

# 14. Hybrid or Inbred: The Purity Hypothesis and Hollywood Genre History

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Two theses in recent film scholarship seem closely linked. One thesis is that films produced in Hollywood in the past forty years or so are persistently instances of genre mixing. For example, in discussing two films, *Back to the Future Part III* (Robert Zemeckis, 1990) and *Dances with Wolves* (Kevin Costner, 1990), Jim Collins writes,

. . . they represent two divergent types of genre film that co-exist in current popular culture. One is founded on dissonance, on eclectic juxtapositions of elements that very obviously don't belong together, while the other is obsessed with recovering some sort of missing harmony, where everything works in unison. Where the former involves an ironic hybridization of pure classical genres . . . , the latter epitomizes a "new sincerity" that rejects any form of irony in its sanctimonious pursuit of lost purity.<sup>1</sup>

Collins notes that John Cawelti noticed this generic transformation happening as long ago as the early 1970s. What Collins hopes to contribute is a description of the 1990s films as "ironic hybridization" and "new sincerity," as well as an explanation for the trend.

The second thesis in recent scholarship is that genre studies has been handicapped by its failure to sort out just exactly what critics are doing when they think about "genre." Examples of this thesis are excellent essays by Rick Altman, Tom Gunning, and Adam Knee in a 1995 issue of *Iris*. Interestingly, it is also in the early 1970s that Andrew Tudor provides a detailed discussion of the problems of doing genre studies, just when Cawelti notices a rash of genre transformations occurring.<sup>2</sup>

This conjunction of theses about genre films and how to do genre studies in the 1970s and again in the 1990s might be explained in two different ways. One is that something different happens in Hollywood movies which provokes critical attention to how we categorize and define groups of films. Another—and the one I want to argue for—is that Hollywood films have never been "pure"—that is, easily arranged into categories. All that has been pure has been sincere attempts to find order among variety.

Good reasons exist to find such order. For one thing, patterns of plot structure and conventions of representation do persist throughout decades (and some plot structures and conventions predate the emergence of cinema). To suggest, as I shall, that Hollywood films have never been pure instances of genres is not to say that Hollywood films do not evince patterns. Patterns do exist. Moreover, patterns are valuable material for deviation, dialogue, and critique. Variations from patterns may occur for making a text fresh or for commentary about the issues raised within the standard pattern, and both aesthetic and ideological functions of variations make no sense without a notion of some pattern or order. Hence, although the tactics of grouping films by genre have been eclectic, grouping films can still be an important scholarly act because it may elucidate what producers and consumers of films do. That is, they see films against a hypothesized pattern based on viewing other films. The process of comparison—which requires pattern—is crucial to communication and may contribute to the enjoyment of a text.<sup>3</sup>

Where finding order may go awry, however, is when a subjective order visible in the present is mapped onto the past and then assumed to be the order visible in the past. This historicist fallacy is then compounded if the past pattern is assumed to be pure against a visible present that is not, that the visible present is some transformation, deterioration, or hybridization of a pure essence and origin.

To claim that films produced in “New Hollywood” (hereafter “post-Fordian Hollywood”) are typified by a recombinant force is to misunderstand seriously “Old Hollywood” (hereafter “Fordian Hollywood”).<sup>4</sup> And the cause of the historical error is our own critical apparatus that has led us to believe erroneously that Hollywood films and genres were once pure. To make this argument more than an assertion, I want in this essay to review why the “genre” purity thesis is fallacious, both theoretically and historically, and why the “hybrid” claim for post-Fordian Hollywood is a particularly pernicious characterization.

### **A THEORETICAL REJECTION OF THE PURITY THESIS FOR FORDIAN HOLLYWOOD**

Two ways exist to argue theoretically against a purity thesis for films created during the Fordian era of Hollywood. One argument is to note that the eclectic practices and failures of prior critics of genre suggest that any attempt to find a suitable method for describing genres is doomed: if critics could have done it, they would have already. The other theoretical argument is to take a poststructuralist position that any observed pattern will invariably criticize itself. Both arguments have recently been used to discuss the activity of genre study.

