictly poetic terms based on a close textual analysis devoid of the postmodern tropes that have been exhaustively recycled? My paper here will follow the second path in order to draw attention to the fact that during the past two decades a considerable number of contemporary filmmakers have initiated a significant transformation in the way movies look and tell us their stories. Their works have creatively renegotiated and adjusted the rules and conventions of the cinematic traditions of the past, creating a consistent repertory of narrative techniques that should no longer go unnoticed.

A new mode of narration: the post-classical

The key term 'mode of narration', of course, comes from Bordwell's monumental work *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) where he defined it as 'a historically set of norms of narrational construction and comprehension' (Bordwell 1985, p. 150). According to Bordwell, a narrative mode transcends genres, schools, movements and even national cinemas, as it is wider in scope and relatively stable and consistent over time. The four distinctive historical paradigms of narration that Bordwell has identified in the poetic history of cinema so far include: (a) the classical narration, (b) the art cinema narration, (c) the historical-materialist narration and (d) parametric narration.¹ Each of these modes presents the filmmakers with various constructional patterns and options and it holds a specific historical presence and significance. In the next few pages I will try to sketch out the pattern of a fifth mode—the *post-classical*²—based on the careful examination of the aforementioned films along the three basic narrative systems: the narrative logic (causality), cinematic space and cinematic time.³

Starting with the system of narrative logic, I would like to note that the post-classical mode—just as the classical—regulates the story material and justifies its presentation in the plot, according to the four types of motivation that Bordwell has identified in his narrative theory: the compositional, the realistic, the generic and the artistic (Bordwell *et al.* 1985). The particularities of this new paradigm begin to emerge when we take each motivation, one by one, and examine the manifold ways in which they depart from the classical norm.

Firstly, the compositional motivation in the post-classical mode inherits from Hollywood cinema several constructional elements such as character-centered causality, recurring motifs and the double plot structure that combines the formation of the heterosexual couple with the undertaking of a mission. At the same time, it reinforces the centrality of the characters' actions by placing an exceptional emphasis on a detailed description of their lives and personalities, which is usually conveyed in ubiquitous voice-overs. For example, in *Lola Rennt* or *Amélie* not only do we follow the classical story of a heterosexual romance and a clear goal-oriented plot but we are also guided into the minds and actions of the protagonists by the informative intradiegetic or extradiegetic voice-over narration. The post-classical in-depth presentation of the characters often reaches such an extreme level of prominence that it results in a loosening of the goal-oriented progression of the narrative. When a film like *Fight Club* or *Arizona Dream* dedicates a large portion of its duration to the extensive presentation of the characters' preferences, habits, thoughts and desires by means of non-diegetic sources, it inevitably reduces the length of the diegesis, it slackens the development of the action and privileges a more episodic exposition of the story events. This effect is even further intensified by the fact that post-classical films have significantly increased the number of protagonists and the plotlines that the

latter are involved in. Whereas the classical Hollywood hero was a causal agent with clear goals and objectives that advanced the story and narrowed the range of alternative outcomes of the action, the post-classical hero is merely one source of agency among numerous others. The post-classical narration uses a plurality of characters and multiplies their interactions in order to create a diversification and fragmentation of their goals and their consequent fulfillment. The two classical plotlines—the formation of the heterosexual couple and the undertaking of a mission—remain persistently present in the post-classical story construction but they acquire other dimensions, as they extend and bifurcate into various parallel or intertwined subplots.

Moreover, the innovations of the post-classical model become considerably more radical when we examine the second motivation, the realistic. The realistic motivation in the post-classical paradigm relinquishes the attachment to the classical realism defined in the terms of André Bazin, who regarded the screen as a ‘window to the world’ and argued for transparency, perspective and depth of field. Given that realism is a concept ‘purely conventional and therefore infinitely “corruptible” through repetition’ (Elsaesser in Hill 1986, p. 56), the post-classical paradigm tries to capture the real in more contemporary terms by establishing a hypermediated realism that favors the expressive mode of hypermediacy (Bolter & Grusin 1999) and the use of intermedia, layering and intensified continuity. Hypermediated realism tries to recreate the authenticity of the story by using a variety of modalities and ‘windows’ onto the action and by manipulating the spatial and temporal qualities of the image for a heightening effect. This new ‘windowed world’ becomes hospitable to the most subjective experiences bringing as a corollary a high dose of subjective realism that attempts to visualize the innermost mental and emotional states. Hence the long sequences of hallucinations and mental disorder in *Requiem for a Dream* and *Fight Club* or the manifold images of elation and excitement in *Amélie* or *Natural Born Killers*. Thus, the realistic motivation in the post-classical mode demonstrates an entirely different strategy in justifying the realism of the story, initiating an explicit rupture with the classical realist tradition.

