

Although the notion of a 'classical' American cinema had been in circulation for decades, the concept became a focus of theoretical attention in journals such as *Monogram* and *Screen* in the 1970s, and was given far greater substance by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson in their landmark 1985 work *The Classical Hollywood Cinema (CHC)*.² Influenced by both André Bazin³ and – less obviously but perhaps just as significantly – Jan Mukařovský, Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson use the phrase 'classical Hollywood cinema' to refer to a mode of film practice (an aesthetic of 'decorum, proportion, formal harmony' (*CHC*, p. 4)) supporting and supported by a mode of film production (the studio system).⁴ 'The label "classicism" serves well', the authors argue, 'because it swiftly conveys distinct aesthetic qualities (elegance, unity, rule-governed craftsmanship) and historical functions (Hollywood's role as the world's mainstream film style)' (*CHC*, p. 4). 'Classical', then, connotes not only particular aesthetic qualities, but the historical role of Hollywood filmmaking as a template for filmmaking worldwide: classical films are classical in the sense that they are *definitive*.

Following Mukařovský, Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson separate several dimensions of form: they write of material, technical, aesthetic and socio-ethical-political ('practical') norms. Each of these can be said to have been highly regulated in the studio era (many material and technical norms, for example, were regulated and stabilized by co-operation among the majors, while many practical norms were regulated by the Production Code). The emphasis of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* is very clearly and explicitly placed on technical and aesthetic norms, though to that statement we need to add two qualifications. First, material and 'practical' norms are considered, though only to the extent that these impinge upon technical and aesthetic norms (the norm of the union of a heterosexual couple is examined as an instance of Hollywood's interest in narrative closure, for example). Second, there is an important principle of interdependence in operation: not only between the mode of production and mode of film practice, but also, implicitly at least, among the various norms. One might argue, for example, that the technical norms of narrative closure and shot/reverse-shot editing are interdependent with the aesthetic norms of 'unity' and 'harmony'. This extends into a kind of holistic principle (also evident in Bazin): the idea that the regulated stability of each of the formal norms, along with the ordered nature of the mode of production, generates a greater overall level of stability than the sum of each of these levels. There is, to recall Bazin's metaphor, an overall 'equilibrium profile' which arises from the stability achieved in each of the institutional and formal dimensions.

Where Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson argue that the classical style has 'persisted' since 1960 (the date at which the detail of their study ends) in spite of the shift to package production, and the later process of conglomeration,⁵ other authors have argued that the classical aesthetic gradually dissipated with the

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breakdown of the studio system (and, for some authors, the wider emergence of postmodernity). Indeed, for almost as long as Hollywood has been conceptualized as a 'classical' cinema, there have been claims regarding the end of the classical period. Probably the first such claim was implicitly made by Bazin, who suggested that the classicism of 1930s Hollywood began to give way to a 'baroque' cinema in the 1940s, a cinema of greater self-consciousness and stylization, in the form of, for example, 'superwesterns' like *Duel in the Sun* (1946), *High Noon* (1952), and *Shane* (1953). In 1952 Manny Farber lambasted the 'new mannerist flicker' which seemed more concerned with thematic seriousness and stylistic ostentatiousness than with the traditional Hollywood virtue of entertaining storytelling.⁶ In 1971 we find one of the earliest uses of the phrase 'post-classical', which explicitly takes its cue from Bazin. Contemplating Bazin's characterization of American cinema in the late 1930s as a cinema of 'classical perfection', Lawrence Alloway noted 'it follows that the later developments must be post-classical. Extending the morphology of styles implicit in Bazin's formula, the movies I grew up with [in the 1940s and 1950s] were baroque, Hellenistic, overblown, late.'⁷ In an argument that in some ways prefigures an aspect of the study by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, Alloway rejects this thesis, claiming instead that Hollywood films of the 1940s and 1950s intensified or 'maximized' the themes and formal possibilities established in the 1930s, rather than overthrowing them.