The observation of eclectic practices and failures to describe genres by previous critics is the argumentation method preferred by film scholars when tackling the difficulties of hypothesizing patterns across films. Indeed, this is the strategy employed by Tudor in his 1973 analysis of the pitfalls of doing genre work. Tudor notes four methods by which critics might try to group films, and he underlines the problems for each one. These methods, and my labels for them, are as follows: (1) find a film and judge other films against the pattern and conventions in that film (the *idealist* method); (2) determine from empirical observation the necessary and sufficient characteristics to include a film in the category (the *empiricist* method); (3) make an a priori declaration of the characteristics of the group (the *a priori* method); and (4) use cultural expectations to categorize the text (the *social convention* method).

Problems with the *idealist method* include finding ways to judge among various declarations of which film is the ideal from which the pattern should be derived. For the *empiricist method*, a circularity exists. The critic cannot observe objectively, since the critic has already predetermined which films to include in the group in order to find the necessary and sufficient characteristics. The a priori method like the *idealist method* presents problems of settling debates among critics as well as operating in a predetermined fashion. Finally, the *social convention method* raises questions about how the critic finds evidence of expectations and determines cultural consensus. Moreover, for all four methods, characteristics can shift from grouping to grouping. Tudor notes that while the western is defined by “certain themes, certain typical actions, certain characteristic mannerisms,” the horror film is defined by the above *and* also the “intention to horrify.”<sup>5</sup> Tudor’s reaction is to take the practical approach I have mentioned already: simply to live with the inconsistencies in method and “deficiencies” in the objects of analysis for the sake of what might be learned from textual comparison. Indeed, most film scholars know these theoretical shortcomings of genre study, and then just forge ahead anyway.

The inability of previous scholarship to find an appropriate method of genre categorizing has also been the focus of the recent essays by Gunning, Knee, and Altman. They, too, note the eclectic practices and failures associated with genre criticism. Gunning particularly stresses that the groupings created by critics assume some kind of “preexistent phenomena” that critics “articulate.”<sup>6</sup> These phenomena may be quite at odds with the use of genre terms by individuals charged with distributing and exhibiting films, who may have much to gain by expanding the categories into which a film might fit and thus widening the appeals to various audiences. Thus, Gunning urges that scholars distinguish carefully between academic and industrial acts of genre classification.

In reviewing the sources of science fiction films of the 1950s, Knee details a variety of categories of films from which these movies drew their features. Among them are the war film of the 1940s and the postwar documentary. In fact, Knee eventually concludes that 1950s “science fiction in a sense functions both as a genre and as a mode of generic discourse, a rendering fantastic of other generic forms.”<sup>7</sup> Such a view of the “adjectival” possibilities of genre categories has existed for some time among scholars of melodrama who argue that melodrama is less a narrative formula and more a mode of vision, inflected upon many different narrative patterns.

Altman, too, outlines contradictions in categorizing films by genre. Expanding somewhat on Gunning’s list, he details four different approaches to “genres”: (1) a *model*, which becomes a formula of production; (2) a *structure*, which exists as a textual system in a film; (3) an *etiquette*, which is the category used by distributors and exhibitors; and (4) a *contract*, which is an agreement with spectators on how to read a film.<sup>8</sup> These four approaches then produce five disparities in the critical application of genres to individual texts or groups of texts: (1) words used for genres are sometimes nouns and sometimes adjectives; (2) producers try to reproduce the norm but also deviate from it; (3) genres defined by critics are different from genres perceived by audiences; (4) genre categories are sometimes historical and sometimes trans-historical; and (5) genres defined by producers are different from genres analyzed by critics.

