

Hollywood's Major Crisis and the American Film "Renaissance"

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In its long history, Hollywood faced several crises most of which were sustained with slight damage. However, the most severe crisis started in the post-war years and culminated in the period of the late 60s and early 70s when the Big Hollywood Studios came to the brink of bankruptcy. The aim of this paper is to re-examine the post-war period in order to assess the major changes (social, political, economic, technological) that gravely affected the Hollywood system of production and transformed the American cinema. As a result of this, Hollywood underwent a brief period of radicalization and innovation, which came to be known as Hollywood Renaissance. Hollywood Renaissance films like *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *The Graduate* (1967), and *Easy Rider* (1969) marked a return to a truly American Cinema. Furthermore, the films' artistic sensibilities brought them closer to their European counterparts. In effect, the period of the late 60s and early 70s signaled a rebirth of the American Film and paved the way for what is now called New Hollywood.

The phenomenon of the late 60s and early 70s in the history of American cinema, finally established as "Hollywood Renaissance," has been given more critical attention during the first explosion of interest around the 70s and 80s,¹ than in the period following 1985, when publications around the wider issue of "New Hollywood" proliferated. What emerged from such studies was that the radical innovation and

1. For more information, see Kanfer; Madsen; Jacobs; Elsaesser, "The Pathos of Failure: American Films in the 1970s: Notes on the Unmotivated Hero"; Gomery, "The American Film Industry of the 1970s: Stars in the 'New Hollywood' "; and the *Wide Angle* issue on "The New Hollywood."

sophistication, characteristic of the Hollywood Renaissance, is to be attributed to the new breed of talented, independent filmmakers, who had some training in television or were film college graduates. As the great studios started losing their power, they stormed Hollywood purposefully and passionately in order to demonstrate that a dense and elliptical film language could be applied to filmmaking and that a new film vocabulary could be introduced which would be easily assimilated by the media-savvy youthful audiences of the time. Most of the critics also agree that the Hollywood Renaissance films, with their radical and fresh outlook, constituted a truly American cinema, reflecting or being part of the turbulent socio-political climate and the social upheavals of the 60s. As Diane Jacobs remarked, from Woodstock to Watergate, the cultural energies of the nation, which “had been gestating within the frenetic activity of the previous decade ... were cathartically channeled into the arts—and particularly the popular arts—of the 70s” (11).

The appearance in 1985 of the pioneering and monumental work of David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson entitled *Classical Hollywood Cinema* inspired heated critical reaction among researchers. Most of them took their cue from the main issue in this volume that disputed the “New” of the New Hollywood and claimed that the classical Hollywood style of filmmaking was not really affected by any of the changes that the Hollywood industry underwent at the time and that it persists as the dominant filmmaking style even today. Many book-length studies² offered comprehensive accounts of the status of the American Cinema since the 60s, situating the New Hollywood of the 1965-76 period in a historical, political and social context; similarly, collections of articles contained essays as well as detailed case studies on the key aesthetic, ideological, industrial, technological and cultural developments since the late 60s.³

To these we must add some publications centering on key New Hollywood directors, such as Robert Kokler’s *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Stone, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg Altman* (2000), or Ryan Gilbey’s *It Don’t Worry Me: Nashville, Jaws, Star Wars and Beyond* (2003), amongst other books and articles which focused on audience demographics and the cultural reception of this new type of cinema.⁴

Most of the researchers refer to the confusion created around the

2. See Cook; Monaco; Geoff King; Allen; Haines; Hoberman; and Wood.

3. See Neal and Smith; Elsaesser, Horwarth, and Noel King.

4. See Biskind; Lev; Miller; Ryan and Kellner; Bernardoni; Stempel; and Krämer.

term of "New Hollywood" (Noel King 20): that is, whether the term applies to the brief period of radical innovation and artistic sensibility of the 60s-70s, the so-called Hollywood Renaissance,⁵ or whether it designates the post-1975 period when Hollywood swerved into the opposite, conservative direction of the "calculated blockbuster," of the expanded media markets and conglomerated corporations which some critics, to differentiate it from the previous term, call it the "New New Hollywood" or "Contemporary," even "Postmodern" or "Post-Classical Hollywood," depending on the context of the critical approach adopted. Several critics, such as Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, explain this conservative turn by the reactionary backlash in American culture associated with Ronald Reagan's administration. Although the post-1975 period films do seem to reflect the socio-political changes of that time, the conservative blockbuster is best explained in terms of the industrial factors, mainly by the need to appeal to a wider cross-section of the American audience (Geoff King 8). Definitely, the "calculated blockbuster" policy of the giant Hollywood corporations signals a totally new mentality in terms of production, promotion and distribution.⁶

Some theorists or film historians even insist that the crucial changes responsible for the transition from the Old to the New Hollywood had started taking place in the years after World War II,⁷ a position I am inclined to endorse in the present analysis.

Taken as a whole, this significant body of film criticism seems to be divided into two broad categories, depending on the researcher's point of view and the context in which he/she places his/her observations: in the first category we find studies which take notice of the changes (on the economic, political, legal, socio-historical and cultural levels) that Hollywood had to undergo and offer an account of the transformation of the American cinema since the second World War; in the second category belong those that are bent on highlighting continuities in the system rather than radical changes. Recent studies⁸ seem to be aware of this division and acknowledge the fact that, if there were seismic changes, there also existed steadfast continuities since Hollywood is indeed "a multi-faceted creature, and cannot be reduced to a single essence, 'Old' or 'New'" (Smith qtd. in Geoff King 2).

5. See chiefly Jacobs; Elsaesser; and the *Wide Angle* issue on "The New Hollywood."

6. See Schatz; Wyatt; and Corrigan.

7. See Gomery, *Movie History: A Survey*; Ray; Schatz.

8. See Smith; Geoff King.

My concern in this paper lies in the area of changes rather than of continuities, because my contention is that, after the Second World War, the multitude of historical changes in politics, in society, in the economy, in technology, in the media and in culture generally, critically affected the Hollywood establishment of the classical era, which, as a result, faced one of its worst crises. For the first time, the ever mighty Hollywood studios came close to utter bankruptcy. Reactions of the Hollywood establishment towards the above mentioned changes precipitated another set of changes in the film industry itself and transformed the American cinema by admitting a certain degree of experimentation and innovation into the system. As a consequence, the rebirth of the American cinema, known as “Hollywood Renaissance,” occurred, like the cavalry in westerns, at the last moment, to save Hollywood, but not the Big Majors, who may have retained their names, but they had surely lost their power. Despite the multitude of studies on the phenomenon of “New Hollywood,” one is left with the impression that this particular decade of the late 60s and early 70s, which usually is looked upon nostalgically by some “as a brief window of opportunity [for] an adventurous new cinema” (Noel King 100), or as “the Golden Age of the ‘New Hollywood’ ” by others (Horwath 11; Elsaesser 37), has not been fully covered. Or, to be fairer, the subject of the “Hollywood Renaissance” deserves a full account as it was the outcome of a major socio-political crisis, and it produced a kind of cinema which was much different from what had preceded or followed it.

The cursory treatment this subject has so far received, as it has been squeezed in the broader debate over what constitutes the New Hollywood, does not do it enough justice. As Thomas Elsaesser points out, the late 1960s and early 1970s deserve a fresh appraisal, because they are a genuine period of transition from Old to New Hollywood, as momentous in some ways as that in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when the coming of sound changed the structure of the film industry” (39).

Approaching this subject, then, from the historical distance already afforded by the passage of time and in the wake of so many existing studies on the New Hollywood phenomenon, sets up a methodological problem. Given the multi-faceted nature of Hollywood, the best approach, as suggested also by Geoff King, would involve acquiring a broad perspective, in a “social, cultural or historical context” (2), in order to account for the changes in the industrial context, and thus to arrive at a fuller explanation of the causes as well as the outcomes of the deep-seated, perennial crisis that afflicted the Hollywood Studio system in the post-war years. For, as

Geoff King warns, "changes at one level are related to changes at another, but there is no guarantee that they match tidily" (2). To understand how Hollywood came to face such a crisis that resulted in the output of radically different, almost arty productions, it will be necessary to examine a number of dramatic changes that the studios had to undergo, changes that were directly related to the socio-political, economic and cultural climate of the time, as will be shown in the sections to follow.

Classical Hollywood and America: At the Summit of Power and Influence

As Robert Ray has pointed out, Classical Hollywood's formal and thematic paradigm had enjoyed a formidable stability up to the mid-40s due to the interaction of three controlling factors:

the film industry itself (with its own determinants); the audience (with its expectations and perceptions, shaped to a significant extent by the movies), and the objective situation of America (the least important factor, since Americans had learned to experience historical events of even World War II's magnitude by means of the traditional mythological categories adopted by Classical Hollywood). Any and all of these three controlling factors could change. (130)

The first cracks in the Hollywood citadel started being felt soon after the end of World War II.