There are essentially two ways of understanding the thesis that the classical mode of practice persisted beyond the breakdown of studio system. The first, and more circumspect, argument involves the claim that one or more aspects of the system described above persists: classical narrative structure, for example, but not the practical norms with which it was associated in the 1930s and 1940s. This is a view which stresses the multi-faceted nature of Hollywood and accepts that change may well be uneven, occurring at different rates and at different moments across these facets.⁸ The second, and much stronger, claim is that it is not merely isolated elements of the system that persist, but that the equilibrium obtaining among and across the various levels – that supervening feature which adds greatly to the sense of stability in the system as a whole – has also persisted. This stronger claim is much more difficult to defend, though it is not clear that anyone, including Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, wishes to make it: they admit, for example, 'that the force of the classical norm was reduced somewhat' (*CHC*, p. 10) after 1960, even if many formally classical films continued to be made; and more recently, Thompson has argued that certain technical and aesthetic norms associated with classical filmmaking have persisted, not that the broader overall stability has endured.

The question of the existence of a distinctive post-classical cinema – like the question of the existence of a classical cinema – is, then, one with both empirical and conceptual dimensions. Nothing approaching the scale and rigour of The

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Classical Hollywood Cinema has been undertaken on the empirical aspect of this question, and this volume cannot claim to make more than a very modest contribution towards it. What I want to focus on here, however, are the conceptual aspects of the issue – aspects which, it should be underlined, are never eradicated by empirical work, no matter how thorough. If there is no agreement at this point on whether there is a post-classical cinema, or on which features of such a cinema are the features which mark it off from a preceding classical cinema, we can at least sketch out what sorts of criteria would be important in answering these questions. Hollywood, as a total institution, is a multi-faceted creature: which of its facets are of most significance in understanding its evolution? Are the most important criteria those of changes in technology, narrative form, or the use of style? Should changes in the mode of production of films, or changes in their marketing, distribution and exhibition have greater priority? Is the positing of an 'epochal' transition only warranted by a global assessment in which all of these factors play a role and undergo change? In what remains of this essay, I want to explore these questions – questions about the assumptions and criteria present in arguments concerning classicism and post-classicism. I will do this through an examination of two arguments – or rather, one argument, and a second family of arguments – in favour of the idea that the classicism of the studio era has given way to something new. The first argument roots itself very much in the nature of industrial organization, while the second family of arguments stresses the interdependence of the aesthetics of Hollywood films with their mode of production.

Vertical disintegration and post-Fordism

The equilibrium profile of classicism – its high level of stability – will only be disrupted, Bazin argued, by a 'geological movement', as a result of which 'a new pattern' will be 'dug across the plain'.¹⁰ Bazin's metaphor provides a way into the argument that the most significant development in the post-war Hollywood system is the shift away from the Fordist principles around which it had been organized during the studio era. For the proponents of the 'post-Fordist thesis', the Paramount decrees of 1948 constitute a seismic 'movement' which fundamentally alters the 'pattern' of Hollywood.

Although the concept of post-Fordism is relatively obscure within film studies, it has a direct bearing on debates regarding the shift to package production. The notion of post-Fordism was coined by sociologists studying shifts in the nature of capitalist production, particularly after the Second World War when in many industries the strategies of Fordist mass-production (economies of scale through standardization and a detailed division of labour) were revised as a result of changes in market conditions. In a series of articles, Michael Storper and Susan