In all of these cases of attention to the eclectic practices and failures of critics to delineate clear, coherent, and consistent categories for films, the underlying premise is *not* that this could not be done. Rather, it is that until critics sort this out and everyone—from the authors to the distributors and exhibitors to the audiences and the critics—agrees on how to categorize films, no hope exists for genre study to function so that critics might find exemplars of the formulas, patterns, and conventions. Thus, this theoretical argument against a “purity” thesis operates from an assumption that human behavior and labeling can never be controlled in such a way that critics would know a “pure” genre or genre film.

This practical approach to arguing against critical knowledge of “pure” genre films is quite different from a poststructuralist thesis. A poststructuralist thesis would argue that every text inherently displays what it is not. A good example of this has been the argumentation against a purity thesis invoked by Thomas O. Beebee in his study of literary texts, and this method could fruitfully be applied to film studies. Like Tudor and Altman, Beebee finds four different approaches to genre: (1) as *rules*, which display the “authorial intention” in production of the text (adherence to or deviation from the conventions and patterns might occur); (2) as *species*, which is the historical and cultural lineage of a genre text; (3) as *pat-*

*terms of textual features*, which exist “in the text itself”; and (4) as *reader conventions*, which exist “in the reader.”<sup>9</sup> Appealing to poststructuralism, Beebee suggests that every act of labeling is “always already unstable”:<sup>10</sup> “I argue that, since a ‘single’ genre is only recognizable as difference, as a foregrounding against the background of its neighboring genres, every work involves more than one genre, even if only implicitly.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, genre labeling by any of the above four approaches is “inescapable” (individuals cannot understand a text except in context with surrounding texts). Moreover, the text is inevitably impure because it cannot but be known by the context in which it exists. Beebee goes on to argue that genre texts often are in dialogue with their own definition by (fallacious) exclusion, creating moments of metatextuality and places for assessing ideological struggle.<sup>12</sup>

Beebee’s approach to the problems of genre and notions of the “purity” of a text is most obviously familiar in poststructuralist criticism that elucidates structuring absences (“what a text cannot say but says in spite of itself”), evidences of overdetermination, and intertextual dialogues. Since poststructuralism hypothesizes this breaching of boundaries and impurity to be features of every text, then any text located as an instance of genre would also, ipso facto, breach generic boundaries and display its excluded otherness. In other words, no genre film is pure.

Both the practical argument about eclectic practices and failures and the poststructuralist argument provide theoretical reasons why critics should reject the notion that Fordian Hollywood ever produced pure examples of genre films. Why is it, then, that the sense of a “transformation” in genres or an “ironic hybridization” and a “new sincerity” exists strongly enough in the era of post-Fordian Hollywood to encourage special attention to generic instability as some new feature of the post-Fordian era?<sup>13</sup> Cawelti believes the trend is due to an exhaustion and inability of the underlying myths of popular genres to deal with the post-Vietnam War era. Collins explains “ironic hybridization” and “new sincerity” as attempts to master “the media-saturated landscape of contemporary culture.”<sup>14</sup> In cases of “ironic hybridization,” the films explore the plurality of genre experiences through referential dialogues with their sources. In cases of “new sincerity,” the films revert nostalgically to seek a lost “authenticity.”<sup>15</sup> Both textual strategies are methods to control a sensory experience of the “hyperconscious.”<sup>16</sup>

Another explanation exists as to why Cawelti and Collins find generic transformations and hybridizations in post-Fordian Hollywood, and that is that they never interrogate the generic descriptions of Fordian Hollywood. As Gunning notes, the beginning of genre classification by film critics occurs in the 1940s, particularly in the writings of Robert Warshaw and James Agee. Film genre study accelerates with the arrival in the uni-

versities of academic film studies and the critical methods of new criticism, structuralism, and semiotics. The descriptions of Fordian Hollywood genres upon which Cawelti and Collins rely are ones constituted by film critics observing a limited set of films produced mostly between 1930 and 1960.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, those founding generic descriptions display the definitional fallacies described above.

