

The Persistence of Hollywood, Part II: Reflexivity, Feedback and Self-Regulation

The World that is Hollywood

If one can speak of Hollywood as providing the *lingua franca* of a certain sociability, affording people from all parts of the world an instant familiarity and imaginary intimacy in the public sphere, then the case for Hollywood as a world-historical achievement along the lines sketched at the end of the first part of this essay is still far from self-evident. Despite its longevity of nearly a hundred years, and its sense of its own historical significance (annually on display during the Academy Awards Ceremony), Hollywood is too close, too much with(in) us, for one to compare it, say, to the monumental permanence of the Egyptian pyramids or the architectural and spiritual grandeur of Gothic cathedrals, or even the 19th century bourgeois novel.¹ What would be the common standard for such a comparison, forgetting for the moment that most educated people will think the very idea little short of blasphemous? Raymond Bellour has probably given the suggestion that Hollywood is more than the sum of its parts the right kind of personal inflection, hinting that the comparison might not be such hubris or folly after all:

There are three things, and only three that I have loved in the same fashion: Greek mythology, the early writings of the Brontë sisters, the American cinema. These three worlds, at first sight so dissimilar, have one point in common, which is of immense impact: they are, precisely, worlds; that is to say, totalities complete in themselves, which respond truly, at their given point in time, to all the questions one might pose oneself about the nature, the function and the fate of the universe. This is very clear about Greek mythology. The stories of Gods and heroes leave nothing in the shadows: neither the heavens nor the earth, neither the genealogies nor the emotions; they impose the idea of an order, finite and infinite, within which a child can imagine his or her fears and desires. . . . The American cinema found itself giving birth, at the scale of the largest modern society, to a similar phenomenon. And it expanded its reach (almost) around the entire planet. . . . To this day, the American cinema is the last attempt at a mythology of Western culture [and] since its invention, there has been an extraordinary fit between the machine that is cinema and the continent that is America. The United States immediately recognized, in this machine to reproduce reality, the instrument it needed to create its own. Its power lies in having believed in it instantly.²

Bellour cannily places Hollywood between the world-making mythology of the civilization whose imprint we still bear, and the personal mythology of a family of very gifted writers, thus reaffirming the foundational polarity that understands Hollywood as a complex but internally consistent secular “cosmology”—André Bazin’s “genius of the system,” and at the same time, as the enabling condition for a “family” of great artists—the genius of the “auteurs.” Hollywood’s strength is that it has transcended its origins in the music hall, the circus, popular theater and vaudeville of the late 19th and early 20th centuries to become a uniquely rich art form, while remaining faithful to the needs for and sources of the visual spectacle as pioneered in the magic lantern phantasmagorias and smoke-and-mirror displays of the post-Revolutionary period around 1800.

This sense of the American cinema tapping into a long tradition and a venerable, if often denigrated, pedigree has in recent years been given the name of “the cinema of attractions,” emphasizing the fundamental grounding in spectacle, special effects, surprise and sensation of a cinema that is traditionally analyzed more in terms of story-lines and plotting, narrative and narration, foreshadowing and suspense—in short, highlighting linear progress, goal-directedness and the sense of closure that comes with the resolution of conflict or contradiction.³ I want to recontextualize the other side, that of the “cinema of attractions,” by linking it to what I have earlier referred to as the “event” character of movie-going in general, and the blockbuster in particular. Recall that the architectural language of movie-theaters (Egyptian, Chinese, Aztec, Gothic) often alludes to cinemas as what one might call “spaces of ritual” or of formalized behavior—temples, palaces and churches—deemed necessary for the occurrence of an event: a miracle, a sacrifice, a special effect, a transubstantiation.

What in this sense is an event? The key element I take to be that the event is in some ways unique, that it constitutes a rupture in relation to what surrounds it, and that it has an extension in time and space; an event is something taking “place” in “time.” In particular, while the temporality of the event is that of “simultaneity,” the media event always involves two spaces, related to each other and yet distinct from each other, a now/here space, and a now/there space, which also means, of course, that an event implies a subject, a bearer of an experience. On television, for instance, it concerns a remote location, which is being brought close; in the case of a traditional cinema experience, the key spaces designate the auditorium space and the screen space, and the time, of course, the duration of the projection, but also the time of anticipation that precedes it. Indeed, the two temporalities, as much as the two spaces have to be experienced as distinct, so that their conjuncture or melding—brought on, for instance, by the dimming of lights, sound, narration and spectacle—can actually take place.

Yet the cinema experience has the event as its organizing principle also in a different sense. One could propose a definition of cinema in the electronic age, that is, *after* television and the Internet, which, however, merely highlights a general feature of cinema since its beginnings, namely that a film requires a performance for its completion, and an event for its actualization. The event can assume various shapes, and has—over the past hundred years—taken very diverse forms. For instance, if the event character in the 1930s and 1940s was defined around the family audience, in the 1970s and 1980s it modeled itself on the leisure habits of its predominantly youthful, male audience, and since the late 1990s has—thanks to (digital) animation—increasingly found again its family audience. The constitutive elements and quality of this event, as we also know, is for exhibitors a critical factor economically, since their income from concessions and amenities can exceed that from the share of the box-office admissions.⁴

Another indication that the cinema has had an event-scenario built into its commercial exploitation almost from the very beginning is the fact that, since the 1910s, spectators have been charged according to a time advantage and a location advantage: the principle of “first run” or *première exclusivité* or now the “opening weekend” by which cinemas and admission prices are classified mean that,

in effect, audiences pay a premium for seeing a film during its initial release period, when it has the attention of the press and the general public. Its commodity value resides in its temporality, here expressed as the time advantage: we are prepared to pay extra for a film while it is still an “event.” The emergence of the prerecorded video-cassette and then the DVD, at a cost barely above the admission price of a cinema ticket, has further shortened the period in which the cinema film is an event, although it has, as already mentioned, given the film a substantial secondary market, in which its event character is intended to reverberate as recollection and memory.

The “event-driven” nature of cinema today also reflects the changing function of public spaces in the wake of urban renewal schemes for inner cities, where crowds no longer gather for political action or to go to work. Since the existence of television and the automobile, a whole range of other activities competes for the population’s free time. But these static and mobile vehicles also mean that people who frequent the streets of city centers do so almost wholly for the purposes of shopping, leisure and entertainment: activities connected with seeing and being seen, in which “going to the movies” is part of a continuum of spectatorship, ranging from window-shopping, meeting friends at a café or eating out. But the movie-theater also marks a liminal space, at once a physical focus and social experience, defined in relation to its opposite: the home. As Edgar Reitz has put it: “cinema is a sort of consensus about going out, it gives a name and an address to the desire of leaving the house for an evening.”⁵

An effect of the blockbuster as the main attraction of theatrical release and as a marketing tool for other audio-visual services and material products is that it makes “cinema” partake in the meta-genre “media-event,” comparable to political events, public holidays, natural or man-made disasters. This is why we come across the cinema everywhere, but in a peculiar temporal modulation. A new film more likely than not, first hits us in the form of movie trailers, billboards, behind-the-scenes features on television and star interviews. In this respect, the blockbuster’s carefully orchestrated marketing campaign involves a build-up and an intensification, followed by a media-blitz, whose nearest analogy is the weather. It is much like a hurricane gathering force (for someone living in Europe) in mid-Atlantic, as it were, showing first signs of turbulence in toy shops, on the web or on music television, before moving inland to the capital for its big release, and then finally sweeping the rest of the country’s screens before gently subsiding in the videothèques and undulating through the Internet. The event-movie par excellence, the blockbuster is characterized by the fact that it takes place in a kind of countdown time and that it occupies all manner of urban, mental and media spaces. On the other hand, it can also lay waste the cinema landscape for more modest films, usually of domestic or European origin (once again, speaking from outside the US).

The new cinema space, by becoming absorbed into a different dimension (be it the theme-park atmosphere of the cineplex or the art-house ambiance modeled on museums, or the lobby areas of other high-profile high-tech public or corporate buildings), are part of an urbanism in which they figure as “cathedrals of another faith,” to use a memorable phrase coined by the architect Hans Hollein for the kind of prestige buildings that today make up a metropolitan skyline.⁶ John Ellis goes so far to speak of the “sacred” quality of the cinema space. For him, it is the possibility of “epiphanies” that justify the cinema’s main claim to be different from television:

A cinema is a special space, one to which we are permitted a limited access. It is not our space, it is a controlled public space which we enter according to set rules—the payment of money, arrival at an appointed hour—and agree to behave according to still further established rules. These rules certainly vary according to the particular culture in which the screening is taking place, but in Europe our established convention is that we sit, we do not talk, and we attend to the spectacle. We submit—and, having submitted, we can enter into a different modality of existence, into a realm of fantasy. This process is essentially a sacred one. . . . Collective

submission to rules and rituals allows the individual a degree of epiphany. . . . Television, on the other hand, occupies a different space entirely, one that has no sacred dimension to speak of. We have television of right in our society. It is a social necessity in the same way that indoor plumbing is a social necessity.⁷

Thus, compared to the old stand-alone cinemas, but especially the shoebox cinemas of the 1970s, the multiplexes since the 1990s offer not only a difference of kind and level in the amenities but a different recoding of space itself. The old cinema space is all about “drawing boundaries,” marking the event is separate. By contrast, the new ones are about integration as well as differentiation, making the cinema space not merge, but be contiguous with a café, a bar or restaurant space: reflection of a different policy not only of services inside the cinema, but of how contemporary public spaces relate, communicate and connect with each other, and what experiences are being offered across these spaces. In contrast to Ellis’ sacred space, which is essentially a homogeneous space, the auditorium can also be a heterogeneous space, in which the function of the screen space becomes somewhat different: not merging with the auditorium, but one where separation and distance are differently coded: one recalls the phenomenon of cult films like *THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW* or *THE BLUES BROTHERS*, or the sing-along *SOUND OF MUSIC*, where the narrative action became secondary (and with it the temporality of suspense or other narrational devices). The fans’ familiarity turns the film into a cue sheet for a performance. One might call such a film experience—echoing what was said earlier—a space to be entered, traversed and explored, a map to be navigated, rather than an itinerary to be followed. This sharply differentiates “going to the movies” from the home theater experience and also suggests that however much new releases are pirated or circulate on the Internet, the physical experience and the event-character will remain a key “attraction” of the Hollywood cinema.

Thus, in light of these considerations, there may be a number of factors that even for a historian invite comparison with earlier cultural achievements: blockbusters as “buildings” in time rather than space, or as media events that linger on in the memory of a generation or a community. A quite different parallel to earlier “cathedrals” might be the collective craftsmanship of Hollywood, and the often semi-anonymous authorship manifest in the multi-million spectacles (few will stay behind for the five minutes of scrolling credits). The concentration of the American film industry in one physical location over such a long period of time has meant that generations of professionals, men and women with very special skills, have invested themselves, in a uniquely American blend of imagination and engineering, competition and competence. This professionalism was passed on in the form of an impressive institutional memory: an infinitely varied body of specialized knowledge, whose talent pool has renewed itself by attracting outsiders in ways equally unique, if one compares it to similarly tightly organized areas of industry or manufacture. However, since this manufacture concerns products and services, whose historical role it was, as I shall argue further on, to partake in the “industrialization” of consciousness, of thought and of fantasy, the “power” of Hollywood is both more indirect and more insidious, but also—in the sense of world-historical achievement—more lasting in its invisible effects on minds, the senses and mental habits, than in its visible products.