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Christopherson have used the development of the US film industry after 1948 as a case study of post-Fordism. As they apply the concept to post-war Hollywood, post-Fordism involves a shift from a largely undifferentiated mass market served by a limited array of standardized, mass-produced commodities, to that of a more heterogeneous range of specific markets to which more specialized products can be profitably sold. The 'initial shock' of the Paramount decrees, which forced the major studios to sell off their exhibition arms, dramatically raised 'the level of uncertainty [and] instability' in the market for film, Storper argues.¹¹ Loss of control over exhibition encouraged the trends (already underway) towards fewer but more expensive films, and 'independent' package production. The details of this process of vertical disintegration are relatively well-known within film studies. Storper's analysis does, however, draw our attention to a number of less well-understood features of the post-war industry. The rise of package production leads to a growth in the number of independent film companies – both independent production companies (small production companies without a corporate relationship with a distribution company¹²), as well as specialist firms serving various aspects of preproduction, production and postproduction (talent agencies, special effects houses, catering firms, etc.). These specialist firms then adapt the products and services they offer to the needs of a variety of clients, a process Storper refers to as product variety (as distinct from product differentiation), in order to ensure their own long-term viability. The organization of production is now 'flexibly specialized' in the sense that, relative to a typically Fordist mode of production, the specialized units are far more capable of adapting to shifts in market need (or of the needs of a variety of 'niche' markets). This can be seen as parallel with the effect of horizontal integration at the corporate level: as film companies became incorporated within larger conglomerates, with interests in other entertainment fields, so the risk attached to film production – relatively greater because of the ever-increasing investment in individual films – was dissipated by the other products and assets of the conglomerate. A vital part of Storper's analysis, however, is that corporate control of the organization of production, and of the process of vertical disintegration, is absent once the process reaches a certain point:

A process of replacement of internal economies is set into motion, and beyond a certain point the large firms can no longer reverse it, because no single firm can assert enough control for a long enough period of time. Disintegration, in this manner, may begin with subcontracting, but it may end with the appearance of a network of independent supplier firms and a flexibly specialised system.¹³

Questions from a variety of angles can be posed with respect to this analysis. First, because films are not absolutely identical – two formulaic genre films still

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 had been set by the monumental success of those 'hyperbolic simulations of
 Hollywood B-movies', *Jaws* (1975) and *Star Wars*.²⁹ Many of the features of these
 neoclassical 'event' movies are borne out of the horizontal integration now
 existing between film producers and other entertainment companies, in which
 films are 'designed with the multimedia marketplace and franchise status in
 mind'.³⁰ While Schatz has argued that these films are unlike classical Hollywood
 films in their emphasis on 'visceral, kinetic and fast-paced' plotting at the expense
 of character, one might argue instead that such films draw on a different strain of
 the legacy of studio era Hollywood - the serial B-film, most obviously in *Star Wars*,
 the *Indiana Jones* series, and in the British remake of *Flash Gordon* (1980).
 In an argument which parallels Schatz's in several respects, Justin Wyatt has
 argued that the economic and institutional changes in Hollywood since 1960 'have
 irrevocably altered the forms of product from Hollywood'.³¹ Given the principle
 of interdependence between form and industrial context, there is one institutional
 change in particular which we might expect to have had an impact on the form of
 Hollywood films. Following on the process of conglomeration, and the emergence
 of cable, satellite, and home video markets, the bulk of the profits on most films
 are now derived from these 'ancillary' markets rather than from theatrical box
 office.³² Why should this development be of such moment - of any greater
 significance than all the other changes since 1948? When the bulk of profits is
 derived from sources other than the theatrical market, it is reasonable to assume
 that the pressures from these 'secondary' markets will command more attention
 in the making of the product.³³ One example of this concerns the changes in
 widescreen compositional practices due to the significance of the television mar-
 ket, discussed by Steve Neale in this volume; according to Wyatt, a more dramatic
 set of formal changes has been driven by the synergies with music marketing
 (music videos and soundtrack albums) and advertising, resulting in what he terms
 a 'modular' aesthetic, which tends to stall and 'fragment' narrative form.
 Wyatt locates the modular aesthetic in the immensely popular and influential
 'high-concept' film, a term and a form that came to prominence in the 1970s. A
 high-concept film is one which places a great emphasis on style and 'stylishness',
 revolving around a simple, easily summarized narrative based on physically typed
 characters, which in turn affords striking icons, images and shabby plot descrip-
 tions as marketing 'hooks'. The high-concept film is heavily reliant upon stars, and
 gives great prominence to its soundtrack (usually a mixture of original scoring and
 pop songs), which is marketed separately as one or more soundtrack albums
 associated with the film (as discussed by K. J. Donnelly in Chapter 9 of this
 volume in relation to the first two *Batman* films). In addition, music videos often
 rework aspects of the film in order to promote both the film and the music. These
 are the factors that give rise, he argues, to the modularity of the high-concept

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film, in which sections of the film are apt to exceed the requirements of the
 narrative and take on a quasi-autonomous function, in contrast to the economical
 'knitting' of segments in the classical film.

