

Storytelling

Classical Hollywood cinema and classical narrative

Elizabeth Cowie

This chapter looks at the relation of notions of classical Hollywood cinema and classical narrative in Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's account of classical Hollywood cinema. The initial and principal focus of discussion here will be classical Hollywood in terms of the studios as industrial/financial organizations, and as a mode of storytelling. It will be argued that classical narrative is only one aspect of, and is not synonymous with, classical Hollywood. Rather, classical Hollywood included forms of storytelling which lack the 'well-made' qualities associated with classical narrative form.

The transformations in the economic conditions in Hollywood and implications of these transformations for film production suggest that we should now refer to post-studio Hollywood production, while the extent to which post-studio production continues the imperatives for film making established in the classical system needs to be examined as such in order to understand its requirements for modes of narrative and narration. Unhooking classical narrative and classical Hollywood as equivalent is, I suggest, an important step in enabling the differences between 'classical' and 'post-classical' American cinema to be properly assessed.

Paradoxically, I suggest, in two of the most sustained accounts of classical Hollywood, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (CHC) by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, and David Bordwell's subsequent study, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, the Hollywood film becomes increasingly indistinct because it appears undifferentiated, at least narratively, as a result of the inclusiveness of the definition of classical narrative as it emerges in these two texts. A dominant mode of narration - classical Hollywood narrative - is defined, but its very definition includes, it seems, virtually all possible deviations, so that every exception therefore proves the rule. The church is so broad that heresy is impossible.

The hegemonic account of classical narrative in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* arises as a result of the functionalist approach adopted there. As Dirk Eitzen shows

in his discussion 'Evolution, functionalism, and the study of American cinema', its

basic historical argument . . . is that every element in that system was more or less constrained to serve both the function of storytelling and the function of profit maximization. Innovations that performed better in both these roles than their functional alternatives tended to become incorporated into the system as norms or as standard practice.¹

functionalism: 'well-made' - 'storytelling' - 'profit' - 'maximization' - 'norms' - 'standard practice'

This approach, as Eitzen emphasizes, has value: it has produced a much clearer account of the Hollywood film industry both at the level of the description of specific practices - it contains a great deal of valuable information - and at the level of explanation: it avoids simplistic intentionalist accounts of history. Eitzen argues that *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* underrates or ignores 'other important impulses',² such as a non-narrative, melodramatic impulse, and the role of spectacle. But its limitations are not the effect of its restriction to just two pivotal functions - narrative and profit. The additional impulses Eitzen mentions cannot be added to the functionalist schema of the book without undermining it, for its limitations are the result of the assumptions framing its two determining functions.

CHC - problem: 'well-made' - 'storytelling' - 'profit' - 'maximization' - 'norms' - 'standard practice'

The profit function is framed by the authors of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* in terms of definitions of 'capitalism', and in terms of industry-generated definitions of profit. But it is qualified, they argue, by the ideological/signifying practices which arose in Hollywood, such that 'In the balance between economical production and a presumed effect on the film, the latter won out.'³ Profit maximization was not determining; rather additional costs were accepted in order to preserve a mode of practice. This is explained as the result of the prioritization of classical narrative, for

profit: 'well-made' - 'storytelling' - 'profit' - 'maximization' - 'norms' - 'standard practice'

in a capitalist society there is no opposition of business and art: most artists make art to make money. And one could make movies more cheaply if one did not recognize conventions of narrative construction, spectacle, verisimilitude, continuity and so on.

(CHC, p. 367)

The function of storytelling is bracketed as 'classical Hollywood narration', and all innovations, developments and changes are seen as functional for this form of narrative. Eitzen suggests, moreover, that those which cannot be related to this definition are seen as functioning for the profit motive. This is undoubtedly correct, but it is not quite the argument of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*.⁴ Instead there are two distinct strategies used in the book to negotiate the relation of these

two distinct strategies: 'well-made' - 'storytelling' - 'profit' - 'maximization' - 'norms' - 'standard practice'

20.11.11 - 24.11.11: (Bordwell's) 'well-made' - 'storytelling' - 'profit' - 'maximization' - 'norms' - 'standard practice'

two functions, and these, I argue, are in the end in contradiction with one another.