During Hollywood's classical period, that is, from 1930 to 1945, film-going was the nation's standard mode of entertainment, as the "movies averaged 80 million in weekly attendance" and "attracted 83 cents of every U.S. dollar spent on recreation" (Ray 26). The movies, systematically and massively created by the studios, were easily recognized as typical entertainment products, telling simple but compelling and palatable stories. And as such, they addressed a largely homogenized audience: that of the American family. By the end of the 30s, the Hollywood filmmaking production system, with the appropriation of sound technology, had reached its peak of perfection, according to the French film theorist André Bazin, who defined it as the Classical Narrative Style.⁹ In fact, such was

9. André Bazin was one of the first film theorists to talk about the Hollywood aesthetic as a form of "classical" art, and that this classical film style was dependant on a particular mode of production (28-31).

the power and the glory of Classical Hollywood, that it was established as the standard style in cinema production, so that “a film,” to quote Ray, “departing from the Classical Hollywood model would not seem like a film at all” (130). The movies’ rule over other forms of entertainment fulfilled a major sociological role with their “ability to act as the nation’s unifying force,” especially during the war, “demonstrating the industry’s collective myth-making power” (Ray 130).

At the same time, America was also enjoying the glory of one of the most powerful and richest nations in the world. The United States came out of the war, not only victorious, but stronger than ever, since it was the only country to have avoided fighting on its own homeland, “while most of Europe lay in ruins;” having survived a harsh depression just a decade ago, it now found itself “in the midst of an economic boom, and alone possessing the most powerful weapon on earth, the atom bomb” (Ray 130). Such drastic developments, however, precipitated a change in politics. Since World War II, the U.S. had remained faithful to an isolationist policy. World War II, as Daniel Bell pointed out, “was the fateful turning point for American Society,” in forcing the U.S. out of that “insular role in 1945”:

The scope of America’s economic reach was now worldwide. And if political power did not necessarily follow the contours of expanding economic influence, it did have a trajectory of its own—to fill the power vacuums created by the withdrawal of the British and French from Asia, to defend Europe itself against the pressures of Russian expansion. (qtd. in Ray 133)

Thus a series of political events, such as signing the U.N. chart, the Berlin airlift, the Truman doctrine, the Marshall plan etc., marked the beginning of a new foreign policy of intervention in international affairs, demonstrating the United States’ willingness to become a member of the community of nations. Such a radical change in politics, however, meant for the average American and the American society as a whole, that there was a price to pay. As Ray aptly put it, “the great fear of *Casablanca* had come true”:

... by fighting the war to preserve the American Dream, the United States had been forced to forsake permanently the isolationism on which that dream rested. More than any other issue, it was this paradox that haunted Americans in the late forties and fifties, causing widespread disillusionment and anxiety. America had won the war, but in doing so had lost some essential part of its self-definition, the freedom, perhaps, to lead a remote, unentangled

existence, interrupted only occasionally by threats that could always be quickly defused. The enduring appeal of America's great myth—the reluctant outlaw hero, like Huck or Casablanca's Rick, who briefly emerged from his solitude to help society before lighting out again for the territory—suggests how basic this image of an unencumbered life was to the American self-image. (134)

While the post-war political climate was forcing upon the average American the ideological dilemma of intervention vs. isolationism, Hollywood itself, the other controlling factor of the three mentioned above, found out that it was not immune to change. The Hollywood production system received consecutive blows to its stability, such as the witch-hunt by the House for Un-American Activities Committee (1947), the Anti-trust Law (1948), restrictions on import duties by foreign governments on Hollywood products (1949), and, the most important threat of all, the appearance of television in 1946 with its increasing popularity throughout the 50s as Hollywood's major media rival. With its black-listing strategy, Senator McCarthy's Congressional Committee knocked out of the system a good percentage of Hollywood talent (directors, screenwriters and other professionals), while pointing a finger at such progressive films as *The Best Years of Our Life* (1946), *Citizen Kane* (1941), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) which led the Hollywood establishment towards the production of more conservative, harmless or escapist subjects (such as musicals, melodramas, or biblical epics) (Ray 131). But we will eschew discussion of the other important factors of change, as they will be dealt with more exhaustively later, so as to focus in the next section on the third controlling factor, which is that of the audience, since the greatest symptom of the impending crisis threatening Hollywood was the heavy decline in admissions.

Hollywood's Major Problem in the Post-War Years: A Steady Decline in Admissions

The classical period can be summed up as constituting Hollywood's glory days, since the studio-produced films were commercial successes and extremely popular with the public. The year of 1946 was the culminating year of Hollywood's success, as movie-going reached its highest peak: average weekly attendance was estimated at 83 million (Filner qtd. in Krämer 20). However, as the economic prosperity usually associated with the war booming industry came to a slump in the late 40s, a decline in movie theater admissions became readily obvious. By 1952, weekly attendance

had fallen to 42 million, while by 1966, give and take some minor fluctuations, attendance had further declined to a quarter of the 1946 figure (Filner qtd. in Krämer 20).

It is true that in the past Hollywood had suffered several other crises (for example the advent of sound in the late 20s and the stock-market crash in the early 30s) which were sustained, more or less, with slight damage. But the post-war crisis in the U.S. movie-industry threatened the soft underbelly of an Institution mostly driven by profit, that of the Hollywood box-office.

The steady decline in theater admissions, which had become evident since the late 40s, turned into a perennial nightmare for the studio moguls during the 50s: Hollywood started losing its homogenized audience. Initially it was thought that the culprit was TV, as people would prefer free entertainment at home rather than going out and paying for the price of movie tickets. Gomery, however, notes that such reasoning is faulty, as TV was not all that much spread in the late 40s and early 50s, when people massively stopped going to the movies.¹⁰ The reasons for the decline in attendance were mainly sociological: suburbanization and baby-booming.

In the post-war years, Americans started to adopt a different life-style, by moving to the suburbs, buying new homes and appliances, creating bigger families and preferring to spend leisure time at home, at a time when television had just become available (Gomery 279-80). The big studio heads would have to acknowledge this radical change in audience demographics and to comply with differentiating their product: making pictures for the entire family would not suffice anymore. They would have to cater for the special needs of different target audiences; in particular, as Pauline Kael had noted in *I Lost It at the Movies* (1965), not only the standard film audience had started to shrink, but it was also sharply divided between the “art-house crowd,” and the “old-fashioned, entertain-ment-seeking moviegoers” (qtd. in Ray 138).

In post-war years, there seemed to be an influx of European art-films, as many independent theater owners realized there was a sizeable and growing art-house audience, so they turned their theaters into art houses showing some fashionable neorealist films, such as *Paisa* (1946), *Open City* (1945), *Shoeshine* (1946), and *The Bicycle Thief* (1948). These art-houses would go on showing in the future the iconoclastic films of the French New

10. In the late 40s and early 50s, television signals did not reach all parts of the country; besides, only one third of the population owned TV sets (Gomery, *Movie History: A Survey* 280).

Wave or the masterpieces of international auteurs like Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Luis Buñuel, and Andrej Wajda.

Thus what was alarming to the Hollywood studio heads was that a good part of the audience was no more content with the puerile and simplistic stories of standard Hollywood family pictures, and their preference for European films signaled the rising of expectations for more serious subject matter. Apart from their increasing availability in the American film market, Ray attributes the appeal of such "serious" films to a more sophisticated, educated portion of the audience, who were in a position to consciously realize the changed situation in America: World War II, the atom Bomb, and the Cold War which forced the United States to take up a more energetic role in international politics, having in turn "damaged the self-sufficient image of America on which Classic Hollywood had depended" (139).

Closely associated with this elitist audience was the appearance of the cult film and the cult star for the first time in the history of the American cinema. In the 50s, the biggest stars to adorn the Hollywood firmament were John Wayne, Rock Hudson, Doris Day, Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis, and Elvis Presley, whose films swept the box-office. At the same time, Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Montgomery Clift had risen to stardom as the main cult figures of the age, even though their films rarely made it to the top-twenty hit list in the box-office (with the exception of Brando). There was, in other words, a discrepancy between a body of films that had reached cult status as opposed to the mainstream Hollywood output of the widely popular successful films of the period. Films that attained cult status, such as *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *The Third Man* (1949), *Rancho Notorious* (1952), *The Wild One* (1953), *Johnny Guitar* (1954), never made *Variety's* Top-Twenty Box-Office List. However, later they came to be considered as films of significance (Ray 140).

On the contrary, the most successful films to reach the first, second or third place in the box-office listings and receive a Nomination or an Academy Award, were "super-westerns" (*Duel in the Sun* [1946], *Shane* [1953]), inflated historical or biblical epics (*The Ten Commandments* [1956], *The Bridge on the River Kwai* [1957]), or the "integrated" musical (*Easter Parade* [1948], *An American in Paris* [1951]) (Ray 140).