High-concept films are the most overtly 'market driven' films made by Hol-
 lywood, according to Wyatt. As the major film companies became absorbed
 within larger conglomerates, so the potential for synergies between the previously
 separate entertainment industries could be realized. As several essays in this
 volume make clear, the 'big screen' film is now just the beginning of a profit
 stream involving television, home video, CDs, computer games, clothing and so
 forth. Wyatt places a special emphasis on marketing: it is not merely that the
 mode of production has changed, but that the stress on the marketing and 'pitch-
 ing' of individual films, and the convergence between fiction films and advertising,
 has directly affected the form of these films. The influence of advertising is
 evident, for example, in the development of product placement, soundtrack mar-
 keting and television advertising of new releases, as well as the gleaming, over-
 polished visual style of directors weaned on advertising, and the substitutability
 among film performers, stars and fashion models.

Other authors take a less measured stance on the impact of marketing and
 advertising on narrative. Richard Schickel claims that 'Hollywood seems to have
 lost or abandoned the art of narrative'; most contemporary films, he suggests,
 offer little more than 'a succession of undifferentiated sensations, lucky or
 unlucky accidents, that have little or nothing to do with whatever went before or
 is about to come next'.³⁴ From such an account, one would be forgiven for
 thinking that a Dada film like *Entr'acte* (1924) had become the model of Hol-
 lywood filmmaking. Reports of the death of narrative in Hollywood filmmaking,
 however, are surely much exaggerated (and usually either impressionistic specula-
 tions or generalizations based on a single or very few examples). Narrative has not
 disappeared, but the new technologies and new markets have encouraged certain
 kinds of narrative, traceable to serials, B-adventures and episodic melodramas.
 Given the potential profits to be made from computer games; for example, it
 should not surprise us that action-adventure films - like *The Lost World* (1997) -
 are perceived as potential high-earners, since their chase scenarios dovetail easily
 with the formats of such games. But even here, narrative is still omnipresent.
 There may be less attention to detailed character motivation, greater emphasis on
 spectacle - the kinds of features that Thomas Schatz stresses - and even straight-
 forward narrative sloppiness, but narrative has certainly not disappeared under a
 cloud of special effects. In action films, the plot advances through spectacle; the
 spectacular elements are, generally speaking, as 'narrativized' as are the less
 ostentatious spaces of other genres. As the chapters by Peter Krämer and Warren
 Buckland in this volume demonstrate, careful narrative patterning - a prerequisite
 for the kind of emotional response associated with classical narratives - is still

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things that account for the events which force the system either to reorient itself, or collapse – take on more weight than the longer-term patterns and constraints.⁴² Arguing along similar lines, Henry Jenkins suggests that there is a 'necessary process of experimentation and accommodation which surrounds the adoption of alien aesthetic norms into the dominant classical system',⁴³ a process which Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson tend to downplay in favour of the ultimate assimilation of 'alien' elements within the existing system. In its eagerness to

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avoid overstatement regarding the 'subversiveness' of this film or that genre, the functionalist bent of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* perhaps flattens the local and immediate experience of change and discontinuity.

As the Annales historians have taught us, however, history consists of many layers which change at very different rates, and stasis is as much a fact of history as is change. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson do not 'banish' history; rather, their account implies that there are various levels of historical change and development.

There is a history of devices, but this is distinct from the history of the functions of devices, and from the history of the relations between the systems within which they function (CHC, pp. 6–7, 9–10). The mode as a whole – the 'total style' – which encompasses all of these levels, can be subverted: it is just that the standards for such subversion are high indeed – the continuity of classicism is argued for in part by contrasting the American art film with more radically different kinds of cinema, such as the 'counter-cinema' of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet. To argue that Elsaesser's New Hollywood fails to mark an epochal divide is, thus, hardly to argue that a shift had not occurred at a less fundamental level.