First, in the discussion in 'The Hollywood mode of production: its conditions of existence', a neo-Marxist frame of analysis is adopted, drawing both on the work of Harry Braverman and, less directly, on the rereading of Marx by Louis Althusser. It is argued that 'While in the last instance economic practices may have been determinant, this part [Chapter 8] will stress that ideological/signifying practices continually influenced the necessity to divide labour and to divide it in its particular configuration' (CHC, p. 89). What in Althusser is argued as the relative autonomy of ideological practices becomes here the relative determination of the economic by the ideological.⁵ *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* then attempts to shift away from a functionalist account and draws instead upon approaches influenced by Michel Foucault's work, emphasizing a field of competing discourses in which the economic is not simply determining.⁶

In the second strategy, however, the two functions come to be identified as the same, for in Chapter 30, 'Since 1960: the persistence of a mode of film practice', the assumption that Hollywood makes money, not art, is qualified: 'Hollywood makes classical movies to make money' (CHC, p. 367). This is a compromise which attempts to resolve the tension in the book between economism and the emphasis on the dominance of the ideological norms of Hollywood film practice, of a 'group style', and of classical narrative. What the authors seek here is to show the tensions and contradictions between the economic and the discursive field of signifying practices in the socio/political formation, implying a process of multiple determinations. This has been enormously helpful in demonstrating the discursive determinations of the ideological/signifying practices in distinction from the simple profit-function. As a result, the history of the process of their interaction can be studied. But, in contrast, the competing determinations in relation to the signifying practices are held to be resolved, producing a hierarchy in the 'group style' of realism and verisimilitude, causal coherence, continuity, spectacle, stars and genre, under the 'primacy of narrative', understood as 'classical narrative', which is in fact defined as all of these elements under the control of 'conventions of narrative construction' (CHC, p. 367). The problem here is not, or not only, that this is a circular argument, rather it is that we cannot study Hollywood production practices historically. For after 1917 no innovations produce change in the mode of practice, only accommodations; there is no 'resistance' in the system. Here the explanatory value of functionalism is considerably reduced.⁷ Meanwhile this account, though explicitly qualifying it, still assumes profit as the determining function.

What, then, is the relation of storytelling and profit? For the Hollywood studios narrative or storytelling is secondary to the aim of profit; all films were made to make a profit but 'story' films made the most profit, hence they became synonymous with profit. The profitability of story-films is not inherent, but the result of

specific exhibition practices in relation to the creation of a market (a middle-class audience) and a product for that market.⁸ What emerges in the early years of cinema is not, simply, the narrative film - 'Hollywood's very definition of a movie' - but a profitable commodity, which can be produced through regular and controlled manufacturing processes (CHC, p. 367). The story-film could be produced within a fixed site under careful production control. The detailed division of labour which arose in film production facilitated not just the skills and practices of film production, but also the managerial supervision whereby economies in costs could be achieved through maximum use of labour time.⁹

What is critical for a manufacturer of luxury goods - as forms of entertainment such as films may be termed - is not simply the cost (which can, within limits, be passed on to the customer), but the predictability of cost so that advance sales can be planned and future returns on investment calculated. Thus 'factory' production, which began with the streamlined output of cheap one-reel films, was adopted throughout the industry. This produced not only a standardization of product but also standards of product, of qualities in films which themselves, as 'high production values', were (and are) an important component in profitability, defined in terms both of the quality of stars, costume, sets and locations, but also in terms of costs. Standards of narration in film were maintained through the continuity system of editing. The impetus to high standards in production requires determinate criteria, and it is here that the ideological and signifying practices which established the 'norms' of classical Hollywood arise, as Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson show.

These ideological and signifying practices are not, therefore, autonomous (even relatively), but solicited and supported by the firms. Moreover, that the pursuit of certain norms was costly was not necessarily in conflict with the function for profit. For capitalism as a mode of production the maximization of profit is not a simple calculation of what will make the most money, but a question of choices within a determinate economic context. In Hollywood, for example, the transition to sound in the late 1920s was undertaken under the new conditions of oligopoly in which the five studios which were vertically integrated with production, distribution and exhibition now functioned together with the three smaller producer/distributors to limit and delimit forms of competition between themselves. In this market it was possible for the studios to pursue the maintenance of established production procedures in the transition even where these would produce considerable costs, since they could be recouped at the box office and, more importantly, passed on to exhibitors. That the studios did so is not simply the consequence of the influence of ideological/signifying practices.