On the other hand, when we look at the third motivation, the generic, the two models—classical and post-classical—seem to come closer. The post-classical films are undoubtedly genre films that depend heavily on familiar and popular generic formulas, such as the musical, the film noir or the western. The close textual analysis and a sober examination of the theory and history of genres does not allow us to make the common claim that contemporary films make a radical break from the past by mixing the formulas and creating hybrid genres because hybrid films have always been around, as Steve Neale argues (Neale 1995, p. 171). However, what distinguishes the post-classical paradigm is that it turns the hybrid and multi-generic films into the norm, while it simultaneously initiates an archaeological dig into the classical generic codes to revive them triumphantly.

For instance, *Moulin Rouge* is not merely a musical in the classical sense but also a celebration of the long tradition of musicals in Hollywood and in Europe, bringing together the Busby Berkeley and ‘backstage musical’ aesthetics of the 1930s, the romantic duets from the operetta tradition and the ‘integrated musical’ schemes from the 1940s. Similarly, *Europa* is not just another film noir but a careful stylistic mélange of all the noir elements that theorists have identified in the history of the genre. Consequently, post-classical genericity can be regarded as an archaeological investigation into the past of the classical genres—in this case the musical and the film noir—to bring together its most distinctive elements, as if trying to create a generic archetype.

Finally, the fourth motivation, the artistic, becomes another crucial point of departure from the classical standards, as it allows the post-classical films to take full advantage of the workings of parody and engage in a dialogue with the cinematic history. In contrast to the classical films that had little space for disrupting techniques that could ‘lay bare the device’—in the Russian formalists’ terms—the post-classical cinema explores the formal strategy of parody with a broad logic that surpasses the limited scope of parody as a comic device. The post-classical filmmakers choose their materials, build their characters and motivate their stories by using the rich history of cinema and other arts, as a source of inspiration but also as a possible point of critical irony. The settings, the characters, the genres and the auteurs of the past become words in a new cinematic vocabulary that endows the new works with a double encoding and exercises the principal function of parody, namely, the need to create repetition with critical distance and allow ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity (Hutcheon 1988, p. 26). With this strategy, the post-classical mode acknowledges both its fictional status and its awareness of its lineage in film or media history.

When we look at how the four aforementioned motivations function in the narration of these films, we realize that the strength and novelty of the post-classical paradigm lies in the collaboration of all the diverse motivations on equal terms. Whereas the classical film subordinated the realistic and the generic motivations to the tight cause-and-effect logic and the compositional parameters of the plot, the post-classical films invite an increased freedom among the various motivational factors that loosens the tight causal chain, without abolishing it, and allows other elements to come regularly into prominence, such as the heightened sense of realism in intense moments or the playful parodic references. By constructing a detailed schema of the numerous fluctuations that can be accommodated in a post-classical narrative—as the one I am trying to sketch out here—we could put an end to the dilemma of narrative progression versus spectacle that several theorists resorted to in order to be able to explain some of the ‘unclassical’ elements of contemporary filmmaking. As we can observe in table 1, the complexity of the filmic narration and the numerous justifications that

TABLE 1 Motivations

	<i>compositional</i>	<i>realistic</i>	<i>generic</i>	<i>artistic</i>
Classical	Tight cause-and-effect logic, character-centered causality, recurring motifs, formation of the heterosexual couple, undertaking of a mission	Classical Bazinian realism (depth of field, perspective, verisimilitude, continuity editing), Screen as a window to the world	Genres: both pure and hybrid	Limited
Post-classical	Character-centered causality, recurring motifs, formation of the heterosexual couple, undertaking of a mission but also Loose goal-oriented plot, episodic structures: spliced plots and multiple draft narratives	Hypermediated realism (remediation, layering, intensified continuity) and Subjective realism (visualization of mental/emotional states) Screen as a windowed world	Genres: mostly hybrid and multi-generic, and an archaeological attitude towards classical genericity	Parody

we can provide for the appearance of an element in a film, should prevent us from employing binary oppositions to describe the evolution of cinematic language. Similarly, this table shows that the distinction of the post-classical from the classical mode is based on a very elaborate system of motivations that fully appreciates the aspects of continuity and discontinuity that both bind and separate the two models.