This problem – a lack of clarity about what aspect of Hollywood is being discussed – is one that has frequently afflicted debate around classical and 'post-classical' Hollywood. Critics have often argued at cross-purposes with one another, rushing to judgement without checking the scope of the problem or being clear about the purview of their arguments. No matter what other factors are relevant – including the careful empirical study of a representative body of films – assessing the plausibility of arguments concerning classicism and post-classicism will require that we begin by considering the breadth and nature of the claims being made.

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Notes

- 1 Miriam Hansen, 'Early cinema, late cinema: permutations of the public sphere', *Screen*, vol. 34, no. 3 (Autumn 1993), pp. 197–210. Hansen even suggests that one sign of the end of this regulated, classical spectatorship is the rise in complaints about talking in movie theatres (p. 198).
- 2 David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press,

1985). All subsequent page references in the main text are to this edition, abbreviated as *CHC*, followed by page number(s).

- 3 For André Bazin, the stability and 'maturity' of Hollywood filmmaking in the 1930s, in terms of subject matter (a range of genres with established conventions), style (conventions of editing, cinematography, sound, etc.) and technological development, as well as its worldwide success as 'a common form of cinematic language', warranted its description as a 'classical art'. André Bazin, 'The evolution of the language of cinema', in *What is Cinema?* vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 28–30.
- 4 Although this interdependence is not absolute: 'the Hollywood mode of production . . . while congruent in some respects, cannot be simply superimposed upon stylistic history' (*CHC*, p. 9). The emphasis on style (albeit in relation to mode of production) is implicit in the very word 'classical' – we would be unlikely to label an industrial practice 'classical' if it were not associated with a commodity apt to be described in aesthetic and art historical terms. The art historical origins of the term 'classical' are plainly visible in the key definitions of it in the first few pages of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, and are stressed by Bordwell when he insists that 'the history of an art' may periodize history differently from histories prioritizing political or social matters (p. 9).
- 5 The same sort of continuity is argued for from an economic and institutional perspective by Douglas Gomery, 'The American film industry of the 1970s: stasis in the "New Hollywood"', *Wide Angle*, vol. 5, no. 4 (1983), pp. 52–9.
- 6 André Bazin, 'The evolution of the western', in *What is Cinema?* vol. 2, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 149–57; Manny Farber, 'The Gimp', in *Negative Space* (New York: Praeger, 1971), p. 71.
- 7 Lawrence Alloway, *Violent America: The Movies, 1946–64* (New York: MOMA, 1971), p. 11.
- 8 For general historiographical discussions of these issues, see David Hackett Fisher, *Historian's Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 146; and Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985), pp. 48–9.
- 9 Kristin Thompson, 'Narrative structure in early classical cinema', in John Fullerton (ed.), *Celebrating 1895* (University of Luton/John Libbey, forthcoming). Thompson specifically argues for the persistence of a kind of temporal 'golden mean', which dictates that a large-scale portion of narrative should last between twenty and thirty minutes.
- 10 Bazin, 'The evolution of the language of cinema', p. 31.
- 11 Michael Storper, 'The transition to flexible specialisation in the US film industry: external economies, the division of labour and the crossing of industrial divides', in Ash Amin (ed.), *Post-Fordism: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 217.
- 12 This is the definition provided by Janet Staiger in 'Individualism versus collectivism', *Screen*, vol. 24, nos. 4–5 (July–October 1983), pp. 68–9; and reiterated in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 317.
- 13 Storper, 'Flexible specialization in the US film industry', p. 218. The notion of 'flexible specialization' is derived from the work of Michael Piore and Charles Sabel; see especially *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). A very useful discussion of 'flexibility' in relation to film and other media can be found in Michael Curtin, 'On edge: culture industries in the neo-network era', in