In the vertically integrated industry of Hollywood after 1924, profitability depended not on the unit-cost of individual films in relation to their returns but on the saleability of cinema as a whole - on the mass market for films in general -

economic
CHC

relative determination
economic by ideological

1. ideological practice
the for profit
step
the
under a total
of the
CHC a

determine
the process
determination
and to use

the complex
determination
may be
being
determination
the material

problem
to determine
the historical
the intention

what is the
a function?

the = only
the visible
with your intention

norms of standard
determination
of the historical
same as
with

and for this a system of regular and predictable production of films of determinate standards and quality was central. The role of monopolistic practices modifies the playing-field of competition and redefines the scope and means for profit-making. Eitzen claims that *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* presumes a continuous competition in the system between functional alternatives, for example, between studios, stylistic options and sound technology. But this was not the case, for not only were the five studios dependent as exhibitors on each other's product, but the history of the introduction of sound technology is the story of monopolistic practices in the electrical communications industry as well as in Hollywood.¹⁰ Thus Eitzen's summary could be rephrased, for there are not two functions but only one, profit, which nevertheless is subordinated in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* to the function of classical narrative.

The emphasis I am placing here on profit in Hollywood is not an attempt to assert its simple primacy but to show, as Eitzen has pointed out, that certain elements in the 'group style' of classical Hollywood, notably genre and stars, but also spectacle and spectacular effects, were important not for narrative but as touchstones for the profitable film. Rather than classical narrative, I suggest that it is the notion of the 'package' which was key for the Hollywood studios. The story is part of the package but the studios wanted multiple guarantees. These would be provided - it was hoped - through the other elements of the package, notably stars and high production values, but also sensational and spectacular elements, involving set features such as battles or chases or spectacular settings and events in nature. John Ford's *The Iron Horse* (1924) typifies this package approach. According to Tag Gallagher, Ford

commanded . . . 5,000 extras; construction of two whole towns; 100 cooks to feed the crew; 2,000 rail layers; a cavalry regiment; 800 Indians; 1,300 buffalo; 2,000 horses; 10,000 cattle; 50,000 properties; the original 'Jupiter' and '116' locomotives that had met at Promontory Point May 10, 1869; Wild Bill Hickcock's derringer; and . . . the original stagecoach used by Horace Greeley.¹¹

The film had no scenario, only a short synopsis, and according to Gallagher, Ford kept making it up as the weeks went on - ten in all, rising from a budgeted four weeks. The film was among the top grossers for the decade, and against costs of \$280,000 it returned over \$2 million.

It (1927), by contrast, is a realistic romantic comedy with a contemporary setting involving sales girls in a department store, but it also functions as a package of story, spectacle and voyeurism, featuring not only its star - Clara Bow - but also the department store itself as a palace of consumerism. These were all recognizable elements in the film package for 1920s audiences. For *The Classical*

Handwritten notes on the left margin of page 182, including phrases like 'The Classical Hollywood Cinema', 'Eitzen', 'package', 'touchstones', and 'John Ford's The Iron Horse'.

Hollywood Cinema, these elements are motivated by the generic identification of the film as comedy. Indeed by categorizing both key elements of the classical Hollywood 'group style' - genre and stars - as forms of motivation, each are brought into service for the norm of classical narrative. Motivation enables the viewer to understand why characters act as they do, or why an element is in the film: 'Motivation is the process by which a narrative justifies its story material and the plot's presentation of that story material' (CHC, p. 19). But, unlike motivation involving plot and characters - 'compositional motivation' (CHC, p. 19) - both stars and genre present extratextual references, functioning *intertextually*. These references are part of audience expectations for the genre or for the star and constitute an extratextual narrative image which is brought into play, varied and adapted within any particular film. As a result, it is argued, as viewers we are not at all disturbed when Judy Garland bursts into song, since we expect her to sing in films; audiences read such elements in relation to the star-image and/or generic conventions. Nor is the unity of the film disrupted, it is claimed, since it is premised on the inclusion of such elements. Such elements do, however, disrupt classical narrative since, as intertextual elements, they pose the narrative as a construct, disturbing the suspension of disbelief as audiences draw on their knowledge of other films to understand the elements in this film. Nevertheless, while such elements do produce narrative disruption it is argued that they are motivated generically within the classical narrative, and as a result, 'in such instances the typical multiple motivation of the classical text simply gives way to a more linear series: a scene motivated compositionally, then a song or gag motivated generically then another scene, and so forth' (CHC, p. 71). There is narrative disruption, since the structure of causality is interrupted and the film becomes discontinuous, but this is motivated generically. This is the achievement of classical Hollywood, but it is not, I suggest, classical narrative.