Even more significantly, the generic descriptions are produced by critical methods that *by their very methodology* offer one genre category with which to label and analyze the text. New criticism analyzes how great works overcome apparent contradictions to create a master coherence: all the parts are made to fit together by the critic or the text is demeaned as a lesser artistic work. Structuralism finds one underlying binary opposition influencing the surface. Semiotics looks for narrative patterns and transformations that also reveal primary, if perhaps contradictory, structuring paradigms.

What Cawelti and Collins do not tackle is how arbitrary and inadequate those original generic descriptions are to the original texts. Fordian Hollywood genre texts appear to be suddenly transforming in the 1970s or hybridizing in the 1990s because the generic definitions were “fixed” by critics in the 1960s using critical methods that sought coherence and purity. This “fixing” of genre definition (and of text in genre category) ignored (or sought to overcome through critical argumentation of coherence) the industrial practice by Fordian Hollywood of providing at least two plots for every movie. And it is here that I turn to historical reasons to reject the purity thesis of Fordian Hollywood genres.

### **A HISTORICAL JUSTIFICATION FOR THE REJECTION OF THE PURITY THESIS FOR FORDIAN HOLLYWOOD**

Several fundamental economic and ideological forces influenced the normative construction of the conventions of the classical film produced by Fordian Hollywood. Among these were the needs to (1) both standardize and differentiate products, and (2) market movies to many individuals. From the 1910s, Hollywood business people assumed several types of audiences: adult and child, male and female, urban and rural. In analyzing what appealed to these various audiences, these people assumed that certain genres had greater appeals to the various subgroups. Throughout the history of Fordian Hollywood, discourse is plentiful about the varying tastes. Moreover, a movie appealing to a variety of audiences was praised as having good potential box office. Reviewers often tried to describe what the various audiences would or would not find in a film.

The Fordian Hollywood film is typified by usually having two plots—one often being a heterosexual romance. What makes this dual plot line

“classical” is that the two plot lines hinge on and affect each other. The advantage of the dual plot line, I would argue, is that such a narrative structure permits appeals to multiple subgroups of taste. Moreover, the edge for one plot line being a heterosexual romance is the presumptive appeal to women consumers (whom the industry also assumed from the 1910s were major decision-makers in family entertainment choices). Finally, add to this the need to differentiate product. Combinations and rearrangements of formulas are quite simple if two conventional plot lines from different genres are merged together.

To test the thesis that Fordian Hollywood films are a mixture of multiple genres and not pure examples, I need to analyze them. However, since the theorists of genre point out how many different ways genres might be defined, I want briefly to show that no matter how I create the criteria by which genres are constructed, Fordian Hollywood movies will not stand up to the purity hypothesis. For the most part, I will make only gestures toward this proof, but I hope the evidence and argumentation will seem to have sufficient validity that common sense will take my argument to its conclusion.

For my purposes here, I will use Altman’s set of the four methods for defining genres that I described previously: a *model*, a *structure*, an *etiquette*, and a *contract*. To determine etiquette and contract, I will use film reviews as a sort of explicit statement of mediation among the distributors, exhibitors, and spectators. My presumption is that film reviewers are functioning as surrogate consumers, following up on the promotion and publicity generated by the studios and affirming or denying the proposed reading strategies to counsel viewers about what they will see. Thus, the reviews are one among several sites of evidence for both etiquette and contract.

How did Fordian Hollywood construct genres as models of production? They certainly did not construct them rigorously or neatly. One way to determine how studios perceived formulas would be to examine the work areas of associate producers for studios. In 1932, Irving Thalberg’s associate producers were organized as follows: Al Lewin was in charge of sophisticated stories; Bernie Hyman, animal stories; Bernie Fineman, genre pics and curios; Eddie Mannix, action films; Larry Weingarten, Marie Dressler films; Paul Bern, sex fables; and Harry Rapf, sad stories.<sup>18</sup>

Beyond the use of dual-plot structures and the incoherence evident in MGM’s allocation of work assignments (which is typical of all the studios) is the production source of stories. Since Fordian Hollywood found purchasing novels, plays, and magazine stories economical (the story came ready-made and possibly with some indication of consumer satisfaction and advance publicity), Fordian Hollywood dealt a good deal of the time with pre-made stories that might not fit any studio-produced formula.<sup>19</sup>

The pre-made stories were usually reconfigured to adhere to Fordian Hollywood norms of storytelling, but their original sources outside the studio system contaminated them. Moreover, the value of innovation produced work in cycles, widely acknowledged by commentators on the Fordian Hollywood system.<sup>20</sup> No, the purity hypothesis most certainly would not hold up if I were to use the *model* method of defining Fordian Hollywood genres.