Furthermore, our understanding of this division between the post-classical and the classical is deepened when we look at the second narrative system, the cinematic space (table 2). The filmic space in a classical film had a very clear goal: to become a vehicle for the narrative. The tight causality of the classical model demanded that the graphic space of the filmic image be entirely subordinated to the compositional and realistic motivations that strove to create an unobtrusive visual space to accommodate the story. The classical space both 'in frame' and 'out of frame' expressed an anthropocentric commitment by privileging the psychological causality and by seeking to provide the viewers with the best possible view of the story world. This commitment is irrevocably altered—or

TABLE 2 The system of cinematic space

Classical	Photographic space: staging in depth, linear perspective, central positioning, continuity editing, temporal montage
Post-classical	Graphic space: clusters, special effects (back projections, split screens, matte paintings, miniatures, optical tricks), intensified continuity, spatial montage

rather made much wider and more profound—when the post-classical narrative logic introduces new demands and concerns with the establishment of new motivations.

In technical terms, the key to the transformation of the post-classical space is the introduction of a digital logic that invites new approaches to spatial construction. As Lev Manovich explains in his account of ‘digital cinema’, the advent of digital technologies prioritized the graphic and painterly qualities of the image over the photographic ones, reversing the hierarchy between traditional cinema and other peripheral cinematic types like animation and the avant-garde. The strategies that were once pushed to the margins of the filmmaking practice because they were too artificial or self-reflexive, such as back projections, collages and optical tricks, are now coming back with a vengeance to express the mainstream logic of computer design (Manovich 2001). The conceptual principles of Manovich’s ‘digital cinema’ are fully applied in the post-classical spatial system, which probably constitutes the first type of digital cinema in mainstream cinematic practices.

More specifically, the post-classical films adopt a different approach to cinematic space that emphasizes its graphic nature. While the classical system depended on a photographic realism that favored the staging in depth, the linear perspective, the central positioning and above all the continuity editing, the new system opts for intensified continuity and spatial montage. The former establishes new strategies of editing and framing, such as a fast-cutting rate, the use of extreme lens lengths and a preference for close framings and free-ranging camera movements (Bordwell 2002). On the other hand, the spatial montage allows different images to coexist in the same frame, blurring the distinction between the space ‘in frame’ and ‘out of frame’ and breaking down the logic of one screen/one image. If we look at *Europa*, for instance, or the more famous *Requiem for a Dream*, we can observe the multifold ways, in which the back projections or the split screens replace the classical rules of frame construction and introduce a new logic for connecting the shots and establishing causal links. Similarly, *Amélie* and *Moulin Rouge* treat the cinematic surface as a monitor where various signs from diverse sources and modalities can be called up simultaneously to create a very dense and hypermediated visual space.

Having traced this key difference, it is imperative to make two clarifications that will prevent misleading conclusions and theoretical overstatements. Firstly, I would like to point out that the post-classical space does not eliminate the classical rules and conventions; it simply introduces new norms that become *the technological and aesthetic dominant* of this new narrative paradigm. For instance, there is no doubt that all the films I have mentioned still contain ‘classical’ images that are carefully centered and staged in depth, as well as sequences that are constructed with the help of analytical editing. Besides, at no point does the post-classical paradigm abolish the classical rules altogether to replace them with some

radically new ones. On the other hand, the novelties of this paradigm should not be downplayed nor should they be deemed as a mere evolution that can be assimilated by the classical tradition. The important aspect of the post-classical space is that it embraces a new logic for generating images and constructing representations that challenges the 'invisibility' and 'seamlessness' of the classical film.