There are two different accounts of narrative motivation here. One emphasizes the notion of psychological and causal motivation, while the other poses the notion of 'unity'. 'Understanding classical story causality takes us toward grasping how a classical film unifies itself. Generally speaking this unity is a matter of motivation' (CHC, p. 19). While generic motivation does 'unify' an otherwise heterogeneous text, it does so in a way antithetical to classical narrative, since psychological and narrative causality are broken. The conflict here is recognized but dismissed on the grounds that

On the whole, generic motivation co-operates with causal, or compositional, unity. Genres are in one respect certain kinds of stories, endowed with their own particular logic that does not contest psychological causality or goal-orientation.

(CHC, p. 20)

Handwritten notes on the left margin of page 183, including 'CHC', 'Eitzen', 'motivation', and 'intertextually'.

Handwritten notes on the right margin of page 183, including 'intertextually', 'audience expectations', 'star-image', and 'narrative disruption'.

This is true for narrative genres such as the detective story, and the gangster film, but not for the musical films and for comedies. However, strongly marked narrative genres, such as the horror film and detective film, were rarely 'A' pictures in classical Hollywood, at least before 1940. Musicals and comedies, both of which were regularly produced as 'A' pictures, were therefore important elements in classical Hollywood but were not confused with 'proper' story-films.

Genre reappears at the end of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* to subvert the notion of a post-classical or non-classical cinema: 'Classical film style and codified genres swallow up art-film borrowings, taming the (already limited) disruptiveness of the art cinema' (CHC, p. 375). Thus Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974) 'exemplifies how the New Hollywood has absorbed narrational strategies of the art cinema while controlling them within a coherent genre framework' (CHC, p. 377). Genre, however, is not classical narrative.

The history of melodrama as a film genre exemplifies some of the problems of genre and classical narrative as well as the role of profit in classical Hollywood. While the story-film enabled economies of production, the profitability of the story-film arose with the shift to the middle-class audience and the higher admission prices that could be charged. At the same time that the turn to the middle classes offered respectability, and relief from the censorship and approbrium of reformers, it also opened up the possibility of creating a new mass audience. Tom Gunning has argued that to effect this shift appropriate narratives and forms of narration were adopted, and film's narrative role had to replace its role as fair-ground novelty. It was to respectable theatre and literature that film producers turned for stories and storytelling. Nevertheless the new narrator system he describes arising in the work of Griffith, and its more complex narrative form, 'derives more from the melodramatic stage than respectable classics'.¹²

Director Frank Borzage's comment in 1922 that 'Today in the pictures we have the old melodramatic situations fitted out decently with true characterizations' (cited in CHC, p. 14), points to this complex inheritance which is not yet, I think, fully understood or placed in relation to classical Hollywood and classical narrative. Indeed Borzage's own films specifically break the canons of classical narrative, not only in *Seventh Heaven* (1927) with its unmotivated ending, but also the later *Strange Cargo* (1940) which is on the one hand a standard star vehicle for Joan Crawford and Clark Gable and on the other hand presents a story of miraculous redemption which does not square with the rationalist motivation of classical narrative. The ending of *The Public Enemy* (1931) is pure theatrical melodrama. Suspense is created through the characters' lack of knowledge contrasting with the audience's partial knowledge and the forewarning given the spectator by the contrast of the music - with cross-cutting characteristic of D.W. Griffith and silent cinema melodrama. The sequence ends with a shot of Tom Powers' morally upright brother Mike stepping away from Tom's corpse

to depict
the
E.