In its double function as visual language of naturalization and self-evidence, coupled with a vast array of techniques of persuasion and propaganda, as well as technologies of immediacy and presence, Hollywood represents a special kind of symbolic power, not just in and through the cinema, but at the level of a more generalized code of the perceptible, the sensible and the intelligible: the news on television, the visual language of politics, the design of everyday objects, the clothes we wear, and the propagation of desirable life-styles all bear incontrovertible signs of the impact of American movies. In addition, movies have given elegance and grace to gesture and body language,

pith and wit to dialogue and verbal exchange that go well beyond this particular film or that particular actor, important though these are; cinematic comportment is a recognizable measure of sophistication and “cool,” it connotes physical attractiveness and what constitutes a winning personality. In this sense, with Hollywood, the sum is greater than the parts, and yet, it is also true that the parts, the films that are best remembered, the “classics,” or even just a scene or a sentence, can stand for the whole. Once again, the relation of part to whole, which back in 1972, I mainly saw in terms of a “classical aesthetics” and within the canons of “organic unity” and proportionality, are more complex, more troubling, as I have tried to suggest by subsuming them under the term “continuity principle,” which I turned into an oxymoron by emphasizing its inherent discontinuities, divisions, a-symmetries and reversals.

The Internal Logic of the American Film Industry

Although I have examined this in more detail in a separate chapter, it is perhaps worthwhile to just summarize how the history of Hollywood from an economic perspective has been rewritten in recent years, under the impact of three interconnected factors: the “revival” of Hollywood around the blockbuster as marketing concept; the transformation of Hollywood due to finance capitalism; and the uncertainty and opportunities arising from the introduction of digitization in production, post-production and distribution/exhibition. When recapitulating the different narratives that have evolved about the internal changes of the American film industry since 1945, one notes that a number of significant landmarks and key events keep returning in each of them. If placed on a time-line, they would oblige one to keep track of a fairly extensive list of variables, ranging from legal decisions, such as the outcome of the anti-trust case against the major studios (1948) or the change of censorship regulation and the scrapping of the Hays Code (1968), to technical innovations in lighting and sound or special effects, changes in basic technology, such as the introduction of color, wide-screen, to the opening of television studios, the mergers or takeover in the ownership of the studios, the rise of the agents and the package unit system, major flops that bankrupted studios or production companies, the rise of multiplexes, the introduction of the Dolby sound system and so on.

The broad outlines of these different histories and how they interlace are by now fairly well known, thanks to thorough scholarship along the lines of “revisionist historiography,” and combining detailed monographs on specific individual topics with the ambitious multi-volume “History of American Cinema” series published by University of California Press.⁸ They tend to favor the narratives of continuity over those of rupture, of break or radical renewal, and while historians differ as to the causal agents of the most recent series of transformations, the general agreement centers on a combination of changed business models (of accounting and financing) and marketing-and-distribution practices (all associated with the blockbuster, i.e. saturation release, high-concept advertising, putting exhibition chains under long-term contract).⁹ Perhaps not surprisingly, these narratives have themselves analogies with Hollywood movies: for instance, the fall and rise of “Hollywood” can be personalized, in which case it is about the men who made it possible, and how they accomplished it, in a combination of ruthlessness and charm, entrepreneurial brilliance, and a gambler’s instinct for risk. Yet even when personalized, the story has two (Hollywood) versions: the good guy story and the bad guy story, that is, it is about heroes and villains, although (as so often in Hollywood movies, too) the good guys and the bad guys are sometimes the same individuals: Douglas Gomery tells a “good guy” story (starring Lew Wasserman), while Jon Lewis tells the bad guy story (with a similar cast of characters).¹⁰

On the other hand, the story can be structural-conjunctural: symptomatic of the economic forces of “Late Capitalism” or globalization, determined by changes in technology, and affected by demographics or the shifting patterns of leisure and consumption. If these are the pressures that

force CEOs, deal-makers or studio heads to decide as they do, then, their own foibles or personal vendettas are largely irrelevant, because what counts are the banks, the fund-managers or the shareholders: the famous “bottom line” on the balance sheet (this is the line taken by scholars such as Tino Balio).¹¹

The net result, one can argue, is largely the same: the command-and-control structure known as “vertical integration” which had existed from the 1920s until the late 1940s (when it was broken up by the anti-trust case) has been largely re-established since the 1990s, thanks to the lax oversight of successive US administrations, as well as strong lobbying efforts by the MPAA. Integration now functions perhaps on a more horizontal axis, with “synergies” and diversification replacing the vertically integrated “production-distribution-exhibition” triad.¹² Nonetheless, from the economic-institutional perspective, Hollywood functions, in the domestic market, as a diversified yet highly coordinated cartel made up of a relatively small number of entangled entertainment conglomerates, where legal ownership rests partly in the hands of foreign multi-nationals (Canadian, Japanese, for a time also French) as well as venture capital and hedge funds.

These detailed economic histories of Hollywood are crucial to an understanding of the various challenges, and of how the many sub-systems have coordinated their crisis management, and have effected the transition from “industry” (making “products”) to “business” (providing “services” that both produce surplus value, i.e. profit, and administer cultural assets, i.e. act as the nation’s cultural memory). But precisely because of the latter, the cultural asset dimension, a purely economic-industrial approach also risks making Hollywood no more than a case study or illustration of a larger process in manufacturing observed in the latter half of the 20th century, namely the move from “Fordism” to “post-Fordism,” initially—as the name implies—pioneered in the auto-industries, and imported into the US and Europe from Japan (Toyota, Honda).¹³

There is thus a need to also investigate other models that might explain a “business” that has typical characteristics, but also unique risks that are not shared by other forms of industrial (assembly-line) production. Three features in particular have attracted attention: the high degree of “creative” input and the importance of a specific location over a long period of time; the unique requirement for a logistics of managing time, timing and temporal flow; the “international” or global dimensions of the American film-business, and notably its relations to foreign audiences but also foreign talent and personnel. The first is associated with the work of Allen Scott and the concept of “cultural clustering,” much discussed among sociologists or urbanism, but also of interest to cultural historians. Scott’s *On Hollywood: The Place, The Industry* is a valuable, but so far in film studies little discussed contribution to the “persistence of Hollywood” debate.¹⁴ The second—the logistics of time-management—can be seen as the reverse of Scott’s “clustering” argument, and be related to Manuel Castells’ investigations into the “network society” and especially his idea of a “space of flows.”¹⁵ But the same questions are also addressed by another ambitious study, Aida Hozic’s *Hollyworld* which looks at the way the different branches of the traditional film industry have responded to both the pressures to relocate and diversify in the face of globalization (noting a shift from “producers” to “merchants”), and the need to be both present and in control of what she calls “cyberspace” (the on-line, real-time flow of information, including new marketing and distribution forms such as downloading, but also piracy and copyright protection).¹⁶ The third topic—Hollywood’s relation to its foreign markets, the import of talent and the export of labor costs—has been most thoroughly investigated in *Global Hollywood*, edited by a group of New York scholars led by Toby Miller.¹⁷ This latter topic, on the other hand, links up with a broader theme, also often debated with Hollywood and the film industry as a prime example, namely the so-called “Cultural Imperialism” debate, begun in the late 1960s and led by US scholars critical of the dominance that US media—especially television—and US cultural exports have had notably in the developing world, to the alleged detriment of local or indigenous cultural activity and creativity.

Hollywood Hegemony, Cultural Imperialism and Creative Destruction

A typically programmatic statement of the case for seeing the economic developments which I characterized as a move from “product” to “service,” and second, from “industry” to “business,” and which logically implies a move from “overseas” markets to “global presence,” might run something like this:

Hollywood is a set of interconnected practices, both industrial and symbolic. . . . The theatrical exhibition of films is now merely one market among many in which the major studios are involved. Over the last three decades, the studios have become consolidated within “tightly diversified” transnational entertainment conglomerates. In this industrial context cinematically released blockbuster films are not only engineered to sell across different market segments, they have also become “launch-pads” for multi-media product lines. Successful film “brands” are exploited and disseminated internationally across a range of commodities and popular cultural experiences, from home video to theme parks, books, soundtracks, television spin-offs, toys, video games and Happy Meals. The studios also have a stake in exploiting significant niche markets, via genre production and links with the “independent” sector. In short, Hollywood is a resource for making and distributing culture worldwide.¹⁸

Implied in this emphasis on the symbolic, alongside the industrial prowess of Hollywood, is the point made earlier, namely that Hollywood films have evolved a peculiar kind of universality, meaning that a cultural form has been created which is very specific to a nation, an age and a century, but also universal, in the sense of being universally appreciated as well as universally understood. This is a fairly remarkable historical fact, once again ranking Hollywood alongside the powerful symbols (and symbols of power) of the great world systems (including religions), as well as—disturbingly perhaps—putting it in the company or vicinity of the great universal brands (McDonalds, Coca Cola, Nike, Sony, Mercedes, Apple—many, but by no means all of US origin).¹⁹ Yet equally pertinent—and precisely a source of critique, once one grants Hollywood this kind of symbolic power—is Hollywood’s ability, thanks to this universalism, to set the terms by which it can be discussed and analyzed, and by extension, by staking out in advance the terrain on which it can be challenged or opposed. Once one puts the question of cultural imperialism on the agenda, for instance, one has to confront the argument that Hollywood only gives to its domestic and world audiences what these audiences “want,” that is, that it is also part of a master/slave dialectic.²⁰

The general definition of the cultural imperialism thesis would be something like the following, formulated by its first and foremost critic, Herbert Schiller:

The concept of cultural imperialism today [1979] best describes the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system. The public media are the foremost example of operating enterprises that are used in the penetrative process. For penetration on a significant scale the media themselves must be captured by the dominating/penetrating power. This occurs largely through the commercialization of broadcasting.²¹

Subsequent commentators have preferred the term “dependency theory” (whereby imported communication media “vicariously establish a set of foreign norms, values, and expectations which, in varying degrees, may alter the domestic cultures and socialization processes”),²² while yet others have stressed the continuity between cultural imperialism and 19th century imperial colonialism.²³

The more specific formulation of Hollywood hegemony would rest on the assertion that US dominance in matters cinema have stifled, marginalized and at times even repressed many other forms of cinema. The American film industry's sheer economic power—together with the trading advantages it negotiated after the US winning the second world war in Europe, as well as its government dictating terms in economic forums like the World Trade Organization—have effectively meant that Hollywood was able to “colonize” the rest of the world, and deeply imprint on less developed countries (and minds?) its images, its fantasies, its life-styles, its dream-scenarios and the material shape of its aspirations, indeed even impose its very idea of social, but also perceptual reality.