Most of these commercial hits addressed the great silent majority of the film audience, by being bland, politically neutral movies, and by taking the form of "safe" genres, such as the musical, the biblical epic, or the family melodrama. They reflected thus on the conservative climate of the 50s (Cold War, witch hunt) and mirrored the ambivalent ideological

dilemma that the majority of Americans faced: domestic optimism for an affluent life full of opportunities, or a new sense for the necessity of involvement in world affairs.

Hollywood's inertia to sudden change, which was evident in the adherence to such conservative filmmaking—a fact lamented by the polemic critics of the time, who accused it of a “refusal to mature,”¹¹ was not bound to last long, however. Urgent decisions for “counter-measures” would have to be taken against the loss of its audience.

The Hollywood establishment did not want to risk losing neither the art-movie/cult crowd, who craved for more serious or “realistic” subject matter, nor its traditional audience who looked forward to what the industry had always offered: pure entertainment. So a solution was provided with the so-called “problem picture,” a film that would combine the serious social consciousness of the foreign film with the formulaic old-fashioned storytelling mode of the domestic picture. Unlike the socially-conscious films of the 30s, produced mainly by Warner Bros, the “problem-pictures” of the post-war years, such as *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), *The Caine Mutiny* (1954), *On the Waterfront* (1954), or *Guess Who Is Coming to Dinner* (1967) did exceptionally well at the box-office.

To put it in a nutshell: the dissolution of the homogenized audience in the post-war years brought about the differentiation of the Hollywood product, which was a remarkable change already. During the classical period, the standard practice had been the invariable production of the A' class quality picture made by the big studios which was the main money-maker; and this was accompanied by the B-movie, a product of a few minor Hollywood companies. With the decline of admissions in the post-war years and in need to satisfy its mainstream audience which seemed to be attracted more and more by TV, Hollywood shifted its strategy towards the production of blockbusters.¹²

11. Gilbert Seldes, in his comprehensive study of mass media in post-war America entitled *The Great Audience* (1950), linked Hollywood's continuing immaturity to the decline of cinema attendance. Similar critiques were voiced later in the 60s by John Simon, Richard Schickel, Arthur Knight, and Andrew Sarris in his article “The Future of Film: A Symposium.”

12. The concept of the blockbuster became widely known due to its establishment as a standard practice since 1975, but actually as some film historians note (Gomery, *Movie History: A Survey*; Schatz, “New Hollywood”) the blockbuster and the “event” film were actual marketing strategies in the post-war period, and even in the classical period, though they were very rare phenomena.

These were none other than the former A' class pictures of the classical period which were now thematically and stylistically boosted with bigger budgets, top stars and an international cast, shot in full color and designed for the wide screen as great spectacles. In concordance with everything else, their duration also grew close to 3 hours and, in some cases, to 4 hours. As a rule, they usually turned out to be breakaway box-office hits. The first of such films to become a smash hit was Cecil B. DeMille's biblical epic *Sampson and Delilah* (1949). With \$12 million in rentals, it left all its competition for the 1949 season far behind,¹³ paving the way for the blockbusters of the 50s and 60s.¹⁴

All the blockbuster films of this period comprise three broad categories: historical epics with a biblical (*The Robe* [1953], \$18 million, *The Ten Commandments* [1956], \$43 million, and *Ben Hur* [1959], \$37 million) or non-biblical content (*The Bridge on the River Kwai* [1957], \$17 million, *Cleopatra* [1963], \$26 million, and *Dr. Zhivago* [1965], \$47 million), musicals, with either an historical setting (*My Fair Lady* [1964], \$34 million, and *Mary Poppins* [1964], \$31 million) or a contemporary one (*West Side Story* [1961], \$20 million, and *The Sound of Music* [1965], \$80 million), and international adventures, again either historical (*Around the World in Eighty Days* [1956], \$23 million) or contemporary (*Goldfinger* [1964], \$23 million, and *Thunderball* [1965], \$29 million) (Krämer 28). Most of these super-hits, with their spectacular backdrops, had non-American settings and non-American characters played mainly by foreign or British actors.

This "Europeanization" or rather this "internationalism" of the American cinema in most of the 50s and 60s has its own explanation as a phenomenon, but it already testifies to the first steps that Hollywood had taken in departing from its traditional classical production mode. With the prices of film stock and equipment skyrocketing, and the salaries of actors

13. The other biggest hits of the season, *Battleground*, *Jolson Sings Again*, *Sands of Iwo-Jima* and *I Was a Male War Bride* did not score more than 4-5 million in rentals each (Krämer 111).

14. In the entire history of American cinema, only three other films can be said to have reached a blockbuster status, and two of them were Civil War epics: David W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and Walt Disney's animated feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) had earned twice as much as their close competitors up to 1939, when David O. Selznick's production of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) held the record of an all-time super-hit, only to be topped by the super-blockbusters of the post-70s New Hollywood.

and technicians soaring higher and higher, Hollywood executives found it more profitable to strike co-production deals with foreign, mostly European companies, and shoot their films abroad and usually on location. Besides, many European governments had posed restrictions on the importation of Hollywood pictures, setting up quotas, in order to protect their own national cinemas; they had also passed laws to prevent Hollywood from extracting their enormous profits out of the country. On the contrary, they encouraged co-productions with Hollywood companies, as having Hollywood blockbusters shot in their country would boost the national economy that had suffered during the war. As these blockbusters offered stories of spectacular action or adventure and required hordes of extras, many European countries were willing to offer the services of their armed forces for the provision of thousands of extras, free of charge. So with the blockbuster strategy, the heads of the Hollywood Studios aimed at dominating the foreign markets as well.

However, for the domestic market these blockbusters were meant to be an answer to the ever-growing appeal of television. So, with the aid of everything new that technology had to offer (Technicolor, Cinerama, 3-D, CinemaScope), Hollywood's launching of big-budget blockbuster spectacles was an attempt to ward-off any further losses of its audience to the rival medium of TV. As a matter of fact, these films were given a different release treatment, as Krämer points out, known as the "Roadshow release," which conferred on them the status of special cultural events. Initially, the launching of a blockbuster roadshow involved presenting it only in a few, select and prestigious theaters, at premium prices and limited showcase times with orchestral overture and intermission. Blockbusters given such a royal treatment would sometimes run for years. However, while the original roadshow was still going on, and after the films had picked up the necessary hype in the media as special events, they were released in the regular theaters at regular prices for the mass audience (Krämer 21). In the classical era, the roadshow release had been reserved only for a few special films, such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, or *Gone with the Wind*. Krämer points out that after the World War II "Hollywood invested more heavily than ever before in an increasing number of films intended for roadshow release, and that almost all of the big hits from 1949 to 1966 were roadshows" (22).

This period then that Krämer has dubbed as the "Roadshow Era" (22), marks the transition from Old to New Hollywood, during which the Hollywood establishment tried to refigure its production and marketing

strategies towards product diversification to survive the withstanding box-office crisis, at times with remarkable success. The blockbuster roadshow policy, however, proved to be a short-lived or momentary success of the formula for Hollywood's survival against the competition of TV or the decline of admissions. As a distribution strategy, the roadshow release treatment of blockbuster spectacles would have been effective if it had been used sparingly as during the classical era. But in the transition years, as more and more blockbusters kept being released as special events, the roadshow policy eventually defeated its own purpose and the very specialness of the blockbusters was undermined. As Peter Krämer points out, "their number grew from one or two in the late 1940s and 1950s to about ten per year in the first half of the 1960s and between 15 or 20 in the second half (43).

The momentary success of the blockbuster roadshows in the post-war years has been noted by Thomas Schatz in terms of cycles of genres that grew in popularity and then declined in three distinct decade-long phases: from 1946 to 1955 (the biblical or historical epic), from 1956 to 1965 (the musical), and from 1966 to 1975 (disaster films). The biblical or historical epic, for instance, after picking-up momentum with *The Robe* (1953, \$18 million), the first picture run on the CinemaScope screen, culminated with the huge box-office success of *The Ten Commandments* (1956, \$43 million), the highest grossing religious epic in history. From then on, most subsequent historical epics, proved short of the executives' expectations, as they fared rather poorly at the box-office. *Cleopatra* (1963), for instance, turned out to be a flop, considering it cost approximately \$ 44 million and returned only \$26 million in rentals.