What about the *structure* method? Here is the method most likely to result in satisfactory findings, since the point of the structure method is to uncover underlying, nonconscious patterns that only the sensitive critic can reveal. Is Fordian Hollywood replete with examples of films that display pure examples of genres with no interference by other patterns or formulas, no hybridizing? Here is how three critics deal with apparently prototypical genres or examples of genre films:

(1) Paul Kerr, in discussing film noir, writes: “Furthermore, the ‘hybrid’ quality of the film noir was perhaps, at least in part, attributable to increasing studio insecurities about marketing their B product (covering all their generic options, as it were, in each and every film).”<sup>21</sup>

(2) Dana Polan, in discussing *In a Lonely Place* (Nicholas Ray, 1950), allocates the film to film noir, screwball comedy, and gothic romance categories.<sup>22</sup>

(3) Peter Wollen, discussing *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) and *Marnie* (Hitchcock, 1964), declares: “[The films are] hybrids of the fairy tale with a detective story.”<sup>23</sup>

I do not mean by these examples to suggest that no critic could ever find examples of “pure” structures of a genre. However, I would also argue that if another critic came along, that second, argumentative critic could likely make a case for contamination, influence, or degradation of the pure-case example. How to do this is neatly argued by David Bordwell in his book *Making Meaning*.<sup>24</sup> Recalcitrant data exist in all Fordian Hollywood films to permit critical debate and perception of other patterns and formulas: see the second plot line just to begin. Moreover, the argumentative critic could easily dispute the pure-example critic’s original definition of the pattern and conventions of the genre category, as shown by the theoretical work of Altman, Gunning, and Beebe.

How easy this argumentation would be to do is evident when I turn to the *etiquette* and *contract* methods of genre definition. The routine effect of combination within Fordian Hollywood is obvious not only for apparent cases such as *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* but even for films that critics have labeled as classics in a particular genre. Take, for instance, the classic “screwball comedy,” *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934), described by contemporaneous reviewers as “a smooth blending of the various ingredients” with “a deadly enough familiarity all





31. *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*: The routine effect of genre combination within Fordian Hollywood.

through”; intertextual references include the film being called “another long distance bus story” and a “Molière comedy,” while the male protagonist is “one of those crack newspaper men frequently discovered in Hollywood’s spacious studios.”<sup>25</sup> Those remarks notwithstanding, the reviewers thought the film charming but not the start of a new movie pattern.

*Little Caesar* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1930) is a crime movie but the “modern criminal . . . thirsts primarily for power.” Thus, it is also a “Greek epic tragedy,” a gangster film, and a detective movie. *The Public Enemy* (William Wellman, 1931) is a gang film, documentary drama, and comedy, but “in detail *The Public Enemy* is nothing like that most successful of gangster films [*Little Caesar*].”

*Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939) is resolutely not described in *Variety* as a western (this would be a derogatory term in 1939), but instead is a “‘Grand Hotel’ on wheels,” an “absorbing drama without the general theatrics usual to picturizations of the early west.” Likewise, the *New York Times* uses “frontier melodrama” and concludes with a pun on the



32. *Stagecoach* (1939): A “*Grand Hotel* on wheels.”

film director’s name: “They’ve all done nobly by a noble horse opera, but none so nobly as its director. This is one stagecoach that’s powered by a Ford.”<sup>26</sup>

*Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942) will succeed because of the “variety of moods, action, suspense, comedy and drama.” While it “goes heavy on the love theme,” *Casablanca* also has “adventure” and “anti-Axis propaganda.” “[Warner Bros.] is telling it in the high tradition of their hard-boiled romantic-adventure style” with “a top-notch thriller cast,” and “they have so combined sentiment, humor and pathos with taut melodrama and bristling intrigue that the result is a highly entertaining and even inspiring film.” It is another “*Grand Hotel* picture, a human crossroads.” *Mildred Pierce* (Curtiz, 1945) is a “drama,” “melodrama,” “frank sex play,” “mother-love” story, and, of course, a “murder-mystery.”