the
X
the
the
the

Borzage
the
the
the

and looming forward in frame, holding his fist in what might seem a gesture of revengeful anger, contradicting his earlier character and implying a new narrative. The ending is clearly not a closure. Rather a hesitation is introduced, and the death of Cagney as the Tom Powers character is presented as regrettable through our alignment with both his mother and brother, while the closing titles refer audiences to the general issue - and fears - of organized crime.¹³ The ending suspends us, therefore, in a similar way to the ending of *Thelma & Louise* (1991).¹⁴

At the same time non-linear, episodic narrative, in which a series of narrative scenes are presented which are causally self-contained or only weakly causally connected, remained acceptable in Hollywood. *The Iron Horse* is one example, while Ford's later *Four Sons* (1928) only partially conforms to Bordwell's outline - the son who leaves for America fulfils the criteria of a goal-oriented hero, but he does not bring about the story's events. In the 1930s, and staying with Ford as exemplar, *Steamboat Round the Bend* (1935), a highly successful Will Rogers vehicle, is not a story in which events are causally prepared for.¹⁵ All the key actions are given off-screen and reported by characters, including the killing and Duke's subsequent trial, as well as his appeal against his conviction and sentence to death. These, moreover, are displaced by the set pieces such as the wedding, and the confrontation with the local community leaders who are won over to the 'educational' travelling show. The rivalry of the steamboat captains is set up with the bet on the race, and then abandoned as a narrative goal, for although Captain John does enter the race and succeeds in beating Captain Eli, he does so in order to reach Duke before he is hung.

The Classical Hollywood Cinema, however, argues that the narration which arises with the films of narrative integration has wholly adopted the norms of bourgeois theatre and literature, and it is this that it terms classical. A 1920 manual for aspiring scriptwriters is cited as a typical account, 'Plot is a careful and logical working out of the laws of cause and effect. The emphasis must be laid upon causality and the action and the reaction of the human will.' The authors add that 'Here in brief is the premise of Hollywood story construction: causality, consequence, psychological motivations, the drive toward overcoming obstacles and achieving goals. Character-centered - ie personal or psychological - causality is the armature of the classical story' (CHC, p. 13). A similar account is given over forty years later by Irwin R. Blacker in *The Elements of Screen-writing*.¹⁶ This seems to support the case made in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* for the continuing hegemony of classical narrative, but it may more simply attest to a continuity in assumptions about the norms of screenwriting which writers assert. What is presented here is a discourse of screenwriting which, even in 1986, bases itself on the priority of Aristotelian principles. Blacker, for example, notes that 'All plots are contrived, but they must not appear to be so', hence too much coincidence

the
the
the
the
the

the
the
the
the
the

the
the
the

the
the
the

must be avoided.¹⁷ Similarly 'story holes' or an unexplained piece of story create gaps which can 'shatter the willing suspension of disbelief and leave the audience unsatisfied'. It is just such a 'story hole' which John Ford introduces in *The Searchers* (1956) when Ethan Edwards, instead of shooting Debbie as he had sworn to do, sweeps her up into his arms and embraces her.

Blacker's guide, while drawing in the main on a much later repertoire of film references, remains closely within the terms set out by Frances Marion in 1937.¹⁸ But films are not equivalent to their screenplays, and an aspect of such manuals, at least in the period of classical Hollywood, was the assertion of the craft and art of scriptwriting against the barbarism of the producer's (and, with Ford, the director's) cuts. Blacker notes that the demands of the industry are at variance with good scriptwriting:

In the film industry, the lead character is very important: producers will ask about the character before the story because of the star factor in financing and distribution. And film critics tend to praise character portrayal more than plot because the audience identifies with the characters. This is not the natural way to work on a screenplay, and it creates distortions.