The same story is repeated with the cycle of the integrated musical in the second phase, between 1956 and 1965. Starting off with *South Pacific* in 1958 (\$18 million in rentals), the genre gains in popularity with greater hits (*West Side Story* [1961], \$20 million, *My Fair Lady* [1964], \$34 million) to reach its highest peak with the unprecedented success of *The Sound of Music's* (1965) \$80 million (Krämer Appendix 3). The monumental success of this film led Fox executives "on a blockbuster musical binge," as Schatz observes, "with disastrous results: losses of \$11 million on *Dr. Dolittle* in 1967, \$15 million on *Star!* in 1968, and \$16 million in 1969 on *Hello Dolly*, at the time the most expensive film ever made" (14). It seems that the blockbuster policy was eventually ineffectual, probably due to the fact that these movies, mostly historical epics, "adult" westerns or "integrated" musicals, were essentially the stock stories of the

A' class pictures of the Old Hollywood, but "inflated stylistically and thematically" (Ray 151) to attract, as new technological wonders, the mass cinema audience. But as soon as their novelty wore off, movie-going started declining again. Perhaps the reasons for the ineffectuality of these post-war blockbusters will become more obvious in the next section where attention will be paid to the additional changes that occurred, as for example the Anti-trust law, which crucially affected the American film industry.

The Changing Role of the Studios

Heavy losses at the box-office was not the only problem that the studio moguls faced. Far more alarming was the so-called Paramount decree, a decision of the U.S. Supreme Court that ordered the majors to divest of their theater holdings at a time that a rival medium, that of TV, was on the rise. The Court's Anti-Trust ruling against the Big Five and the Three Little Hollywood companies in effect obliged the studios to dismantle their vertically integrated structure: each company would have to split in two separate enterprises, with the production and distribution as well as the exhibition arm having to have different owners. This ruling meant an end to their oligopolic market domination. Of the 18.000 cinema theaters in the classical period, the studios owned only 3.000, but these were big, prestigious film palaces in the major cities (Balio, "A Mature Oligopoly, 1930-1948" 225) and represented the most profitable aspects of studio enterprise, as "they accounted for some 70% of the entire box-office" (Geoff King 26).

Generally, it was thought that the production sites of the studios, being thought of as glamorous dream factories, constituted the main bulk of investment. In reality, the huge production facilities, along with the salaries of stars and crew, accounted only for 5% of the total, while 1% accounted for distribution and the rest 94% of the investment was devoted to theater property. Each of the majors, with its own chain of theaters, had carved up a percentage of exhibition in various parts and regions of the country from coast to coast (Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System* 8-10; Geoff King 26). These theaters played a key-role as the Studios' main show-case venues for their A' features, or later, in the Roadshow era, for their lavish blockbusters. If other, independent cinema owners wanted to show one of the big studio feature films in their theaters, they would have to accept along with it other, less desirable, products of the studios, complying with the so-called Block Booking system of distribution. For the studios had set up a

nation-wide distribution network, through which they ensured a fail-safe system of guaranteed exhibition for their prized products, and through the combination of distribution and exhibition they controlled the entire movie market. With the loss of their cinema chains, Hollywood Studios entered a period of high financial uncertainty and instability (Storper 217). As Schatz points out, "without the cash flow from their theater[s] [tickets] and a guaranteed outlet for their product, the established studio system was effectively finished" (11). As property, the theaters had fulfilled a far more important function: that of standing as collateral against the investment of capital spent on the production of movies. From now on, Hollywood executives would have to seek new resources of capital elsewhere, or find new ways of minimizing the financial risk of production, or even transfer that risk on the shoulders of others.¹⁵ At the same time, the studios tightened their belts, "fired their contract personnel and phased-out active production" units, and re-organized their various departments so as to be leashed to independent producers, "providing [also] co-financing and distribution as well" (Schatz 11).

One thing is certain after these developments. The old, factory-like system of production, compared by some critics to a Fordist model in capitalist economy, was a thing of the past. Films in this post-1948 period became a one-package deal. An executive producer, or more frequently, an independent agent, would undertake responsibility for the entire project: securing the rights, if the film was an adaptation from another form, arranging for the writing of the script, assembling a director, film stars and the rest of the crew. "These would constitute the basic 'package,' for which finance would then be raised" (Geoff King 28). Thus, the shift in the production mode after the vertical disintegration of the studios appeared to resemble more a post-Fordist model, with emphasis placed, according to the sociologist Michael Storper, on the "specialized flexibility" of the package deals, on "product variety" and on the catering of the needs of fragmented or "niche" markets (qtd. in Smith 9).

As Murray Smith points out, Storper's thesis was strongly contested by a number of critics on several grounds, most of which need not concern the

15. By establishing a special relation with television networks and launching the production of "television" or mini-series, as these were low-budget projects with sure-fire profit, they off-set the risk taken in financing blockbusters. Also, the "package" deals they made with independent producers meant transferring the risk on the independents.

present discussion, save for one: the extent to which the shift in the production mode after the studios' vertical disintegration affected the form or style of the movies. This has been a key argument in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985), "that the classical style has 'persisted' since 1960 ... in spite of the shift to package production, and the later process of conglomeration" (4). For all its rigor and scope, the work of Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson is characterized by Richard Maltby as "a partial study of Hollywood, in so far as it is concerned with the relationship between film style and the organization of management and production in the industry, and is ultimately driven by an interest in the aesthetics of Hollywood" (Neale and Smith xv). Maltby proposes a wider perspective, which takes into account distribution and exhibition in addition to production, with regard to the areas in which Hollywood shifted its policy towards re-stabilization in order to survive the Paramount decree blow and overcome its financial crisis. So, economic relations should also be considered in unraveling such a complex phenomenon as Hollywood. Similarly, Geoff King contends that "New Hollywood represents a *style of filmmaking* different from that which went before, ... and that it signifies a changed *industrial context*" (1-2, emphasis in original). He, therefore, proposes a broader *social, cultural* or *historical* context in discussing how much this has changed or remained the same since the "classical" or "studio" era (2, emphasis in original). If I have taken such pains so far in elaborating on the various changes that affected post-war Hollywood, it is because, like Geoff King, I believe that "changes at one level are related to changes at another" (2), and by showing, as it appears in the following section, the connections between them, I will reveal the depth of the overall crisis and the degree to which the movie industry had transformed itself.

Hollywood's Special Relationship with Television and the Rise of the Independents

If the aim of the Justice Department had been to abolish Hollywood's oligopolic practices once and for all, they should have concentrated on the distribution and not just on the exhibition arm of the companies. As far as distribution was concerned, Hollywood never lost its power, which actually resulted from dictating to the film market the terms on which its movies would be shown nationwide. It is a paradigmatic case of the classic scale of power between manufacturer and retailer in the business world.

Another reason why Hollywood remained strong in terms of distribution was the control it retained over the international markets. The American government did not impose any anti-monopoly laws on the distribution activities of the studios abroad. Instead, an act which passed in 1918 encouraged the collusion of Hollywood corporations in the name of promoting American economic and cultural influence internationally. To maintain the costly operations of an international distribution network, the majors often collaborated in setting up joint offices in metropolitan centers overseas and they became unbeatable with regard to this kind of entrepreneurial competition. This explains the international turn of the American cinema and the surge of the spectacular blockbusters, with their easily recognizable international stars, that had a formidable appeal to audiences overseas. As Geoff King notes, "during the 1950s and 1960s the market outside the United States accounted for about half of Hollywood's box-office revenue" (61).

On the domestic front, the selling of cinema chains freed up capital which had been locked-up in theater property that was consequently channeled into the production of increasingly fewer but costly pictures, with the blockbusters given the special roadshow treatment. Meanwhile, the studios, after an initial inimical stage, came into a more co-operative relation with the growing television networks. The cinema-television liaison proved to have the typical characteristics of a love-hate relationship. In the beginning, the studios set into a competitive relation with the television networks, since the competition with a rival medium was forcing them to spend extra capital towards product differentiation through the application of technology. At first, New Republic and Monogram Pictures sold their back-catalogue of B-movies, shorts, and so on, to local television stations, and pretty soon the Majors followed suit by selling or renting their pre-1948 libraries to syndicated television networks. "In 1956 alone, some 3000 feature films went into syndication; by 1958, all of the Majors had uploaded hundreds of pre-1948 films" (Schatz 12), that filled the early or late shows of network programming. At this stage, the studios found themselves in the pleasant situation of having their cake and eating it too: not only did they find some use for their obsolete and commercially valueless commodities, but they also capitalized on the much needed cash-flow from the sales, and spent it on the new technologies of widescreen projection (Hilmes 165).

At the same time, in order to keep their main lots and the remaining salaried personnel in operation, since fewer films were being made and most of them were shot on location, the studios started leasing their facilities to

independent moviemakers who were willing to make feature-length films or mini-series for TV, while the studios co-financed and distributed them. Some of the studios, on the initiative of the Little Three, especially Universal which was the most versatile in product diversification, made “television” production their own business, and soon MGM, Warners, and Fox joined in with their special television production departments. Pretty soon Los Angeles became the center for television production instead of New York, which had been its main headquarters (Gomery, *Movie History: A Survey* 291).