The “Cultural Imperialism Theory” belongs in many ways to the 1960s and 1970s, when aggressive US foreign policy in South East Asia and Latin America gave additional ammunition to the “culturalist” argument. Among communication studies scholars, its central thesis has been largely abandoned since, partly because little proof could be found for it on empirical grounds, partly because—with the emergence of other media and information technologies, as well as the debate over globalization—it came to be refined and redefined, mainly in the following ways: first, cultural imperialism is best understood as the ideologically biased name for the global rise of a middle class in developing countries, whose chief characteristic it is to embrace or aspire to consumerist values and life-styles, modeled on the “West.” Second, insofar as cultural imperialism is tied to media and communication, it affects rich countries more than poor countries. The latter tend to remain more “national” in their tastes of entertainment forms (music, television), not least because one has to be relatively affluent to frequent Hollywood movies in the first place, since for instance in India and other Asian countries (including China), cinemas tend to charge higher admission than for locally produced films. Third, Hollywood films and their global distribution actually make the world more cultural diverse. This is the position put forward most vigorously by Tyler Cowen, in *Creative Destruction: How Globalization is changing the World's Cultures*.²⁴

Cowen systematically challenges the view that capitalism and mass consumer culture has damaged the vitality and diversity of the arts. Maintaining that a capitalist market economy is providing a largely underappreciated framework to support a wide range of artistic forms of expression, he concedes that globalization will disrupt, dislocate and transform (“Creative Destruction”) many of the world's indigenous or particular cultures, but asserts that the net result will be positive for everyone concerned, not only for the culturally or economically dominant countries. Cowen is no simplistic free-marketeer; he provides detailed case studies of how markets for literature, painting, sculpture and music have arisen across the centuries, and the kind of monetary, but also immaterial incentives (similar to Bourdieu's “cultural capital”) that markets create for innovation and for countering prevailing artistic traditions and institutional habits. Cowen has a separate chapter on Hollywood (“Why Hollywood rules the world and whether we should care”), whose main claim is dialectical:

Hollywood's universality has, in part, become a central part of American national culture. Commercial forces have led America to adopt “that which can be globally sold” as part of its national culture. Americans have decided to emphasize their international triumphs and their ethnic diversity as part of their national self-image. In this regard, Hollywood's global-market position is a Faustian bargain. Achieving global dominance requires a sacrifice of a culture's initial perspective to the demands of world consumers. American culture is being exported, but for the most part it is not Amish quilts and Herman Melville. *JURASSIC PARK*, a movie about dinosaurs, was a huge hit abroad, but *FORREST GUMP*, which makes constant reference to American history and national culture, made most of its money at home.²⁵

Furthermore, for Cowen, cultural dominance is not a one-way street: it forces national and local industries to become more competitive and innovative; in the case of Hollywood, it not only requires

the American film industry to pay attention to its audiences overseas, but also obliges it to import personnel of diverse cultural backgrounds and local expertise, allowing for greater mobility among creative labor and talent.

Global Hollywood

This latter point—the relation of Hollywood to its foreign audiences and its importation of talent from overseas—is beginning to receive wider attention.²⁶ What is important, however, is to recognize that there are different historical as well as conceptual frameworks within which this transnational-global dimension can be studied. Historical fact is that from its inception, Hollywood was keen to attract the best filmmaking talent from all over the world, and especially from its most serious competitors (and most lucrative markets).²⁷ Better known are the periods, notably in the late 1930s and early 1940s, when Hollywood became the refuge and exile for hundreds of émigrés from Germany, France, Hungary, Austria and other countries, fleeing from anti-Semitism and other forms of persecution. Yet it would be wrong to project the refugee paradigm either back into the earlier decade or forward into the post-WWII period. In a number of articles (not included here) I have studied the complex relations which Hollywood has maintained ever since the early 1920s with, for instance, the German film industry—extending not just to the war years and the Nazi period, but resuming especially since the late 1980s, with the “import” of directors such as Wolfgang Petersen and Roland Emmerich and cinematographer Michael Ballhaus.²⁸ Similar case studies could be made about directors from, notably, Australia, New Zealand and Britain, but also Taiwan, Hong Kong, Mexico, Spain, France, Poland, and even The Netherlands and Finland.²⁹ The chapter on William Dieterle and the Warner Bros. biopic underlines many of these general points, and shows how closely economic, political and personal factors can be intertwined.

Lest, however, one should have too harmonious an impression about Hollywood’s welcome of its foreign personnel, even when they are not political refugees, the study on *Global Hollywood*, already mentioned, focuses not on the high-profile directors or stars who came to Hollywood to improve their careers or win international fame as “artists,” but very specifically deals with Hollywood’s labor relations across different branches of the industry, and in particular, on international labor relations since the onset of globalization—thereby modifying any idealized vision one might have of the craft guilds that formally regulate the film industry’s skilled labor force, or of the “anonymous authorship” I mentioned in analogy to Gothic cathedrals.

While giving up the generalized cultural imperialism thesis, *Global Hollywood* concentrates on one aspect of this thesis, namely Hollywood’s hold over its foreign outlets. The authors show how much political muscle, economic clout and legal pressure the US exerts, in order to keep the world’s markets open for US product, while resolutely closing off its own markets through all kinds of protectionist measures. It thereby is able to make a strong case for the “proletarianization” of creative labor, via the practices of outsourcing, runaway productions and the relentless search for more cost-effective environments (locations, government subsidies, cheaper labor) for big budget film production.

The problem with the theories of *Global Hollywood* is one I mentioned above, when looking at the primarily economic accounts of Hollywood: that such studies merely demonstrate that Hollywood behaves like every other multi-national company, irrespective whether it is located in the US, in Britain, the Netherlands, Germany or China, South Korea or Japan. In this sense, we learn less about what is specific to Hollywood than the title or the project promises, especially given its polemical tone and overt hostility to academic film studies, to *auteurism* and the hermeneutics of film-interpretation. Thus, there may be a need to keep the broader perspective in view, extending it even, by pointing out not only that Hollywood has always imported talent, but that immigrants and

foreigners have played a major part in making the cinema “American”: Neil Gabler’s book on the shaping impact Jews have had on Hollywood, for instance, or Michael Rogin’s *Black Face White Noise* add to the purely economic argument a necessarily differentiating cross-cultural and ethnic dimension.³⁰

This type of argument does not contradict *Global Hollywood*, but complements it, as it also complements the argument that points to the increasing dependence of American cinema on its foreign audiences, leading to a particular kind of transnationalism at the very heart of Hollywood picture making, and confirming that Hollywood has always had a multi-cultural political unconscious—within white hegemony.³¹ Few reliable studies exist about Hollywood’s foreign audiences, but again, specific case histories, such as a comparative study on the global reception of *LORD OF THE RINGS*,³² help to get a sense of how local audiences refigure globally designed media products,³³ catching up in cinema studies with work done in the mid-1990s around the international reception of US television series such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty*.³⁴

Hollywood and the Attention Economy

Earlier, I noted the many contradictions that the study of Hollywood poses to the analyst and the historian, and suggested its robustness and persistence may actually be due to these unresolved tensions, which seem to energize the system overall rather than paralyze it. Both in its internal relations—if one thinks of the permanent redefinition of what are goods and what services, or the shift in the balance of power between “merchants” and “producers”—and in its external relations (the relentless search for cheap labor, outsourcing of specialized tasks and skills, the role in the WTO in policing intellectual property, but also the firm eye on foreign audiences), Hollywood continues to repair itself by acting as a crisis-managing institution, an organism with strong survivalist instincts. By “restructuring” through bankruptcies and mergers, by being opportunist in its alliances and predatory in its marketing strategies, the American film industry behaves much in the ways analyzed by Tyler Cowen also for other industries, following the Schumpeter model of creative destruction favored by conservative economists for dealing with the crises of capitalism.

If this seems, once again, too benign an interpretation of Hollywood as multi-media conglomerate with its tentacles in all media platforms and dominant in all markets, a perspective correction is provided by the more anthropological approach mentioned earlier, where the question is “why cinema,” posed now within the history of capitalism, and in particular, the Marxist problematic of how the products or objects of human labor become commodities, and commodities both reify and immaterialize themselves in (the circulation of) images. First sketched by Fredric Jameson in the context of an argument about 20th century modernism appropriating 19th century realism through the cinema as a form of commodity fetishism,³⁵ the argument has been elaborated and extended by Jonathan Beller, in a book called significantly, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle*.³⁶ Beller is not specifically concerned with Hollywood, but tries to offer a sweeping rethink of what the cinema has contributed or destroyed during its hundred-year dominance as *the* visual medium of the 20th century. In particular, his thesis is that the most typical form that (abstract) capital has taken in the 20th century is that of “moving images,” by which he understands the mobility in time and space of goods and people as allegorized by the dissemination of motion pictures; the industrialization of consciousness, as predicted by Adorno and Horkheimer; the “society of the spectacle,” as analyzed by Guy Debord; the affective labor invested in sight and vision, as theorized by Michel Foucault: all of which coagulate into new potentials for exploitation and profit. If cinematic spectacles represent the different aggregate states of the abstract entity called money, they would be the latest stage of capitalism: in seizing on the senses, and converting vision and looking into reified acts of exchange, cinema readies and primes “attention” to become the most precious, but

also the most profitable commodity of the 21st century. Making the case historically—from chronophotography’s time-and-motion studies, via Dziga Vertov’s *MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA* and behaviorist psychology, through psychoanalysis to the Coen Brothers’ *BARTON FINK*—the book traces the stages by which filmic perception attains commodity status. In the central chapter, “Inspiration of Objects, Expiration of Words: Cinema, Capital of the Twentieth Century,” Beller maintains that what he calls (after the Coens) “capital cinema” taps “the productive energies of consciousness and the body in order to facilitate the production of surplus value.”³⁷ Not unlike Hardt and Negri, in their book *Empire*, Beller subscribes to the notion that human attention is a form of labor. Coded as pleasure and play, attention sustains many of the most commercial forms of circulation and exchange that depend on the flow of images, on the interaction with media and on media technologies.

The role of cinema in these processes is a historically crucial one: as the only art form which owes its existence to capitalism, “the [classical] cinema first posits and then [the post-classical cinema] presupposes ‘looking’ as a value-productive activity.” A development of, but also an abstraction from assembly-line work, moving images have become the most prominent, because socially sanctioned, interface between the body and all the forms of abstraction that regulate the individual’s relation to society: “Where factory workers first performed sequenced physical operations on moving objects in order to produce a commodity, in the cinema, spectators perform sequenced visual operations on moving montage fragments to produce an image.”³⁸ In a further, meta-theoretical move reminiscent of Friedrich Kittler, Beller also maintains that the cinema’s rapid ubiquity and universality caused the crisis in literature, language and reference, of which first psychoanalysis, then the linguistic turn in the 1960s, including post-structuralist deconstruction of the 1980s with its philosophical debates about “difference,” “being” and “presence,” were the unacknowledged rationalizations and reactions: cinema, as the elephant in the room, so to speak, of 20th century intellectual history, and one of the reasons why “culture” has become both the central economic force of late capitalist societies, as well as the ground for the humanities’ ambivalent epistemological status. University-based film studies, in this perspective, would then become the symptom of what it claims to analyze.

Once one takes into account the dual implications of Beller’s analysis—the (Hollywood) cinema as a (historically necessary) stage of capitalism, where critical reflection on the cinema, both direct (in the form of film studies), and indirect (in the form of philosophy and cultural studies) inevitably comes up against this “untranscendable” epistemic horizon of capitalist reification—then the paradoxes which I noted about Hollywood might very well be merely the outward projections of the contradictions within film studies itself, rather than real-existing ones. The question to ask would then be: what are the historical conditions on the side of Hollywood, that make possible the versions and inversions in the successive valorization, critique, delegitimation and re-evaluation of the American cinema from the late 1940s in France, to the present day in university courses all over the world? And in particular (with respect to the guiding idea of the present book, which tracks the tensions between the “genius of the author” and the “genius of the system”), is there a more general logic underlying the sense that it is now the “author” who *is* the “system,” that is, who embodies it, represents it and promotes it—not in some obvious, salesman-like fashion (though occasionally, that too), but in the full awareness that thanks to the cinema, the traditional antinomies of art and money, creativity and industrialization, solitary artist and business entrepreneur have become redundant or are being superseded? It is this possibility—and its consequences—that I want to probe in the following sections.

Reflexivity: Self-Reference between Literalness, Metaphor and Allegory

Trying to explain to myself the attraction the *auteur* theory held for me in the 1960s and 1970s, I wrote (in 1979):

What seemed to make [Vincente] Minnelli exemplary. . . was that in his films the act of seeing, the constraints and power relations it gave rise to, appeared so uncannily foregrounded that the action always tended to become a metaphor of the more fundamental relation between spectator and *mise en scène*, audience and (invisible, because ubiquitous) director.