Rather, citing Paddy Chayafsky, Blacker argues that the writer starts with the incidents and then develops characters to execute those incidents, 'so that the characters take shape in order to make the story true'.¹⁹

What is presented in these accounts is a version of the 'well-made play', in contrast to the melodrama of the nineteenth century. Namely, the centring of a few or one protagonist, with causally connected incidents, motivation, and psychologically developed characters. As Barry Salt has noted, the innovation of American cinema here - drawing on theatrical norms - is the inclusion of comic incident as contrast.²⁰ In the accounts of the screenwriting guides, melodrama is eschewed. As a result, as noted earlier, the heritage of stage melodrama and its role for cinema has been obscured - it is both a source for classical Hollywood,²¹ and the form against which classical narrative in Hollywood defines itself, rejecting the stereotypes, the use of spectacular staging and effects, and the subordination of dialogue, acting, and indeed narrative, to the pictorial, all of which were seen as characteristic elements of theatrical melodrama at the turn of the century. For A. Nicholas Vardac, melodrama is the precursor of silent cinema,²² but screenwriters such as Frances Marion rejected it:

Melodrama bears somewhat the same relation to tragedy as farce does to comedy. It requires sensational situations with exaggerated power to affect the plot actors and it also needs acute conflict. The plot is more important than the characterization because the plot controls the

Along with plot -
important to the
audience
is the story
(the characters)

all the same
story is the
main thing
the characters
are secondary
to the plot

is a contradiction
of the
theatrical
melodrama
is a form
of the
theatrical
melodrama
is a form
of the
theatrical
melodrama

characters. The action, the events, are stressed and chance or fortune is the motivating factor. The weakness of melodrama lies in the use of plot for plot's sake.²³

Blacker similarly asserts that 'Plot is more than a pattern of events: it is the ordering of emotions. If the plot is all action and little emotion, it is melodrama'.²⁴

Narratives require a cinematic discourse in order to become film stories - to be narrated in cinema. Film form in Hollywood, the particular deployment of cinematic techniques, is characterized in *CHC* by its unobtrusiveness. The 'continuity style' of Hollywood emphasized imperceptible editing, while camera movement, angle and shot scale served the dramatic action. It is a styleless style.

Classical narrative, for Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, is the subordination of form to narrative (*CHC*, p. 50). Stylistic features are placed in the service of the narrative, conveying information, helping the spectator to construct a coherent - causal and logical - time and space. David Bordwell sees classical Hollywood as drawing on a limited paradigm of stylistic and technical devices which offers a codified system recognizable by the spectator. This allows him to argue that the classical system always codifies, or contains, any excessive stylistic element, any feature which deviates from the norm of psychological motivation.²⁵

While norms of cinematic narration, such as the 180° rule, were characteristic of the studio-system in Hollywood, these were not necessarily used in an unobtrusive way. *Detective Burton's Triumph* (1914), cited as an example of the subtle use of eyeline matches (*CHC*, p. 209), appears quite self-conscious in its use of shot-reverse shot between the characters looking and the object of their looks. The film displays the eyeline match, just as it displays the visual procedure of investigation by the Pinkerton detective, and preparation of and for the crime. The film is less incipient classical narrative than a precursor to the documentary drama of a film like *Call Northside 777* (1948).

Such norms, moreover, were not always accompanied by the kind of classical story *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* outlines. Howard Hawks' *The Big Sleep* (1946) is wholly classical in its style, unfolding action and space coherently. This clarity does not support a similarly straightforward narrative, however. Of course, as a detective mystery, the unfolding of the narrative involves keeping the spectator in the dark - the film is characterized by quite extreme retardation of narrative information, restricting us to Marlowe's knowledge but without any access to his understanding or analysis of the events and actions until the end. Here the film is clearly generic, but, while remaining formally a detective story, it fails to deliver as a whodunnit. Although the film does supply causes for all its events (despite Hawks' claim to the contrary), these are highly convoluted. For example, Geiger's death and Carmen's involvement arise independently, but appear in the film at first as causally linked. The problem is not, or not just that, as Bordwell notes,

with the
form

many scenes
with the
visual
procedure

the kind of
classical
story

the film
is clearly
generic

causal information about the crime is rarely given more than once, rather it is that the film does not make it clear how the crime-detection is being pursued in the actions and events we are shown. The key to the story is Carmen, it is she who is the cause of the events in the film. She killed Regan, leading Vivienne to seek Eddie Marr's help in covering it up, opening her to his blackmail, and it is Carmen's drug habits which give rise to demands for money which prompt General Sternwood to engage Marlowe's services. All of this is not the central story, rather it is a *mise-en-scène* for the love story which develops between Marlowe and Vivienne. Structurally, all the murders function much in the same way as the leopard in *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), that is, as devices.²⁶ Bordwell suggests that *The Big Sleep* is a detective film in which the interest of constructing the investigation *fabula* takes precedence over the construction of a coherent crime *fabula*. I would suggest, however, that both of these are displaced by our interest in the interaction of characters. As a result the lack of 'proper' motivation in relation to why and how is not disturbing. Nevertheless while *The Big Sleep* is classical cinema, it deviates from the definition of classical narrative in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*.