However, television networks feared that Hollywood might take control of their business, that of television broadcasting, and were reluctant to do business with Hollywood on the grounds that TV might be weakened as a medium and become “just a new system of distribution for Hollywood” (Sarnoff qtd. in Hilmes 122). However, local stations received the film libraries of the minor film companies, airing gladly most of the black and white B-movies (westerns, musicals, comedies, and others); they even included old films coming from British Studios (Ealing, Rank, Korda), as such films had never found distribution in the U. S. theaters (Gomery 291). Pretty soon it became evident that the television public would go for anything that came in the form of fictional entertainment.

So, the major television networks came to negotiate with the studios the booking of film material. Initially, pre-1948 films were broadcast in “early” or “late” shows, because no agreement was required by the craft unions and the Actors’ Guild. After the agreement which was signed in 1953 between the studios and the Actors’ Guild for residual payment on the release of post-1948 features, the time was ripe for television networks to show major Hollywood feature films on prime time a few years after their theatrical release (Schatz 12). NBC led the way by establishing “Saturday Night at the Movies” in September 1961, showing *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953).¹⁶ ABC and CBS followed suit, and soon there were an “ABC Sunday Night Movie,” a “CBS Friday Night Movie,” and so on (Ray 264). With classical movies becoming a standard part of television programming and enjoying great popularity, TV essentially took over the role played until then by Classical Hollywood as the sole purveyor of national mythology.

TV, after all, turned out to be more of a willing provider than a

16. Thirty one titles were shown in that season by NBC, fifteen of which were in color, and all were prestigious big-budget releases. One important detail shows the synergy in related business firms: NBC was a subsidiary of RCA, manufacturer of color TV sets; so NBC showed a preference for color films and was used in this way to boost the parent company’s business.

"dreadful" foe. From this symbiotic relationship between the industries of cinema and television three consequences must be noted, all three having much to do with Hollywood Renaissance: (1) a new, youthful cinema audience; (2) the rise to importance of a new breed of independent auteur filmmakers; and, (3) an increase in irony and self-consciousness characterizing most of the movies of the period.

The rise of television in the late 50s and especially during the 60s and 70s opened up the field of home entertainment which, as a cultural phenomenon, is closely associated with the radical changes in post-war American society, as mentioned in the opening pages of this paper: suburbanization and baby-booming, as well as the increasing presence of the media in the daily life of Americans. A whole generation of young Americans was practically raised in front of the TV set. "Middle class suburbanites," writes Douglas Gomery, "who had already abandoned the movies ... after buying a TV set, put the kids, the baby boomers born between 1945 and 1964, in front of it to be entertained" (*Movie History: A Survey* 282), as well as to be educated into Hollywood lore. As kids and grown-ups alike were exposed to the majority of the stock Hollywood genres (western, gangster, screwball comedy, musical, detective, horror), whether those of the cheaply and rapidly made B-movies of the minors (Monogram, Republic, Columbia, Universal or Seven Artists), or the pre-1948 A' class features of the Majors, they became familiar with the film language and style of the Classical Hollywood cinema. An additional factor of television influence in the shaping of this "cine-literate" audience was related to the very nature of network programming, as Ray observes: "the sudden transition from the network's news shows to each evening's regular series eliminated all buffer space between actual events and mythological representations ... Inevitably, the viewer's attitude toward conventional versions of America's mythology became increasingly ironic" (266). From the moment that a new medium, in the present instance that of television, intersected obliquely with the older medium, that of the cinema, "it provided an unexpected exposure of the latter's established procedures" (Ray 37). This turned the classical films, whose invisible style had always made them appear real in the eyes of their audiences, into artificial products, exposing thus their ideological basis.¹⁷

17. The same thing happened to the novel, the storytelling form *par excellence* in the nineteenth century; when it became obvious that cinema had undertaken that function of seamless storytelling, the novel had to move closer to the ironic nuances of poetic language. See Monaco, *How to Read a Film*.

At this point we should perhaps consider the significant role that both cinema and TV, as the prevalent mass media,¹⁸ played in shaping public opinion. Since the late 50s, the mass media had become a vital aspect of everyday American life. The role of TV in particular is fully appreciated within the context of the mass media in general that became an increasingly vital part of political, social and cultural life in the 60s. The surge of mass media in the 60s gave the decade a paradoxical, weird tinge, as “the media could at once portray reality, radically change reality and get caught up and entrapped in reality” (Berman, Jacket Review of J. Hoberman’s *The Dream Life* n.p). TV, the mass medium par excellence, provided society with a spectacular fusion of publicity, stardom and consumption. “By 1960,” cultural historian J. Hoberman contends, “television had fully penetrated the nation’s homes, bars, and motel rooms. Less an entertainment medium than a total environment, TV was now the great equalizer, streamlining the imagined community, rationalizing the dream life, offering everybody everything, including something to blame. It was in this context that all events—news as well as movies—occurred” (38).

In the process, media saturation was so great that it turned politics into a show, while the media themselves became highly politicized. Presidential elections were won as a result of the impact the highly televised debates had on the audience. A Presidential candidate (John F. Kennedy) came into office just because he had the charm and glamour of a Hollywood star. A Hollywood actor (Ronald Reagan) became president of the U.S. Another president (Lyndon B. Johnson) sought and got as much media exposure as none of his predecessors ever had. Movie stars made significant political statements. The media permeated political, social and cultural life to such an extent that public opinion was heavily polarized; and in the quite extraordinary socio-political upheaval of the 60s, they had so much to feed on, as Geoff King describes:

The civil rights movement, race riots: “black power.” The counterculture, hippies, drug-taking: “flower power.” Youth, popular music and fashion. Protests against the war in Vietnam. Student radicalization and the “New Left.” A new wave of feminism and demands for gay rights. Political hopes, dreams and nightmares. Kennedy. The Kennedy Assassination. Another Kennedy. Another Assassination. Martin Luther King: assassination. Mai Lai,

18. The radio and the press should also be included here.

Cambodia and the shooting of students at Kent State. Battles on the streets of Chicago. Nixon. Watergate. Humiliating withdrawal from Vietnam. (14)

In this sense, the 60s is considered to be "a watershed as important as the American Revolution or the Civil War in causing changes in the U.S. (Goldman qtd. in Ray 251).

The extent to which such incidents were responsible for the complete undermining of traditional American mythology is still hard to detect. Cinema had never directly confronted political or social matters, anyway. For example, there would be no direct representation of the Vietnam War¹⁹ until the late 70s. But cinema and (fictional) TV would implicitly respond to the great issues of the day. Besides, considering the great polarization of the public (the New Left or Counterculture on the one hand, the great silent and more conservative majority on the other hand), the way films responded to such issues would be one case of stylistic deviation (with heavy doses of irony, satire and self-consciousness). This is why by the mid-60s more and more parodies of other television shows as well as of Hollywood movies appeared progressively on TV.

By the time the feature film established itself as a mainstay in television programming, more and more of the films produced since the 60s in the U.S. adopted a sophisticated, self-conscious style, heavily laden with irony, camp and parody. Ray provides a long list of films produced in the period between 1966-1980 which "depended on their audiences' ability to recognize them as overt parodies, 'corrected' genre pictures, or exaggerated camp versions of Hollywood's traditional mythology" (257). All the James Bond movies, since *Thunderball* (1965), increasingly became camp versions of the traditional caper or adventure story, as their popularity testified due to their permanence within the the top ten box-office list.²⁰

Most of the Hollywood Renaissance films owe their freshness and

19. Vietnam, for instance, was implicitly alluded to in Robert Altman's *M*A*S*H** (1970), a biting war satire, though the film was set on the Korean War.

20. The popularity of such films is readily understandable, as they addressed a basically male and young audience that would love this type of action and adventure movies, but also because the members of their audience would be culturally competent enough to read such films as a kind of fictionalization of current political affairs. In the case of the Bond series, they would perceive the dramatization of spy action as a sly comment on the rivalry between the two super-powers in their on-going struggle for supremacy in issues such as the Cold War, the Space Race, the Vietnam War, and others.

sophistication, among other things, to the way they reworked established genres: *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967, a revisionist gangster movie), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), *The Wild Bunch* (1969), *Little Big Man* (1970), *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971, revisionist or “corrected” westerns), *M*A*S*H** (1970, slapstick war movie), *Play It Again Sam* (1972, Humphrey Bogart parody), *The Long Goodbye* (1973, revisionist noir), *Nashville* (1975, revisionist musical), and so on. Robert Altman, one of the main representatives of the Hollywood Renaissance, built his entire career, which extended well beyond the 70s, by reworking the conventions of the most popular genres (Ray 267).