Here, the thesis expounded by Beller is mirrored back into the film itself, across the audience, before it is refocused (or reified) in the director, confirming him as *auteur*. Whereas “the act of seeing” appeared to me as a metaphor (for the manifold relations between spectator and director), “looking” for Beller is an allegory (of its commodity status within advanced capitalism). The two frames of reference are like the recto and verso of each other, with “metaphor” implying a direct relation of substitution and equivalence, whereas “allegory” suggests the indirect representation of the more abstract and extended relation between sight or vision and the capitalist reification of subject and image. Yet it is the tension between these two figures of speech that encourages me to try and bridge the gap between the symbolic-narrative practice of Hollywood (the “film as system”) and the economic-industrial practice (the “film industry as system”), in short: the gap between the *history* of American cinema and the *hermeneutics* of American cinema. To do so, I propose to revise and extend the concept of “reflexivity” and examine the several of types of reflexivity present in Hollywood’s institutional mode as well as Hollywood’s modes of address to its audiences, where the films (as product *and* service) function not as texts, but as the “relays”: dynamic and reversible circuits between Hollywood and its audiences that allow for the mirror-like doubling of metaphor as well as the more disjunctive coupling of allegory.

There are initially four such types of reflexivity that can be identified: the “modernist” self-reference just cited and associated with the director as *auteur*; the self-reference of the industry as a whole, manifest on the one hand in a persistent concern with self-regulation, and on the other, with annual rituals of self-celebration; the self-reference of the individual studios, in the form of intellectual property right protection, logo management and branding; finally, the self-reference and recursiveness established through the circuits of promotion and audience research that bind producers to consumers and regulate reception of a given film as story, event and experience (via poster, tag-line, advertising, press coverage). Despite their crucial differences, all of these forms of reflexivity can be read as manifestations of constitutive and ongoing power-struggles both *within the industry* (in the early years, between editorial control on the part of the exhibitors versus editorial control by the producers; in later years, vertical integration, its loss in 1948 and reinstatement since the 1980s) and *between the industry and its audiences* (in the early years: disruption through censorship, followed by pre-emptive self-censorship via the Hays Code, to be replaced by more covert forms of self-regulation and more aggressive marketing techniques, as well as more sophisticated tools of audience research and technology-backed feedback loops). That the site of such struggles can be the film itself is what is fascinating about studying Hollywood’s modes of address, because the means of address and control—expanding on Beller’s diagnostics—could well be reflexivity itself, in the form of complicity and knowingness, by which the film implicates the viewer at the story level and a meta-level, enfolds the audience in cognitive double-binds, counters blasé indifference with immersive sensory overload, or acknowledges fan power through narrative complexity, while also answering (by performing within the film) the conspiratorial-paranoid readings of Hollywood that professional academics and critics are fond of.³⁹

Modernist-Auteurist Reflexivity

As several of the chapters in the present collection—those on Minnelli, Nicholas Ray, Sam Fuller, Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock and Fritz Lang—are written from the implicit assumption of

auteurist self-reference and with an explicit media-reflexivity in mind, not much more needs to be said here, except perhaps that in the chapters on Altman, Kubrick and Coppola the media-reflexivity is often allegorizing the history of Hollywood (and its “decline-demise”) more than making “the cinema” a metaphor, as in the case of Lang or Hitchcock. If my primary concern at the time was to assert this reflexivity on the side of the director, in order to claim for the work (and thus for the cinema) the status of modernist art, I would now extend, but thereby also revise this claim by saying that one of the hallmarks of much of Hollywood, both in its classical and post-classical phase, is that the work “is” what it “is about”, that is, that films generally instantiate their subject matter also in their own form and mode of address. However, the exact means that manifest this level of self-reference—and the reasons for it—can differ considerably from the medium specificity or deconstructive self-interrogation of (high) modernist art; they need to be investigated in each case separately, and as a result, such self-reference can be more literal than metaphoric, while its literalism can also quite allegorical, in the sense that it is not always self-evident what is the implied referent to which the level of reflexivity addresses itself: it could be the audience, the studio or even an individual.

Self-reference as Self-celebration and Self-regulation

Over its long history, one highly publicized aspect of the persistence of Hollywood has been the annual self-celebration of its own existence, called the Academy Awards Ceremony, or *Oscar Night*.⁴⁰ It functions not merely in order to award to insiders prizes and peer-recognition; it also is an occasion for the industry to consolidate its own history, to work on the invention of traditions, to recycle and perpetuate its tried and true mythologies. There has been relatively little scholarly work to my knowledge, which analyses and evaluates the Awards Ceremony from the vantage point of memory-creation and self-regulation. Despite the show-biz elements and thus the camouflage of hidden agendas, a meta-history of sorts is being written annually in the Kodak Theater in Los Angeles.

One remarkable feature of Hollywood’s self-celebration, for instance, is that the professionals assembled at the Awards Ceremony each year take themselves deadly seriously, but they do so in the mode of comic self-denigration and self-parody. A claustrophobic world of in-jokes and self-reference, the annual ritual exhibits a peculiar combination of amnesia and memory that can be read as both a protective cover and the performative display of one of the industry’s most noteworthy institutional achievements: its successful form of self-regulation—originally meant to fend off government interference, but now also to enforce collective self-discipline—paradoxically confirmed by the mixture of self-aggression, self-aggrandizement and sentimentality that characterizes the event.

If “classic Hollywood” is the coinage mainly of academics, “Hollywood classics” is what the industry itself likes to take credit for, revalorizing its film libraries by declaring them to be America’s individual and collective memory, and feeding with them entire television networks.⁴¹ “Classic” thus becomes a retronym, an expression that not so much designates a practice or an object, as it retroactively confers on it an identity that it cannot itself have known that it possesses. This is also true for the academic use of the term, put in circulation (for instance, by myself in 1972), at a time when the studio system seemed to have disintegrated, but the industry’s own use since the rise of the VCR and cable television highlights the connotations of nostalgia and pastiche that the “classic” Hollywood cinema now invariably carries in the post-classical era. On the other hand, if “classic/al” is a retronym from the start, then the very sign of the post-classical would be that it aspires to the “classical” as its dominant effect: each term would name the other, and be dependent on the other, which might explain why historians like David Bordwell see a continuation of the “classical Hollywood cinema”

without a notable break, whereas others (myself included) have argued not only for the existence of a “post-classical” Hollywood, but for the epistemic necessity of placing oneself outside the classical, in order to understand the classical. Both positions would be “correct” and “untenable” at the same time.

Self-regulation, this core feature by which Hollywood has managed to minimize outside pressure as well as maximize internal authority via the MPAA, has been studied quite closely in recent years. In particular, the Hays Code, usually ridiculed as a sign of the film community’s prudishness and moral double standards, has undergone substantial re-evaluation. Chief among the historians of this re-evaluation are Richard Maltby and Ruth Vasey.⁴² Maltby in particular has built much of his approach to the study of Hollywood on the centrality of self-regulation, whose external, reflexive dimension he characterizes by the “principle of deniability.” It is a political term originally used by Vasey to characterize Hollywood’s stance on sensitive topics, when it came to its dealings with foreign and export markets, but developed by Maltby into a more general strategy of both equivocation and ambivalence. Deniability allows Hollywood to disavow “authorial responsibility for whatever moral or political intent” a spectator might attribute to, or an institution, like the Church, might detect in a film,⁴³ and thus becomes a tool to defend elliptical narratives and even contradictory modes of address, that is, to manage the communication feedback loop with audiences under adverse or hostile conditions. Maltby is able to show that such a tactic of double address, said to be typical of post-modern or “New” Hollywood, and first described by Noël Carroll,⁴⁴ actually dates back to the early days of the Hays Code. He cites the Code’s first administrator, who argued that the movies needed a system of representational conventions:

from which conclusions might be drawn by the sophisticated mind, but which would mean nothing to the unsophisticated and inexperienced. . . . This involved devising systems and codes of representation, where “innocence” was inscribed in the text, while “sophisticated viewers” could “read into” the movies whatever meanings they pleased to find, so long as producers could use the Hays Code to deny that they had put them there.⁴⁵

Maltby’s best-known example is the scene from *CASABLANCA* (1942), when Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman finally meet in a shabby hotel. After reminiscences and recriminations, a 3½ second fade leaves the viewer with mutually incompatible information: we never find out whether they actually made love or not during this furtive encounter.⁴⁶ Maltby’s essay is in turn cited by Slavoj Žižek, to illustrate his theory that belief is always “delegated,” involving either “interpassivity” or an appeal to the “Big Other.”⁴⁷

Studio Self-Reference: Intellectual Property, Logo-Management and Branding

One of the most productive areas of the so-called revisionist historiography of American cinema since the 1970s has been the study of how the industry has developed new marketing strategies, has taken advantage of new technologies in sound and vision, and has turned its genre prototypes into “franchises.” Authors such as Douglas Gomery, Thomas Schatz, Justin Wyatt, Janet Wasco, Tino Balio and many others have presented valuable empirical research on how Hollywood has managed changes in the demographics and the geographic location of its audiences, implemented key technologies, such as computer-generated special effects and digital post-production methods, and exploited its intellectual property, that is, the individual studios’ film holdings (“libraries”), trademarks (“logos”) and universally recognized heroes, whether derived from popular literature (James Bond, Harry Potter, etc.) or comic books (Batman, Spiderman, etc.). Although less concerned with either self-reference or self-regulation, these studies confirm that the changing business models and organizational structures adopted by the film industry in the crucial years between the 1970s and

1990s, when the “event movie” or blockbuster became the new norm, brought about an industry posture that put more emphasis (and money) on marketing and promotion, and relied on the skills of different kinds of middlemen (notably agents and brokers), in order to position the films within and across the different platforms and markets necessary to generate the revenue streams that can recoup the enormous sums invested in major productions.

Yet just as promotion also means self-promotion and marketing is marketing of awareness and attention, these forms of reflexivity can also be regulatory. The blockbuster not only connotes “high concept” (“the book, the look and the hook”)⁴⁸ but also “total entertainment,” which in turn is a category of control, as well as access. It means that individual films are merely the local, temporary instances (the means) of practices and strategies that need to be put in place at several levels and over several years (the ends), aligning films with theme-parks and rides, converting cinemas into multi-purpose entertainment centers, and promoting them with discourses of “security and comfort zones” in the manner of shopping malls, pedestrian areas and gated communities.⁴⁹ The cinema, in its reflexive doubling as a “product” selling a “service,” that is, a slice of time and a piece of place, necessarily falls in line with, or models itself after several of the prevailing surveillance paradigms, turning the service offered into a new form of “control,” in the sense of Foucault or Deleuze.