My aim here has been to find a way to challenge the hegemony of this account of classical narrative. For the 'flexibility' claimed for it becomes so elastic that there can never be a post-classical that is not absorbable by the classical system. Contemporary American cinema is marked by the disappearance of the studio system and by new forms of competition and organization 'for profit' in the context not merely of television, but of cable, satellite and video. Its aims, as a narrative cinema, cannot be seen as unified as was possible under the old oligopoly. Stylistic norms have changed, and perhaps no longer exist as a consistent group of norms. The relation of contemporary American cinema to classical Hollywood and its narrative forms remains to be investigated.

Notes

- 1 Dirk Eitzen, 'Evolution, functionalism, and the study of the American cinema', in *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 28 (Fall 1991), p. 75. Eitzen refers to two systems and functions, but then suggests that every element must serve both of these, implying in fact only one system and one function.
- 2 Eitzen, 'Study of American cinema', p. 80.
- 3 David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 89. Hereafter cited in the text as *CHC*.
- 4 Eitzen writes, 'Musical production numbers that do not advance the storyline of a movie are regarded as vestiges of a past system, namely vaudeville, that have been preserved in the system because of their close links with successful traits, particularly sound' (p. 80). The page-citation given, however (*CHC*, p. 71) refers to the absorption of such disruption through generic and other motivation.

- 5 Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971); Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).
- 6 For example, Paul Hirst, *Law and Ideology* (London: Macmillan, 1979), Chapter 3; Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975); Antony Cutler, Barry Hindess, Paul Hirst and Athar Hussain, *Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).
- 7 This is true for all functionalist explanations, since they depend on showing how processes and practices 'fit' and function for the system. Thus Eitzen argues that 'In this way, despite constant innovation and change, the underlying system perpetuated itself' (Eitzen, 'Study of American cinema', p. 75).
- 8 Eitzen seems to give an autonomy to the function of narrative when he refers to the 'regularities of the environment', arguing that 'narrative movies exist because even before they existed people were predisposed toward narrative forms of entertainment' (Eitzen, 'Study of American cinema', p. 81).
- 9 Analysed by Janet Staiger in 'Dividing labour for production control: Thomas Ince and the rise of the studio system', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Spring 1979), pp. 16–25.
- 10 Douglas Gomery, 'The coming of sound', in Elizabeth Weis and John Belton (eds), *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
- 11 Tag Gallagher, *John Ford: The Man and His Films* (Berkeley: University of California, 1986), p. 31.
- 12 Tom Gunning, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1991), p. 95.
- 13 The film was also read generically; the *New York Times* reviewer André D. Sennwald called it 'just another gangster film, weaker than most in its story, stronger than most in its acting' 24 April 1931, p. 27, cited by Garth Jowett in 'Bullets, beer and the Hays office: *Public Enemy*', in P. Davies and B. Neve (eds), *Cinema, Politics and Society in America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981).
- 14 Richard Maltby's discussion of *Casablanca* (1943) shows the deliberate inclusion of shots which produce two mutually conflicting readings of the scene when Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman) first seeks Rick's (Humphrey Bogart) help, and passport, to escape *Casablanca*; Richard Maltby, "A brief romantic interlude": Dick and Jane go to 3½ seconds of the classical Hollywood cinema', in David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison University of Wisconsin, 1996), pp. 434–59.
- 15 The film was co-written by Lamar Trotti whose work as a censor with the Studio Relations Committee Production in the late 1920s, as well as a screenwriter when he joined Fox in 1932, clearly shows his grasp of 'classical narration' in the sense of the well-made play.
- 16 Irwin R. Blacker, *The Elements of Screen-Writing: A Guide for Film and Television Writers* (New York: Collier Books, 1986). Blacker taught at the University of Southern California where his students included the writers of *American Graffiti*, *Apocalypse Now* and *Star Wars*, as well as Bob Gale, writer of *Back to the Future*.
- 17 Blacker, *The Elements of Screen-Writing*, p. 32.
- 18 Frances Marion, *How to Write and Sell Film Stories* (New York: Colvici Friede, 1937).
- 19 Blacker, *The Elements of Screen-Writing*, p. 36. A player's star-image in classical Hollywood always took precedence over plot, sometimes disrupting storylines, as *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* emphasizes. Thus Cary Grant cannot be a murderer

in Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941), while the casting of Rita Hayworth in *Gilda* (1946) requires a happy end which is insufficiently motivated given the earlier plot. In *Dead Reckoning* (1947), where Hayworth was replaced by Lizbeth Scott, very similar plot elements are recycled but the different star, and star image, meant that the film could kill her off. The story of *Mildred Pierce* (1945) was changed not only in order to satisfy the Production Code but also in order to produce an appropriate vehicle for Joan Crawford.

- 20 Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*, 2nd edition (London: Starword, 1992) p. 113. Salt cites here Alfred Hennequin's *The Art of Playwriting*, published in 1890. Salt gives as an example the films of Mary Pickford where she was her own producer, such as *Poor Little Rich Girl* (1917), in which she insisted on comedy scenes despite director Maurice Tourneur's resistance.
- 21 'It is probable that such casual splendours [in *Casbah* (1948)] offered by the Hollywood film owe a great deal to its mixed parentage in vaudeville, melodrama, and other spectacle-centred entertainments.' (*CHC*, p. 21).
- 22 A. Nicholas Vardac, *Stage to Screen: Theatrical Origins of Early Film – David Garrick to D. W. Griffith* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987).
- 23 Marion, *Film Stories*, p. 141.
- 24 Blacker, *The Elements of Screen-Writing*, p. 20.
- 25 Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 188.
- 26 For Raymond Bellour the 'high classicism' of *The Big Sleep* lies in its filmic mode of narration, i.e. in its deployment of the codes of cinema, editing, shot scale, length of shot, etc., in a characteristic structure of repetition and difference through symmetry and dissymmetry. He uses the term 'classic narrative film', in order to focus on the classicism of the Hollywood narrative film, not the classical narrative of the Hollywood film. See Raymond Bellour, 'The obvious and the code', *Screen*, vol 15, no. 4 (Winter 1974/5).

Chapter 13

Specularity and engulfment

Francis Ford Coppola and *Bram Stoker's Dracula*

Thomas Elsaesser

New Hollywood

When looking to define post-classical Hollywood, one could do worse than take the current American cinema's most maverick of charismatic producer-director-auteurs as example, and among his varied *oeuvre*, pick one of the more hybrid films. Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) was allegedly a 'commercial' and therefore less 'personal' project (in the language of auteurism), helping to restore the director's battered industry reputation after the collapse of Zoetrope and the disaster of *One from the Heart* (1982).¹ But it could also be regarded as a professionally confident, shrewdly calculated and supremely self-reflexive piece of filmmaking, fully aware that it stands at the crossroads of major changes in the art and industry of Hollywood: looking back as well as forward, while staking out a ground all its own.

Post-classical filmmaking of the kind represented by *Bram Stoker's Dracula* is unthinkable without the 'New Hollywood', a label referring, above all, to the economic revival of Hollywood filmmaking since the mid-1970s.² Its beginning dates back to the worldwide success of Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975), George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) and Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972).³ Three elements make up the 'New Hollywood': first, a new generation of directors (sometimes called the 'Movie Brats'),⁴ second, new marketing strategies (centred on the blockbuster as a distribution and exhibition concept),⁵ and third, new media ownership and management styles in the film industry.⁶ One could add new technologies of sound and image reproduction, ranging from digitized special effects to Dolby sound, and new delivery systems, but it seems that the second – the new marketing strategies, also known as 'High Concept'⁷ filmmaking – was in many ways the most crucial. If the cinema was to survive, so common wisdom has it, it needed to attract audiences brought up on television and popular music, audiences who identified with the broader attitudes and values of 'youth-culture' (non-conformism, rebelliousness, sexual freedom, fashion-consciousness and conspicuous consumption). The signs, images