Another important development in the mid-60s, which was an outcome both of the cinema-television collaboration as well the studios’ concentration on fewer but more expensive movies, was the rise of independent producer-directors. The old guard of contract-salaried Hollywood-based directors had retired by the mid-60s with a few exceptions who continued making films in old age (Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, and Orson Welles). So it was time for a new breed of outsiders to take over film direction on the “package-deal” system since the break-up of the studios’ vertical integrated structure. These new directors-producers came from different backgrounds: Peter Bogdanovich and Paul Schrader were former film-critics; Stanley Kubrick was a photo-journalist; Mike Nichols came from the theater; Milos Forman, Francis Ford Copolla, George Lucas, Roman Polanski, Terence Malick, Martin Scorsese, and John Milius graduated from film schools; Robert Altman, Arthur Penn, Steven Spielberg, Paul Mazurski, and Sam Peckinpah came from TV; Warren Beatty, Peter Fonda and Jack Nicholson were former actors. The majority of these filmmakers who contributed the most to the rebirth of the American cinema did their apprenticeship in the so-called Corman factory.

Roger Corman was an institution by himself. He had established, since the late 50s, American International Pictures (AIP) and, later, New World Pictures; these were production companies that specialized in exploitation films, low-budget B-movies (the whole “porn, horror, violence” routine) made at the fringes of the studio system, but mimicking it (Elsaesser, *The Last Great American Picture Show: New Hollywood Cinema in the 1970s* 52). His contribution was not so much the second-rate films he produced, but the fact that he gave practically a whole new generation of fledgling film buffs or film-school graduates the chance to get involved in the movie world and learn the tools of the trade. The deal he would make with these aspiring filmmakers remains legendary: “bring in the film footage on time and on

budget, and you are free to do your own thing" (McDonaugh 113). For the trainees, this was an apt lesson in independent filmmaking philosophy. Among his protégés are included the much celebrated "movie brats" of the Hollywood Renaissance and of the second New Hollywood: Copolla, Bogdanovich, Monte Hellman, Scorsese, Dennis Hopper, Nicholson, Fonda, Ron Howard, Jonathan Demme, Joe Dante, James Cameron, Nestor Almendros, Lazlo Kovacs, and John A. Alonso (the last three being directors of cinematography).

Corman, always the shrewd entrepreneur, must be credited for another function relevant to the developments which occurred in the film industry of the late 60s. Not only did he supply the dying neighborhood theaters and impoverished drive-ins with cheap horror-violence-sex B-movies, but he was also the American distributor of European art films—Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, Francois Truffaut, Volker Schloendorf, Alain Resnais. Thus, he was instrumental in helping turn the declining theaters in the U.S. into art-house establishments. Furthermore, as Elsaesser points out, "by providing both stage and outlet for New Hollywood, European auteur films, as well as exploitation movies, New World Pictures and the art house circuits invented the idea of the 'cult' film, or 'cult' classic, labels later taken over by the successors of all second-run movie-houses" (53). No wonder that by the 70s "traditional distinctions between art films, commercial entertainment and exploitation movies grew hazy," as Maitland McDonagh observes (108). Of course, such confusion is explainable within the general climate of dissent and questioning of all kinds of values in the turbulent 60s; closely tied to this is still another kind of change that occurred and affected film production, a development that had much to do with the changing morals of the time.

The Demise of the Production Code

There is one more crucial development in the film industry which directly affected the kind of films that would be made during the Hollywood Renaissance period: the demise of the Production Code in 1966. Since the 30s, the Hollywood establishment had set up through the MPPDA (Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America) its own system of self-censorship in order to avoid bans or boycotts of individual films by powerful organizations, such as the Catholic Church's Legion of Decency. The Production Code Association (which came to be known as the Hays Office), had set up the guidelines of what was permissible as the viable content of the movies: "films should uplift (or at least not lower) audiences'

moral standards, refrain from creating sympathy for ‘crime, wrong-doing, evil or sin,’ depict ‘correct standards of life,’ and never, ever ridicule law (‘divine, natural or human’) or valorize those who do” (McDonagh 107). For one thing, this self-regulation system suited the studio’s oligopolic policy, offering them a measure of control in distribution: if a film did not abide by the above rules, it was refused the seal of approval for mainstream release. Geoff King notes: “The ability to award or withhold the seal was a source of considerable power” (30). For another, the Hollywood Studios, as the nation’s major entertainment outlet, shaped America’s cultural identity by perpetuating the myth of the American Dream. In the heyday of the classical period (1930-1945), approximately five hundred feature films were produced annually, all fostering an idealized vision of America, “defined by respect for the law and government, marital fidelity, gentility, hard work, patriotism, fairness, honesty, personal responsibility, devotion to principles and esteem for family and community” (McDonagh 109).

Since the mid 50s, the Production Code started to come under increasing strain from various sources. The dissolution of the homogenized audience was an important factor, which meant its division into different target audiences and generally the radical change of its leisure or entertainment patterns. The break-up of the studios’ vertical structure implied a destabilization of the system’s control and enforcement of the Production Code. The role of TV in shaping a new, more sophisticated and culturally-informed audience, was no less effective in eroding the studios’ self-regulating system of censorship. Not to mention the rise to power of the independents, who were determined to retain their artistic freedom in making more “personal” films, which tended to verge more and more into sex, violence and sensationalism that the Production Code explicitly forbade. Besides, according to historian Eric Goldman, the 60s was “a watershed as important as the American Revolution or the Civil War in causing changes in the U.S.” (qtd. in Ray 250). Between Woodstock and Watergate the pace of change in culture and society was accelerated so much that it brought about a real break in the continuity of the American experience. As McDonagh points out, “American society was changing convulsively—government was widely viewed with suspicion and hostility, families shattered or had drifted apart, the sexual morality of the past was challenged and abandoned—and the tastes of veteran studio filmmakers and younger moviegoers were increasingly out of synch” (110). In the age that smacked the rebellious spirit and experienced an explosion of the media, the most celebrated cultural icons were those of the counterculture:

sex, drugs, rock music, pop-art, high camp, low-culture and hippy-flower power psychedelics.

The Production Code was revised in 1956 and kept on being gradually reduced to widen the margins of what was permissible until 1966, when it was completely abandoned in order to be replaced in 1968 by a ratings system: a classification of movies according to the suitability of their content for particular age groups. Hollywood rushed to institutionalize the new ratings system through the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) for fear that the various States would impose their own ratings standards and this would create chaos in the movie industry. As Geoff King mentions, "the breakdown and eventual replacement of the Production Code was a development of great significance to the establishment of the Hollywood Renaissance" (32). If the Production Code had been in force, practically none of the Hollywood Renaissance films would be possible, as most of them undermined the moral certainty of the classical Hollywood films.

The Rise of the American Film Renaissance

By the mid-60s, as film historian Tino Balio points out, the big studios came to the brink of a total collapse (1969 being the worst of the Recession years). Thomas Schatz also cites *Variety's* estimation of combined industry losses for 1969-1971 amounting to \$600 million. In addition, he mentions another economic study made by Joseph Dominick, according to which, the average studio profits that in the five-year span from 1963 to 1968 were estimated at \$64 million fell down to \$13 million from 1969 to 1973 (15). Of course, the old studios, in the meantime, had taken all sorts of counter measures to win their audience back (drive-in theaters, multiplex cinemas at the malls, bigger budgets, wider screens); and despite adopting the blockbuster policy, they barely managed to stay afloat.²¹ Instead they became ripe for takeover by conglomerate corporations around the mid

21. The Big Five studios of Paramount, MGM, Twentieth-Century-Fox, Warner Bros., and RKO managed to stay afloat. RKO actually did not, as it closed down after it had been taken over by Howard Hughes. The Little Three, Universal, Columbia, and United Artists actually did thrive in the post-war years and were elevated to the status of the Majors. In the 50s, a new player entered the field, a small company specializing in animation, that of Walt Disney Corporation. Setting up its own distribution network (BuenaVista), entering television and specializing in theme parks, Disney was on its way to becoming much later, in the 1990s, a major force.

60s. What saved the studios from sheer bankruptcy was the production of some rather inexpensive, off-beat films, like *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967, rentals of \$22.8 million) and *The Graduate* (1967, \$43 million), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969, \$46 million in rentals), *M*A*S*H** (1970, \$36.7 million) and *Easy Rider* (1969, 19 million) (Schatz 15). These films were not only off-beat in terms of production but they touched a nerve in an enthusiastic and receptive audience in terms of their thematic preoccupations: the youth alienation, the generation gap, rebellion against all kinds of authority, celebration of counterculture values, allusions to the Vietnam trauma and the Watergate fiasco. In general, they reflected the liberalization of society in the 60s and formally departed gravely from the conventions of classical cinema.