Secondly, the technical means for the spatial montage and the clustered images, such as miniatures and back projections, existed long before the coming of the digital era and were also used in mainstream classical films on several occasions. We should not forget that over 80% of *Citizen Kane* consisted of special effects, like matte shots, double and multiple exposures (Giannetti 1996, p. 472). The great distinction, however, is that the same means are now used for a completely different end; while the matte shots of Kane's Xanadu try to hide their traces and to convince the viewer of the mansion's grandiosity, the miniatures of Paris in *Moulin Rouge* are not hiding a single detail of their painted surface and artificiality. Similarly, the use of digital filmmaking techniques does not necessarily lead to a post-classical articulation of space, as the vast majority of digital effects in Hollywood are still striving for a greater sense of classical realism (Manovich 2001, p. 309). The dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* or the feather in the opening scene of *Forrest Gump* are built with the help of the latest versions of digital compositing, which in this case aims at higher transparency and verisimilitude. Evidently, the computer software has the capacity to emulate both photographic and graphic spaces but, compared to the classical filmmaking practices, the digital technology design favors hypermediacy and facilitates enormously the creation of spatial effects and clusters.

Along with space, the wide use of digital techniques in the phase of post-production has brought in significant alterations in the system of time, the third main component of the narration (table 3). When working within the post-classical mode, the filmmakers acquire an impressive freedom in the handling of the temporal qualities of their films and are allowed to try out several creative

TABLE 3 The system of cinematic time

	<i>conception of time</i>	<i>order</i>	<i>duration</i>	<i>frequency</i>
Classical	Real time	Linear chronology, emphasis on successivity	Emphasis on (the illusion of) equivalence	Singulative
Post-classical	Mediated time	Complex chronology (flashbacks, flashforwards, loops), emphasis on simultaneity and non-seriality	Emphasis on reduction and expansion, use of the pause	Singulative and repeating forms

options. Imbued with the logic of digitality that treats the analogue movement of time as merely one option among many,⁴ the post-classical mode of narration exhibits a complex and multi-faceted system of time that problematizes the natural progression of real time with the aid of numerous technical devices. The three variables of temporal construction—the order, the duration and the frequency—obtain new dimensions, as they are allowed to come into prominence and reveal the mediated nature of cinematic time.

As far as the temporal order is concerned, the post-classical films tend to portray the events in the plot in a non-linear manner by constantly making backward or forward movements in the story time with self-conscious and blatantly signaled flashbacks and flashforwards. These temporal shifts are usually highlighted in order to challenge in an explicit manner the linear progression of the story and to emulate the non-serial access of information typical of some other contemporary media forms, such as CD-ROMs or video games. For example, in films like *Fight Club*, *Lola Rennt*, *Trainspotting* or *Magnolia* we are asked to follow the action in a fragmented manner and to construct the story out of excessively intermittent diegetic pieces. At the same time, these case studies seem to extensively explore the relation of simultaneity that derives from the building of the shots in the form of clusters. The spatial montage allows different images to appear on the screen, establishing various types of simultaneity among them.

In addition, the quality of duration is represented with an evident emphasis on the strategy of reduction and expansion, which render the passage of time more palpable than ever before. As far as the use of reduction is concerned, the post-classical temporal system—apart from the use of ellipsis that was also an indispensable element of the classical film—compresses the screen time with fast-motion cinematography to accentuate aspects of the action or to transmit to the audience the energy of the story. On the other hand, it regularly expands the duration of the story both with slow-motion and with the insertion of non-diegetic shots or even sequences. And since it can move back and forth or go quickly and slowly, the time in this system can also pause for a while. Freeze-frames have become a common device that can appear at any point in the film in order to signal the closure of a section of the story, as in *Chungking Express*, or to stop the image and give the audience time to register the information, as in *Magnolia* and *Trainspotting*.

Lastly, the frequency is the temporal category that varies the least between the two paradigms, as the singulative form remains the dominant rule, dictating that each event should be represented only once. Nevertheless, a recurrent use of the repeating form is observed in more and more films, indicating the renegotiation of a strong taboo in the classical mode. The post-classical system of time permits on various occasions the repetitions of shots or scenes that are either required by the plot for the solution of a mystery, as in *Fight Club*, or constitute playful moments in the overall flamboyant narratives, as in *Lola Rennt* and *Million Dollar Hotel*.