At the same time, franchise films, such as *LORD OF THE RINGS*, *PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN*, *SHREK*, *HARRY POTTER*, *TOY STORY* or the various superhero series, sequels and prequels, are obvious examples of films that are both spectacles in their own right (providing thrills and sensory experiences in safe surroundings) and service platforms on which products (books, toys, t-shirts, costumes, decals, songs, DVDs) can be promoted and sold.⁵⁰ This awareness of “place” and “time” is also a form of recursiveness, often projected from the films to the spectator. Peter Krämer, for instance, has shown how films like *JAWS*, *THE LAST ACTION HERO*, *GREMLINS* or *HOME ALONE* reference in their plots the family constellation and seasonal situation of their target audience,⁵¹ observations I have also explored and expanded in Chapter 20, “The Blockbuster as Time Machine.”⁵²

The idea of “total entertainment” introduced by Maltby and Acland, as an umbrella term of some complexity, to indicate the range of activities within which a specific film is both central and only one element among others, is also taken up by Paul Grainge, in his study of the pervasiveness of branding in contemporary Hollywood.⁵³ He calls branding “a means of imbuing goods with symbolic or aesthetic content, and then using the laws of intellectual property to control their circulation.” Focusing initially on merchandising, franchises and product placement, Grainge wants to reframe these phenomena under the heading of branding, understood as such by the film industry itself, for whom the idea of promoting an identity while staking a property claim is not especially new. The studio logo, used as a branding device, goes back to the very early days of cinema, when the company’s initials or icon were often incorporated into the sets more or less inconspicuously, in order to prevent unauthorized copying. The logo functioned like a watermark on a banknote, to discourage forgers: the Biograph logo (a blended AB, for American Mutoscope and Biograph Company) was used this way, as was the Pathé rooster, but especially with Pathé in the United States, it was also brand-advertising and product placement, functioning as a subliminal self-reference: you are in a (Pathé) theater, watching a (Pathé) film.⁵⁴ Since then, Hollywood branding and advertising has featured in many studies, though perhaps nowhere more critically than in T.W. Adorno’s condemnation of “The Culture Industry”: “Today every monster close-up of a star is an advertisement for her name, and every hit song a plug for its tune. Advertising and the culture industry are merging technically no less than economically.”⁵⁵

What in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* is still a critical insight, intended to disqualify mainstream cinema from serious consideration as art, has, in the meantime, become an object of study in itself: with the twist that we can now see this self-same advertising in the form of putting up front the trademark or logo as another version of the kind of reflexivity—“foregrounding the ‘device,’”⁵⁶ once

espoused by artists to protect their work from commodification and consumption, that is, to rescue its aesthetic autonomy from the culture industry!

Grainge's study of different branding strategies—ranging from the placing of (and playing with) the shape and tactility of the Warner Bros. studio logo to the promotion of Dolby technology via its differently “themed” sound signature, from *THE MATRIX* as merchandising concept to the intertextual ironies of *Looney Tunes* cartoons in contemporary animation films—shows how the studios organize their production schedules and distribution platform around the need to add value to the studio logo. As with other internationally recognized brands, “the process of selling entertainment has come to rely, increasingly, on the principle of deepening audience involvement in immersive world brands.”⁵⁷ At the same time that it wants to increase recognition, a brand is an invitation to interaction and exchange between a company and its customers, supported by focus groups, neuro-personality polls and the full panoply of consumer research instruments.⁵⁸ Hence the fact that Adorno's worries have, if anything, extended to democracy itself: “The association. . . of branding at the end of the twentieth century with a neoliberal agenda to replace society with the marketplace has resulted in debates around whether brands are part of an increased commercialism that threatens democracy and citizenship or a site for contemporary struggles for meaning and identity.”⁵⁹ However, once one traces the rationale of branding beyond its directly economic objective, it becomes evident that branding itself is an inherently contradictory process: it seeks to expand the meaning and access of the brand at the semiotic level, while simultaneously enforcing the control of meaning and access at the economic level.⁶⁰ The brand tries to overcome this contradiction, by playing with the logo in the story-lines, developing what Grainge calls “forms of corporate irony that leave [the brand] knowing but ‘open’ in an ideological and commercial sense.”⁶¹

In the trade-offs between material culture and discursive practice embodied in branding, one encounters a typically postmodern form of reflexivity, poised between recognition/repetition, ironic distance and sensory immersion: confounding the “modernist” categories of defamiliarization, while also blurring the lines between aesthetics and politics, even turning history into media memory and media memory into cult-classic nostalgia.⁶²

Allegorical Readings

Maltby, Acland and Grainge also provide empirical evidence for another major effort to connect Hollywood, the studio system (as an industry and a business) with Hollywood, the textual system (as narrative and social symbolic). Especially noteworthy, in light of my general argument about Hollywood reflexivity between metaphor and allegory, are studies that try to read Hollywood films as allegories of their own conditions of production, as parables of their studio's self-projection, and as commentaries on how Hollywood writes and rewrites its corporate history.⁶³ Different from an earlier allegorical tracking of cinematic *double entendres*, which tried to establish elaborate parallels between a genre, the Western, and contemporary politics, by distinguishing, for instance, between “Democrat” (*HIGH NOON*) and “Republican” (*RIO BRAVO*) narratives, or identifying a film as a “Barry Goldwater Western” or a “Joseph McCarthy Western,”⁶⁴ contemporary allegorical readings come with a sophisticated understanding of textual and intertextual effects. They are schooled in the techniques of deconstruction, rather than practicing the “hermeneutics of suspicion” of another generation of film critics.⁶⁵ Journals such as *Representations* (Berkeley) and *Critical Inquiry* (Chicago) made a name for themselves showcasing such allegorical readings between deconstruction and the new historicism, notably with essays by Michael Rogin and Carol Clover.⁶⁶ Also focused on Hollywood are the contributions by Jerome Christensen and J.D. Connor. In several important articles, discussing films from the classic period as diverse as *MRS MINIVER*, *THE PHILADELPHIA STORY*, *FOUNTAINHEAD* and *THE BANDWAGON*, and taking on Spike Lee, the Time Warner *BATMAN* franchise and *YOU'VE GOT*

MAIL, Christensen, for instance, extracts a second narrative from the primary one, in which the particular studio responsible for the film seems to be speaking to its managers and employees about the challenges they face and the objectives they need to implement.⁶⁷ Reminiscent of Claude Lévi-Strauss' dictum that myth is a form of speech by which a society communicates with its members through objects and relations, the allegories allow Christensen to reconstruct what he calls "corporate authorship," a term partly taken from Peter Drucker's management theories (according to which, well-run corporations seek to create customers through advertising)⁶⁸ and partly deployed as a critique of *auteurism* as practiced in film studies. Focusing on Time Warner (which echoes Grainge's preoccupation with Warner Bros.' reflexive and self-conscious branding strategies), Christensen sees both Tim Burton's *BATMAN* (1989) and Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991) not as manifestations of these two highly idiosyncratic directors' personal vision or obsessions, but as "corporate expressions":

Formed in 1989, . . . Time Warner, the corporate merger of fact and fiction, was deeply invested in a vision of American democracy gone sour and sore in need of rescue. That investment is most salient in two films: *Batman*, released in 1989 during the merger negotiations between Time Inc. and Warner, and *JFK*, the signature film of the new organization. I will argue that *Batman* and *JFK* are corporate expressions: the former an instrumental allegory contrived to accomplish corporate objectives, the latter a scenario that effectively expands the range of what counts as a corporate objective. *Batman* is an allegory addressed to savvy corporate insiders, some of whom are meant to get the message, while others err. *JFK* aspired to turn everyone into an insider. It inducts its viewers into a new American mythos wired for an age in which successful corporate financial performance presupposes a transculturalist politics: corporate populism. Under corporate populism the old, corporate liberal agencies for integrating a *pluribus* of individuals into a social *unum* are to be superseded by a mass entertainment complex capable of projecting a riveting logo that summons all people's attention, that offers membership in an invisible body by virtue of collective participation in a spectacular event or cathexis of a corporate person or enthrallment in a sublime virtuality, and that substitutes for credal [sic] affiliation a continuously renewable identification with logo, trademark, slogan, or brand.⁶⁹

Such an interpretation first of all reads film texts against other texts: as Christensen freely admits, he is indebted to two book-length studies of the Time Warner merger, its key players and boardroom struggles.⁷⁰ Second, one once more senses the concern for democracy and the social contract being hollowed out by the a-social bond between the consumer and the commodity, across the fetish of the brand. But the allegorical mode is also symptomatic of the felt need to account for the frequently acknowledged reflexivity of contemporary Hollywood films, while expressing dissatisfaction with the usual attribution of such reflexivity to an all-purpose, "anything goes" postmodernism.⁷¹

J.D. Connor, who studied with Christensen, similarly takes the massive organizational changes that have reshaped the American film industry during the post-studio era of mergers and horizontal diversification in the 1980s and 1990s as the subtexts he expects to find allegorically represented in major Hollywood productions. He is especially interested in narratives that respond to several significant developments: the tapping of fresh talent while reducing the risk, through incorporating the "independent" sector; the practice of "outsourcing" certain specialized activities, such as computer generated imaging; the creative dependence of Hollywood on foreign personnel and the economic dependence on foreign audiences; the need to exploit the substantive holdings of old films via DVD sales and other subsidiary markets.⁷² In an article on *BRAVEHEART* (Mel Gibson, 1995; distributor: Paramount) Connor highlights first of all the synergies between Mel Gibson, Hollywood's Australian "bad boy" insider-as-outsider, and the genre of the "Scottish film," often used by Hollywood for

“working out particularly vexing industrial problems under the guise of tackling U.S. political problems.” Connor then goes on to elaborate on the economic history and theoretical models supporting such readings, explaining that:

my thinking here, influenced by critics as different as Richard Maltby, Thomas Schatz, and Victor Navasky, is that the studio system strongly encouraged its workers to understand the films they made as corporate representations, and that it was as normal for films to allegorize the conditions and ideologies of the corporations. . . as it was for them to allegorize the medium itself. . . . In today’s neoclassical Hollywood, then, the reflection on self-imposed conventions that marks the classical includes the convention of, the reality of, the allegory of industrial crisis, even when the instance that displays that crisis is as assured as *BRAVEHEART*.⁷³

One key aspect of the allegory centers on Gibson’s quasi-feudal relations with Warner Bros., on whose “land” Gibson has established his own production company *Icon*, granted to him because of the star’s loyalty to the Warner Bros. *LETHAL WEAPON* franchise. *Braveheart*/Gibson’s “rebellion,” then, consists of his defection to Paramount for the rights to distribute his film. The pressure of “opening wide” and the anxieties over the first weekend’s box office take are, furthermore, allegorized in the *jus prima nocte*, the feudal right of the lord to take any bride’s virginity, which in the film is the ostensible cause of Wallace’s rebellion against Longshanks.