If this was the story of Hollywood, as seen from different perspectives in its social, cultural or industrial contexts, it could amount to the story of a reluctant hero in the face of a sea of changes and his efforts to stick to his traditional past (a resonant theme in countless Hollywood movies). Hollywood faced the most severe crisis in its history as it had to cope with problems coming from all directions at the same time: a steady decline in admissions, the division of its once homogenized audience into different audience groups, an enforced break-up of its vertically integrated structure, restrictions imposed by foreign governments on the importation of its products, the rivalry of TV and a fast-changing American culture and society. The twists and turns of the plot of this adventure story reflect the struggle of the big studios to retain their power: by catering to the needs of the split audiences through a revision of its strategies; by implementing new technologies, re-organizing and retrenching to keep control of their business; by collaborating with each other to dominate foreign markets; by coming to terms with rival media and adjusting to changing market conditions. The film industry was transformed, but in the process, the big studios lost their power, as they were taken over by conglomerated corporations.²²

22. I am referring to the first wave of conglomeration. MGM was taken over by Kirk Kerkorian in 1969; Warner Bros. initially merged with sister company Seven Arts to be purchased in 1969 by Kinney National Services, Inc., a New York conglomerate with holdings in parking lots, car rental, construction and funeral homes; Paramount was taken over by Gulf + Western Industries in 1964; Twentieth Century Fox became subject to a take over struggle, but it held on; after flirting with bankruptcy in 1967-69, it was saved by unexpected hits (*Patton* and *M*A*S*H** in 1970) and survived (Gomery, *Movie History: A Survey* 296-300).

However, Hollywood, as a movie-making business survived, when the old guard was succeeded by a new generation of independent filmmakers who brought about the fresh air of modernization and innovation. The obvious interrelationship between the changes at the various levels—the social, cultural, and industrial—resulted in a rebirth of the movies. This, “sudden harvest of grace,” to quote Welles in his article “But Where Are We Going” (1970), very aptly described the Hollywood Renaissance phenomenon (qtd. in Jacobs 11).

It was definitely the product of a crisis, since the studios in the midst of financial uncertainty and instability and on the brink of extinction realized the ineffectuality of the blockbuster policy and every other measure taken to avert catastrophe; the only escape route left was to try some low-budget, off-beat independent productions. With the Production Code “breathing its last gasp in 1968” and promising “a wide open future where no topic would be a taboo” any longer (McDonagh 107), and a growing youthful audience (the baby boomers of the previous decade had come of age to become avid movie-goers) ready for more sensational thrills which TV could not provide, the situation was perfect for the flourishing of new talent and artistic freedom. To complete the picture, the young generation of filmmakers (though some of them were not so young), with different backgrounds in theater and television, or in Corman's exploitation factory, were more educated than the old Hollywood directors, since many of them were college graduates, and had been influenced by the work of European auteurs (the French New Wave) or by American art filmmakers (of the New York circle). According to a survey made on hitmakers (writers, producers, directors) of movies between 1965 and 1982, the majority of them “[were] quite liberal and cosmopolitan, apt to criticize traditional institutions such as religion, the police, the military and the government, and they endorse[d] a new sexual morality” (qtd. in Krämer 85). So, the 1965-1975 period in Hollywood history has come to signify the Golden Age of American cinema by manifesting a radical thematic and stylistic departure from the classical Hollywood movie: a cinema of relative artistic freedom, of experimentation with new forms, and of stylistic innovation—the only period in the entire history of the American cinema that its films came to resemble so much their European arty counterparts.

The reasons for the existence of such radical films at the particular time junction in film history should be evident after the preceding analysis. For one, they were films made by young filmmakers, who had been influenced by arty European cinema and, as independent directors/producers they

enjoyed much more freedom than the old Hollywood directors. Besides, they were addressing a young, predominantly male and rather sophisticated audience that would be open and receptive to thematic and stylistic innovation. Last but not least, with the demise of the Production Code, these iconoclastic filmmakers could be liberal in their subject matter since taboo subjects no longer existed and thus they could focus on culturally relevant issues to which the youngish audiences were attuned.

Bonnie and Clyde and *The Graduate*, both released in 1967, marked the initiation into the version of New Hollywood that became known and widely celebrated as a Hollywood “Renaissance” (Geoff King 12). The other key-film of the period, a road movie celebrating the counterculture, *Easy Rider* (1969), became a landmark of the shift in revolutionary independent filmmaking. Penn’s *Bonnie and Clyde* made a modest budget of \$2.5 million, becoming initially more of a popular rather than a commercial success. After the controversy that its subject matter had generated, Warner Bros.-Seven Arts re-released it in the following year. With the 1968 revenues, its total figure in rentals rose to \$23 million which placed it in the fifth place at the top ten list of 1967. The film, set in the Depression era of the 30s reads as an implicit allegory of the youth rebelliousness of the 60s. Warren Beatty (as Clyde Barrow) and Faye Dunaway (as Bonnie Parker) are set in the roles of two handsome, rather mixed-up, young people who attempt bank robberies as a habit and pastime just to escape the limitations of small-town dull life.

Much of the critical controversy generated by the film, which was also one of the reasons for its popular success, had to do with the way it represented violence. Many of the action set pieces—bank robberies, police car chases, narrow escapes, and the climactic vigilante massacre at the end—were presented in extremely violent graphic terms due to the director’s stylistic devices, lifted straightaway from the French New Wave films: fast motion and slow motion, jump cuts, scenes shot through oddly distorted filters, black and white photography, accelerated montage and music pieces ironically commenting on the action. Robert Ray presents a long list of such devices that show Penn’s borrowing freely from Truffaut’s *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960) and *Jules et Jim* (1962), as well as Jean-Luc Godard’s *Breathless* (1960). He even spots some visual puns as allusions to Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane* (1941) and Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) (288-94).

Krämer observes that the success of both *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Dirty Dozen*, the “two breakthrough hyper-violent films of 1967” (52), set

up a trend of escalating graphic violence (both sexual and non-sexual) in a number of movies of the New Hollywood which had been rated as "R," such as Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969), *Straw Dogs* (1971) and *The Getaway* (1972), Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), Boorman's *Deliverance* (1972), Coppola's *The Godfather (Part I and Part II)* (1972, 1974), Sidney Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973), and Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976).

The Graduate, directed by Nichols, was also made on a budget of only \$3 million but made a grand box-office hit with \$44 million in rentals. Krämer calculated that "[t]he *Graduate* took every tenth dollar spent on movie tickets in 1968 ... prevailing over enormous competition" (6) since the number of films produced by the major studios (Columbia, Fox, MGM, Paramount, United Artists, Universal, and Warners Bros.) amounted to 177, while "independent distributors, such as Embassy, the company behind *The Graduate*, released another 277 films. In addition to this total of 454 films, there was a number of films, like *The Graduate*, that had been released in 1967 or earlier, which were still in circulation in 1968" (6). This film, which reached 80 million people (that is practically close to 1/4th of the U.S. population), had a great resonance in the American culture of the late 60s and a great impact on the subsequent Hollywood Renaissance films. First of all (along with *Bonnie and Clyde*), it set a trend away from Hollywood's "internationalism" towards a purely American cinema with a story set in the 60s suburbia and featuring as its main hero an All-American boy. As a powerful satire of the conformist, shallow, upper middle-class suburban life, it touched a sensitive social chord, that of youths' alienation and the generation gap. Its bold and shocking thematic motif, that of an illicit sexual relationship between a young man and a much older, married woman, which would be unheard of in the previous decades, and which was now possible precisely because the Production Code was no longer in effect, was the first of the social taboos to be broken in the movies to come. As Krämer points out,

[i]n the wake of *The Graduate*, extensive displays of nudity, men cavorting with prostitutes or prostituting themselves, married middle-class couples contemplating partner swaps, prostitutes featured as comic heroines, men sleeping around in search not of love but of sexual gratification, and extra-marital affairs between older women and young men could be found in many films set in contemporary America, including the following top ten hits: *Midnight Cowboy* (3rd/1969, rated "X"), *Easy Rider* (4th/1969,

rated “R”), *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* (6th/1969, “R”), *Woodstock* (5th/1970, “R”), *The Owl and the Pussycat* (10th/1970, “R”), *The French Connection* (3rd/1971, “R”), *Carnal Knowledge* (8th/1971, “R”), and *The Last Picture Show* (9th/1971, “R”). (50)

Such popularity of sexually-themed films, of course, had much to do with the particular constitution of the movie-audience, the former baby-boomers now in the age-range of 16 to 30, which comprised the majority (58%) of ticket buyers. In two 1968 surveys, the majority of the young and especially male members of the audience, admitted that “they approved of the high degree of realism in film content that has taken place in recent years”; and in particular, of those under 30, “only a small fraction would have strong objections to increased emphasis on sex or to more violence on the screen” (Krämer 54). Film audience in the mid 60s-early 70s period had been gravely polarized between the young (under 30) and predominantly male segments, who favored a radical departure from traditional Hollywood fare, and the older than 30, predominantly female counterpart, who had become alienated and turned to television, watching in late-night shows their favorite movies from the previous decade, such as *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Ben Hur* (1959), *Mary Poppins* (1965), or *The Sound of Music* (1965), scoring top ratings (between 30 and 40).