The significant changes in the systems of causality, time and space in the post-classical mode have also altered another important factor: the way the narrative controls the transmission and the flow of story information. According to Bordwell, the narration of the film—all three systems, in other words—is a vehicle for information of different sorts. This vehicle is governed by three main elements: self-consciousness, knowledgeability and communicativeness (Bordwell *et al.* 1985, p. 25). In this case, Bordwell borrows Meir Sternberg's terms to be able to analyze the way a film controls the filmic information in relation both to the story itself and the audience. More specifically, a narration can be *self-conscious* to different degrees, depending on how much it acknowledges the fact that it is presenting information to an audience. The core question one asks in order to evaluate the self-consciousness is: How aware is the narration of addressing the audience? Secondly, a narration can be more or less *knowledgeable* in relation to how much information it has on the story. The question here is: How much does the narration know? Thirdly, a narration is *communicative* at various levels according to how much information it communicates to the viewer. Now the question becomes: How willing is the narration to tell us what it knows? Bordwell examined these principles in the classical narration, drawing the following conclusion:

In the opening passages of the film, the narration is moderately self-conscious and overtly suppressive. As the film proceeds, the narration becomes less self-conscious and more communicative. The exceptions of these tendencies are also strictly codified. The end of the film may quickly reassert the narration's omniscience and self-consciousness.

(*ibid.*)

When we enter the area of the post-classical, however, things begin to change. As table 4 shows, the reconfiguration of the narrative motivations results in a

TABLE 4 Narration

	<i>self-consciousness</i>	<i>knowledgeability</i>	<i>communicativeness</i>
Classical	Constantly low: The marks of narration become only moderately visible in the opening/closing	Potentially high: The narration knows it all due to its spatial omnipresence but tries to restrict it	Moderate: The narration progresses steadily towards complete disclosure
Post-classical	Constantly high: The narrating act comes forward from start to finish	Explicitly high: The narration is open about its temporal and spatial omnipresence	High: The narration is highly communicative, revealing crucial information even from the start

considerable reformulation of the three characteristics. The key difference of the post-classical narration depends on its high degree of self-consciousness that is accompanied by an equally explicit knowledgeability. In other words, the post-classical film reveals its constructed nature by exposing the means of its own making and flaunts its omniscience by conveying information through numerous channels beyond character subjectivity. In more technical terms, the extreme scale of both the omniscience and the self-consciousness results from the relentless shifting of the diverse narrative levels.⁵ The films under scrutiny have a clear predilection for non-diegetic and diegetic narrators who blatantly manipulate the narrating act and expose its constructed nature. At the same time, these higher levels of narration are recurrently followed by the lowest levels, those of internal or external focalization, which disclose the innermost perceptions of the characters through their eyes or their mind. In sharp contrast with the classical narration that transmits most of the story information through the characters' dialogues and their interactions at the level of the diegesis, the post-classical narration eliminates these constraints and flaunts its materialized textuality by an ingenious and provocative use of voice-overs, as in *Europa* and *Million Dollar Hotel*, coupled with some of the most focalized sequences, as in *Fight Club*, *Requiem for a Dream* or *Natural Born Killers*.

On the other hand, the common trait of the classical and the post-classical is the element of communicativeness that consistently enlightens the spectator on the progression of the story and the motivations of the characters. In both paradigms the narration tries to gradually reveal all the facets of the plot and fill in the significant gaps by the time it reaches the end. The post-classical films even take their communicativeness to an extreme level by disclosing essential story information and giving away important secrets from the very beginning, as in *Moulin Rouge*, *Chungking Express* or *Million Dollar Hotel*.

The combination of high communicativeness with an equally high self-consciousness and knowledgeability is indeed the most intriguing aspect of the post-classical narration. Traditionally, the use of self-reflexive devices in art cinema favored the obscurity of the plot and the suppression of some basic information about the story and the characters. Whereas art films aimed at creating a feeling of estrangement in the audience and at opposing the accessibility and openness of the Hollywood style, the post-classical films share none of these concerns. Their self-consciousness clearly derives from hypermediated realism that encourages a discontinuous and opaque visual space, as well as from the strong presence of parody that problematizes the historicity of textuality. The post-classical cinema pursues thus a different agenda with the use of self-consciousness and remains widely accessible and pleasurable for its spectators. Once again the detailed schema below renders palpable all the fine nuances that distinguish the new paradigm from the classical tradition and aims to do justice to the complex nature of both narrative models.