When discussing Oliver Stone’s *ALEXANDER* (2004, Warner Bros.), Connor emphasizes the anti-Bush themes one can safely attribute to the director (which makes the film the prequel to W, Stone’s 2008 film about the youthful George W. Bush), but he doubles these with the corporate themes anxieties and the directors’ self-identification with them, put in the mouth of Ptolemy, survivor of an earlier Babylonian/Iraq quagmire and guardian of Alexander’s legacy:

These days any commercial filmmaker (and particularly one with a fondness for casts of thousands and lavish period detail) needs a certain amount of imperial hubris: that is, he needs to believe that audiences will flock to his or her films around the globe. Call it cultural imperialism or a superior distribution network, filmmakers with \$200 million budgets need Hollywood’s power, and it is not hard to convince them to pay obeisance to it. When Alexander or Achilles yells about “everlasting glory,” the hearts of studio marketing executives beat a little faster: everlasting glory equals more downstream revenue. . . . No wonder Anthony Hopkins, as the old general Ptolemy, narrates “Alexander” from the great library at Alexandria: Library rights are where it’s at, and they’re certainly why Sony bought MGM this fall.⁷⁴

In grounding his allegorical readings in an epistemology, Connor is more explicit than Christensen. In fact, he comes close to arguing that while for classical Hollywood metaphoric doubling is the dominant mode, neoclassical (as Connor calls it) Hollywood subscribes to allegorical modes of reflexivity. For the classical mode, he cites Jean-Claude Lebensztejn’s definition of the classical frame:

First, a painting should be framed to avoid confusion between its objects and surrounding objects. . . . This separation is a landmark of classicism, which aims at the values of order, clarity, and distinction. . . . The classical frame both enables classical space and serves as an emblem of the themes that will be dealt with in that space. The order the frame makes allows the painting to address “order.” The second point. . . is that the frame should be there, but not insistently there; it should not attract too much attention to itself. This balance should give the appearance of a “natural constraint.”⁷⁵

Through Lebensztejn, Connor is able to propose a definition of the classical different from the one given by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson:

[Hollywood's] classicism lies in the balance it can strike between the conditions of its production and the demands of its literal narrative. For the authors of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, the system is so overwhelming that the actual instances that system produces can have no effect on its operation. There is no need to read the films of classical Hollywood for their self-understanding of that system because no such understanding is permissible.⁷⁶

But Connor's classicism also wants to distance itself from other versions that define the classical (positively or negatively) via transparency, such as the realist one attributed to André Bazin, and critiqued in *Screen*, by among others, Jean Louis Comolli, Stephen Heath or Colin McCabe:

What is stable or ordered about this system is. . . the division within [cinematic] space between the "insistently there" and the "naturally constrained." Since the frame must encompass both the classically constrained and the unclassically insistent, the relatively simple emblemization of the frame's ordering as the picture's order appears at one remove. Emblemization becomes the complicated allegorization of the attempt to balance the insistent against the constrained.⁷⁷

In this reading, the classical becomes neoclassical, when this balance between narrative and meta-narrative can be staged as a mere effect. As a consequence:

what makes neoclassical Hollywood neo is this difficulty in containing its self-consciousness, not, as a Romantic account of neoclassicism might put it, the self-consciousness itself. The mismatch between the attention given to the allegorical and the attention given to the literal is what gives these films. . . their whiff of pomposity. Neoclassical Hollywood films are often overwhelmed by their allegories.⁷⁸

The "insistently there" trumps the "naturally constrained," and allegory consumes metaphor.

Reflexivity as Feedback

Connor and Christensen still adhere to what one might call "allegories of representation," even if their referents blend "American politics" with the internally generated reflexivity of the corporation's self-representation at an abstract level, as if to suggest that contemporary Hollywood fights its own "identity politics," when protecting its intellectual property and extending its reach, in the face of competition from other forms of entertainment, but perhaps just as much, in the face of competition from the weight of its own history. I have found their discussions illuminating, even where their interpretations of specific films remained suggestive rather than persuasive, and perhaps too narrowly framed to lend themselves to generalization. Their great merit is that, without minimizing the difficulties of doing so, they insist that a historically informed analysis of Hollywood as a high-tech California industry and a global business, must have something to say about the films as highly skilled, multi-layered narratives and multi-purpose vehicles, which must function equally well on different platforms, in different media formats, for different audiences. By positing allegory as the hermeneutics of choice, they intertwine the economic and the textual as a kind of *a priori* requirement, recognizing and respecting the fact that anyone working in Hollywood lives corporate strategy day to day, and is only too aware of the conflicts between financial creativity, marketing creativity and personal creativity. The choice of films across the classical/post-classical chronological divide indicate that forms of allegorizing have always existed, even if the internal upheavals of the industry over the past three decades have given these allegories a new self-correcting and self-regulatory urgency. The Disney-Pixar "partnership," for instance, has produced a string of animation franchise films, such as *TOY STORY* and *SHREK*, which are prime candidates for tracking the recto and verso of individual directors performing an internalized corporate authorship and the studios asserting

authorship through these individuals' self-presentation as *auteurs*, while representing the changed power relationships and reassigning the roles between the different "players."

But Christensen and Connor also convinced me that one of my previous definitions of the post-classical as a special kind of "knowingness" about the classical might require further clarification. After what has been said, the more general principle at issue would be that the classical and post-classical cinema are neither diachronically successive, nor the same in a different guise or context, but rather that they are reflexive in relation to each other, in that each determines the other and is in turn determined by it. This is indeed the technical definition of "reflexivity," especially in the social sciences, where the term refers to circular or bi-directional relationships between cause and effect, each changing or defining the other in such a way that both function as causes and as effects. If reflexivity, however, names situations of self-reference, where an action refers back to, and thereby alters or affects the instance or agent instigating the action, then it might be more correct to speak of "feedback," both positive and negative.

Might this change of spatial metaphor from reflexivity as frame, mirror and reversible relations of inside and outside, to the dynamic metaphors of positive and negative feedback, input and output, and reversible relations of cause and effect help render moot or "sublate" some of the contradictions discussed earlier, such as the one between the self-contained, closed nature of Hollywood storytelling (where a film comes with its own instruction manual and proceeds in a highly predictable, formulaic way) and the open way that a Hollywood film allows for entry and comprehension at almost any point in time along its narrative arc? Can feedback reconcile the category of *product* (the self-sufficiency of a film as a rounded story, complete and replete for all time) with that of *service* (the time-bound and place-specific unique experience of the event), by suggesting for both a new aggregate state, not just of "performance" but also highlighting the instant availability, the fluidity and iterative nature of a film that now exists and reaches its audience as download or streaming video?

If the classical represents in some sense the dominance of negative feedback (of self-regulation and deniability) then the post-classical would signal the presence and appreciation of the positive feedback loops that the new technologies and social networks have added to the managerial to-do list of running a film company or studio in the post-classical period. Balancing the more traditional negative feedback loops against these more recent positive feedback loops, as they have emerged around Amazon, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, is perhaps the major challenge that Hollywood has faced in the past ten years, and it is directly and indirectly the subject of Henry Jenkins' *Convergence Culture*.⁷⁹ Jenkins' frame of reference, however, is different from the one here proposed, insofar as it is more in line with the emancipatory discourse of self-empowerment around popular culture, which he had already championed in his previous bestseller, *Textual Poachers*.⁸⁰ Focusing instead on feedback loops, one can distinguish between negative feedback (the controlling instances of the system, providing an internal frame of reference as stabilizing element), and positive feedback (the fan community that cannot be anticipated, but that has become essential, perhaps not for its "user-generated content" per se, but for its participatory involvement in the institution Hollywood, even at the limits of incoherence and cacophony).⁸¹ Intensifying the focus on branding and the logo in the sense discussed above, would then be more like a principle of homeostasis, a way of not only renegotiating the relationship between product and consumers, but—under conditions of positive, that is, self-reinforcing feedback, as generated by social networks—a chief strategy for capturing and managing these volatile masses and markets.

Conclusion

As I go over the texts presented here, almost everything I have written about the American cinema, in one form or another, relates to aspects of feedback: its loops and repetitions, its interferences and

amplifications, and the subsequent attempts at regulation, auto-correction and the homeostasis of credibly or persuasively attributing meaning. Indeed, I began to realize that Hollywood has always been for me a case of positive feedback, in the full ambiguity of the term: it has always been post-classical, even as I tried to define it as classical.

To recapitulate once more some of the semantic aspects that this ambiguity entails:

- Positive feedback in everyday language refers to all kinds of “therapeutic” interpersonal encouragement, for the purpose of self-regulation, but in a more technical sense it connotes its opposite: the aggravating interferences and conflict escalation that result from intersubjective or transferential over-identification.
- Positive feedback is also a term familiar from performed music, and in particular it occurs when a body, a voice or an electric guitar gets audio feedback from the microphone, which then amplifies the disturbance, also called “oscillation.” Performers like Jimi Hendrix, or The Who would exploit such audio feedback for the creative (or even political) potential it afforded as “interference” that could be shaped, modulated and passed along, in a kind of dialogue between artist, instrument and audience.
- Positive feedback is a major factor in financial markets, at least according to George Soros. Contrary to equilibrium theory, which stipulates that markets move towards equilibrium and that non-equilibrium fluctuations are merely random noise, so that share prices in the long run at equilibrium reflect the underlying fundamentals, Soros argues that prices do in fact influence the fundamentals and that this newly influenced set of fundamentals then proceeds to change expectations, thus influencing prices; the process continues in a self-reinforcing pattern. Because the pattern is self-reinforcing, markets tend towards disequilibrium. Sooner or later they reach a point where the sentiment is reversed and negative expectations become self-reinforcing in the downward direction, thereby explaining the familiar pattern of boom and bust cycles.
- Positive feedback in cybernetics describes the situation when the output of a system is fed back as input, amplifying the possibility of divergence, and thus enabling change and branching, and thus new states of equilibrium and self-regulation. But positive feedback may also lead to collapse, implosion and the self-destruction of the system, for instance when a suspension bridge breaks up, because a storm amplifies the vibration of the cables.
- Finally, certain forms of self-reference or recursiveness in the arts, literature, philosophy and computer science might be said to be instances of positive feedback, such as the rhetorical trope and heraldic emblem of *mise-en-abyme*, the logical paradoxes associated with Zeno (“Achilles and the tortoise”) or the process of a simple system activating a more complex system, also known as “bootstrapping.”

A theory of the cinema centered on feedback would highlight the following features: at the micro-level of the textual system, for instance, of classical Hollywood cinema, feedback in general would characterize the uneven circulation of information. Its regulation via sequential narrative of cause-and-effect, and its distribution among characters, and between characters and spectator, via narration and focalization would be instances of “negative feedback,” while the sheer amount of data produced by mechanical reproduction of sound and image, much of it neither contained nor constrained by style, technique and narrative, would fall under “positive feedback.” *Identification*, as opposed to comprehension, *cinophilia* and cult cinema, as opposed to film appreciation or criticism, would thus respond to this excess or contingent flow of information, and therefore also be effects of positive feedback. Melodrama—in the way I have written about it—would be the example par excellence of positive feedback, as the genre that not only exceeds the norm, but whose affective data (as manifest, for instance, in what we usually refer to as the *mise-en-scène*) comprises all those elements

not governed by controlling instances: be they linear narrative, the conventions of genre, the social symbolic of patriarchy, or the super-ego of the Law.

At the macro-level, positive feedback would be relevant as the category that accounts for the peculiarity of Hollywood cinema in the public sphere, for instance, the apparent fickleness of popular taste, the unpredictability of box-office success, as well as the nature of the ancillary industries that sustain the multi-media “event movie” we call the blockbuster, and are sustained by it: Hollywood will always need positive feedback for innovation and change, and negative feedback as self-regulation or self-censorship in self-celebration. Rather than concentrating on the classical *auteurs* within the system (Ford, Hawks), this collection puts more emphasis on the feedback loops that underlie the antagonistic-cooperative relations between *auteur* and system, Hollywood and Europe, *maudit* and mainstream, or the parasite-host relationships that developed around émigré directors in the 1940s and the New Hollywood directors in relation to New Economy Hollywood in the 1970s. What regulates talent transfers, characterizes the film festival circuit, or can explain the “pilot fish” function of the independent sector for global Hollywood all takes place in the force field of negative *and* positive feedback.

Throughout the 20th century, the cinema would have been fulfilling a special role in society at large: as the mainstay of mankind’s audio-visual heritage, it has an extraordinarily central “memory function,” increasingly taking over the role previously assigned to the fine arts, to literature and the study of languages. But the American cinema also partakes in society’s “oscillation function” (to use a distinction made by Niklaus Luhmann),⁸² which is more generally associated with technological change, with cutting edge design, new life-style opportunities or activism: the “creative destruction” discussed earlier. According to Luhmann, culture is the name we give to the memory of social systems, but not in the form of spatial repositories that one can enter or leave, open or close. Rather, the memory function of a society would be that continuous process of recursive erasure and recall of significant symbols or images, through which the constitutive contingency of the moment becomes “reflexive” and therefore active. Extending this thought further, I want to conclude by suggesting that the cinema in general and Hollywood in particular is engaged in precisely such processes of permanent erasure and recall, and thus constitutes the most technologically developed form of this “recursive memory” of social systems, which could indeed be called “culture,” but which I have been specifying as “the persistence of Hollywood.”