As several of the theoreticians of Hollywood suggest, the ways to create genre categories are multiple. By all of them, except the critical method that a scholar can find a pattern within the text, I have argued that, historically, no justification exists to assume producers, distributors, exhibitors, or audiences saw films as being “purely” one type of film. In the case

of the structural method, both the problems with traditional critical methods of genre study and the evidence that critics have argued that genres are mixed in Fordian Hollywood cinema suggest that even the structural method of defining genre fails to locate “pure” examples of genres within Fordian Hollywood cinema. This is not to suggest that the pattern or genre is not “pure” but that Fordian Hollywood films do not provide clean examples of the critically defined genre.

### THE PERNICIOUS HYBRID THESIS OF POST-FORDIAN HOLLYWOOD

In the preceding two sections, I have argued that representing Fordian Hollywood films as simple examples of films that would fit into neat, coherent genre categories is an inadequate thesis both theoretically and historically. Rather, films produced during that period were perceived by the producers and audiences to belong potentially to several categories. No one worried about this. Instead the lack of purity broadened the film’s appeal in terms both of the likely audiences who might enjoy the movie and of the film’s originality.

The reason, however, to expend this much effort on the problem of the purity thesis for Fordian Hollywood cinema is that the purity hypothesis is then used as the foundation upon which is built a *critical difference* for the post-Fordian Hollywood era. It is one thing to claim, as Cawelti does, that genres are transforming in the early 1970s. It is another to propose that post-Fordian cinema is typified by its hybridity.

The reasons for my complaint are twofold. One is that this proposed difference just is not the case.<sup>27</sup> The second reason is that the use of the term *hybrid* for post-Fordian cinema distorts and reduces the potential value that the theory of hybridity has for cultural scholars.

The notion of “hybridity” comes from botany and zoology and describes the crossbreeding of separate species.<sup>28</sup> An influential application of this organic concept to literature comes from Mikhail Bakhtin. What Bakhtin writes stresses the meeting of two different “styles” or “languages” derived from different cultures. He summarizes: “The novelistic hybrid is *an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another*, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another, the carving out of a living image of another language.”<sup>29</sup> Bakhtin particularly emphasizes that the event of hybridization permits *dialogue* between the two languages. In botany and zoology, the function of hybridization is to produce invigorated offspring by crossbreeding, but the offspring may be sterile. So too, the hybridized literary text (often a parody) may create a strong effect, but the hybrid itself does not generate a new family.

In accord with Bakhtin’s original proposition, the recognition of tex-

tual hybridity has been fruitfully appropriated by postcolonial scholars to describe the outcome of cross-cultural encounters. The editors of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* write that an event of textual hybridity does not deny “the traditions from which [a hybrid text] springs,” nor does a hybrid event signal the disappearance of the culture from which the hybrid derives.<sup>30</sup>

More significantly, however, a textual hybrid has effects on colonizers. Homi K. Bhabha points out that the recognition by colonizers of hybridity produced by the colonized must call into question the transparency of colonizing authority. In “Signs Taken for Wonders,” Bhabha cautions,

The discriminatory effects of the discourse of cultural colonialism, for instance, do not simply or singly refer to a “person,” or to a dialectical power struggle between self and Other, or to a discrimination between mother culture and alien cultures. Produced through the strategy of disavowal, the reference of discrimination is always to the process of splitting as the condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different—a mutation, a hybrid. . . .

. . . Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the “pure” and original identity of authority).<sup>31</sup>

Bhabha’s point here is clear: to recognize a hybrid forces the dominant culture to look back at itself and see its presumption of universality. Hybridity always opens up the discriminatory presumptions of purity, authenticity, and originality from which this textual hybrid is declared to be a deviation, a bastard, a corruption. Bhabha goes on to explain that “the hybrid object . . . revalues its presence by resiting it as the signifier of *Entstellung*—after the intervention of difference. It is the power of this strange metonymy of presence to so disturb the systematic (and systemic) construction of discriminatory knowledges that the cultural, once recognized as the medium of authority, becomes virtually unrecognizable.”<sup>32</sup>

To use the notion of hybridity for the mixing of genres in post-Fordian Hollywood cinema is, thus, to pervert doubly its potential value for cultural studies. In the social and communicative sense in which Bakhtin uses the term *hybridity*, the notion ought to be reserved for truly cross-cultural encounters. I have to ask, are the breedings of genres occurring in Fordian and post-Fordian Hollywood truly cross-cultural? Truly one language speaking to another? I seriously doubt that the strands of patterns that intermix in Hollywood filmmaking are from different species. Rather, they are in the same language family of Western culture. The breeding occurring is not cross-cultural, but perhaps, and with a full sense of the derogatory implications involved, even a *case of inbreeding*.

Moreover, Bhabha's very particular political sense of hybridity suggests that when critics encounter a cross-cultural hybrid, the questions of power, of presumptive authority, purity, and origination of the dominant genre, ought to be the focus of the analysis. Unlike Bakhtin, Bhabha stresses the historical fact of an inequality of cross-cultural contacts and communications.

I cannot, of course, do more than request that critics respect the possibility that narrowing the application of theories such as textual hybridity to a specific situation has value—both descriptive and explanatory—to scholars. However, I do make the plea. Despite all the theoretical and historical problems associated with categorizing films, perhaps the most valuable critical contribution that can be made is to analyze the social, cultural, and political implications of pattern mixing. In the above theoretical discussion, none of the writers ultimately declared the project of genre criticism impossible or unworthy—only fraught with scholarly difficulties. My rejection of the hybridity thesis for post-Fordian Hollywood cinema is not a rejection of (1) the view that pattern mixing is occurring; or (2) the fact that post-Fordian Hollywood cinema is producing hybrids both internally within the United States and externally throughout the world economy of signs. Internal hybrids<sup>33</sup> would be examples of films created by minority or subordinated groups that use genre mixing or genre parody to dialogue with or criticize the dominant. Films by U.S. feminists, African Americans, Hispanics, independents, the avant-garde, and so forth might be good cases of internal hybrids.

Both inbreeding and hybridizing need to be studied, and genre criticism has a contribution to make toward that work. Considering the implications of how critics apply theories can help in that cultural and critical work, but distinguishing between inbreeding and hybridity throughout the history of Hollywood has scholarly potential.

## Notes

1. Jim Collins, "Genericity in the Nineties: Eclectic Irony and the New Sincerity," in *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Jim Collins, Hillary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 242–243.

2. Rick Altman, "Emballage réutilisable: Les produits génériques et le processus de recyclage," *Iris* 20 (Fall 1995): 13–30; Tom Gunning, "'Those Drawn with a Very Fine Camel's Hair Brush': The Origins of Film Genres," *Iris* 20 (Fall 1995): 49–61; Adam Knee, "Generic Change in the Cinema," *Iris* 20 (Fall 1995): 31–39; Andrew Tudor, *Theories of Film* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), reprinted as "Genre and Critical Methodology" in *Movies and Methods*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 118–126; John G. Cawelti, "*Chinatown* and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films," this volume.