- Richard Ohmann (ed.), *Making and Selling Culture* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press/Wesleyan Press of New England, 1996), pp. 181–202.
- 14 Robin Murray, 'Fordism and post-Fordism', in Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew (eds), *Modernity and its Futures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 218.
- 15 Matthew Bernstein, 'Hollywood's semi-independent production', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 32, no. 3 (Spring 1993), pp. 50, 54.
- * 16 Indeed, the post-Fordist thesis has been challenged on home territory by those who point out that the production of cars incorporated the need for 'flexible specialization' from the late 1920s onwards; 'it is thus to be seriously doubted whether mass production has ever consistently corresponded to the Fordist paradigm'. Mark Elam, 'Puzzling out the post-Fordist debate: technology, markets and institutions', in Amin (ed.), *Post-Fordism*, p. 55.
- 17 Storper, 'Flexible specialisation in the US film industry', p. 195.
- 18 Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins, 'Hollywood for the 21st century: global competition for critical mass in image markets', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 7, 13, 16. In fairness to Storper, it should be noted that this anomaly in the argument was acknowledged by him, though he does downplay its significance: Storper, 'Flexible specialisation in the US film industry', p. 222, note 9.
- 19 Murray, 'Post-Fordism', p. 218.
- 20 Richard Maltby and Ian Craven, *Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 7.
- 21 Bernstein, 'Semi-independent production', p. 51; see also p. 52, note 4. Bernstein is quoting Richard Dyer MacCann, 'Independence with a vengeance', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 4 (1962), p. 4. Also of relevance are Tino Balio, *United Artists: The Company That Changed the Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); and Tino Balio, 'When is an independent producer independent? The case of United Artists after 1948', *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 22 (1986), along with other essays in this issue by Bernstein, Kevin Hagopian and Ed Lowry.
- 22 Aksoy and Robins, 'Hollywood for the 21st century', p. 20. See also Tino Balio, "A major presence in all of the world markets": the globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s', this volume, pp. 58–73. Other authors, however, have discussed some of the 'localizing' responses to the global power of the Hollywood aesthetic. See, for example, Curtin, 'On edge', p. 187; and Dana Polan, 'Globalism's localisms', in Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (eds), *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 255–83.
- 23 Nicholas Garnham, quoted by Aksoy and Robins, 'Hollywood for the 21st century', p. 11; see also Curtin, 'On edge', p. 197; and chapters 4–6 by Balio, Wyatt and Schamus of this volume.
- 24 Peter Krämer, 'Post-classical Hollywood', in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 296.
- 25 Thomas Elsaesser, 'The pathos of failure: American films in the 70s – notes on the unmotivated hero', *Monogram*, no. 6 (1975), pp. 13–19.
- 26 Elsaesser, 'The pathos of failure', p. 16.
- 27 In his early overview of arguments concerning the 'New Hollywood', Steve Neale signalled a similar scepticism. "New Hollywood Cinema", *Screen*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1976), p. 120.
- 28 André Bazin, 'On the *politique des auteurs*', in Jim Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinema: The*