- 29 To quote from an article I wrote in the early 1980s:

The New Hollywood cinema at once amplifies and multiplies the sensory input, leading an audience into the echo chambers of its own palpitating heartbeat. The spectator enters the films as if sucked into a space unbounded and unlocalizable, and yet strangely familiar and interior. Not unlike the operation of the probes, scanners and spectrosopes used in medicine or by the military, the cinema today colonizes both the visible and the sense of vision itself. Deprived of gravity or scale, the suspended and immersed spectator no longer trusts the eye, and in free fall, he suddenly relies on sound. This sound, however, has an ominous force, or rather, it is an acoustic Moebius strip on which the spectator takes his roller-coaster ride. The auditorium becomes the outerspace-as-innerspace-as-outerspace: an externalized, publicly shared solid wall of sound, produced directly in one's head. The cinema becomes a magnified walkman stereo, itself a listening experience in the active mode, and once described as similar to Nicolas de Cusa's definition of God, namely as one of being fully present both at the world's centre and at every point of its circumference.

Thomas Elsaesser, "American Graffiti," in *Postmoderne—Zeichen eines kulturellen Wandels*, ed. Klaus Scherpe and Andreas Huyssen (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1986), 313.

- 30 Edward Branigan, "Sound and Epistemology in Film," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47, 4 (Autumn 1989): 312 and 314.
- 31 Branigan "Sound and Epistemology in Film," 312, where this point is footnoted to Tom Levin "The Acoustic Dimension," in *Screen* 25, 3 (May–June 1984).
- 32 Eugene Minkovski, quoted in Sue L. Cataldi, *Emotion, Depth and Flesh: A Study of Sensitive Space—Reflections on Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Embodiment* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 50. I want to thank Warren Buckland for drawing my attention to this passage. See also Chapter 8, "Narrative Cinema and Audience Aesthetics: The *Mise-en-Scène* of the Spectator."
- 33 Chion, *Audiovisions*, 151.
- 34 Chion, *Audiovision*, 151.
- 35 Branigan discusses Comolli's view of sound as an indexical sign, and seems to dismiss it—though without altogether explaining why: rather, he moves in a different terminology, calling sound "adjectival"—maybe because his purpose is to redefine how we can describe sound, that is, a problem of description/ontology. But he then goes on to argue that we do not need to think of sound either adjectivally or indexically, but rather in terms of two types of perception, top-down and bottom-up processing. This distinction for him makes obsolete the difference between "perception" and "cognition" as two separate kinds of mental activities (Branigan, "Sound and Epistemology in Film," 320).
- 36 See Roger Odin, "For a Semio-Pragmatics of Film" and "A Semio-Pragmatic Approach to the Documentary Film," in *The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind*, ed. Warren Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995) 213–26 and 227–35.
- 37 In its edition of October 7, 2010 *The New York Times* felt obliged to append the following Editor's Note to a review essay:

A photograph with an art review on Oct. 1 about the show "Abstract Expressionist New York: The Big Picture" at the Museum of Modern Art, and several other pictures in an online slide show, appeared to show museum visitors viewing the exhibit. In fact, the people shown were museum staff members, who were asked by museum officials to be present in the galleries to provide scale and context for the photographs. The photographer acknowledged using the same procedure in other cases when an exhibition was not yet opened to the public. Such staging of news pictures violates *The Times's* standards and the photographs should not have been published.

www.nytimes.com/2010/10/01/arts/design/01abex.html (last accessed March 10, 2011).

23 The Persistence of Hollywood, Part II: Reflexivity, Feedback and Self-Regulation

- 1 In a famous scene in Victor Hugo's novel *Notre Dame de Paris*, the archdeacon Frollo says, pointing first to a book and then to the Cathedral, "ceci tuera cela"—this (the printed book) will kill that (the built Cathedral). If similar (and equally unfounded) worries have accompanied the 20th century, when the cinema was said to have killed literature (and painting), the scene does illustrate the possibility of a transfer of iconic achievements across the succession of media. In a self-referential turn "ceci" might well have stood in Hugo's mind for his own novel, so that *Notre Dame de Paris* "killed" *Notre Dame de Paris*, just as Charles Laughton / William Dieterle's *NOTRE DAME DE PARIS* would—a hundred years later—"kill" Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*.
- 2 Raymond Bellour, "Nostalgies," *Autrement* 79 (April 1986), special issue "Europe-Hollywood et retour," 231–32.
- 3 Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 58–59.
- 4 For blockbusters, exhibitors might retain as little as 10% of the ticket price (the so-called "house nut," i.e. the running costs of the theater), and are therefore obliged to maximize income generated through the sale of soft drinks and popcorn. See: www.skillset.org/film/knowledge/article/_}5084_{_}1.asp (last accessed March 4, 2011).
- 5 Edgar Reitz, "Das Kino der Zukunft," *Telepolis* 2 (June 1997), 71.
- 6 Hans Hollein, "Alles ist Architektur," *Bau: Schrift für Architektur und Städtebau*, 23, 1/2 (Vienna 1968).
- 7 John Ellis, "Cinema and Television: Laios and Oedipus," in *Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel or Cable? The Screen Arts in the Digital Age*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser and Kay Hoffmann (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), 127.
- 8 The narratives—by Douglas Gomery (*The Hollywood Studio System*, London: British Film Institute, 2008); by Tom Schatz ("The New Hollywood," in *Film Theory Goes to the Movies: Cultural Analyses of Contemporary Film*, ed. James Collins,

- Hilary Radner, and Ava Collins, New York: Routledge, 1993, 8–37); and Jon Lewis (“Money Matters: Hollywood in the Corporate Era”, in *The New American Cinema*, ed. Jon Lewis, Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, 87–121)—have each a different emphasis, but they broadly outline or flesh out the same story.
- 9 See Charles R. Acland, *Screen traffic: movies, multiplexes, and global culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), especially Chapter Six, “Zones and Speeds of International Cinematic Life.”
 - 10 Douglas Gomery, “Hollywood Corporate Business Practice and Periodizing Contemporary Film History,” in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), 47–57; and Jon Lewis, “Money Matters: Hollywood in the Corporate Era,” in *The New American Cinema*, ed. Jon Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 87–121.
 - 11 Tino Balio, *The American Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).
 - 12 The new business model tries to consolidate services, bringing together under one corporate roof activities which the consumers (rather than the producer) associate as belonging together, that is, based a common pattern of service and use, as opposed to a common technology. For instance, the common denominator between the music business, publishing, movie business, television channels and telephone companies is access to typical domestic entertainment forms. This convergence of services is often called “synergy” and is part of how vertical integration was re-established along horizontal lines, after the Supreme Court lifted the ban on distributors owning exhibition platforms in 1986.
 - 13 One of the key essays on Hollywood as an example of post-Fordism is Michael Storper, “The Transition to Flexible Specialisation in the U.S. Film Industry: External Economies, the Division of Labour, and the Crossing of Industrial Divides,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 13, 2 (June 1989): 273–305.
 - 14 Allen J. Scott, *On Hollywood, The Place, the Industry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
 - 15 Manuel Castells, *The Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).
 - 16 Aida Hozic, *Hollywood: Space, Power, and Fantasy in the American Economy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).
 - 17 Toby Miller, Nitin Govall, John McMurria, Ting Wang and Richard Maxwell, *Global Hollywood*, 2nd edition (London: BFI Publishing, 2008).
 - 18 Thomas Austin, “Hollywood Industry and Imaginary,” Course description, University of Sussex, Autumn 2000: www.docstoc.com/docs/17839854/HOLLYWOOD-INDUSTRY-AND-IMAGINARY (last accessed June 12, 2009).
 - 19 The James Bond franchise has become a classic case of product placement. For instance, *TOMORROW NEVER DIES* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1997) had tie-ins with Visa, Avis, BMW, Smirnoff vodka, Heineken, Omega watches, Ericsson cell phones and L’Oréal cosmetics. For a history of product placement, see Kerry Segrave, *Product Placement in Hollywood Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004) and Lean-Marc Lehu, *Branded Entertainment: Product Placement & Brand Strategy in the Entertainment Business* (London: Kogan Page, 2007).
 - 20 This is the argument put forward by the art historian Boris Groys, “Versklavte Götter. Filmstudio und Realität oder Hollywoods metaphysische Wende,” *Lettre Internationale* 52 (Winter 2001): 268–84.
 - 21 Herbert I. Schiller, *Communication and Cultural Domination*. (White Plains, NY: International Arts & Science Press, 1979), 9–10.
 - 22 Thomas L. McPhail, *Electronic Colonialism: The Future of International Broadcasting and Communication* (London: Sage Publications, 1987), 18.
 - 23 Imperialism is the conquest and control of one country by a more powerful one. Cultural imperialism signifies the dimensions of the process that go beyond economic exploitation or military force. In the history of colonialism, (i.e., the form of imperialism in which the government of the colony is run directly by foreigners), the educational and media systems of many Third World countries have been set up as replicas of those in Britain, France, or the United States and carry their values. Western advertising has made further inroads, as have architectural and fashion styles. Subtly but powerfully, the message has often been insinuated that Western cultures are superior to the cultures of the Third World.
J. Downing, A. Mohammadi and A. Sreberny-Mohammadi, *Questioning the Media* (London: Sage, 1995), 482.
 - 24 Tyler Cowen, *Creative Destruction: How Globalization is changing the World’s Cultures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
 - 25 Cowen, *Creative Destruction*, 89–90.
 - 26 See Lauren A. Shuker, “Plot Change: Foreign Forces Transform Hollywood Films,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 2, 2010: <http://online.wsj.com/article/0,SB10001424052748704913304575371394036766312,00.html> (last accessed March 3, 2011).
 - 27 In the 1910s and 1920s, foreign filmmakers would come to Hollywood from France (Léonce Perret, Maurice Tourneur, Jacques Feyder), Germany (Ernst Lubitsch and F.W. Murnau) and Scandinavia (Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller). See Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby (eds.), *“Film Europe” And “Film America”: Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange 1920–1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999).
 - 28 Thomas Elsaesser, “Ethnicity, Authenticity and Exile: A Counterfeit Trade?,” in *Exile, Home and Homeland*, ed. Hamid Naficy (New York: Routledge, 1998), 97–124; “Walter Reisch: Vienna-Berlin-London-Hollywood,” in *Pix3*, ed. Ilona Halberstadt (London: BFI Publishing, 2001), 43–67; “German Cinema Face to Face with Hollywood: Looking into a Two-Way Mirror,” in *Americanization and Anti-Americanism: The German Encounter with American Culture after 1945*, ed. Alexander Stephan (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 166–87.
 - 29 See Melis Behlil, *Home Away From Home: Global Directors in New Hollywood*. PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2007.
 - 30 Neal Gabler, *An Empire of their Own: How the Jews invented Hollywood* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989); Michael Rogin, *Black Face White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