3. Tudor, "Genre and Critical Methodology," pp. 119–121.
4. I reject the representation of Hollywood as "new" after World War II; rather, I see Hollywood's industrial structure, modes of production, signifying practices, and modes of reception as an intensification of monopoly capitalism. Following contemporary theorists of global capitalism, I am relabeling the period of Hollywood of 1917 to around 1960 as "Fordian Hollywood"; the Hollywood of post-1960 or so I will call "post-Fordian Hollywood" to emphasize the strong linkages to the past as well as the industry's accommodations to late monopoly capitalism. Moreover, this labeling permits the possibility of a new descriptive term for Hollywood if it moves beyond "post-Fordian" practices—which is less the case for a label such as "new." See Kevin Robins, "Reimagined Communities? European Image Spaces, Beyond Fordism," *Cultural Studies* 3, no. 2 (1989): 145–165; Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Public Culture* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 1–24; and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, "The Global and the Local in International Communications," in *Mass Media and Society*, ed. James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (London: Edward Arnold, 1991), pp. 118–138.
5. Tudor, "Genre and Critical Methodology," p. 120 (emphasis in original).
6. Gunning, "'Those Drawn with a Very Fine Camel's Hair Brush,'" p. 50.
7. Knee, "Generic Change in the Cinema," p. 36.
8. Altman, "Emballage réutilisable," p. 14. This list is quite similar to Thomas O. Beebee's list, summarized below, in *The Ideology of Genre: A Comparative Study of Generic Instability* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994). Altman does not refer to Beebee, and I have no reason to assume influence: just the happy coincidence of intelligences.
9. Beebee, *The Ideology of Genre*, p. 3.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–19.
13. Cawelti, "Chinatown and Generic Transformation"; James Monaco, *American Film Now: The People, the Power, the Money, the Movies* (New York: New American Library, 1979); Robin Wood, "Smart-ass and Cutie-pie: Notes towards an Evaluation of Altman," *Movie*, no. 21 (Autumn 1975): 1–17. Monaco writes: "*Easy Rider*, by all accounts one of the most significant movies of the decade, was a Chase-Caper-Road-Youth-Drag-Buddy film," and in the 1970s, "the lines of definition that separate one genre from another have continued to disintegrate" (p. 56). Wood even uses the "hybrid" term: "[Robert Altman's] best films are hybrids, products of a fusion of 'European' aspirations with American genres" (p. 7). As I shall discuss below in the third section, at least Wood's use of the term *hybrid* may have justification, since he suggests an encounter between two "languages" (although whether European cinema is another "language" than Hollywood could be debated).
14. Collins, "Genericity in the Nineties," p. 243.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
17. The lack of access to films prior to 1930 is an important cause for the problem of the limited descriptions by these critics of Hollywood genres.

18. "Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer," *Fortune* (6 December 1932), reprinted in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), p. 260.

19. Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, *Film Facts 1942: 1922–20 Years of Self Government—1942* (New York: MPPDA, n.d.), p. 52.

20. William J. Fadiman, "Books into Movies," *Publishers' Weekly*, 8 September 1934, pp. 753–755.

21. Paul Kerr, "'My Name Is Joseph H Lewis,'" *Screen* 24, nos. 4–5 (July–October 1983): 52.

22. Dana Polan, *In a Lonely Place* (London: British Film Institute, 1993).

23. Peter Wollen, "Hybrid Plots in *Psycho*," in Wollen, *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (London: Verso, 1982), p. 37.

24. David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

25. These and the following unattributed quotations are from contemporary reviews in *Hollywood Reporter*, *Motion Picture Herald*, *New Republic*, *New York Times*, *Saturday Review*, *Time*, and *Variety*.

26. *Variety* and *Motion Picture Herald* would not use "western" because of that genre's association with a rural taste, but the *New Yorker* does not hesitate.

27. Or both Fordian and post-Fordian cinemas are hybridity cinemas, which is not the way I want to go. See below.

28. It can also apply to genera and family, so technically the term could be used for what we are discussing. However, see my remarks below.

29. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 361 (emphasis in original).

30. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 184.

31. Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 153–154.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

33. The term *internal* implies accepting the notion of a "nation," which is a problem for theories of post-Fordian capitalism. This is an issue impossible to take to its appropriate conclusions here.