- 1950s – Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 258.
- 29 J. Hoberman, *Vulgar Modernism: Writing on Movies and Other Media* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), p. 284.
- 30 Thomas Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', in Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins (eds), *Film Theory Goes to the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 35. See also the essay by Tino Balio in this volume. For an analysis which draws upon the notion of 'neoclassicism', see the essay by K. J. Donnelly on the first two *Batman* films, Chapter 9 of this volume.
- 31 Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), p. 16.
- 32 See Douglas Gomery, Chapter 3 of this volume, p. 52.
- 33 James Schamus, Chapter 6 of this volume, p. 94.
- 34 Quoted in Schatz, 'New Hollywood', p. 33; see also chapters 2 and 6 by Richard Maltby and James Schamus in this volume. For another account which argues that Hollywood films have suffered a breakdown of narrative due to the influence of advertising, see Mark Crispin Miller, 'Advertising: end of story', in Mark Crispin Miller (ed.), *Seeing Through Movies* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), pp. 186–246.
- 35 Peter Krämer, 'The lure of the big picture: film, television and Hollywood', in John Hill and Martin McLoone, *Big Picture, Small Screen: The Relations between Film and Television* (Luton: University of Luton/John Libbey, 1996), pp. 9–46.
- 36 Schatz, 'New Hollywood', pp. 33–4.
- 37 This is the line of argument taken by Douglas Gomery in 'Toward a new media economics', in David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (eds), *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), pp. 407–18.
- 38 See Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Henry Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts? Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Dirk Eitzen, 'Comedy and classicism', in Richard Allen and Murray Smith (eds), *Film Theory and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 394–411; and Elizabeth Cowie, Chapter 12 of this volume.
- 39 Maltby and Craven, *Hollywood Cinema*, pp. 35 and 37.
- 40 Maltby's position in Chapter 2 of this volume is somewhat different to that in his earlier book with Craven. In this volume, he argues that though the potentially disunifying presence of the commercial intertext has been present throughout Hollywood history, the pressures threatening to fragment narrative unity and stylistic coherence have increased.
- Christopher Williams has similarly argued against the aptness of the adjective 'classical', though with no particular stress on the commercial factors which, for Maltby, lead to the loss of formal 'decorum': 'After the classic, the classical and ideology: the differences of realism', *Screen*, vol. 35 no. 3 (1994), pp. 284–5. Like Andrew Britton ('The philosophy of the pigeonhole: Wisconsin formalism and "the classical style"', *CineAction!*, no. 15 (Winter 1988/9), pp. 47–63), Williams is more concerned to stress the diversity of aesthetic strands within Hollywood cinema. It should be noted here, however, that Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson neither deny the existence of non-narrative impulses within Hollywood films, nor that many of the streams running into Hollywood filmmaking were anything but classical (CHC, p. 4). But they do argue that classical narrative requirements acted as the 'constructive

principle' in Hollywood filmmaking. Robin Wood justifies the term 'classicism' in a somewhat similar way, albeit in a critical language informed by psychoanalysis rather than Formalism, in *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 48–9.

- 41 See Elizabeth Cowie, Chapter 12 of this volume; and Maltby and Craven, *Hollywood Cinema*, p. 218.
- 42 Dirk Eitzen, 'Evolution, functionalism, and the study of American cinema', *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 28 (Fall 1991), pp. 82–3.
- 43 Henry Jenkins, 'Historical poetics', in Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovich (eds), *Approaches to Popular Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 114; see also Murray Smith, 'Technological determination, aesthetic resistance', *Wide Angle*, vol. 12, no. 3 (July 1990), pp. 92–3.

Chapter 2

'Nobody knows everything'

Post-classical historiographies and consolidated entertainment

Richard Maltby

Griffin (Tim Robbins): [The story] lacked certain elements that we need to market a film successfully.

June (Greta Scacchi): What elements?

Griffin: Suspense, laughter, violence, hope, heart, nudity, sex, happy endings. Mainly happy endings.

The Player (1992)

As a classical metanarrative, the history of classical Hollywood cinema lacks only one element: a happy ending. Its resolution is problematic, untidy and uncertain. Among its chroniclers, there is no consensus as to when (if ever) classical Hollywood ended. But whenever its final scenes are set, they are seen to act out a prolonged decline. The metaphors of evolution that brought Hollywood from primitivism to maturity are replaced by notions of decadence and decay. The last three decades of Hollywood's history are most often presented as a story of failed promise: the promises made to, or at least believed by, that generation of critics who espoused cinema as 'the most important art of the twentieth century,' and constructed its study as an academic discipline.¹ In his historical survey of American cinema, John Belton entitles the section on contemporary Hollywood 'The failure of the new', and invokes Fredric Jameson in support of his account of contemporary Hollywood as 'stylistically youthful and inventive but politically conservative', constrained by 'the inability to say anything that has not already been said. . . . The authentic expression of ideas that took place in the past is today replaced by quotation and allusion to that authentic expression.'² By the 1980s, he concludes, the continuity of the Hollywood tradition had begun to fall apart:

Each new film existed in an aesthetic vacuum, though it continued to compete with the box-office statistics of its predecessors. Audiences who expected little were enthralled by the little they got. And they had even