- 31 Ever since Richard Dyer's seminal studies in *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997) there have been several book-length studies on Hollywood's "equal-opportunity racism," among them Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Daniel J. Bernardi (ed.), *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Vera Hernan and Andrew Gordon, *Screen Savors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).
- 32 Martin Barker and Ernest Mathijs (eds.), *Watching the Lord of the Rings: Tolkien's world audiences* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007); see also Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
- 33 The controversies and eventual success of *SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE* (Danny Boyle, 2008) in India have focused on the issue of local reception, as well as on Hollywood—and Bollywood—aiming for each other's global audiences. See Nandini Lakshman, "Hollywood Meets Bollywood as India's Movies Go Global," *Bloomberg News*, February 20, 2009: www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/feb2009/gb20090220_{_}330804.htm (last accessed March 3, 2011).
- 34 Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz, *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas* (London: Polity, 1994) and Jostein Gripsrud, *The Dynasty Years: Hollywood television and critical media studies* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- 35 Fredric Jameson, "The Existence of Italy," in *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 155–229.
- 36 Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle* (Lebanon, NH: University Presses of New England, 2006).
- 37 See also Jeff Bell's review of Beller's "Cinema, capital of the 20th century," *Postmodern Culture* 5, 1 (September 1994): <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.994/bell.994> (last accessed March 3, 2011).
- 38 Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production*, 5.
- 39 These options are examined in more detail in Thomas Elsaesser, "The Mindgame Film," in *Puzzle Films*, ed. Warren Buckland (Oxford: Blackwell 2009), 13–41.
- 40 The first Academy Awards ceremony was held on May 16, 1929. It gave the Oscar for best picture to *WINGS* and *SUNRISE: A SONG OF TWO HUMANS*; best actor: Emil Jannings (*THE LAST COMMAND*; *THE WAY OF ALL FLESH*); best actress: Janet Gaynor (*SEVENTH HEAVEN*; *STREET ANGEL*; *SUNRISE*); best director: Frank Borzage (*SEVENTH HEAVEN*) / Lewis Milestone (*TWO ARABIAN KNIGHTS*); best adapted screenplay: Benjamin Glazer (*SEVENTH HEAVEN*); best original story: Ben Hecht (*UNDERWORLD*); best cinematography: Charles Rosher and Karl Struss (*SUNRISE*). See also Emmanuel Levy, *All About Oscar: The History and Politics of the Academy Awards* (New York: Continuum, 2003).
- 41 For an astute analysis of Hollywood's memory management and the "invention of tradition," see Vinzenz Hediger, "The Original Is Always Lost: Film History, Copyright Industries and the Problem of Reconstruction," in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, ed. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 135–49 and Vinzenz Hediger, "Politique des archives: European Cinema and the Invention of Tradition in the Digital Age": <http://www.rouge.com.au/12/hediger.html> (last accessed March 4, 2011).
- 42 Richard Maltby, "The Production Code and the Hays Office," in *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930–1939*, ed. Tino Balio (New York: Scribner's, 1993), 37–72; Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918–1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997). See also Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2003), 59–73.
- 43 Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, 61.
- 44 Noël Carroll, "The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies and Beyond," *October* 34 (Summer 1981): 51–80.
- 45 Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, 63.
- 46 Richard Maltby, "A Brief Romantic Interlude: Dick and Jane go to 3½ seconds of the Classical Hollywood Cinema," in *Post-Theory—Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 434–59.
- 47 Recapitulating the argument of the sophisticated and the innocent viewer ("Dick and Jane"), Žižek adds: "our only correction to Maltby would be that we do not need two spectators sitting next to each other: one and the same spectator, split in itself, is sufficient." Slavoj Žižek, "Shostakovich in Casablanca," *Lacanian Ink*, 2007: www.lacan.com/zizcasablanca.htm (last accessed March 4, 2011).
- 48 The terms are taken from Justin Wyatt, *High concept: movies and marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).
- 49 The 1986 Supreme Court Paramount ruling allowed major US distributors (which is what the studios had become by then) to enter the exhibition sector, making vertical integration once more an economic reality. The consequence was the concept of the multiplex/megaplex, a new type of cinema, whose purpose was to create "spaces of total entertainment," defined by "upscaling, comfort, courteousness, cleanliness, total entertainment, and prestige." Acland, *Screen traffic*, 106.
- 50 For an account of how media images become "things" and vice versa, and how communication (once more) takes place through (totemic) objects, see Scott Lash and Celia Lury, *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things* (London: Polity, 2007).
- 51 Peter Krämer, "Would You Take Your Child To See This Film? The Cultural and Social Work of the Family-Adventure Movie," in Neale and Smith, *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, 294–311.
- 52 Originally published as Thomas Elsaesser, "The Blockbuster: Everything Connects, but Not Everything Goes," in *The End of Cinema as We Know It: American Film in the Nineties*, ed. Jon Lewis (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 11–22.
- 53 "Total entertainment refers to industrial structures of corporate ownership as well as to particular textual and consumption practices that have developed at a junction where entertainment content is inclined, and designed, to travel in mobile ways across media platforms and ancillary/territorial markets." Paul Grainge, *Brand Hollywood: Selling Entertainment in a Global Media Age* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 175.
- 54 On Pathé's (and other companies') promotional strategies, see Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 14–19.

- 55 Theodor W. Adorno, with Max Horkheimer, "Culture industry: Enlightenment as Mass-Deception," *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 133. The passage is also quoted in J.D. Connor, "Logorrhea, or, how should we watch a neoclassical Hollywood film?," in Connor, *The Studios after the Studios: Hollywood in the Neoclassical Era, 1970–2005* (forthcoming). I am grateful to the author for letting me see a draft of this essay while I was completing this chapter.
- 56 The "foregrounding of the device" is a key concept of the Russian Formalist School, based on the insight that poetics effects are achieved by defamiliarizing language, often by means of repetition or a change of context. Jan Mukarovsky developed the notion into a literary concept, but it was given a politically progressive meaning mainly via Bert Brecht's estrangement or alienation effect.
- 57 Grainge, *Brand Hollywood*, 175.
- 58 [Brand Hollywood's] chapter on the LORD OF THE RINGS trilogy and the HARRY POTTER franchise shows that the need to nurture brands over a longer period, to be "credible" with fans and stay true to the brands' "core values" forced Warner Bros to enter into "careful forms of negotiation" with fan communities about content, even while their marketing and promotional materials could be tailored more strategically to target new (non-fan) markets and age groups.
Liz Moor, "Global Brands," *Global Media and Communication* 5, 1 (2009): 101–2.
- 59 Catherine Johnson, review of *Brand Hollywood* in *Screen* 50, 2 (2009), 254.
- 60 The economic value of brands is reflected in the increasing protection given to them through changes to copyright and trademark law, as well as the valuation given of brands on the stock market and other financial markets. The semiotic value of a brand is the degree of recognition and the field of associations attached to it.
- 61 Grainge, *Brand Hollywood*, 128.
- 62 It is the aesthetic/affective combination of studio memory and blockbuster hype that can be applied more widely to the symbolic economy of post-classical logos. By tailoring the form and appearance of logos for specific presentational ends, and by occasionally insinuating themselves into a film's (promotional) diegesis, logos have helped code the event status of the modern blockbuster while visibly asserting the industrial history and position of their corporate progenitors.
Paul Grainge, "Branding Hollywood: studio logos and the aesthetics of memory and hype," *Screen* 45, 4 (2004), 360.
- 63 For an example from the 1930s of a studio writing and rewriting its history through a genre, see Chapter 11, "Transatlantic Triangulations: William Dieterle and the Warner Bros. Biopics."
- 64 See for instance, Philip French, *Westerns, Aspects of a Movie Genre* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973).
French categorized Westerns by the American political figures he thought they most resembled. Thus High Noon and Johnny Guitar are McCarthy Westerns because both show individuals persecuted or abandoned by hostile political environments. The Magnificent Seven was judged Kennedy-esque by virtue of its Peace Corps-style American professional supermen taking their superior skills and firepower out to right wrongs beyond U.S. borders. Goldwater Westerns, on the other hand, tended to take the patronizing Republican/conservative tack of upholding the past and "old ways" as the ideal to be aspired to; there was nothing wrong with men, women or conflicts that good old-fashioned brawling, spanking, or mayhem couldn't solve. . . . French further inflected his thesis by subcategorizing films having Kennedy content treated in Goldwater style (the LBJ Western), and Goldwater content with a Kennedy style (the William Buckley Western).
Glenn Erickson, "Foreign Intervention and the American Western" (1999): www.dvdtalk.com/dvdsavant/s80west.html (last accessed March 5, 2011).
- 65 An example would be J. Hoberman's *An Army of Phantoms: American Movies and the Making of the Cold War* (New York: The New Press, 2011), as well as his "'Nashville' Contra 'Jaws' or 'The Imagination of Disaster' Revisited," in *The Last Great American Picture Show: New Hollywood Cinema in the 1970s*, ed. T. Elsaesser, A. Horwath and N. King (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), 195–222.
- 66 Michael Rogin, "The Two Declarations of American Independence," *Representations*, 55 (Summer 1996): 13–30; Carol Clover, "Dancin' in the Rain," *Critical Inquiry* 21, 4 (Summer 1995), 722–47.
- 67 Jerome Christensen, "Delirious Warner Bros: Studio Authorship and The Fountainhead," *Velvet Light Trap* (Spring 2005): 17–31; "Taking it to the Next Level: You've Got Mail," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Autumn 2003): 198–215; "The Time Warner Conspiracy: JFK, Batman, and the Manager Theory of Hollywood Film," *Critical Inquiry* (Spring 2002): 591–616; "Studio Identity, Studio Art: MGM, Mrs. Miniver, and Planning the Postwar Era," *ELH* 67, 1 (Winter 1999): 257–92; "Spike Lee: Corporate Populist," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Spring 1991): 582–95.
- 68 Peter Drucker, *The Practice of Management* (New York: Harper Collins, 1954).
- 69 Christensen, "The Time Warner Conspiracy," 591.
- 70 The two chief accounts are Richard M. Clurman, *To the End of Time: The Seduction and Conquest of a Media Empire* (New York, 1992) . . . and Connie Bruck, *Master of the Game: Steve Ross and the Creation of Time Warner* (New York, 1994). . . . My version of the negotiations is completely indebted to Clurman and Bruck, unless otherwise indicated.
Christensen, "The Time Warner Conspiracy," footnote 4.
- 71 Christensen has in turn had to endure quite harsh criticism of arbitrariness and tautology by Peter Havholm and Philip Sandifer, in "Corporate Authorship: A Response to Jerome Christensen," *Critical Inquiry* 30, 1 (Autumn 2003): 187–97,

- to which Christensen replied with “Taking it to the Next Level: You’ve Got Mail,” *Critical Inquiry* 30, 1 (Autumn 2003): 198–215.
- 72 On the economics of studio libraries, see Jan-Christopher Horak, “The Hollywood history business,” in Lewis, *The End of Cinema as we Know it*, 33–42.
- 73 J.D. Connor, “‘The Projections’: Allegories of Industrial Crisis in Neoclassical Hollywood,” *Representations*, 71 (Summer, 2000), 50.
- 74 J.D. Connor, “The anxious epic,” *The Boston Globe*, November 28, 2004.
- 75 Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, “Framing Classical Space,” *Art Journal* (Spring 1988): 37–38.
- 76 Connor, “The Projections,” 60. Connor is referring to David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).
- 77 Connor, “The Projections,” 60.
- 78 Connor, “The Projections,” 61.
- 79 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006).
- 80 Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
- 81 Involving the fans in the scripting of a film has turned out to be a mixed blessing. *SNAKES ON A PLANE* (2006, David R. Ellis, New Line Cinema) was not the success that its initiators had hoped for: “In response to the Internet fan base, New Line Cinema incorporated feedback from online users into its production, and added five days of reshooting. . . . Despite the immense Internet buzz, the film’s gross revenue did not live up to expectations, earning US\$15.25 million in its opening weekend.” (Wikipedia entry, accessed March 7, 2011).
- 82 Niklaus Luhmann, “Globalization or World Society? How to conceive of modern society,” *International Review of Sociology* 7, 1 (March 1997): 67–69: www.generation-online.org/p/fpluhmann2.htm (last accessed March 7, 2011).