On the whole, the careful textual analysis of a number of contemporary films can help us delineate a new narrative model that becomes increasingly influential in contemporary filmmaking practices all over the world. The elaborate descriptions of the three main narrative components—causality, space and time—that I have laid out here provide enough evidence for the existence of something new that goes beyond the shallow and oversimplistic labels such as MTV style or postmodern pyrotechnics, which have been circulating in film criticism and have made David Bordwell latch on his well-established narrative modes, and particularly the classical. Yet, despite my attempt to refute Bordwell's claim that 'it's all still classical', I now find myself confronted with another question: 'so is it all post-classical'?

This question brings up the issue of boundaries that separate the different historical modes as heuristic categories. Although I have argued here for the emergence of a post-classical mode of narration with an international baseline in the last two decades and I have substantiated the general characteristics of its three basic narrative systems, what remains unquestionable is that the classical rules and norms, which were crystallized between 1917 and 1960 in Hollywood studio filmmaking, are still quite influential in the film production worldwide. Indeed, the bulk of the Hollywood movies nowadays, as well as a large number of international productions, follow for the most part the conventions of the classical model, despite some partial changes in the shooting techniques and the technologically advanced filming equipment. For instance, Steven Spielberg remains to a considerable extent a remarkably classical filmmaker, while some of the most popular blockbusters of the last 25 years, such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1990), *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), *Titanic* (1997), *Jerry Maguire* (1996) or *Two Weeks Notice* (2002) comply with the basic tenets of the classical mode.

On the other hand, the persistence of the classical mode to this day should not prevent us from mapping the significant developments in the narration in another important segment of current filmmaking. Instead of carefully selecting contemporary classical films to prove that all the recent changes can be assimilated in the ever-lasting classical structures, it is more challenging to begin to grasp the new patterns that have been emerging and evolving in another part of American and international cinema since the late 1970s. Some key examples of this new post-classical model would be found in the works of the older generation such as Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977), Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) and Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* (1990), as well as the films of younger filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and the two volumes of *Kill Bill* (2003–2004), Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet* (1996), Spike Lee's underappreciated *Bamboozled* (2000), George Clooney's *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (2003), Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002), Todd Haynes' *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), Fernando Meirelles' *City of God* (2002) and Wes Anderson's *The Royal*

Tenenbaums (2001). The appearance of these films encourages us to look beyond simplistic overstatements that either claim ‘it’s Hollywood business as usual’ or ‘it’s the end of cinema as we know it’ (Lewis 2001), and urges us to delve into a careful narrative and stylistic examination and to soberly evaluate the changes that are well under way in the cinematic language on a global scale.

Notes

- 1 For a thorough account of these narrative models see Bordwell (1985).
- 2 Choosing a name for this paradigm is certainly a troublesome task, as it is bound to be loaded with hidden assumptions and all sorts of connotations that are potential points of contention. My predilection for the term ‘post-classical’ in this case testifies a need to avoid the notoriety of the ‘postmodern’ but also hints at the strong affiliation of this new paradigm with the classical Hollywood cinema and the sense of historical continuity that binds them.
- 3 The paper presents an overview of the research findings of my doctoral dissertation. For a full account, see Thanouli, Eleftheria (2005) ‘Post-classical narration: a new paradigm in contemporary world cinema’, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam.
- 4 As Yvonne Spielmann notes about the nature of simulation:

Two aspects of simulation become visible: first, in the forward movement as an affirmation of moving, filmic images; and second in the reversal of this movement, moving backwards, and also in the still point of movement that both dissolves and negates the first feature. *Because moving is possible in both directions it becomes optional.* The reversibility of moving images indicates that transformation is possible in both ways, either to affirm analogue tools or to transgress those in digital manipulation.

(Spielmann 1999, p. 146; my emphasis)

- 5 The notion of the ‘levels of narration’ comes from Edward Branigan’s work on narrative theory. For the detailed schema and description of the levels of narration, see Branigan (1992).

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