Another reason that accounts for the popular success and the cultural resonance of *The Graduate* was the use in the film, for the first time in American cinema, of the pop songs by Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel. Before the mid 60s, it was mainly mood music or orchestral scores that featured in the soundtrack of most movies with the exception of special cases, such as the Elvis or Beatles films. But the appeal of such hit songs as “Mrs. Robinson,” “Scarborough Fair,” and “The Sounds of Silence,” to the youthful audience of *The Graduate* brought the Simon-Garfunkel album, according to *People* magazine (2000), to the second place in the charts of 1968 (qtd. in Krämer 8). This set up a trend with other films of the period, whose soundtracks or individual hit songs were placed at the top ten of the Billboard’s annual album charts: *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (no. 8 in 1970), *American Graffiti* (no. 6 in 1974), *The Sting* (no. 9 in 1974), *Easy Rider* (no. 7 in 1970) (Krämer 12). This bears on the synergy between sibling media industries (film, book, music) and its impact on their product success pattern: a film might owe its success to last years’ best-selling novels or to the top-charts album that features in its soundtrack; or,

vice-versa. The synergy principle would find central application in the more sophisticated marketing strategies of the post-1975 blockbusters, as it would raise the tie-ins value of the film in related markets.

Easy Rider (1969), an off-beat production that cost only \$500,000 and grossed over 25 million (\$19 million in rentals), came up as a typical case of the teamwork usually encountered in Corman's sweatshop. As a matter of fact, Dennis Hopper who directed, co-wrote and starred, Fonda who produced, co-wrote and starred, and Nicholson, who leaped to stardom with this film, had all began filmmaking at Corman's independent movie factory and had worked together making Corman's *The Trip* (1967), a psychedelic "hymn" to LSD (McDonagh 114). Initially, they took the project to their mentor's AIP company, but after Corman turned it down, they approached another independent company BBS (Bert Schneider, Bob Rafelson, and Steve Blauner). Bert's brother, Stanley, was head of Columbia at the time, and he was convinced to make the deal for the mainstream production and release of the film. The film went to the Cannes Festival and received the Best Picture for First-Time Director Award. *Easy Rider* is another pivotal film whose box-office success "marked a point at which this kind of filmmaking crossed over into the Hollywood mainstream. Money flowed more freely, ... to a new generation of filmmakers ... who made considerable inroads into the culture and business of Hollywood" (Geoff King 13).

The "criminal couple" motif and the "road trip" form of both *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Easy Rider* became staples of the counterculture that initiated a new genre, that of the road movie: Monte Hellman made *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971), Tom Laughlin *Billy Jack* (1971), Spielberg *The Sugarland Express* (1974), Malick *Badlands* (1974). Most of the radical or leftist films of the period reveal the counterculture's contradictoriness: on the one hand, the road trip stands for a celebration of the individual's escape from society towards freedom, and on the other hand, it suggests lack of destination, a kind of emptiness and loss of purpose in the journey. Elsaesser makes an apt point on the "pathos of failure" of the American films of the 70s by comparing the films of New Hollywood with those of the classical tradition. There he finds that the dramaturgy of the classical narrative posited "psychologically and emotionally motivated characters: they had a case to investigate, a name to clear, a woman (or man) to love, a goal to reach. ... Such implicit confidence is less easy to find in the films of the 70s that pick up of the motif of the journey" ("The Pathos of Failure: American Films in the 1970s: Notes on the Unmotivated Hero" 281). On the contrary, the low-

budget, genre driven, independent productions of the Hollywood Renaissance, which have out-sold the lavished roadshowed blockbusters of the Classic Hollywood, are populated with characters who are “eccentric loners, hustlers, drug users, iconoclasts, thieves, drop-outs, prostitutes, losers, sexual rebels and even killers” (McDonagh 107). These films speak with greater candor and send practically the same message about the existential malaise of their time: “that there is no longer any common ‘connective tissue’ in American life which could serve as the bedrock for progressive, univocal moral positions” (Horwath 92).

Concluding Remarks

Hopefully the preceding historical analysis of Hollywood’s post-war crisis has yielded some interesting conclusions as a contribution to the on-going critical debate on continuities vs. changes in Hollywood. Those critics who insist that nothing much has changed in Hollywood since the “classical” or “studio” era may feel vindicated even by some of the findings in the present analysis the main theme of which has been the cataloguing of changes. For instance, the idea of a blockbuster, as a production strategy, is not exclusively a trait of the New Hollywood, since, as we have seen, it played a central role in the transition years.

The difference between the blockbusters of the post-war years and the “calculated blockbusters” of the present is definitely one of scale as well as a result of the radically transformed movie industry. Another key-concept that defines contemporary blockbusters is their marketing as cultural “events,” although this was not a new idea, since the “roadshow” release treatment of blockbusters in the transition period was aiming exactly at advertising these films as “special events.” In addition, the growing critical complaints against the tendency of contemporary blockbusters to thrive on spectacle and special effects at the expense of narrative integrity find similar echoes in the film criticism of the 50s and 60s against the spectacular blockbusters of the postwar period. Finally, what has unquestionably remained the same is the commercial character of the Hollywood movies which has persisted even during the period of radical innovation of the Hollywood Renaissance.

On the other hand, a series of changes in audience demographics, in politics, in society and culture, as well as in technology and the media, affected the Hollywood studios critically and resulted in one of the most severe crises ever experienced by Hollywood. These changes precipitated

more changes in the film industry which affected the types of films produced, Hollywood's relationship to the other mass media and the interrelation of movies with politics, culture and society.

By approaching the Hollywood phenomenon through a wider socio-political, economic and cultural perspective, the aim of the present study has been to analyze Hollywood's crisis effectively: especially by showing that the changes experienced in one sector of life dramatically affected other sectors and precipitated further changes. For instance, the post-war economic affluence enjoyed by large segments of the American population in the late 40s and early 50s resulted in demographic changes (suburbanization and baby booming) and in different life-styles and patterns of leisure or entertainment due to the rise of TV. Immediately Hollywood felt a decline in admissions. The loss of a homogenized audience meant a division into various target audiences, the art-house or cult crowd, and the mainstream audience. To cater for the needs of different types of audiences, Hollywood was forced to attempt its product differentiation with the aid of new technologies. As a result, post-war Hollywood movies showed the first signs of departure from the standard production style of the Old Classical cinema: social consciousness films (problem or cult movies) for the more educated segments of the public or spectacular blockbusters (as an answer to TV) to lure the mainstream audience into the theaters both in the domestic, but more importantly, in the international market (hence Hollywood's "Europeanization"). The crossover with European or international artistic films was materialized by the increasing availability of such films in a growing number of art-house theaters which grew in numbers after the majors were obliged to divest of their own theater chains. Corman's role as an importer of European art films was instrumental. These films, in turn, were influential in constituting a particular art-crowd audience which most probably included the new breed of independent filmmakers who would later play a central role in the rise of New Hollywood cinema.

Another interesting conclusion to be drawn from the preceding discussion could derive from the symbiotic relationship between the movie industry and the television networks. TV helped Hollywood survive its financial crisis by paying good money for the studio's obsolete back catalogues and by renting their useless production lots for made-for-television films and mini-series, while the majors, by giving up their old classical films to television networks, helped them to prosper and take over from them the traditional role they had held as the nation's collective myth-

making power. Together Hollywood cinema and TV, as the dominant mass media, were instrumental in changing politics (appearance vs. essence) and in contributing to the polarization of public opinion (the New Left and counterculture vs. the conservative silent majority). Their role was also instrumental in shaping a more sophisticated, “cine-literate” audience—that is the baby-boomers of the late 40s and early 50s—who by the late 60s-early 70s had come of age to form Hollywood’s main audience

Therefore, by following the interrelationships of changes on several different levels, it finally becomes clear that Hollywood’s most severe crisis in the transition from the Old to the New Hollywood offered that brief window of opportunity for an entirely different kind of cinema, albeit truly American, to exist for a while. The films of the Hollywood Renaissance become more highlighted and the period can be seen as a benchmark for measuring the state of cinema either of the classical or of the post-classical period. As for their artistic integrity, the films of the Hollywood Renaissance are most often referred to as the ones bearing signs of more intelligent life in Hollywood filmmaking than the majority of the films that preceded or followed.

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